

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
AFRICAN CATHOLICISM

Table of Contents

THE DILEMMA OF CHILDLESSNESS AMONG THE LUO CATHOLIC FAITHFUL OF WESTERN KENYA By Ephraim Ochieng and Susan Mbula Kilonzo. Page 4

*HUMANAE VITAE* AT FIFTY: A NIGERIAN MORAL THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE By Rev. Dr Raymond Olusesan Aina (MSP). Page 25

A SEMIOTIC INVESTIGATION OF *IFA* SYMBOLISM IN RELATIONS WITH *ÌBEJÌ* AND SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN OF CATHOLIC FAITH By ÒKÉWÁNDÉ, Olúwólé Tẹ̀wógboyè. Page 40

*IFÁ* SYMBOLISM AND THE CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION: A CHALLENGE FOR THE CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS BY OLÚWỌLÉ TẸ̀WỌGBOYÈ ÒKÉWÁNDÉ Page 71

JUSTICE FOR THE RICH, JUDGMENT FOR THE POOR: ‘ELITE IMMUNITY’, RAMPANT IMPUNITY AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN NIGERIA By Mike, OMILUSI. Page 97

THE EARLY CHURCH CONROVERSIES AND THE PROBLEM OF ECUMENISM IN NIGERIA By Rev. JOHN OKWUDIRI OBINECHE AND NWAKA, CHIGOZIE SAMUEL Page 122

CHRISTIANITY AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA By Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, SDV. Page 143

PRE-MARITAL PASTORAL COUNSELLING/*GO LAA* ON ISSUES OF GENDER AND HUMAN SEXUALITY: NAOMI//LABAN SHOWERS IN GABORONE, BOTSWANA By Madigele Tshenolo Jennifer, Dube Musa, Motswapong Elizabeth, Kebaneilwe Mmapula Diana , Gabaitse Rosinah, Setume Doreen, Modie-Moroka Tirelo, Kgalemang Malebogo. Page 177

FIRST SUNDAY WORSHIP IN THE PLACE THE LORD HAS CHOSEN AS HIS OWN: READING DEUTERONOMY 12:13–19 IN HONOR OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL DOMINIC EKANDEM OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF IKOT EKPENE By Michael Udoekpo. Page 202

‘YOU CANNOT STOP RECEIVING THE BODY OF OUR LORD’: THE EUCHARIST IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE’S *PURPLE HIBISCUS* By Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, SDV. Page 219

MEDIOCRE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: A CRITICAL EVALUATION By Rev. Fr. Dr. Gerald Emem Umoren. Page 232

APPRECIATING RECENT SCHOLARLY INTERPRETATIONS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15:8 By Christopher Naseri Naseri. Page 254

BIBLICAL PARADIGMS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE USE AND MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN NIGERIA: INTERPRETING JOHN 6:1-15 FROM AN ECO-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE. By *Christopher Naseri and Patrick Bassey*. Page 266

*BOOK REVIEW: THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION: GROANING FOR A NEW CREATION IN AFRICA*. Emmanuel Katongole, By Idara Otu. Page 283

## The Dilemma of Childlessness among the Luo Catholic Faithful of Western Kenya

Ephraim Ochieng and Susan Mbula Kilonzo

### Abstract

How does a native Catholic faithful behave when the demands of culture dictate that they disregard the demands of the Church? What choices do they have if they want to fit within the two conflicting cultures? This article examines the place of Catholic childless couples in two conflicting cultures – the Church and the Luo tradition. The findings are part of a larger cross-sectional field research done in Western Kenya. The study targeted Catholic childless couples, Priests, Catechists and Small Christian Community (SCC) leaders. Data was collected through in-depth oral interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The authors show that the notion of childlessness among the Luos of Western Kenya is not just the complete lack of children in marriage. Couples, who have one child or daughters only, are termed as childless. Further, the teachings of the Catholic Church conflict with the traditional Luo worldview on involuntary childlessness. Since Luo Christian childless couples face a number of socio-religious challenges ranging from alienation or stigmatization by the community members to ostracization from Church activities, some seek traditional remedies for their childless marriages against the teachings of the Church. Those who find comfort in the teachings of the Church accept their situation and live with the cultural consequences. We juxtapose this dilemma in the article and recommend a refocus on inculturation to help struggling childless Luo Catholic couples.

**Key words:** Childlessness, Involuntary childlessness, Marriage, Christianity, Catholic Church, Luo Community.

### Introduction

Traditionally, marriage is meant to bring up new members into the family, and by extension the clan, through procreation. Childbearing, therefore, becomes an integral aspect not just within the family, but the society at large (Kenyatta, 1970; Ayayo, 1976; Inhorn, 2007; Nwoye, 2007). To societies that hold the notion that marriage and begetting children are inseparable ingredients, the two rites of passage must be fulfilled. In such a worldview, as “two become one”, the society expects them to beget children and contribute to sustenance of the kinship. Mbiti (1969) argues that for an African to die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human society, becoming disconnected or an outcast

and to lose all links with humankind. Kimani (2001) explains that in some African communities, marriage was nullified under two conditions, when either the woman failed to conceive or she was not a virgin. A good amount of scholarly work has devoted time and space to the challenges associated with childlessness within and beyond African families (Mbiti 1969; Ayayo, 1976; Morell, 1994; Kawango, 1995; Kimani 2001; Mboya, 2001; Nwoye 2007, Inhorn, 2007; Yang & Rosenblatt, 2008;). For instance, in her study of health problems of mothers and children, their causes and management, Kawango (1995) found that one of the problems the Luo women faced was infertility. This can be juxtaposed against cultures around the world where marriages survive without children as shown by Morell (1994).

Although there are always reasons for voluntary or involuntary childlessness, some scholars have argued that the main problem lies in the very definition and understanding of the meaning of marriage, and the role of the same in the society. Hastings (1973) defines marriage according to the traditional teaching of the Church as a unit, permanent at least by intention of a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation and rearing of children and mutual companionship and assistance. He points out that the difference between the Church's understanding and the African tradition is that: in the traditional understanding, stress is laid upon the production of children and not upon the interpersonal relationship of the couple. While looking at marriage from different angles, Hastings (1973) sees a stretched triangle: the claims of the gospel, the claims of African tradition, and the claims of modern man and woman. This battle over marriage is at the very center of the struggles of traditional African Christian couples.

This article examines how Luo Christian families deal with challenges related to childlessness. The Luo community largely believes that children are central in any marriage and a couple must do whatever it takes to have offspring as a way of sustaining the family lineage. This belief is juxtaposed along the requirements of the Catholic Church that the primary role of marriage is companionship. Whereas the traditional approaches to resolving challenges related to childlessness are deemed necessary and sufficient within the Luo culture, the Catholic Church considers them alien and unchristian.

### **Methodology**

The findings for this article are part of a study conducted from October 2011 to February 2015 in Western Kenya, specifically in Nyanza region, as area occupied by the Luo. The target population was Catholic childless couples, Priests, Catechists and Small Christian Community

(SCC) leaders. Samples were drawn from these target groups using snowball (for childless couples), purposive (priests and catechists), and, systematic sampling (for SCC leaders). Data was collected through in-depth oral interviews and Focus Group Discussions. This generated qualitative data that was transcribed, coded, analyzed thematically and presented in descriptive form and verbatim narratives.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Childlessness: A Focus on the Luo community**

Childlessness as the state of being without an offspring mainly results from infertility/impotence of either of the couple. However, there is voluntary childlessness that happens when a couple chooses not to have children. Morell (1994) calls this voluntary or intentional childlessness. This choice may result from socio-economic factors as some people perceive children as burdensome and too expensive to take care of. Some look at children as a disturbance to their marriage and peace. The primary concern for others is gratification of sexual needs, high unemployment rates, education and career ambition (Kimani, 2001; Morell, 1994; and, Chamie & Mirkin, 2012). Globally, childlessness is influenced by contextual factors. Steinhauer's study (2013) in Switzerland showed that the German-speaking women who are working and educated choose to be childless. Mariette (2012) showed that nearly half of Canadian couples, that is, 44.5% are voluntarily not having children due to the current economic and social reasons. These categories of childlessness are not within the scope of coverage for this article. Our interest lies in the involuntary childlessness, specifically among the Luos of Western Kenya.

While arguing for the importance of children in African communities, Kimani (2001) explains that sex was more than sexual intercourse. Apart from procreation, it was also meant for sustaining, maintaining and extending the clan and the society. Among the Kikuyu of Central Kenya, Kenyatta (1970) argues that men and women regard procreation of children as their first and most sacred duty. The women who do not give birth, the society looks at them as selfish and irresponsible (Morell, 1994:2). Morell substantiates that women without children are ignored unless they are desperately seeking motherhood. Yang and Rosenblatt's study (2008) of the childless couples of Korea corroborates the above argument when he found out that even voluntary childlessness is not viewed positively by the society.

To show the relevance of marriage among the Luo of Western Kenya, Mboya (2001) explains that a virgin who died would be buried outside their homestead; and before the burial after the grave had been dug, an old woman came to break the hymen of the dead lady. Wedding songs were then sung as if she was still alive, getting married. This was to avert the possibility of her spirit coming to disturb those still alive. Mboya (2001) further avers that fathers would urge their sons who had attained the age of marriage to look for wives and advise them on which families to marry from. An unmarried man was despised. He would be named *misumba*, which literally translates to a servant or slave. This implied that one who did not marry had no status within the familial or societal matrix and would only be compared to an outsider - a servant. On the part of Luo women, barrenness was considered evil. In traditional Luo community a couple that suffered childlessness would be helped through a diviner since the causes of infertility seemed to carry cultural explanations.

Kawango (1995), while studying infertility as a challenge among women in the Luo community, cites sorcerers who either tied the womb of a woman or bewitching (*ndagla/nawi*); spirits of the dead who would also refuse to open the womb of the woman if they were offended by the woman or one of the couple; family witchcraft; breaking of taboos; among other reasons, as the causes of infertility and childlessness thereof. Kawango (1995) also observed that sub-fertility would also occur if the wife had a child out of marriage and the tradition of *kalo nyathi*, (where the parents of the child place the child between them on their bed sometime after the delivery) happened. If the baby was conceived on another bed or belonged to another man, either the child would die from *chira*<sup>1</sup> or the mother would bear no more children. This acted as a check on infidelity. Genetic or hereditary causes were also cited as sources of barrenness.

A traditional witchdoctor, or a diviner (*ajuoga*), would be consulted to resolve infertility (Kawango, 1995:93). These two would diagnose and provide possible remedy, which varied according to the different causes of infertility. If the womb had been tied, the spell would be destroyed. If it was spirits of the dead, they would be appeased. *Manyasi* (herbal concoction) would be drunk if a taboo had been broken. If by any chance it was not possible to restore fertility, the Luo couple would resort to other means of ensuring children were born in a family. In most cases, polygamy would be recommended. Nwoye (2007) supports the argument that, polygamy was connected to barrenness of the first wife or with her one-dimensional

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<sup>1</sup> Chira is understood to be a misfortune that befalls anyone who transgresses a cultural observance.

reproduction of female children only. This implies that childlessness was not just perceived as total lack of children, but also absence of male children. Another solution to childlessness was surrogate unions.<sup>2</sup> Ayayo (1976) describes how a woman who was barren would bring another woman from her clan. She would be called *nyar ot* (daughter of the house) or *siweho* (a girl brought by a married woman to her husband because she was either too old or she could not give birth to a son).

Luo men feared any association with childlessness since the status of *buoch* (impotence) was loathed. If it was proved beyond reasonable doubt that it was the man who was impotent, then it was organized under oath that his brother or a cousin sires for him children with his wife. Mbiti (1969) shows that such arrangement would happen in the absence of a husband and in other cases, if the husband was too young. The importance attached to children in the Luo family can also be likened to the Jewish community in the Old Testament. The gift of fecundity was God given from the moment of creation. The book of Genesis 1:27-28 records that God created human beings both male and female and ordered them to go and multiply and fill the earth. Marriage and sex, therefore, are considered holy and good. Among the Deutero-canonical books in the book of Tobit 8:6-9, Tobias prays to God before having sexual intercourse with his wife Sarah, in pursuit for children.

The Old Testament depicts childlessness as a misfortune and a reproach; childless couples are displayed as a miserable lot. The childlessness of Abraham was his major concern that made him question God's promises (Genesis 15:2). In the Jewish set up, barren women were despised just like in the Luo community. The barren women in the Bible believed God through prayer, could resolve their problem. In Genesis 16:4-6, Sarah, the wife of Abraham is despised by her slave girl Hagar after the latter conceived a child with Abraham. In Genesis 21:1ff, the Lord remembered Sarah as he had promised and Sarah gave birth to Isaac. In Genesis 25:21-26, Rebekah the wife of Isaac was barren and Isaac prayed to the Lord and she conceived. She then gave birth to twins Esau and Jacob. In Genesis 30:22, Rachel the wife of Jacob who had been barren prayed and God opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son whom she named Joseph. In the book of Judges 13:1ff, Manoah's wife was barren and the angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her that she would conceive and bear a son. She indeed conceived and

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<sup>2</sup> In sororate unions, a man marries the female relative of his wife. In some instances, a woman brings in the relative, or her friend as a wife to her husband.



gave birth to Samson. In the first book of Samuel 1:1-8, Hannah is despised because of her barrenness. She prayed to God in tears and she conceived and gave birth to Samuel. The above shows the challenges these Old Testament personalities faced due to childlessness, yet there was a solution from the supernatural.

Most of these Old Testament childless women acted like a Luo barren woman. Sarah for instance, gave her slave girl to Abraham. Rachel too, in Genesis 30:1-8, gave Jacob her maid Bilhah and she bore children for her, Dan and Naphtali. Leah also gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob and she gave birth to a son whom she named Asher (Genesis 30:9-13). This may be a proof that the Jewish culture is not contrary to the traditional Luo beliefs of solving the problem of childlessness.

Flynn (2012) shows that childlessness, whether voluntary or involuntary, have challenges. For Christians, the challenges are socio-religious and affect their lives in the society and in the Church. In the New Testament, Zechariah and Elizabeth are unhappy in their state of childlessness. They prayed to God and Elizabeth gave birth to John (Luke 1:25). The suffering that the childless couples undergo is therefore depicted in both the Old and the New Testaments.

Banzikiza (1995) observes that the Catholic Church traditionally taught that marriage is for begetting and educating the children. Love, companionship and remedy against lust were regarded secondary. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), however, stressed that marriage is for mutual love and companionship. Banzikiza (1995) justifies that begetting offspring is not a component of the marital covenant, since, neither the husband nor the wife can determine ability to conceive. Nevertheless, the condition of childlessness is not easy to handle and it is not welcome in most African marital unions.

### **Study Findings and Discussions**

#### ***The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Childlessness***

The Catholic Church's teachings on involuntary childlessness are derived from her teachings on marriage and children. In Genesis 1:28, God said to human beings "Be fruitful and multiply." The gift of fecundity is therefore God-given. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is explicit that marriage must be open to fertility (CCC, 1652). To safeguard fertility, the Church also condemns the use of contraception. In cases of childless marriages, it states that, "spouses to whom God has not granted children can have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of

sacrifice” (CCC, 1654). On childlessness, the Church teaches: “A child is not something *owed* to one, but is a *gift*. The “supreme gift of marriage” is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged ‘right to a child’ would lead” (CCC, 2378). Pope Pius XII indicated that, “the Church understands the pain of infertility in marriage but still insists that marriage does not confer upon the spouses the right to have a child, but only the right to perform those natural acts which are *per se* ordered to procreation” (p. 471-473). This teaching on childlessness is stressed in the second Vatican Council that:

Marriage is not only for procreation of children. Marriage is by its nature an indissoluble contract between two people and the good of the children demand that the mutual love of the partners is properly shown. In cases where despite the intense desire of the spouses there are no children, marriage still retains its character of being a whole manner and communion of life and preserves its value and indissolubility even when despite the often intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking (*Gaudium et Spes* no. 50).

The Church consoles spouses who suffer infertility that after exhausting legitimate medical procedures, they should unite themselves with the Lord’s Cross- the source of all spiritual fecundity (Pope John Paul II, 1982). Physical sterility could be for the spouses the occasion for other important services in the life of humanity, including, adoption, various forms of educational work, assistance to other families and to poor or handicapped children. During a visit in Nigeria, Pope John Paul II told childless couples:

To couples who cannot have children of their own I say: you are no less loved by God; your love for each other is complete and fruitful when it is open to others, to the needs of the apostolate, to the needs of the poor, to the needs of orphans, to the needs of the world (Homily at Mass for families, Onitsha, Nigeria, February 13, 1982).

The United States Conference of Bishops (2009) supported adoption by saying:

The Church strongly supports adoption as a wonderful way to build a family. As Christians we should especially appreciate this, as we are all sons and daughters of God by adoption (Gal 4:5). Those who cannot conceive or bear a child who wants to consider adoption should receive every assistance and support so this process can be successfully completed in ways that respect the dignity of everyone involved. Adoption is a gift to a child who receives a new family, to the new parents who receive a child to love and to raise, and to the biological parents who, in self-sacrificing love have done all they can to provide their son or daughter with a good home and a bright future. Adoption also benefits the society by contributing to a culture of life in which the inherent dignity of every child is recognized (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2009) *Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology*).

The priests in the area of study emphasize that the fruits of marriage are the goodness of the spouses and procreation of children. But in a case where a child is not forthcoming, the most important thing is the goodness of the spouses. They said that marriage is more of a commitment to one another. Thus a child is not a fundamental element in marriage. The priest in charge of Rang'ala Parish said:

When the two come together, they have to be open in their marital bliss to the getting of children but in a situation where that does not happen, that should not be a basis of declaring a marriage null. According to the Church's teaching marriage is not anchored on begetting offspring. God gives children in his own way and in his own time (oral interview on 3/2/2015 at Rang'ala Church).

This is the same view that both the priest and the catechist of Aluor Parish (oral interview on 21/11/2014 at Aluor Church) had. They stressed that the Church wishes for a couple to have children. But if this is not possible, the Church teaches that they should accept their situation. What is important in marriage is the love between the husband and wife. The position of the Catholic Church therefore seems: a marriage is valid and should be maintained whether a couple begets children or not. The traditional Luo community do not entirely subscribe to this position.

### ***The Church's Teachings on Divorce and "Illegitimate" Unions***

Even though in the traditional African communities divorce was rare because of childlessness, field data indicated that currently, childlessness has been a cause of divorce. For example, Anyango (not her real name - oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala) and Achieng (not her real name - oral interview on 30/10/2013 at Aluor, Akala) both explained that their marriages were unsuccessful because they could not bear children. What then, are the teachings of the Church on divorce and "illegitimate" unions? The latter are common among the Luo people specifically in cases of childlessness. They include *inter alia* polygamy<sup>3</sup>, levirate<sup>4</sup>, sororate and cohabitation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In polygamous marriages, a man marries more than one wife.

<sup>4</sup> Levirate union is a situation where the brother, or a close relative of a deceased man, is allowed to take in the dead man's wife as his wife or one of his wives.

<sup>5</sup> In cohabitation, a man and a woman live together as a couple though without formal indication that they are married.

The Church teaches that marriage is a permanent union and divorce can only happen for limited reasons. This is in line with Jesus' teaching in the Scriptures, when the Pharisees approached him to question over the issue of divorce he had this reply to them; "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:8-9). St. Paul, while writing to the Corinthians, reminds them that there should be no divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). St. Augustine, clearly places what he calls the blessing of matrimony in this indissolubility when he says: "In the sacrament it is provided that the marriage bond should not be broken, and that a husband or wife, if separated, should not be joined to another even for the sake of offspring... it is wrong to leave a wife that is sterile in order to take another by whom children may be brought forth" (*Casti Connubii*, 1930). In *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) the Second Vatican Council teaches the following:

Polygamy, divorce and free love unions affect the institution of marriage. Marriage is meant to be a lasting union and this is for the good of the spouses, their offspring and the society. The spouses have to love each other with perpetual fidelity. Marriage is a holy institution that should not be profaned by adultery or divorce (*Gaudium et Spes* no. 47 and 48).

Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter reminds Christians that marriage is a permanent bond which only death can terminate (*Humane Vitae*, 1968). Pope John Paul II in his exhortation to Christian couples reminds them that in marriage the two give themselves to each other in a lifelong union until death (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981). Pope Pius XI exhorts Christians in his letter that there should be no carnal intercourse outside the marriage bond with another man or woman even if it is for getting offspring (*Casti Connubii*, 1930). He condemns both Cohabitation and trial marriage. This Pope taught that Christ the Lord condemns any form of polygamy or polyandry, as they are called, whether successive or simultaneous, and every other external dishonorable act, in order that the sacred bonds of marriage may be guarded absolutely inviolate (*Casti Connubii*, 1930). The Church therefore condemns divorce and is against any form of illegitimate union. Such unions are those that are outside the institution of marriage. This is based on the Commandments of God and the Biblical teaching on human sexuality. The Book of Leviticus forbids other forms of illegitimate sexual unions (Leviticus 18:6-30).

These were the same views expressed by all the Parish Priests and the catechists interviewed. They said that sex should be within the marital union. The priest of Ojolla (oral

interview on 2/7/2013 at Ojolla Church) said that those who are involved in such unions are not allowed to receive Holy Communion. Consequently, all the unions that the traditional Luo engage in as a way of remedying childlessness are viewed as sinful because they are contrary to the Church's teaching.

### ***Traditional Luo Remedies to Childlessness***

The findings of the study showed that childless couples try to resolve problems related to infertility through different approaches. These include: polygamy and sororate marriage (women bringing in their relatives to beget children with their husbands); levirate marriages; sexual unions outside wedlock; visiting a diviner (*ajuoga*) to establish the cause of childlessness; and, the use of herbs prescribed by a herbalist/healer (*nyamrerwa*) - (oral interviews with a catechist on 3/2/2015 at Rang'ala Church, and FGD with SCCs at Nyabondo Parish). The priest observed that men may marry the second and third wives when they cannot have children with their first wives. This seemed to be a common remedy of childlessness and was supported by FGDs with the SCC leaders in all the four parishes. Polygamy is also practiced not only because of childlessness, but also if the first wife bore no sons. Ogho (2005), Nwoye (2007) and Burke (1987) in support of this argue that polygamy is often connected with barrenness of the first wife or with her one-dimensional production of only female children. Nwoye (2007) explains that in Africa, polygamy was not just to satisfy the male sexual lust as often thought by members of other cultures. One is likely forced into polygamy by some pressing conditions. This further justifies the notion that a woman who has begotten daughters only, or has one child, is perceived to be barren and this is a "justification" for polygamy as in the case below:

According to the Luo traditions, having one child is risky. Since my first wife was unable to give birth to more children, my family pressurized me to have another wife. I was convinced that in case this one child died I would remain childless. This is why I took another wife. At first I was confused; it was not easy to give in to the pressure of marrying another wife. It took me time since I had to think about my faith. With time my mother convinced me and I ended up marrying another woman (oral interview with a polygamous man on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng').

Though widely practiced, polygamy, as the findings showed has some challenges. Anne Oloo (not her real name-from Rang'ala) recounted how the mother-in-law arranged for the husband to marry another wife.

My mother-in-law had organized for my husband to marry another wife. I did not know what was going on. My husband went with his brother secretly to see the

woman. When they came back he told me and I realized that something was going on (oral interview on 20/10/2011 at Rang'ala).

The man in question (Joseph-not his real name) said:

I thought about marrying another wife at first. I had even asked my wife Anne to bring a relative of hers to live with us. The problem was that I had never finished paying the bride price for Anne and this became a stumbling block. Since I had not finished all the traditional marriage rites I could not initiate another, so I decided to abandon the idea of another wife (oral interview on 20/10/2011 at Rang'ala).

Other challenges are related to the pressure from relatives. Maureen, (not her real name) from Nyabondo, said:

I had a problem with my uterus so I could not bear children. I saw that his family was complaining that my husband did not have children. They kept on blaming me that I cannot give their son a child. So I told him to look for another wife who could bear children for him. He married another woman and she bore him children (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kamgan).

Sororate unions, in which wives arrange for or allow their husbands to marry their relatives (sisters and cousins), and which in this case lead to polygamy, are common remedies to childlessness among the Luo as in this case:

Since I could not bear children, I brought for him my niece and he married her. She has given birth to children. We live in peace, and even the children love me more than her. They are like my children (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Akala).

The SCC leaders of Ojolla agreed that such sororatic unions are very common and culturally accepted. Nwoye (2007) expresses the view that it is the woman who “marries” another wife for the husband. Sometimes, the first wife, with age, consolidates her position as mother to subsequent wives, while it is not uncommon to see a harem of wives live like sisters. This means that the first wife may also not necessarily bring her sister or a relative but any other woman. Ogho (2005) points out that “children born by subsequent wives are also children of the first wife” (p. 285). Mbiti (1975) made similar observation when he indicated that a barren woman would make arrangement for the husband to get another wife so that the children can be born in the family. Some good men would take one of the children to the house of the elder wife to act as her child and help her in various duties.

Field data showed that in some cases the second wife conceives then the first one also conceives almost immediately. This is an uncommon strange phenomenon. When it happens,

they say, “*Nyachira oyawo ni mikayi*” (which literally translates to, *The second wife has opened the womb of the first wife*) - (FGD with SCC leaders on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

Since as field data showed, male impotency is loathed, a man would try outside of wedlock to see if he can sire, as a way of testing his potency. In other cases, as FGD showed: “... *a private arrangement is made, a woman is advised to look for a close relative of the husband*” (FGD conducted in Ojolla on 27/3/2012) because if a man was not able to impregnate a woman, this would be a highly guarded secret and remedies would be sought covertly within the family, thus:

According to the culture of the Luo, if a man is not able to get a child, there is room for the brothers to come in secretly and sire children for the family. But for a woman who is not able to conceive, then the remedy is to bring the sister or her relative to get children for the family with the man (oral interview with a priest on 22/1/2012 at Nyabondo).

These findings are corroborated by Ayayo’s study on the southern Luo (1976) that the elders would summon such a man to tell him to allow the wife to look for his brother to sustain his lineage. In cases where the man was not co-operative, only the woman was advised by the elderly women to do the same without the knowledge of the husband and pretend that it is the husband who sired. This is a practice that is common among some African ethnic communities. Similar studies by Bujo (2009), Nwoye (2007), and Mbiti (1975) show that if the problem lies with the husband, then a close relative or friend is asked or allowed to sleep with the wife for her to bear children for the family. Nwoye (2007) says that the traditional perspective would view the child that is a product of this private and arranged liaison as a product not of the genitor but of the husband. Within the Catholic faith, this is adultery.

Due to the traditional belief that childlessness has spiritual and generational connections, some couple do not seek for remedies from modern medicine. They go to diviners because childlessness is sometimes attributed to cultural and supernatural causes. Gyandu (2007) argues, among the Africans, barrenness is caused by supernatural powers. He observes that traditionally, among the Igbo of Nigeria a woman who is childless would visit the native doctors (*Diabias*) to help her manage her situation. Dutney (2007) in support of this argues that infertility causes social alienation, which would bring about rituals to appease the ancestors. In our study, Clementine, not her real name, explained how she resorted to the traditional remedies:

I did not go to the hospital. I went to another medicine woman in our village who gives women medicine to cleanse the uterus. She gave me some traditional medicine

which I took but since it was not working I stopped using it (oral interview on 23/1/2013 at Nyabondo, Dago).

We also learned that some couples refused to visit medicine men because of their faith.

I had an option of visiting *ajuoga* (diviner) but I could not do so since my faith could not allow me. Our Church teaches against visiting a diviner. This is an act that is contrary to faith. It is better for me to remain without children than sin against God (oral interview on 30/10/2014 at Aluor, Akala).

From the participants we interviewed, it is interesting to note that only sex outside marriage, sororate and polygamous unions resulted into children. Those who visited medicine men and diviners did not report any success. This finding contradicts the traditional believe that childlessness has cultural and supernatural connections.

The traditional beliefs and practices discussed above as remedies to childlessness have been linked to rising prevalence of HIV in the area of study. In fact the County of Kisumu within which the study area is partly located, leads nationally in HIV cases. This was however not in the scope of coverage for this paper. The section that follows hereunder discusses the conflicts that arise from Catholic couples' search of alternative remedies for childlessness as discussed above.

### ***The Conflict between the Teachings of the Catholic Church and the Traditional Luo Remedies to Childlessness***

From the above discussions it is clear that some of the childless couples turn to the traditional remedies of childlessness. As Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990) argue, most African Christians may revert to traditional religious practices when confronted with critical issues in their lives. For the Catholics, when this happens, and they turn to the traditional cultural practices, conflict is expected since most of these traditional practices go against the Church's doctrine. The priest of Ojolla said that the remedies have serious consequences. When a man marries another wife, for instance, then this brings a challenge to the institution of marriage. He elaborated:

Polygamy you know will definitely deny the two of them the sacramental life which is very vital to a Catholic. The first wife will of course continue with the sacraments. The husband and the second or the third will not receive Holy Communion (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla).

Another Priest explained that, the Church teaches that the couples are supposed to live as they are, with or without children, but among the Luo, marriage and fecundity goes hand in hand.



This leaves the Church at a limbo because the Church does not reject the children born out of the second union. The Church baptizes them meaning that the Church incorporates them into her larger family. However, the parents are sidelined in Church activities. Those taking part in such and other related traditional activities are also denied leadership positions because the Church considers such as offence against marriage (CCC, 2380).

On the same, narrative from a research participant suffices:

I used to receive Holy Communion and I was a staunch Catholic. My first wife who converted to Catholic could not give birth. She brought her sister and I married her. We participate actively; Martina (*not her real name*) is receiving Holy Communion. Her sister and I have been denied the same. The only wish I have is that the Church could allow me to receive Holy Communion because I am like someone who has married twins. I feel that my wife and her sister are like one flesh. The Church should understand the problem that forced me to marry another wife (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

This participant counts himself as a victim of the conflict between the traditional remedies to childlessness and the Church's teaching. For him, the Church can only accept him after he has sent away the second wife or if one of the two women passes on. The Church too, does not allow one to resort to the traditional diviners. Those who do so are not supposed to receive the Holy Communion until they repents of the "sin".

Not all Luo childless Christians are in dilemma. Some have completely subscribed to the Catholic faith. A participant said:

Yes, if I was not a Christian I would have had the option of being unfaithful to my spouse and commit adultery and beget a child because we both know he is impotent. However, as a Christian, my morality and conscience cannot allow me to do that. It would be sinful to break my marriage vows and have children out of wedlock. So I have decided to wait, may be things will turn out differently (oral interview on 26/4/2014 at Rang'ala, Ugunja).

The SCC leaders explained that the remedies that the traditional Luo community uses to resolve the challenge of childlessness are against the teachings of the Church. Since a child is a gift from God, some methods like polygamy and adultery interfere with the marital covenant leading to sin (FGD on 27/3/2015 at Ojolla Church). These, to the Church, are illegitimate unions. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also condemns practices of divination and magic. "Practices of magic and sorcery, taming occult powers for one's service, even if it is for restoring one's health is contrary to religion" (CCC, 2117). The teachings of the Catholic Catechism show that, "...divination, magic and sorcery are offences against true religion" (A Catholic Catechism No. 321).

***The Potential of Inculturation in Resolving Challenges Related to Childlessness***

Inculturation could be one way in which the Church can help address the challenges associated with childlessness. Simply defined, Inculturation is an attempt by the Church to integrate the African values into her teachings. Paul II (1982) refers to this as, the Africanization or indigenization of Christianity. It is an attempt to incarnate the message of Christ. Inculturation therefore entails that the fusion of the two realities, the African culture and the Gospel values. They are not destroyed or absorbed but each remains distinct and they enrich each other, in the long run they leave transforming each other. Subsequently, through inculturation, the Church would try to understand the Luo cultural values and attempt to integrate them into her teachings. This would make some of the cultural values that are considered alien to the Church, acceptable. Once the Church appreciates these values then the childless couple would seek for solutions without fear of going against the Church's teachings. This will allow the Luo community to live integrated Christian lives. All the Parish Priests that were interviewed observed that there is need for inculturation as a way forward to addressing the problems of an African Christian.

As an intervention to encourage openness and avoid hide-and-seek game between the Church and the childless couple, inculturation would effect a more adequate presentation of the Gospel. It would also help the Gospel to be understood and well lived by the African people within the challenges they face. Integrating the teachings of the Church and the indigenous practices would help provide solutions to genuine concerns of the Luo (and African communities at large), and at the same time, enhance a sense of identity for Africans who do not want to ape other cultures. In the end, this would help the Catholic Church have deeper roots in the African soil. This perspective finds support in scholarly works like Nkurunziza (2008), Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990) who argues that African Church must rely on African values and belief systems to become authentic. Nkurunziza likens Africa to a mother that must nurse her child with her own breasts. He says that Africa must look at evangelization from her own perspective and not Euro-centric. These views are echoed by Pope John Paul II (1982), who indicates that inculturation is necessary for authentic evangelization, and that unless the people of Africa feel Christianity as part of their own flesh and blood, their own soul, they will not be disposed to defend the faith.

As Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990) argue, many African Christians at critical moments in their lives have recourse to practices of the traditional religion or where they feel that certain

elements of their culture are more respected. As the discussion above has shown, this is mostly the true reflection of the childless Luo couple. Subsequently, allowing a fusion of African and Christian practices, and specifically practices like polygamy and levirate unions, will help childless couple feel accepted and authentic within the community of believers. The theological and cultural baggage, which was left behind by the western Christian missionaries who planted the Church in Africa, should be dealt with in order to free both the Church and the Africans who find themselves at the crossroads of the two. Magesa (2004, p.126) supports the argument saying that: “*The Church in Africa is like a potted plant living in a foreign soil*”. This “potted plant” can only grow if it finds acceptance among the cultural foundations of African communities.

The Church should consider inculturating African marriage. The concept of marriage as it is today is quite western. Some of the marriage practices among the Luo are quite helpful in distressful situations. For instance in the Luo’s worldview of marriage, polygamy is not seen as infidelity or concubinage. All the wives have equal rights, privileges and a special bond with the husband. Subsequently, as one priest alluded, “God works even in the polygamous families. Most of the clergy in Kisumu diocese come from polygamous families. This shows that even in these families, God can still be experienced” (oral interview on 16/2/2014 at St. Mary’s School Yala). Seen from a different perspective, polygamy helps solve the conflict of culture and religion, and according to Bujo (2009) and Mulago (1981), the Church should therefore inculturate African marriages to avoid all dichotomies that separate African and Christian marriages. In the case of childlessness, inculturating the practice within the Church would enable the African Christians to live faithfully and honestly; thus, as noted by a priest, “the believers of our community will be true to their faith and there would be no double life. Actions branded as demonic acts like visiting diviners and witchdoctors to solve challenges of childlessness would probably drastically reduce” (oral interview on 5/7/2013 at Rang’ala Church). Inculturation of some of the useful practices therefore means making religion relevant to them and their everyday life situations. In a nutshell, the Church should be present and active in the lives of the Africans.

As scholarly works (see for example Malula, 1997; and, Kemdirim, 1996) suggest, and so we emphasize, there is need to study the African cultures and undertake a process of inculturation that would benefit the African Christian. Kemdirim (1996) warns that:

The exclusion of some Christians and the barring of heathens from becoming members of the Church because of irregular marital situations or polygamy would seem to negate making Christ and His message of salvation relevant to the people

of every culture, locality and time. It would, therefore, be appropriate for the Church in Africa to initiate a painstaking and organized research in the African family system at this point in time (p. 242).

The study established that the couples were living dual lives as Christians and at the same time reverting to the traditional Luo practices. Majority of the couples were not satisfied with their state of being childless and they made efforts to overcome it even if the means was against Christian teachings. During moments of crisis in an African person's life, they easily revert to the traditional customs for solutions. Consequently, inculturation should be encouraged to meet the childless Christians within the challenging situations.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion has shown that the teachings of the Catholic Church conflict with the traditional Luo worldview on involuntary childlessness. Whereas the Catholic Church does not see any problem with involuntary childlessness in the marriages of the Catholic couples, the Luo couples need solutions to the problem for marriage without children is meaningless. Due to the conflicts, couples without children face both social and religious challenges. They are mainly alienated or stigmatized by the community members. Until a solution to this conflict is sought, then the two world-views will always conflict. As the last section of the essay shows, the Church is under obligation to pursue the possibilities of inculturation and allow for the practice of certain aspects of the Luo culture to help childless couples remain practice their faith and fit within their community.

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**HUMANAE VITAE AT FIFTY: A NIGERIAN MORAL THEOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVE Rev. Dr Raymond Olusesan Aina (MSP)**

**ABSTRACT**

What is the impact of *Humanae Vitae*'s teaching on today's 'digital natives'? What is the connection between a 'pro-life' disposition demanded by *Humanae vitae* and honorable courtship, which the Church demands of her children? These are the questions that this contribution confronts from a specific context. The contribution argues, first, that some 'counterintuitive' research results in secular sciences appear to confirm a key *Humanae Vitae*'s message. The second argument is that the contraception markets may be slowing down in the West. However, the market is expanding in Africa, without regard to the moral morass and health hazards that even western secular scientists are pointing out. The third argument is that secular scientific studies are grasping the message of the Church's pro-life teaching. There is a connection between conjugal happiness and premarital sexual experiences. Accordingly, today's youths need to explore the relationship between a 'pro-life' disposition demanded by *Humanae vitae* and honorable dating and courtship that the Church stresses in *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 49) and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos 1632, 2350).

*Keywords:* Abortion, Conjugal morality, Contraception, Courtship, *Humanae Vitae*, Pro-life movement, Theology of the Body

**INTRODUCTION**

July 2018 was the fiftieth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*. One wonders if an average African Catholic undergraduate knows the document. Those in various pro-life movements might have come across *Humanae Vitae*. Similarly, some Catholics preparing for their wedding might have heard of *Humanae Vitae*'s message. Nevertheless, participants in pre-nuptial classes and pro-life activists offer arguments deeply rooted in the Catholic moral tradition that Pope St Paul VI articulated. After fifty years, several local churches around the world are assessing the impact of *Humanae Vitae* in their societies. The key questions this contribution confronts are: how has *Humanae Vitae* been received among Nigerian Catholics? What impact has it had on the life, moral reasoning, and choices of the post-*Humane vitae* Catholics? How many are in a state of invincible ignorance (i.e., they do not know)?

Accordingly, this contribution highlights *Humanae Vitae*'s salient points and the extent it has been received theologically and pastorally in Nigeria. The second part of the presentation will dwell briefly on how individual Catholics' choices have been faithful to Pope St. Paul VI's

teaching. In the third part, we shall consider how a ‘pro-life’ disposition demanded by *Humanae vitae* can and should inspire honorable dating and courtship among Nigerian youths.

### I. *HUMANAЕ VITAE* AND ITS RESONANCE FIFTY YEARS LATER

Paul VI published the long-awaited encyclical on the regulation of birth on July 25, 1968.

*Humanae Vitae* (henceforth HV), by today’s standard, is a very short encyclical. HV has three sections. Section one summarises contemporary challenges needing magisterial interventions concerning population growth, demographic change, and the regulation of birth. Section two outlines the doctrinal principles underpinning the Church’s theological responses to issues raised in section one. Here, HV’s author presents the Church’s position on methods of regulation of birth. Section three outlines pastoral directives, which, if adhered to, can make the position of HV easier to follow and promote.

#### Doctrinal Principles on Regulation of Birth

Human beings are not just material or psychological creatures. They are creatures with supernatural vocation. ‘Responsible parenthood’ is a core element of humans’ vocation. The vocation is tied to marriage (conjugal love). The gift of marriage, characterised by reciprocal self-gift, is oriented to “the generation and education of new lives” (HV § 8). Accordingly, there are defining characteristics and demands of marriage. Conjugal love, therefore, is the first doctrinal principle to be considered. This love is “fully human” because instinct and sentiment do not rule it. It moves the persons in the peculiar love relationship towards being one heart and soul on the way to moral excellence (HV § 9). Furthermore, conjugal love is “fecund.” It is not exhausted in the deep love and commitment of partners. Children born of this fruitfulness are supreme gifts and sources of welfare for their parents (HV § 9).

Hence, chaste intimacy must characterise sexual intercourse within marriage; besides, it must be open to procreation. There can be occasions when, due to some accidents utterly independent of the will of the spouses, they ‘make love’ though aware that they will not ‘make babies’. How should one regard this ‘lack of openness to the transmission of life’? HV states that ‘making love’ during this time is lawful *provided* (NB: not ‘because’) the ‘lovemaking’ (sexual intercourse) between the spouses remained “ordained toward expressing and consolidating their

union” (HV 11).<sup>6</sup> HV acknowledges that, indeed, it is not every sexual intercourse within marriage that brings new life. This is possible, according to the ‘laws of nature’ and “rhythms of fecundity.” Nevertheless, HV insists that the Church still calls on men and women to observe those ‘laws of nature’ about the transmission of life.

However, in the last paragraph of § 11, HV restates the traditional doctrinal teaching: “each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life.” HV states in § 12 that we should understand the statement in the last paragraph of § 11 within the context of another traditional position. There is “the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man (sic) on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning” (HV § 12). What HV has done here is to restate traditional teaching using the lingo of contemporary persons so that it can make sense and appeal to them. HV appears confident that it has succeeded in the choice of the words if one considers what it states at the end of § 12. We read, “We believe that the men (sic) of our day are particularly capable of seizing the deeply reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle.”

*Humanae Vitae* saw the danger of the disconnection among sex, marriage, and procreation. The disconnection will increase marital infidelity and the widespread lowering of moral bars (HV 17). Faced with contemporary discussions about human sexuality, especially among young adults, we must ask the crucial question about love and sexuality: ‘What do women and men really want?’ The question leads us to consider what science tells us about *Humanae Vitae*’s subject matter.

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<sup>6</sup> This makes sense, for instance, in the case of a widow and widower who remarried with the woman long past menopause or the man can no longer produce semen due to chemotherapy for prostate cancer. Surely, they will be ‘making love’ but due to factors beyond the control of both parties, they cannot ‘make babies’. Yet, their sexual intercourse has value, meaning and end without ‘love making’ that ‘makes babies’. This concession should make us remember that sexual intercourse has dynamic meaning and values beyond solely being meant for ‘making babies’. We are reminded of Jack Dominian’s message about the symbolisms of sexual intercourse. According to Dominian, there are six possibilities of ‘love making’: 1. Verifying personal significance; 2. Reinforcing identity; 3. Facilitating reconciliation; 4. Confirmation of continuity; 5. Thanksgiving; and 6. Personal life-giving. On few occasions, sexual intercourse is procreative. Jack Dominian, "Sexuality: From Law & Biology to Love & Person," in *Sex & Marriage in the Catholic Tradition: An Historical Overview*, ed. Douglas Letson (Ottawa: Novalis, 2001), 335-46, at 45.

Science affirming the Doctrine of *Humanae Vitae*

Clinical and relational psychologies and sociological research offer us some insights about emotional health and sexual patterns. Researches in these disciplines on emotional health, sexual patterns, and activities show that specific sexual patterns of behaviour today are contributing to reduced physical and emotional health. For instance, the growing rate of STDs and STIs today is frightening. Strains of human papilloma virus (HPV) are the most common of the STIs. About 99% of all cervical cancer implicate strains of HPV. Also, genital herpes, an incurable STD, and lethal HIV/AIDS are part of STIs impacting physical health today.<sup>7</sup> Deducing from the preceding, “the practice of multiple sexual partners” has an intricate connection with the rise in “sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).”<sup>8</sup> According to Theresa Notare, “From the perspective of the physical body alone, the only thing that makes sense is to practice abstinence or monogamy.”<sup>9</sup>

From the perspective of emotional health research, several studies show that since the sexual revolutions of the 1960s, we are witnessing a curious though understandable phenomenon. On the one hand, unhinged sexual activities and experiments in sexual behaviours have increased as consciousness grew in respect for autonomy. In particular, the consciousness grew with the intensification of human rights discourse, especially reproductive rights. On the other hand, there is no parallel rise in emotional health and sexual maturity. Contrary to the projections of the sexual revolution, unhinged sexual behaviours have not led to happier people. According to some past research in the West, depression and attempted suicide are more prevalent between sexually active young adults than their sexually inactive counterparts. Indeed, more sexually active ladies suffer heartaches and emotional distress because of the human immaturity of their male partners. Why? Inadvertently, perhaps, the sexual revolution led to the trivialisation of sex (like ‘one-night stand, or ‘hooking up’).<sup>10</sup> A society that trivialises sex, in the words of Angela

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<sup>7</sup>Theresa Notare, "Sex: What Do Women (and Men) Really Want?," in *Respect Life Program* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), 1-4, at 2.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Hanna Klaus, "Rejecting *Humanae Vitae*: The Social Costs of Denying the Obvious," *The Linacre Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (2018): 322-26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0024363918817319>.

Franks, has some features, “more divorce, more unwed parenthood, more abuse, more abortion, less commitment, less trust, less love.”<sup>11</sup>

Sociological research presents us with another reality about immature mentality and commitment to marriage after extended periods of sexually active cohabitation. There is a strong correlation “between the practices of premarital sex and/or cohabitation and divorce’.”<sup>12</sup> Contemporary society is coming to terms with some other counterintuitive trends. For instance, a 2016 study from the American Institute for Family Life states that the ideological consequence of the sexual revolution of the 1960s has led to decreased marital bliss and increased the odds against marriage stability.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, “For all three decades, the women with the second lowest five-year divorce rates are those who had only one partner prior to marriage. It’s reasonable to assume that these partners reflected women’s eventual husbands. Even so, premarital sex with one partner substantially increases the odds of divorce.”<sup>14</sup>

Another study from the Institute for Family Life returns to the question around the variables for marital happiness. Once again, its findings look back at the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the lasting effect today.<sup>15</sup> Proponents of the sexual revolution argued for respecting personal autonomy as a crucial bioethical principle. Hence, people, especially women, must have the right to deploy their sexual currency without the societal pressure to get married. Unfortunately, some values were lost. For instance, we lost the bigger picture of the connection between happiness in marriage and the number of sexual partners before marriage.<sup>16</sup> Having premarital multiple sex partners harmed the marital quality, especially for women. Premarital sexual activity increased

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<sup>11</sup>Angela Franks, "The Gift of Female Fertility: Church Teaching on Contraception," in *Women, Sex, and the Church: A Case for Catholic Teaching*, ed. Erika Bachiochi (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2010), 97-119, at 09.

<sup>12</sup>Notare, "Sex," 2.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas H. Wolfinger, “Counterintuitive Trends in the Link between Premarital Sex and Marital Stability,” Institute for Family Studies, June 6, 2016, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/counterintuitive-trends-in-the-link-between-premarital-sex-and-marital-stability/> (accessed 10.11.2018).

<sup>14</sup>Wolfinger, “Counterintuitive Trends” (accessed 10.11.2018).

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas H. Wolfinger, “Does Sexual History Affect Marital Happiness?,” Institute for Family Studies, October 22, 2018, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/does-sexual-history-affect-marital-happiness> (accessed 24.10.2018).

<sup>16</sup>Those who abstained from sex till marriage and those who are faithful to their spouses in lifelong relationships are generally happier than those with multiple sexual partners either as premarital or extramarital. Johann Christoph Arnold, *Sex, God & Marriage* (Walden, NY; Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing House, 2015), xiv.

the probability of premarital procreation, and or/abortion. The probability significantly affected marital bliss for women mainly, those who feel used by men, even if it was consensual at the onset.

*Humanae Vitae* outlines some consequences of the contraceptive mentality, which, unfortunately, have come to pass: loss of respect for women<sup>17</sup>, and lowering of moral standards (HV 17). “The feminization of poverty” (HV 17) is another consequence, which can be seen as an offshoot of what Paul VI sees as the ‘*thingnification*’ of the woman (HV 17). People were convinced that contraceptives, especially the pill, would prevent pregnancy. The ‘promise’ put an unforeseen burden on women. Since women could now control their sexual activities and the consequences – contracept, get pregnant and give birth, abortion,

...many men reasoned that they were not responsible for children conceived outside marriage. Indicating men's denial of responsibility: ‘Shotgun marriages’ soon plummeted, while out-of-wedlock births nearly tripled. In less than two decades (1965-1984), abortions among unmarried women grew from an annual 88,000 to 1,271,000.<sup>18</sup>

There is another slogan targeting, especially the youth: ‘safe sex’. However, an appraisal of current statistics yields a different conclusion: ‘contraception may be unpredictable’. According to current statistics, the rate of abortions and teenage pregnancy rose astronomically. For instance, about 1 million of 11 million users of contraceptive pills get pregnant in the United States. 40% of these pregnancies end up in abortions.<sup>19</sup>

In the light of the previous, we come back to our initial and central question: When it comes to sex, ‘What do women and men want?’ *Humanae Vitae* and science appear to have a similar answer: “To love and be loved the way God designed it — generously, faithfully and

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<sup>17</sup>It was not just Pope Paul VI who prophetically foresaw this. Mahatma Gandhi offered similar prediction several decades before *Humanae Vitae*: “‘As it is, man has sufficiently degraded (woman) for his lust, and artificial methods, no matter how well-meaning the advocates may be, will still further degrade her.’” Franks, “Gift of Female Fertility,” 108, citing Mohandas Gandhi, *Gandhi's Health Guide* (2000), 161.

<sup>18</sup> “Another Look at Contraception,” in *Respect Life Program* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018), <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/respect-life-program/2018/another-look-at-contraception.cfm> (accessed 10.09.2018).

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen Raviele, Richard J. Fehring, and Janet Smith, “The Catholic Medical Association and *Humanae Vitae*: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Encyclical,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (2018): 311-12, at 12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0024363918816677>; Klaus, “Rejecting *Humanae Vitae*,” 322-26; “Another Look at Contraception” (accessed).

unconditionally.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, data and interpretation from the sciences support *Humanae Vitae*’s message.

#### The Doctrine of *Humanae Vitae*: Timeless and Meaningful Today

Self-mastery is central to HV’s apparently rigorist message.<sup>21</sup> Self-mastery helps us to reaffirm time and again our fundamental human dignity. As *imago Dei*, we are not passive objects that nature and deterministic laws of nature hold hostage. We are beings-in-relation (to use Martin Heidegger’s expression of the human person). So, our awareness of every person as *imago Dei* demands that we relate with others as subjects and not objects to be acted upon, regardless of their desires, states, and aspirations.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, self-mastery is crucial in the ‘language of the body,’ expressing the true meaning of sex.

HV still challenges contemporary expressions of hedonism and distrust in the human capacity for heroism and self-transcendence. Part of HV’s challenge is that ‘*Deus impossibilia non iubet*’ (‘God does not command the impossible’). This phrase is one of the traditional moral principles that help us appreciate the Church’s longstanding doctrinal teachings on sexual ethics and conjugal morality. According to this principle, “through the grace made available by Christ’s redemptive act, we are able to regain the control of our desires.”<sup>23</sup>

#### Contraception and the Signification of Sex

According to *Humanae Vitae*, the sex act, which is not open to procreation, is not genuinely unitive. We can appreciate this assertion through the logic of semiotics. In postmodernism, we act and produce things to communicate meaning (*signification*). Hence, to grasp the depth and message of something going on, one must go beyond the facile reality and pay attention to the semiotic implication of the action or phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> In other words, through “abstract observation,” we can “determine a logical structure that could be formalized.”<sup>25</sup> Through the

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<sup>20</sup>Notare, "Sex," 4.

<sup>21</sup>Janet Smith, "Pope John Paul II and *Humanae Vitae*," *International Review of Natural Family Planning* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 95-112, at 97.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>24</sup>Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, ed. Peter Barry and Helen Carr, Beginnings, (Manchester; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1999), 25-26.

<sup>25</sup>K. Oliver, "Semiotic, The," in *A Dictionary of Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Protevi (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), 526.

general observation, we can assess social psychology that shows us “what constitutes signs and the laws that govern them.”<sup>26</sup> Semiotic are synonymous with actions like “rhythm, tones, gestures and colour.” Semiotic consideration provides “signification meaning for our lives by discharging drives into language.”<sup>27</sup>

Specific actions and words have some inherent meanings and expectations attached to them by the fact of being uttered or done. Hence, we suffer heartbreak if we experience something to the contrary. Take, for instance, an act of a kiss on the forehead. It expresses by that very fact a message that the one kissing is saying to one kissed, ‘You’re special to me’; ‘you and I are an item.’ Also, the act of kissing on the lips has an original message. It signifies that those kissing care about each other; they love each other significantly; they will look out for each other’s wellbeing. Imagine if the one kissed got to know later that the kiss was merely a ruse or an act of deception, or it was meant to seduce or manipulate or extract gifts or even sex from the one kissed. Anger and resentment at being used replace affection. In other words, certain expectations go with specific actions by the signification value of that act. The same goes for words like ‘I love you,’ ‘My Boo,’ ‘My Bae.’ Individual acts of or with the human body (like sexual intercourse) have inherent meaning.<sup>28</sup> Hence, HV teaches that some actions like sex cannot be treated as ‘casual’ or ‘trials’.

Sex as merely an expression of physical desire without the openness or at least disposition to the possibility of procreation goes against the signification meaning of sex. According to Smith, “To have sex without being open to procreation diminishes the union one is having with one’s beloved.”<sup>29</sup> If contraception is against the signification of sex, must one then not consider a significant consequence of sex – pregnancy, and procreation? Since sexual desire and activities are part of the chemistry of love all our lives, must married people not think about or plan the size of their families? ‘Responsible parenthood’ means whatever they choose about how to transmit life should conform to “the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and of its acts” (HV 10).

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Smith, "Pope John Paul II," 104-05.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 106.



## II. *HUMANAE VITAE* IN NIGERIA: INSPIRATIONS AND IMPACT

An article in the *Conscience* magazine<sup>30</sup>, which offers a defiant critique of *Humanae Vitae*, states a fact African Catholics should note. Africa has “the world’s lowest rate of contraceptive use.”<sup>31</sup> The article affirms that “Catholic bishops have been especially influential in promoting” views that are consistent with *Humanae vitae*.<sup>32</sup> The parent body of *Conscience* pushes this criticism further by singling out Nigerian Catholic bishops:

In Nigeria, Catholic bishops refuse to acknowledge the role that modern contraceptives play in reducing maternal mortality. . . In 2015, the Nigerian bishops charged that international family planning programs were part of a ‘culture of death’ designed to promote a ‘radical’ program of abortion and contraception pushed by ‘wealthy philanthropists, donor nations and international organizations’ that would result in the ‘hyper-sexualization of our youth.’<sup>33</sup>

Catholics for Choice’s report on *Humanae Vitae* is referring in part to the Pro-Life conference organized by the Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province in April 2015.<sup>34</sup> This conference is just one of the many consistent advocacies for a reformation of the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The stringent advocacies of various pro-life groups in collaboration with the Church hierarchy are based first on doctrinal convictions, on the one hand, and troubling existential realities, on the other. Let us briefly consider these existential realities.

### Abortion and Contraception in Nigeria

Abortion in Nigeria has been on the increase since the late nineties. For instance, before the year 2000AD, based on available documentation, there were 610,000 abortions per annum (25 abortions in every 1000 women) of women between the ages of 15-44. Abortion was lowest in poor and rural communities, mostly in northern Nigeria. Abortion rates were highest in the

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<sup>30</sup>*Conscience* is published by the ‘Catholics for Choice’, a movement noted for its staunch opposition to the Church’s teaching on sexual ethics and conjugal morality as declared in *Humanae vitae*.

<sup>31</sup> “*Humanae Vitae*: The Story Behind the Ban on Contraception,” *Conscience*, no. 1 (April 29, 2018), <https://consciencemag.org/2018/04/29/humanae-vitae/> (accessed 10.11.2018).

<sup>32</sup> “*Humanae Vitae*: The Story Behind the Ban” (accessed 10.11.2018).

<sup>33</sup> *Humanae Vitae and the Damage Done: How the Vatican’s Ban on Birth Control Hurt the World* (Washington, DC Catholics for Choice, 2018), 7, <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CFC-HumanVitae-13.pdf> (accessed 10.11.2018).

<sup>34</sup> “Nigerians Speak Out Against Abortion and Contraception Promoted by International Organizations,” *Aleteia*, April 24, 2015, <https://aleteia.org/2015/04/24/nigerians-speakout-against-abortion-and-contraception-promoted-byinternational-organizations/> (accessed 10.11.2018).

economically developed southern regions.<sup>35</sup> From 2006, of the 6.8 million pregnancies that occurred each year in Nigeria, 750,000 women had induced abortions.<sup>36</sup> By 2012, Nigeria recorded 1.25m abortions each year. Of this number, women between the ages of 15 and 49 procured 33 abortions per 1000 women. To date, Nigeria records 56% abortion of unintended pregnancies.<sup>37</sup> Again, abortions are lower in the northern zones; while they are higher in southern zones.<sup>38</sup>

These grim statistics show a significant pattern according to available records in public. The more Christian, and significantly Catholic, southern regions<sup>39</sup> have higher abortion rates. One can infer a few things. First, there is a connection between contraception and abortion.

Consequently, we can safely infer that contraceptive use is also widespread in the southern regions of Nigeria despite the clear teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. According to a 2015 report on nutrition and health situation in Nigeria, produced by the National Bureau of Statistics, recourse to family planning methods rose to an average of 30%. 20% of the users employed mechanical birth control methods (contraceptives), while 10% of women used traditional methods of family planning. However, teenage use of contraception had risen from 4% in 2014 to 14% by 2015. Adult women's use increased from 25% to 31% under the same year under review. However, some academics and activists claim that Nigeria is not doing enough to increase the access to and use of the fifteen types of contraceptives available in

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<sup>35</sup> Stanley K. Henshaw, Susheela Singh, Boniface A. Oye-Adeniran, Isaac F. Adewole, NgoziIwere and Yvette P. Cuca, "The Incidence of Induced Abortion in Nigeria," *International Family Planning Perspectives* 24, no. 4 (December 1998): 156-164, at 156.

<sup>36</sup>Guttmacher Institute, "Facts on Unwanted Pregnancy and Induced Abortion in Nigeria," *In Brief* (June 2006): 1-2 at 1.

<sup>37</sup>AkinrinolaBankole *et al.*, "The Incidence of Abortion in Nigeria," *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 41, no. 4 (December 2015): 170-181; "Abortion is common in Nigeria despite restrictive law," <http://www.ipas.org/en/News/2015/November/Abortion-is-common-in-Nigeria-despite-restrictive-law.aspx> (accessed 23.11.2017).

<sup>38</sup>Bankole *et al.*, "The Incidence of Abortion in Nigeria," 171; "Abortion in Nigeria: Fact Sheet," Guttmacher Institute, October 2015, <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-nigeria> (accessed 23.11.2017).

<sup>39</sup>The total Catholic population in Nigeria is 25,758,098. Of this population, there is a total of 5,607,552 Catholics in northern Nigeria. Southern Nigeria has a total of 19,628,386. There is a marginal difference of 14,020,834 in Catholic population between the Northern and Southern Nigeria. Cf. Raymond Olusesan Aina, "Ist die Kircheverloren? Die katholischeKircheNigerias in den Wirren des Terrorismus," *Forum Weltkirchemit* 2 (*Ausgabe* 4/2017), <http://www.forum-weltkirche.de/de/artikel/24832.ist-die-kirche-verloren.html>(accessed 13.08.2018).

Nigeria. For instance, Funke Fayehun, a senior lecturer at the University of Ibadan, avers that “Nigeria has made no progress in improving the use of contraceptives for the past 10 years. Contraceptive use in the country is incredibly low.”<sup>40</sup> Though an overwhelming number of Nigerians know of at least a contraceptive method, less than 18% use any contraceptive, not even women aged between 15 and 49 years have a percentage use above 15%.<sup>41</sup>

An Irony about Abortion and Contraception in Nigeria: A Challenge to the Pro-Life Movement  
Critical African Catholics should not miss the irony. Scholars and researchers in the West are showing the untoward effects of a contraceptive mentality on human bodies, familial relationships, and psychological states of users. Conversely, scholars, researchers, and activists in Nigeria are carrying on as if these depressing statistics do not matter to African peoples. So, on the one hand, the contraception markets may be slowing down in the West. On the other hand, the African continent is the dumping ground again, without regard to the moral morass and health hazards that even western secular scientists are pointing out.

Assuredly, this state of affairs confronts us with the necessity of increasing the presence and message of the pro-life movement in the public domain, especially the cyber world where the digital natives dwell today<sup>42</sup>. The pro-life movement must be aware of the optics, which move today’s youths and the increasing upwardly mobile Nigerians. The pro-life message must be attuned to capture the attention of these digital natives and technologically savvy professionals. We must not just know the truth. One must know how to say it in ways that will be intelligible, meaningful, and passionate to the targets for contraceptive mentality. Church teaching and criteria are accessible to human reason and “in a convincing way that rouses the intellect from its rational amnesia.”<sup>43</sup> For instance, the pro-life message should present its message, unencumbered

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<sup>40</sup>Funkeb Fayehun, “Contraceptive use in Nigeria is incredibly low. A lack of knowledge may be why,” *The Conversation* (July 27, 2017), <https://theconversation.com/contraceptive-use-in-nigeria-is-incredibly-low-a-lack-of-knowledge-may-be-why-81453> (accessed 12.11.2018).

<sup>41</sup>Fayehun, “Contraceptive use in Nigeria” (accessed).

<sup>42</sup>‘Digital natives’ refer to those born in the 1980s and 1990s (the computer era). Conversely, ‘digital immigrants’ are those born earlier; their first experience of the mass media was the radio. Cf. Gerald Musa, “Integral Development of Priests and Seminarians in Digital Age: A Look at the Privileges and Demands of Social Media,” in *Pastoral Communication: Youth Apostolate in New Media Age*, ed. Inaku K. Egere and Joseph O. Faniran (Port Harcourt: CIWA Publications, 2019), 109-33, at 09-10.

<sup>43</sup>Gerhard Muller, “Bioethics through the Eyes of Faith,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 277-85, at 82.

by medical jargon. It should offer why the Church is so concerned with sex. Sex “has everything to do with love, and God is love!”<sup>44</sup> Sexual intercourse within marriage is “a reflection of Trinitarian Love. God, who is love and life, has inscribed in man and woman the vocation to share in a special way in his mystery of personal communion and in his work as Creator and Father...’.”<sup>45</sup> In conversations on pro-life issues, pro-life advocates should point out “new ways of promoting the Church's bioethical teaching.”<sup>46</sup>

According to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,<sup>47</sup> bio-medical interventions, like mechanical birth control methods, are evaluated, based on unconditional respect of the human person from birth to natural death (DP § 10), and respect of the personal act transmitting life (conjugal sex) (DP § 16). So, instead of presenting the Catholic moral teaching as having “too many prohibitions,” we should first acknowledge how God has blessed humans with gifts from above. The gifts include life, knowledge, freedom, and love. Other gifts include intellectual capabilities and technological works. We are participants in God’s creative power. Accordingly, God calls us too to transform creation by ordering various assets “toward the dignity and wellbeing of all human beings and of the human person in his entirety” (DP 36). Hence, humans are “steward of the value and intrinsic beauty of creation.” We are not masters of creation and its intrinsic patterns. So, behind every ‘NO,’ as in *Humanae Vitae*, there is recognition of intrinsic dignity in creation. As obedient co-creators, we respect and work within the boundaries of creation’s intrinsic dignity and patterns.

We can see that Catholic moral teaching is inspired. The moral teaching in *Humanae Vitae*, for instance, is based on “an inspired vision of the meaning of love, wherein the sexual act finds its proper place as an expression of nuptial intimacy and openness to the life-giving creativity of God.”<sup>48</sup> Problems unravel once the sexual act disconnects from the authentic context – conjugal love (DP 6). The problems include artificial reproductive technologies (ARTs), pre-implantation diagnosis (PID), cryopreservation, and somatic cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT) i.e. embryonic stem cells.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Dignitas Personae on Certain Bioethical Questions* (Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, September 8, 2008). Henceforth, DP.

<sup>48</sup>Muller, "Bioethics through the Eyes," 284.

III. 'HONOURABLE' COURTSHIP AMONG NIGERIAN CATHOLIC YOUTHS:  
AN INSPIRATION FROM *HUMANAE VITAE*

As stated earlier, secular scientific studies are grasping the message of the Church's pro-life teaching: "premarital sexual experience affects marital happiness." For this reason, the Church insistently proclaims the need for honorable courtship. We come to the final section of this contribution. Here, we shall consider how a 'pro-life' disposition demanded by *Humanae vitae* can and should inspire honorable dating and courtship among Nigerian youths<sup>49</sup>.

Given that courtship is a sexual relationship, the Church as *mater et magistra* (mother and teacher) provides a guide. She did this in the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*). In the third paragraph of no. 49, the Church tells us:

It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, above all in the heart of their own families, about the dignity of married love, its role and its exercise; in this way they will be able to engage in honorable courtship and enter upon marriage of their own.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* number 1632 refers to *Gaudium et Spes*' exhortation. In order to understand what 'honorable courtship' means, no. 1632 refers to no. 2350, which states as follows:

Those who are *engaged to marry* are called to live in chastity in continence. They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity and the hope of receiving one another from God. They should reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love. They will help each other to grow in chastity.

The love between persons in an honorable and healthy intimate relationship is characterised by '*amor complacentia*,' '*amor concupiscentia*,' and '*amor benevolentia*'.<sup>50</sup> '***Amor complacentia***' (**love as attraction**) is a mutual attitude between the man and the woman that sees the beloved as a good in herself or himself. '***Amor concupiscentia***' (**love as desire**) is a state of genuine longing for the beloved as a human person, and not because she/he is a means to satisfying the

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<sup>49</sup> This has been elaborated elsewhere. See Raymond Olusesan Aina, "Honourable Courtship in the Church: Towards a Framework for Vocational Discernment," *Asian Horizons* 12, no. 2 (June 2018): 331-44.

<sup>50</sup>Xavier Edayodil, *Sexual Ethics for Today's Youth: Based on the Anthropology of Pope John Paul II*, 3rd ed. (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2012), 89-92.

lover's sensual desire or needs. *Amor concupiscentia* longs for the other in a way that does good to the desired, and not harm. In a healthy relationship, there is also '*amor benevolentia*' (love as goodwill).

Honourable courtship in the spirit of Catholic moral tradition is bound to justice. '*Just love*' means '*an intimate relationship between human persons that is characterised by justice*'.

Margaret Farley, in her *Just Love*, proposes certain norms (obligations) that "must govern all human relationships those which are particular to intimacy of sexual relationships."<sup>51</sup> Norms of just love include the following: Do no unjust harm (*based on the ethical principle of respect for the autonomy and relationality that characterise persons as endowed with dignity; hence their well-being must be respected*); free consent of parties (*based on respect for autonomy*); mutuality; equality; Commitment; Fruitfulness (*these four norms are based on respect for relationality*), and Social justice (*based on the principle of respect for persons as sexual beings in society*).<sup>52</sup>

We come to our final argument in this concluding section. If today's youths follow the dictates of *Humanae vitae*, they shall find an attitude of 'honorable courtship & dating' as truly liberating and pro-life. In the same vein, a respectful acquiescence to *Humanae vitae* promotes a healthy, respectful, and liberating sexual morality demanded by the Church's teaching on 'honorable courtship and dating'. Those who embrace honorable courtship today will, in the future, embrace 'responsible parenthood' as proposed by Pope St. Paul VI in his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. There is hope about Catholic youths in Africa today. An army of a new generation of convinced and more critical youths is growing. This network of young adults is "willing to call into question the thrills of cheap sex and the seeming ease of uncommitted love."<sup>53</sup> The Catholic undergraduates in various Catholic tertiary institutions are part of the new generation restoring hope in the possibility of genuine relationships. They are capable of delaying gratification for the sake of a higher good, just as *Humanae Vitae* called the Church to fifty years ago.

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<sup>51</sup>Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York, NY; London: Continuum, 2007), 230-31.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>53</sup>Arnold, *Sex, God & Marriage*, xiv.

## CONCLUSION

Pope Francis asks us to revisit the fundamental insight of St. Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* on the development of the Church's understanding of marriage and family life: "Blessed Paul VI... further developed the Church's teaching on marriage and the family ... he brought out the intrinsic bond between conjugal love and the generation of life.' Marriage is about love and the possibility of new life. That is a source of great hope for our world today."<sup>54</sup> This is the message that today's youth in Africa, with renewed hope, impetus, and conviction, must set forth with haste to proclaim in their *missio ad/inter gentes*. They shall accomplish this task through individual and collective actions and choices regarding marriage, sex, and family life. They must offer a convincing response to the question posed earlier – a question a society inundated with trivialisation of sex is still battling with: "When it comes to sex, 'What do women and men want?'"

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<sup>54</sup> Terrence Prendergast, "Humanae Vitae at 50 — 1968, the real Summer of Love," *The London Free Press*, July 29, 2018, <https://lfpres.com/opinion/columnists/prendergast-humanae-vitae-at-50-1968-the-real-summer-of-love/wcm/394936f2-1116-4e94-83d2-cc415a9c98ac> (accessed 10.11.2018).

**A Semiotic Investigation of *Ifa* Symbolism in Relations with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic Faith**

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**Abstract**

Relationship in cultural pattern, including religion, accounts for the relationship among human societies generally. The understanding of cultural dynamics of a society is an important way of understanding the value system. Essentially, *Ifá* is believed to be the springboard of Yorùbá culture because virtually every aspect of Yorùbá religious and cultural life has one link or another with *Ifá*. Previous studies on the cultural element of *Ifá* have neither related *Ìbejì* with *Ifá* nor *Ifá* with Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap of *Ifá* symbolism- pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice in relation with *Ìbejì* (twins) among the Yorùbá people and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism. The study examines the pre-*Ifá* divination symbols realised as *ẹ̀bọ* (sacrifice). *Ifá* symbols are investigated to be related with human symbolism in both *Ìbejì* among the Yorùbá people and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith. This work relies substantially on Yorùbá oral literary texts, especially, *Ifá* literary corpus. Semiotics, which is the science of signs, is adopted for the analysis of the data, because, symbolism underlies *Ifá* divination system. Bio or zoo semiotics, which studies symbolism in living organisms, including human beings, is explored. It is found out that, *ẹ̀bọ* is a universal religious implementation order. This universality in the order of religious sacrifice generally and *Ifá* in particular, is however unique with human symbolism in both *Ìbejì* in Yorùbá belief and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith. The work concludes that, the presence of the divinities, and supernatural beings are symbolised in human. In other words, the relationship or connections of *Ifá* symbols are felt on *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism.

Keywords: *Ifá*, *Ìbejì*, Saints Cosmas and Damian, Catholicism, *ẹ̀bọ*, symbolism, semiotics

**Introduction**

This paper is a continuation of the first part<sup>55</sup>, which attempts to establish the cultural links of *Ifá* mythic code with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian. The work demonstrates that, the magical and supernatural power possessed by both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are derived from Yorùbá (*Ifá*) mythology relating to monkey. The study investigates that, medicine, which is a major scope in *Ifa*, is related to the healing or supernatural power possessed by *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian. In addition, the medical ethnical code of *Ifá*, purely based on

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<sup>55</sup> See Òkẹwande (2017, pp. 2-33). A semiotic Investigation of Mythic Relations between *Ifá*, *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic Faith. In *International Journal of African Catholicism*, summer, (9)1. From [www.saintleo.edu/academics/schools/school-of-arts-sciences/international-journal-of-african-catholicism](http://www.saintleo.edu/academics/schools/school-of-arts-sciences/international-journal-of-african-catholicism)



humanitarian service is enforced on *Ìbeji* and Saints Cosmas and Damian. However, the present paper examines the relationship between pre-*Ifá* divination symbols- *ẹbọ idáfá* (*Ifá* divination sacrifice) with *Ìbeji* symbols among the Yorùbá on one hand and Catholic twins- Saints Cosmas and Damian on the other hand. This will further demonstrate that, the relationship of *Ifá* and *Ibeji* with Saints Cosmas and Damian is not in doubt.

*Ifá* has been defined by scholars in different ways that establish the inexplicable and unlimited scope of its knowledge, wisdom and values. Indeed, it is regarded as the bedrock of other aspects of Yorùbá life. The entire life of the Yorùbá people is connected in one way or the other with *Ifá*. “The Yorùbá regard *Ifá* as the repository of their beliefs and moral values...In traditional Yorùbá society, the authority of *Ifá* permeated every aspect of life because the Yorùbá regard *Ifá* as the voice of the divinities and the wisdom of the ancestors” (Abimbólá 1977a, p. v). The implication of these statements is that, the *Ifá* nomenclature transcends Yorùbá religion to other aspects of the Yorùbá life. In other words, *Ifá* encapsulates all that relates with the entire Yorùbá life and to other people’s religion or culture that are related with *Ifá*.

*Ifá* is known to different people by different names throughout the world. Its nomenclature has cut across nations and tribes around the world. For instance, *Ifá* “is considered as the god of divinization in Igala culture. It is believed that, *Ifá* carries messages from the other world to this world. It is also a medium of dialogue between the living and the ancestors” (Negedu, nd, p. 5). *Ifá* communicates in symbols. The symbolisation of *Ifá* is realised in signs, objects, and in animals; including human beings (higher animal). *Ifá* symbolism is also expressed in the physical, spiritual, and the supernatural, living and the dead.

Communication between the human and supernatural agents is made possible by *ẹbọ*. Every religion of the world recognises vital role played by *ẹbọ* in their religious (spiritual) service to God- the Supreme Being. In Yorùbá religion, sacrifice is realised as *ẹbọ*. *Ẹbọ* serves as “spiritual glue” that binds or connects the physical world with the spiritual (unseen) world. *Ẹbọ* is also experienced in other peoples’ culture and religion, especially, those that relate with *Ifá*. For example, Igala people of Nigeria believed that:

*ẹbọ* connects *Ọjọ* to the world symbolized by earth (*ane*) and the ancestral reincarnate human spirit (*ọjọ*). In the phenomenological sphere, *ẹbọ* manifests the divine outpouring of intuition and inspiration of the Supreme Being. **It is the basic participatory character of the human in the divine**, without which the glimpse into the hallowed and holy becomes an illusion. Simply put, **ẹbọ is the gateway to mystical experience and consciousness of the divine presence in the Igala world, creating the pathway**

**for healing and wholeness through destiny** (*okai*) and charisma (Ahiaba 2016, p. 107) (bold mine).

The opinion of this scholar buttresses that, *ebò* opens way for “spiritual network” to perform supernatural events, especially healing- spiritual dispensation known with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian; the attribute that has been established to be derived from *Ifá* (Òkékéndé 2017b). It is equally noted in the above opinion that, it is impossible to dissociate *ebò* from human beings and the supernatural beings, because, *ebò* stands between the gap of human and supernatural being and *Olódùmarè*- the Supreme Being. In other words, *ebò* is complementary divine dispensation of power. “Consequently, in some religions, symbols are a reminder of sacrifice, or of a savior symbol, while in others they are the physical representation of the divine, and in still others, they constitute important lessons to help facilitate and sustain goodness” (Aderibigbe 2016, p. 61). The symbolisms of religion indentified above are relevant to the understanding of the *Ifá* symbolism in *Ìbejì* on one hand and in Saints Cosmas and Damian on the other hand. In other words, the sacrificial, divine and facilitators of goodness, in this case, symbolism of *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are related with *Ifá* symbols.

The relationship of the Yorùbá with the Igala has been addressed by scholars in the areas of social, linguistics and history among others. However, affinity of the Yorùbá with the Igala, extends to religions (*Ifá*) as well. For example, among the Igala people, *Ifá* “is considered as the god of divination in Igala culture. It is believed that, *Ifá* carries messages from the other (invisible) world to this world (earth)”. The present investigation of *ebò-Ifá* (pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice) in relation with *Ìbejì* among the Yorùbá and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith is desirable, the gap that is filled by this study. In other words, both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are supernatural beings. For instance, the Yorùbá believes that, *Ìbejì* are supernatural beings with supernatural power.

Twins are therefore given special names and believed to detain special preternatural powers...Among Yorùbá traditional beliefs and lore some twin-related themes are represented which are also found in other parts of the world. Basic features of the original Yorùbá beliefs have found their way into the religious traditions of descendants of Africans slaves imported in the West Indies and South America (Leroy et al 1995, p. 1).

This opinion recognises the supernatural being nature of *Ìbejì*. It equally established the spread and internalisation of the religious beliefs on *Ìbejì*. Such belief is the human symbolism of *Ifá* on

*Ìbejì-Táyéwó, Kéhìndé and Ìdòwú, Àlàbá and Ìdògbé* and Catholic twins- Saints Cosmas and Damian and Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus.

The birth of *Ìbejì* in the Yorùbá belief is associated with special names given to them. For example, among such special names that make *Ìbejì* supernatural beings are *oba omọ* (kings among children), *olú omọ* (unique children) and *òrọ omọ* (children loaded with words) among others (Òkékéndé 2017a). The above opinion about *Ìbejì* shows that, the belief on the Yorùbá *Ìbejì* is the basic, while variant of this belief about *Ìbejì* is realised as a form of “cultural diffusion”- cultural spread; as in the case of Saints Cosmas and Damian in the Diasporas. In other words, the beliefs on *Ìbejì* have been incorporated to other religious beliefs as a result of culture contact. As a result of this, the spread of *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian in the Diasporas is not in doubt.

The population of the West Indies and the Eastern coast South America largely originates from the previous African “Slaves Coast” corresponding to the present-day coast of Nigeria and Benin. It is therefore not surprising that traditional Yorùbá twin beliefs have been transposed in Latin America. Such is the case of Brazillian traditions of the Candoble and Macumba on the region of Salvador de Bahia and of the Umbanda in Rio de Jeniro and Sao Paulo. These traditions have maintained the Yorùbá Orishas including the sacred Ere Ibeji. In the Umbanda, the sacred twin Saint Cosmas and Damian... are celebrated at the end of September in a feast especially devoted to children (Leroy et al 1995, p. 136).

It is clear that, the influence or spread of the *Ibeji* on Christian beliefs such as that of Saints Cosmas and Damian cannot be overemphasized. The supernatural nature of *Ìbejì* demands for celebration and worship. It is equally noted that, Saint Cosmas and Damian are celebrated along with the children who are twins; just as in Yorùbá twin beliefs tradition. For instance, one of the myths about *Ìbejì* reveals that, children who are twins with their family members gather in Badagry annually for the twin festivals. “Ìtàn sọ fún wa pé àwọn oníbejì máa nṣeibèwò pàtàkì sí ilú kan nítòsí Àgbádàrìgì (Badagry) níbi tí nwọn gbà pé òrìṣà ìbejì tí bèrè tí ó sì tayọ tí àwọn ará ilú yòókù ní orílẹ̀-èdè Yorùbá. Pèlú ijó àti ayọ ni àwọn oníbejì máa nfiwọ ilú yì” (Dáramólá and Jéjé 1967, p. 281). (Myth informs us that the relations of twins do gather in a town near Badagry, where it is believed that, the *ìbejì* divinity started and which is prominent than other towns of the Yorùbá nations. The relations of the twins enter this town with dance and joy). This means, both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are honored, referenced and celebrated as special children even from birth.

*Ìbejì* is one of the most powerful Yorùbá divinities. *Ìbejì* is classified and regarded as one of the senior deities that descended along with other Yorùbá gods. “Ipò irúnmọ̀lẹ̀ ni àwọn baba nílá wa tò wón sí láti ìgbà iwásẹ̀” (Adéoyè 1985 p. 350). (They are classified as a god by our fore fathers from the ancient time). *Ìbejì* (twins), belongs to the spiritual world. “*ÌBEJÌ* is actually a spiritual entity, which originally manifested itself in human form as twins, within the indigenous traditions of the Yorùbá tribe, *ÌBEJÌ* is in fact the Yorùbá word for ‘TWINS’” (Bólá 2011 p. 1). The spiritual being (nature) of twins is associated with the Yorùbá belief. The spirituality and supernatural virtues possessed by twins make them to be regarded as one of the major Yorùbá divinities that is referenced and worshiped throughout the Yorùbá land. To this effect, *Ìbejì*, in the Yorùbá belief, symbolises dualism- soul and body, physical and spiritual, heaven and earth among others.

When twins are born, “the spirit double has been born on earth. Since there is no way of telling which the heavenly being is and which the mortal is, both are treated as sacred from birth.” In case, any of the twins dies, an image is carved by professionals “to serve as a repository for the child’s spirit so that it may return to this world and resume its journey to adulthood” (Curry 2010, p. 25). This is because, “Twins do not have individual souls, and they share one soul. When the soul is divided half in ‘òrun’ and ‘ayé’, it causes an extreme unbalance... twins share the same soul, they are call twins “èjiré” or two who are one” (Dieffenbach 2010, p. 18). In other words, “Soul is the addition of powers of body, it cannot exist without the other, and they both constitute a symbiosis in an organic whole” (Valbuena 2005, p. 19). The inseparable nature of body and soul symbolised, by *ayé* (earth) and *òrun* (heaven), which, if threatened by death, demands for *ère-ìbejì* to maintain a balance.

However, this study investigates the relationship of *Ifá* symbol of pre-divination sacrifice with the Yorùbá *Ìbejì* symbols on one hand and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism on the other hand. The tripartite symbol connections will be another “meeting point or ground” between *Ifá*- “the corner stone” of the Yorùbá culture, *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian. This is aimed to show that, the relationship of *Ifá* with *Ìbejì* among the Yorùbá and with Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith is discernible and, therefore cannot be underrated or jettisoned. The investigation of the interrelated symbols between *Ifá*, *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian is aimed to establish that, the religion of Africans, especially, the Yorùbá is universal; and can be branded, tagged as African indigenous Christian faith.

### ***Ẹbọ* Symbolism in *Ifá* Divination**

“Symbols have become significantly functional in the practice of religion...Religion makes the use of symbols as communication linkages imperative” (Aderibigbe 2016, p. 60). The roles played by *ẹbọ*, especially, in *Ifá*- the religion of the Yorùbá people, cannot be overemphasized. It serves as a means of interaction and peaceful co-existence between the human (visible or physical) and the supernatural beings, divinities and ancestors (invisible or spiritual) world. “From religious perspective, the world can be said to be divided into the physical (visible), and the metaphysical (or the spiritual) levels. Both realms have binding and interactive forces exchanging between them to function harmoniously” (Salami 2002, p. xiv). *Ẹbọ* serves as Holy Communion- an interactive forum or gathering between the human and the spirit (other world), “without which the glimpse into the hallowed and holy becomes an illusion” (Ahiaba 2016, p. 107). One of the contents of *ẹsẹ Ifá* is *ẹbọ*. There is no one exempted to perform sacrifice.

It is compulsory for every individual to perform sacrifice no matter whether the *ori* he chose in heaven is good or bad. The divinities will not support anyone who refuses to offer sacrifice since this is their only reward for their ceaseless watch over human life...Thus, sacrifice is presented in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as the means whereby a man makes his peace with the divinities and improves upon the defects inherent in his own life. (Abimbólá 1977a, p. 33).

No human being can live a peaceful and meaningful life or exist without *ẹbọ*. *Ẹbọ*, must be carried out within the specified period of time. In other words, sacrifice offered outside the specified time by *Ifá* is as sacrifice not offered at all. Therefore, “Timing is very crucial under any prevalent circumstances in the Yorùbá custom, religion, deity, and tradition. All as limited under sacrificial difference between the person that refuses to offer sacrifice on time and one that did not offer at all. Spiritual resonance and intonation changes with time” (Salami 2002, p. xv).

In Yorùbá religion, the prescription of the sacrifice order is exclusively given by *Ifá*. The prescription in regards to the time the sacrifice must be offered, how the sacrifice must be conducted, who is charged with the sacrifice obligation and where the sacrifice is to be carried out, are prescribed or ordered by the *Ifá* priest to the *Ifá* client. In addition, the order of the sacrifice must be given or directed by an initiated *Ifá* priest- *Ifá* priest through *Ifá* divination.

Therefore, the consultation to the *Ifá* priest must be the first step towards the implementation of the sacrifice order. In addition, such consultation is associated with financial obligation (mostly in form of cowries as it was a medium of exchange in the olden days). For example, cowry shells were introduced in the seventeenth century as a means of exchange. “The cowry shell fulfilled to the local people practically all the requirements of money. It served as a medium of exchange, a standard of value, and a store value” (Fádípè 1970, pp. 157 & 8). The fees are prescribed and specified in *Ifá* epistles (corpus), fixed (non-negotiable), received by the *Ifá* priest on behalf of *Ifá* oracle- *Òrúnmìlà*. This is realised as a form of *ẹbọ*. This is described as pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice in this study. This sacrifice is referred to in the context of *Ifá* as *èrù-Ifá* (*Ifá*'s portion or gift).

The use of the pre-*Ifá* divination money as sacrifice is not to satisfy the personal interest of *Ifá* priest; but specified or rendered by *Ifá* oracle on how it must be used. Therefore, the money realised through this form of sacrifice (pre-*Ifá* divination) is sacrilegious. This amount is five (5), referred to as *aárùnún idáfá* (five for *Ifá* divination). This is in two divisions. Two (2) for lots cast- *eẹ̀jì adibò* and Three (3) for mat spreading- *ẹ̀ẹ̀ta itẹ̀ní*. On one hand, the lots cast is symbolised by ‘cowries’, symbolises ‘yes’ (positive) and ‘bone’ symbolises ‘no’ (negative) in *Ifá* divination context. On the other hand, the mat spreading fee symbolises the provision for the mat on which *Ifá* priest conducts the *Ifá* divination. However, the symbolism of this sacrifice is in this study investigated beyond objects or monetary symbols but extend to human beings. Because, the *Ifá* system of divination seems to depend on the interpretation of the random,

behavior of physical objects, called instruments of divination... **This random behavior is somehow related to the wishes and/or behavior of the gods by the diviner.** Only the *Ifá* priests seem to know how this is done. In contrast, the divination system based on astrology **depends on the behavior of celestial bodies. This is the most striking difference between the *Ifá* and several other divination systems** (McGEE 1983, p. 109) (bold mine).

The implication of this opinion is that, the celestial bodies are symbolised, including their behaviors or characters in *Ifá* divination. This is pre-divination sacrifice in *Ifá* as numerically coded in two (2) and three (3) are implied and enforced on Yorùbá *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism. Sacrifice serves as a unifying force between the human and the supernatural.

The psychological function of sacrifice in the community is rated very high by *Ifá* priests. **They maintain that sacrifice helps to unite all the forces both natural and supernatural that operate in the Yorùbá society.** Broadly speaking, these forces are four in number namely the gods, the ancestors, witches and other supernatural powers, and human beings. The function of sacrifice is to enlist the support of these four forces for whatever one may want to do so that none of them may work against one's purpose (Abimbola 1976, p. 37) (bold mine).

The unification, co-operation and integration roles or functions of *ẹbọ* between the human and the supernatural beings and in the ultimate, to God, the *Olódùmarè* is negotiated or actualised by *ẹbọ*. *Ẹbọ*, is inevitable to the *Ifá* clients or supplicants. It is a means of exchange of material things for his or her life.

The Yorùbá believe that, the invisible agents (earlier identified above), will be appeased when certain material things are offered to the *ajogun* (a group of Yorùbá supernatural agents) in form of sacrifice, they would take or receive those things and leave the supplicant untouched. Therefore, *ẹbọ* is a material means of exchange between the human, supernatural and the God.

Sacrifice, in its ritual or ceremonial use, means “a making sacred, an offering that becomes divinized.” Whatever is sacrificed crosses from humans to the divine, and objects are empowered to facilitate the process. Indigenous Africans speak and think of sacrifice essentially as a religious act, which takes the form of rendering something to the supernatural being or beings, and with various intents and purposes (Adogame 2009, p. 75).

Therefore, “Sacrifice is a means whereby man can influence the supernatural power so that the ‘good’ powers may co-operate with him and the evil powers will leave him alone in the execution of his plans on the earth” (Abimbola 1977a, p. 33). *Ẹbọ* is a means that, opens channel or network of communication or interaction between man and the ancestors, divinities, supernatural agents and with God the *Olódùmarè*. While the provision of the sacrificial materials can be waived by the *Ifá* priest if the client is incapable of fulfilling all the requirements. However, the pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice, otherwise known as *ẹbọ idáfá*, cannot be waived. It is obligatory. This is because, it is offered to the spiritual world and agents. Its negotiation or waiver is beyond human beings (either by *Ifá* priest or client).

The obligatory nature of pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice, *ẹbọ idáfá*, is evinced from *Ifá* corpus. In the ancient *Ifá* divination, the *Ifá* consultation (symbolised by two for lots and, three for mat spreading- *eéjì adìbò* and *ẹ́ẹta iténí*) are mandatory for all categories of clients of *Ifá*. *Ifá*

epistles affirm that, there is no waiver for pre-Ifá divination sacrifice. *Òrúnmìlà* himself paid this pre-Ifá divination sacrifice before divination. The wife, the children, friends and the entire family of the *Ifá* priest must observe the payment, as contained in Sàlámì (2002)

*Òrúnmìlà* vehemently warned that, *Ifá* practitioners should not spend *Ifá* consultation fees, *èrù-ifá* wilfully, even for their family members. It is unethical for *Ifá* priest to perform *Ifá* divination for anybody without the payment of the pre-Ifá divination sacrifice. Whoever does this, will not prosper in *Ifá* divination profession. The pre-Ifá divination obligatory charges are sacred for *Ifá* priest. More importantly, the money must not be spent recklessly or carelessly as contained in *Ìká Òbàrà* contained in Salami (2002). In addition, the pre-Ifá divination money and other prescribed items of sacrifice are not to be diverted for use on personal or non-provitable things.

The offering of sacrifice cannot be dissociated from *Ifá* divination. In other words, the *Ifá* divination process is incomplete without sacrifice.

Sacrifice is therefore central to *Ifá* divination and to Yorùbá religion as a whole. Sacrifice keeps the belief system going and links the client, the diviner, the divinities and the ancestors together through a system of service and reward. When the client refuses to perform sacrifice, he makes it impossible for this system of action and reaction be completed. Such a client therefore commits a rape of the belief system since he has exploited the divinities by inviting them to identify and solve his problem for him without providing them with their stipulated reward (Abímbólá 1977a, 11).

To this effect, pre-Ifá divination sacrifice is a “stipulated reward” for divinities and supernatural beings who have been invited by the *Ifá* client to solve his problem for them. Therefore, the sacrifice is sacred.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Semiotics is adopted for this study because, “symbolism underlies *Ifá* divination” (Olátúnjí 2005, p. 135). Semiotics, which is the study of science of signs, is better understood through symbolism. Semiotics can be traced to the pioneering works of Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher and Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss Linguist. According to Saussure, semiology is the study of signs as part of social life. He focuses on the functions of social and cultural phenomenon within semiotic system. Saussure (1974, p. 60) classifies signs into two entities: “signified and or sign-vehicle or meaning.” He refers to the signified, mostly in



form of materials (objects, images, sounds and so on). Saussure is credited with structuralism approach. To him, language is formed by signs which are related in multiple ways. A sign or a word consists of two parts: one part is its form; the other part is its meaning. The association between form and meaning of a sign is fixed by conventions of language use. The link between the form and meaning are inseparable.

According to Peirce, Semiotics is an abstract entity. Sign is something which stands to somebody or something in some respects or capacity. This relation of “standing for” is mediated by an interpretant. According to Peirce (1931, p. 35), “a sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way the interpretant becoming in turn a sign.” This means anything can be adopted as a sign. Peirce model is adopted for this work as the elements of the model are sufficient and appropriate for my analysis.

Three modes of significations are regarded to be sufficient to describe any form of sign. These are icon, symbol and index. However, the symbol mode is adopted for this study. In symbol mode, there is no resemblance or connection between the signifier and the signified, that is, the object and what it stands for. A symbol’s connection with its object is a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. Such symbols, rules and convention between the signifier and the signified must be learnt. In Yorùbá tradition, it can be realised in form of *Àrokò* (symbolism), as such an object or something stands for something or somebody in real life. Symbolism can be realised in different forms. For instance, the Yorùbá believe that ‘fish’ stands for negative and ‘crab’ for positive or to determine the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ of an interrogative statement such as *ẹja n bákàn?* (fish or crab?). It is culturally accepted that ‘fish’ symbolises (stands for) ‘no’ or ‘negative’ and ‘crab’ symbolises (stands for) ‘yes’ or ‘positive.’ In *Ifá* (lots cast) context, bone symbolises ‘no’ or negative while cowries shell symbolises ‘yes’, positive or affirmation (Abimbola 1977a, p. 7). In human symbol significations in Yorùbá religious beliefs, *àfín* (an albino) is regarded and respected to be related with *Ọbàtálá*, who has his color code as white. *Afín* (an albino) is honored and respected because of his/her relationship with *òrìṣà*. To the Yorùbá people, *òwò òrìṣà la fi ní wọ àfín*. Literarily meaning that, honor of god (*òrìṣà*) is bestowed on an albino). This means, symbol is contextual and cultural.

As explained earlier, knowledge of semiotics covers different aspects of life. This work adopts the cultural semiotics, which is concern with the use of cultural objects or signs associated

with cultural meanings. A sign can create multiple meanings, depending on the culture in which it exists. The application of the cultural categories depends on the individual or personal knowledge. “But we are all some ways apart from commanding all cultural knowledge, as we all have little experience in many areas of everyday life” (Lobner 2002, p. 201). The distinction between the semantic knowledge world knowledge (for example, cultural and personal knowledge) is a doctrine of cultural semiotics. Proper interpretation of literary piece cannot be undertaken outside the cultural components of the text.

The methodology employs descriptive with comparison, since the symbol elements of *Ifá* are related with that of *Ìbejì* on one hand and Saints Cosmas and Damian on the other hand so as to establish their interrelated symbols. *Ifá* divination numerical symbols- two (2) and three (3) or five (5), realised as pre-*Ifá* divination symbols in this study are paired with one another including their functional symbols in order to establish their level of relationship. “The basic strategy in using a symbol as a cue is to pair something with the thing that it is to cue. Depending on the particular person, if this pairing is done often enough, with enough intensity, over a long duration the person will come to associate the two things with each other, such a symbolic association allows one thing to be used as a cue for the other” (Comb and Freedman 1990, p. 126). The method of pairing of human symbols through the influence of *Ifá* symbols between or around *Ìbejì* symbols among the Yorùbá people and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith is aimed to establish their elements of agreement, association or co-operation through their investigated symbols. Interpretation and association of symbols with meanings has to do with the knowledge of the individual intelligence. Such association and interpretation should also be backed up with evidences and facts to substantiate such links between the two elements in contrasts in terms of their semiotic relationships.

Cyril (2015, pp. 297-8) advocates for the use of semiotics to the Theology of inculturation. The knowledge of semiotics is required because the church exists in cultural forms. Semiotics also removes impediments of Theological and conceptual in relation with the “practice of inculturation.” Likewise, semiotics mediates the role of language in relation to religions and culture. Cyril opines that, emphasis should be placed on hermeneutics in analysing some stories and the application of cultural interpretation of symbol as propounded by Charles Peirce and Susan Langer. From his opinion, the adoption of semiotics to the Theology of inculturation cannot be overemphasized. It is discovered from his opinion that, culture including language and

interpretation of discourse; which hermeneutics is concerned should break some barriers relating to Theological inculturation.

This approach- semiotics is adopted because, *Ifá*, with which its symbols are related with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are connected in this study communicates in signs and symbols through the interaction of divination objects. “Symbolism underlies Ifa divination system. Each *ẹsẹ Ifá* represents man in his eternal struggle for a *modus Vivendi*. The individual client in his symbolic identification with this primordial man takes the symbolism full cycle” (Olatunji 2005, p. 135).

Symbol can be regarded as the basic and basis of communication, because, symbol forms the writing system in the prehistoric period of development. “Symbols transferred our prehistoric ancestors into organized human beings within the context of cultural livelihood and institutions” (Madubuike 2005 p. 330). Knowledge of semiotics covers different aspects of human and non-human life. This work adopts the cultural semiotics, which is concern with the use of cultural objects or signs, including human symbolisation associated with cultural meanings and beliefs. However, zoo/bio (semiotics a subset of cultural semiotics), which is based on the communication of information in living organisms (including human beings), on which this study investigates and establishes relationship in symbols of *Ifá* with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism symbols. “We have two meanings of ‘semiotics’: semiotics as a discipline or general science of signs and semiotics as specifically human semiosis” (Petrilli and Ponzio 2007, p. 3). The human semiosis is what this study employs as it relates with human symbolism in *Ìbejì*, Saints Cosmas and Damian in connection with *Ifá*.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to establish relationship between, *Ifá*- the springboard of the Yorùbá culture, *Ibejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith. The existence of *ẹbọ*- the pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice, as a spiritual links between the physical and the spiritual worlds symbolised in human is to be demonstrated. This is aimed to show that, the universality and the internalisation of *Ifá* is enforced on *Ìbejì* on one hand and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith on the other hand.

### **Pre-Ifá divination Sacrifice as Symbolism in *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian**

“Symbolism means to attribute more than its superficial value to a word or action through the way the word is used or action is presented. The entire system of Ifá divination is based on symbolism” (Olatunji 1982, p. 60). To this effect, the *Ifá* symbolism of pre-Ifá divination realised as two (2) and three (3) or five (5) in relation to *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian is to be examined in this section. The adoption or application of symbolism is not limited to a word, animals or things alone but equally to figures and human beings. Some cultural figures stand for belief system of the people. Some individuals also symbolise some cultural beliefs beyond ordinary understanding of the society as earlier explained with the cultural belief of the Yorùbá people on *àfin* (an albino).

In the ancient *Ifá* divination poems, the requirement of two (2) and three (3) are earlier mentioned in this study as prerequisite of *Ifá* divination. In fact, there is no one consulting *Ifá* that is exempted from giving these sacrifices to *Ifá* oracle. According to Adéoyè (1985), the gods: *Ògún* (p. 252) *Yemoó* (p. 118) *Ọ̀ṣun* (p. 206) *Òkè* (p. 166) *Ọ̀bàtálá* (pp. 113 & 144) and *Oro* (p. 145) all paid this *Ifá* propitiation fee. Thus Adéoyè (1985, p. 227) asserts that, “Olókun fún Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní eéjì adibò àti eèta itení ó ní kí ó yẹ òun ní ọ̀wọ̀ kan ibò wò...” (Olókun gave Ọ̀rúnmìlà two cowries for lots and three for mat spreading that he should cast lots by divination for him...). Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself offered this obligatory pre-divination fee before he could divine for himself to know a way forward in times of troubles and confusions (Adéoyè 1985, p. 133). The children of Ọ̀rúnmìlà observed this form of *Ifá* sacrifice as well (Abimbólá 1968, pp. 40&1). Abimbólá (1968, p. 32), as contains in *Ọ̀yèkú Méjì* explains these symbols of *Ifá* pre-divination fees as prescribed by the *Ifá* corpus that:

*Eéjì: èrù tí ibò ifá ó gbà.*

*Èyí jẹ ara owó tí babaláwo n gbà gégé bí erù.*

*Eèta itení ni owó tí babaláwo ó gbà, kó tóó tẹni láti dá Ifá*

Two: for lots is received from client by *Ifá* priest.

This is part of offering that *babaláwo* receives as gift.

Three: for mat spreading is money that *babaláwo* receives before he spreads mat to perform divination.

The sum total of these symbols is five (5), as a pre-divination obligatory offering or consultation fee that must be paid for *Ifá* divination. The two (2) is a symbol for lots, while three (3) is a symbol for mat spreading during the process of *Ifá* divination. Babalọ́lá (2000, p. 90) asserts that, “Èlò l’a mú rẹ̀e dáfá nlé Olúsadé? Aárùn ún oko awo ló bá lọ” (How much did we take along in Olúsadé case? Five (5) were used for divination). Sówándé and Fágbè mí (1969, p. 61) affirm

that: “Mo dúró ọwọ mi kò tó isin, mo bèrè ọwọ mi kò tó isin. Mo mú ẹ̀ẹ̀ta itẹ̀nì, mo mú eéjì adìbo. Mo mú aárùún ida’fá. Mo wá re oko aláwo. Àwọn àgbà- kan- àgbà kàn...wá ní ki n’ dá bù yèkè” (I stood up, my hand could not reach *isin*. I bent down my hand could not reach *isin*. I took along three for mat spreading. I took along two for lots cast. I took along five for *Ifá* divination. I went straight to *Ifá* priest. Some elders told me to bend down). The five (5) symbols ( $2 + 3 = 5$ ) are pre-*Ifá* divination symbols of sacrifice offered to the *Ifá* oracle. The *Ifá*’s terminologies as well as their symbolic names for these sum of two and three ( $2 + 3 = 5$ ) symbols are given by Adékéyè (2010, p. 81) as:

One (1) symbolises *Oókan ifidan*

Two (2) symbolises *Èjìrete*

Three (3) symbolises *Èta Ògúndá*

Four (4) symbolises *Èrin-Òra*

Five (5) symbolises *Àrín Òsìn*

These five symbols are very important in *Ifá* divination system. These symbols are here observed to extend to the five symbols (names) associated with *Ibeji* among the Yorùbá people and Saints Cosmas and Damian in the Catholic faith. The symbols are associated with their names which identify and describe each of the symbols (names) and their classifications. The five symbols are classified into two with their specified functions.

Name generally, is associated with semiotics, as it is a signifier (name) of the signified (individual or thing). Much value is associated with individual names in Africa generally and to the Yorùbá in particular. “Nobody exists in African society without a name and such names are often symbolic” (Ọlọba 2005 p. 37), such a name is associated with African culture and beliefs. “African names are derived mainly from the people’s beliefs, culture, season or circumstances surrounding the child’s birth. These names are easily identified; associated or linked to tribes and languages” (Nwanaju 2003, p. 5).

To the Yorùbá people, *orúkọ ọmọ ní romọ* (the name of a child influences the child’s behavior). “The name to the Yorùbá and to Africans in general, is a double plane semiotic system. On the first plane, the name as an indentifying signifier denotes the person or character (the signifier) when answers to the name. This plane of name semiotics is a universal one. On the second plane, the name is also believed to be the signifier of the historical, sociological and psychological behavioral patterns of characters” (Ògúndèjì 1988, p. 79). The two planes of

semiotic system associated with names by Ògúndèjì are relevant in this context. In another context, Africans value their name as such is associated with symbols in their culture. The behavior of an individual is influenced by the individual's name. The behaviors of this divinity are equally felt on the celestial- beings, who are, mostly associated by their celestial names. In other words, a name, in Yorùbá tradition, has impact and influence on the behaviors and attitudes of individual. “Yorùbá b̀ò, ẁon ní orúkọ ní í roni, iwà a sì máa ro èyàn. Orúkọ ẹnì sì ni Ìjánu ẹnì” (Mustapha et al 1986, p. 68).

The Yorùbá believes that, a name is proportional to a child behavior, likewise, character of individual is connected to his or her name. In Yorùbá tradition, names are realised in different forms, such as *orúkọ àbìsọ* (personal name), *orúkọ idilẹ* (family/surname), *orúkọ ẹ̀sìn* (religious name), *orúkọ inagijẹ* (nickname), *orúkọ àmútòrunwá* (celestial name) among others. These categories of names serve as identification in one way or the other among the Yorùbá people. For instance, this study relates to religious names- *orúkọ ẹ̀sìn* (religious name) and *orúkọ àmútòrunwá* (celestial name) as the individuals examines are associated with *Ifá* religion, *Ìbejì* and Catholic beliefs. In addition, all the names under study are celestials (from heaven). The names and their symbolism are connected with their birth situations. In other words, twins in Yorùbá beliefs, are named as *Táyéwò* (the first born of the twins), and *Kẹ̀hìndé* (the second born of the twins) and in Catholic faith, Saints Cosmas (the first born of the twins) and Damian (the second of the twins). This means, the position of a child among the five children is fixed, constant and proportional to his/her name. In addition, the names of the three children born after the twins in *Ìbejì* and Catholic faith follow this order as well. In other words, the positions from the first to the fifth (1-5) of these children are fixed and these positions and their behaviors are determined by their names.

Name, or naming, is one of the Yorùbá ancient forms of writing (identity) associated with individual in the society. It can be used to establish an individual history in relation with family religion, work or profession, chieftaincy or royalty among others. In some cases, “omọ a máa fi Òrìṣà (ẹ̀sìn) iran tàbí ẹbí hàn. Eléyìí ló mú kí orúkọ jíjẹ nílẹ kááárò Oòòjìire yàtò gedegbe sí orúkọ ti àwọn èyà m̀íràn, pàápàá àwọn èyà aláwò funfun” (Mustapha et al 1986, p. 68) (A name shows the god (religion) of family or lineage). In this instance, the relationship between the five names in *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are derivation of religious names connected with *Ifá*. Names, understudy in regards to *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian serve as trace

elements. This function (trace element) makes name among the Yorùbá to be unique and different from other traditions, especially, from the White people). However, there exist cultural (religious) affinities between the five names of *Ifá* divination, *Ìbejì* and twins of Catholicism. Their relationship in the roles and symbol significations are discernible.

In most African societies, newborns are named based on specific situations surrounding their birth. Naming a child is taken very seriously because it is believed that a name can make or mar a person. Thus a name that conveys no concrete meaning, no links to a spiritual source, and evokes neither narrative nor link to any historical events and landmarks is perceived as meaningless. To most Africans, a name represents an essential component of human spiritual anatomy and could serve as an indicator of destiny. Names are often circumstantial, and historical narratives are woven around them. The symbolism, meaning, and power of naming, and several elements of the indigenous naming ritual have been transposed within indigenous and Christian worldviews in Africa and the African diaspora. In Africa and the diaspora, names not only give meaning but also serve as an identity marker in a new multicultural context. Further, they connote personality and build ties to culture and ancestry (Adogame 2009, p. 88).

Names or naming in Africa are trace elements as they have cultural, historical and religions connections among people. To this end, the relationship of individual, group, family and tribes can be established and accounted for in their names.

The spirituality essence of names is also associated with naming in Africa. Names evince the tribes, family history including religion and future aspirations on the individuals with the names.

In Yorùbá philosophy and religion, name given to a child at birth often times designate among other things tribal or clan affiliations, family ties, religious/deity affiliations, or even the hopes of the family for the child. These names tie neatly into family praise singing known as *oríkì* (Oḍéyemí 2013, p. 7).

The above opinions on names equally show that, *Orúkò* (names), are clues to the comprehensive account about such name. Such name is also connected with past religious, social or attitudinal of the related name. Names associated with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are symbolic and are suggested here to be related with *Ifá*.

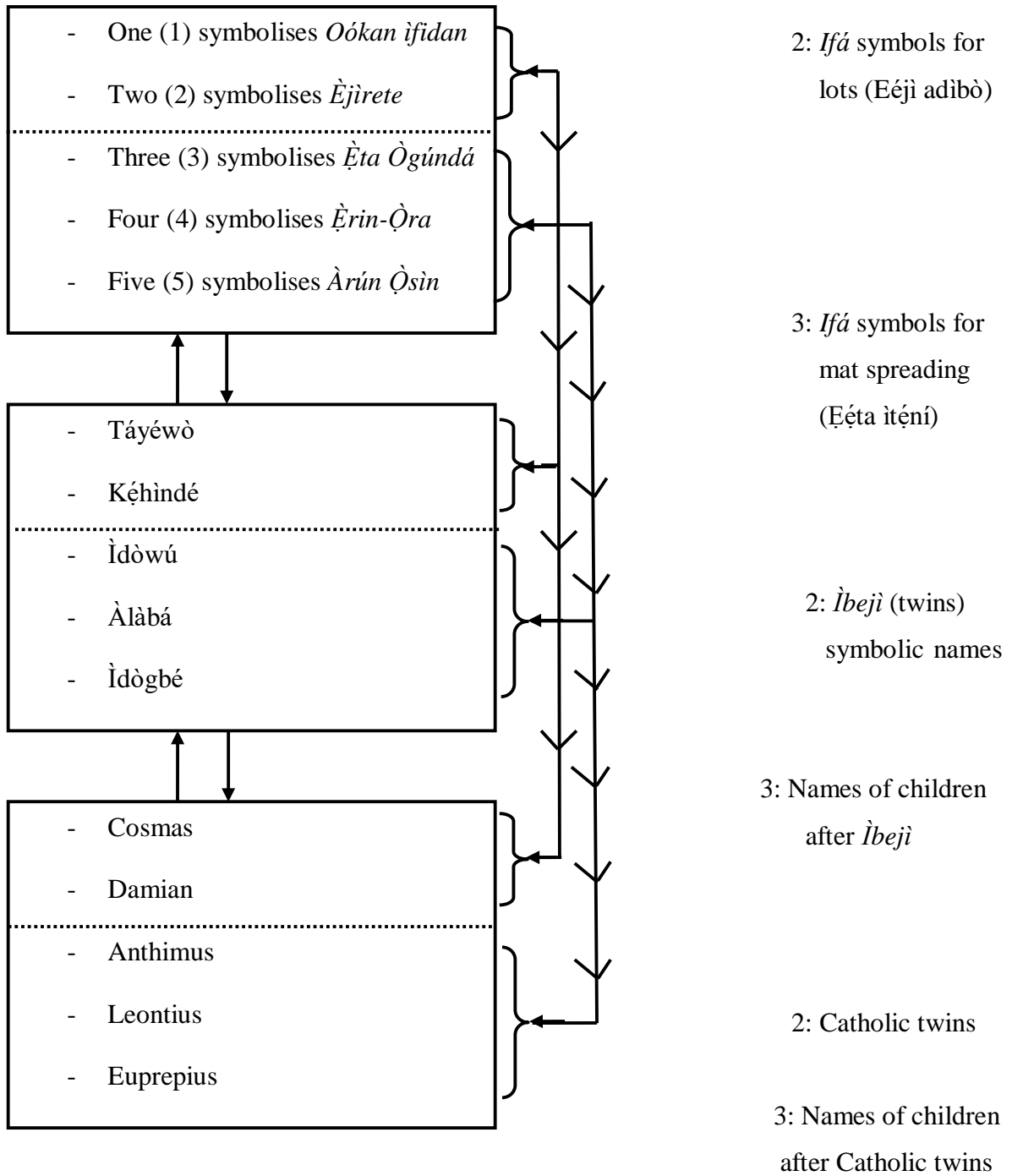
The association of the Yorùbá people with the highest rate of twinning cannot be contested (Leroy et al 1995). The association of the Yorùbá with the highest twinning rate globally is influenced by *Ifá*- the religion of the Yorùbá people as well (Òkékándé 2017a). This

means the understanding of the mystery behind the associations of the Yorùbá with the highest twin birth can only be explained, understood and comprehended spiritually.

Likewise, in Yorùbá religious belief on *Ibeji*, the three children born after twins are associated with their celestial names. These are: *Táyéwò* (a male or female first child of twins), *Kéhìndé* (a male or female second child of twins), *Ìdòwú* (a male or female child after twins), *Àlàbá* (a male or female child after *Ìdòwú*) and *Ìdògbé* (a male or female child after *Àlàbá*). The associations of *Ibeji* with Saints Cosmas and Damian have also been established. For instance, the three children in relation with Saints Cosmas and Damian are Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus (Catholic encyclopedia). According to Mikelle (2001, p. 114), in the Diaspora, especially, Brazil, Cosmas and Damian have three children born after them “demonstrate an iconographic Yorùbá influence on Luso-Brazilian depictions of Catholic saints.”

The model showing the relationship of *Ifá* with *Ibeji*- *Táyéwò*, *Kéhìndé*, *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* *Ìdògbé* and Catholic twins- Cosmas, Damian, Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus is presented in this study below:





### ***Ifá* Symbolism in Relation with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism**

From the above model, the names in *Ibejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are in two categories. The first division under *Ìbejì* (Táyéwò and Kéhìndé) and Catholic twins (Cosmas and Damian) symbolises *ééjì* (two) for lots in *Ifá* divination as explained earlier. The groups under *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian derived their names and behaviors from *Ifá*. It is observed that, *Ifá* oracle is consulted in times of problems or confusions. Therefore, the first stage of solving problem for the *Ifá* client or supplicant is *Ifá* consultation. Process of *Ifá* divination cannot be on course without this sacrifice (for consultation) with the *Ifá* oracle. *Ìbò* (lots), in *Ifá*, is for problem solving and solution to human challenges. It will be recalled that, *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are known for solving human problems; as physicians, healers, magicians and miracle performers. These attributes are believed by this study, to be derived from pre-*Ifá* divination symbols. In other words, the values and attributes are shared by *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian from *Ifá* symbols of pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice.

The investigations of these names within and among these religious beliefs (*Ifá*, *Ìbejì* and Catholic faith) demonstrate some level of connections among them. This means, one can establish the history of an individual by the categories of these names. Before now, no level of relationship has been established to have existed between the *Ifá* symbols and *Ìbejì* on one hand and *Ifá* symbols and Saints Cosmas and Damian on the other hand. For instance, their (*Ìbejì* and Cosmas and Damian) symbolism is believed by this study to be connected with *Ifá*; as *ibò-Ifá* (*Ifá* lots), is:

used to find **answers to the problems** which may arise in the process of interpreting an *Ifá* poem. **They act as a means of quick communication between *Ifá* and the client.** Without the *ibò*, it will be impossible to determine all the minute ramifications of each divination. **But the client is interested in this minute detail in order to gain the satisfaction and confidence that he has identified his problem and offered the right solution** (Abimbola 1977a, p. 8) (bold mine).

From the opinion above, *ibò* (lots, usually in two) is instrumental towards problems solving to *Ifá* supplicant(s) on one hand and on the other hand *ibò* serve as “binding force”, “glue”, and “a conductor.” *Ìbò* serve as facilitators of implementation order. As explained earlier, the essence of religion is to seek peace and satisfactions between a believer and the supernatural

beings and in the ultimate the supreme God. *Ifá* serves as a major divination god to identify and solve problems confronting human beings. This objective can only be achieved through the use of *Ifá* symbols. The bold words and statements associated with *ibò* that symbolises two (2), for which the twins in *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian symbolised. The Theological functions of *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian is to solve people's problems. Their spiritual qualities and attributes realised in form of *ẹbọ* (sacrifice) makes "spiritual communication" possible through them; just like that of *Ifá* and his client(s). The output of spiritual communication in *Ìbejì* is miracles and wonders. The miraculous power associated with *Ìbejì* is not limited to the Yorùbá communities alone but also in the Diasporas. According to Curry (2010, p. 26) the power of *Àṣẹ* (sanction, authority or implementation) resides in *Ìbejì*. The twins possess "Àṣẹ, the "life force," or "spirit" ... Àṣẹ is defined as "that divine essence in which physical materials." Therefore, Pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice- *ẹbọ*, opens gate for solving human problems.

Medicine is a major profession that connects *Ifá* with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian. It is believed in this study that, both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian derive their ethical value from *Ifá*. For instance, medicine is an important aspect of *Ifá* divination. All Yorùbá indigenous medical scope of specialisations- pharmacy, ophthalmology, gynecology, orthopedics, pathology, general medicine and others are derived from *Ifá*.

Medicine, however, is the science or art of prevention, treatment, and cure of disease. The art of medicine is important because man recognizes that health can be lost and medicine helps the body return to its normal state... This is why medicine men, known as traditional doctors, abounds in Africa. They regard their power as a gift from God through the divinities. They claim they are given the art of medicine by divinities (Aderibigbe 2016, pp. 201&2).

In Yorùbá religious belief, *Ifá/Òrúnmìlà* and *Òsanyìn* are the divinities that are associated with medicine and related knowledge. However, *Òsanyìn* possessed his knowledge of medical practice from *Ifá/Òrúnmìlà*. The intimacy of *Ifá/Òrúnmìlà* and *Òsanyìn* on one hand was of servant-master from heaven. "*Òsanyìn* was "*Ọmọ ọ̀dọ̀ Ọ̀rúnmìlà lórun.*" (The house maid of *Òrúnmìlà* in heaven) (Adéoyè 1985, p. 214). On another hand, the relationship between the two divinities was described as "a brother, friend, partner or servant of *Òrúnmìlà*" (Simpson 1980, p. 7). This association between *Òrúnmìlà* and *Òsanyìn* extends to the world. This means, *Ifá* is the custodian of medicine in Yorùbá belief.

Among the Yorùbá people till today, traditional medicine is rated very high, even in the face or presence of the Christianity and Islamic religions. This is informed by the efficacy of healing received from the indigenous medicine. “Traditional medicine is acceptable and popular in the nooks and crannies of Yorùbáland in spite of the Christian against it... In Nigeria, about 80% of the people who are sick consult the traditional doctors” (Ọmọtoyè 2012, p. 90).

In Yorùbá communities, all the medical knowledge and scopes evolve from Yorùbá indigenous medical profession- *Ifá*. In the *Ifá* poetic code, contained in Ilesanmi (1998, pp.10 & 11), no any divinity is associated with medicine, other than *Ifá*.

*Ọwọ Ifá ni gbogbo oògùn ti wá.*

*Ọwọ Ifá nìkan ni gbogbo oògùn ti wá pátápátá poro-n-godo..*

*Òòsà ni Ifá, ǹnkan à̀lò̀ ni*

*Òògùn tún ló jé fún aráyé*

All medicine came from *Ifá*.

All the medicine related things only came from *Ifá* in its entirety.

*Ifá* is a divinity; it is equally an instrument being used

It is equally medicine for the world.

This aspect of *Ifá* (medical) specialisation is so important, that no *Ifá* practitioner can have a successful practice if he does not know anything about medicine. This means, medicine is a general basic knowledge in *Ifá* profession; even though, it is a specialised discipline by some *Ifá* practitioners.

In the traditional Yorùbá society, *Ifá* priest were the physicians, psychiatrist, historians, and philosophers of the communities to which they belonged...even before initiation. The would-be priest must learn something about medicine so that he could cure his clients of minor ailments. No *Ifá* priest can have a successful practice if he does not know anything about medicine since many people go to *Ifá* priest to seek help in curing their ailments (Abimbólá 1977a p. 13).

*Ìbejì*, in Yorùbá beliefs are known with words of authority and sanctions *àşę*. This value is equally shared by Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith. Both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are known for miracles, magic and wonders, the attributes that are shared from *Ifá* (Òkékéndé 2017b). Saints Cosmas and Damian were “early Christian physicians” (Catholic Encyclopedia). These have relational attributes known with *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and

Damian derived from *Ifá*. It will be recalled that, *Ìbejì* are vested with authoritative words or power of sanction; which makes miracles and wonders occur. It is noted that, medicine and the work of healing, which are central to *Ifá* knowledge and the ministry of Saints Cosmas and Damian are akin to divination. For instance,

divination is an important activity and the role of the diviner is widespread. “Divination represents the central organizing mechanism through which the world of Yorùbá practitioners is understood.” **Africans employs divination through the diviner, medicine man, and healer. It involves, in many cases, the enactment of sacrifice. The diviner or medicine man is a pivotal force for order and rapprochement between humanity and the spirit world...***Ifá* is the most widespread means of Yorùbá divination (Adogame 2009, p. 80) (bold mine).

The *Ifá* priest is trained on how to cure different illnesses among the Yorùbá people. “The diviner, medicine man and healer” are professions that, connects *Òrúnmìlà* (*Ifá* progenitor), *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian together. These professions are closely associated with *ẹbọ* (sacrifice), which paves way for the connectivity between the human and the supernatural forces. However, *Ifá* serves as the main source of these medical professions.

In traditional Yorùbá society, *Ifá* priests were the physicians and chemists of their various communities...Healing is, however, such a profound field that only *Ifá* priests-specialists on healing are in a position to heal the more dangerous- disease like madness and epilepsy. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that *Ifá* are very competent at healing some very terrible diseases such as certain kinds of nervous disease. A detailed study of the methods of *Ifá* priest healers...claim that they are able to heal such disease as leprosy, nervous diseases, epilepsy, tuberculosis and other dreadful diseases. Indeed, *Ifá* priests even today still claim that their methods and medicines are more efficient in the cure of certain diseases which modern medicine has placed within the hopeless brackets of “incurable” (Abimbólá 1983, pp. 1&2).

This opinion shows that; medicine is a basic or general knowledge that must be acquired by *Ifá* priest. In other words, “*Òrúnmìlà* himself received the power of healing and support for mankind from the beginning of time” (Lijadu 1908b, p. 107). Furthermore, in *Ifá* ethnics just like the practice of Saints Cosmas and Damian, the medical services are rendered free of charge. For instance, “They accepted no pay for their services and were therefore, called *anargroi* “the silverless” ...Saints Cosmas and Damian are regarded as the patrons of physicians and surgeons and are sometimes represented with medical emblem” (Catholic Encyclopedia). Saints Cosmas and Damian were honored, as a result of this, some churches built in their memory because of the work of healing- cure of different illness. For example, The Emperor Justinian 1 (529 – 568)

honored them for the diseases they cured. In reciprocating them, those that benefited from their ministry Saints Cosmas and Damian, “having been cured of a dangerous illness by the intercession of Cosmas and Damian, Justinian, in gratitude for their aid, rebuilt and adorned their church at Constantinople, and it became a celebrated place of pilgrimage.” This is the same with Pope Felix IV at Rome (526 – 530) (Catholic Encyclopedia).

The symbolisation of Saints Cosmas and Damian is here observed to be derived from *Ifá*. For instance, in the ancient *Ifá* divination practice, the *Ifá* priest must not charge his client. Their services were rendered on humanitarian ground. For instance,

in the ancient times in Yorùbáland, *Ifá* priests were usually very poor. This is because **they were not paid directly for the services they rendered to the community. For their livelihood they had to depend entirely on certain parts of the offerings given to *Ifá* and sometimes on gifts from clients...No *babaláwo* should use his position to enrich himself in any way, he must not refuse anybody his service on account of money...It seems, in fact, that the *babaláwo* is under a vow of poverty, to spend himself in the service of the community, making just enough to keep himself, his real reward being in the service of *Ọ̀rúnmìlá*” (Abimbólá 1976, pp. 17&8) (bold mine).**

However, the pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice realised in this study as *ẹ̀bọ̀ idáfá* (divination sacrifice), is one of the indirect ways or means by which *Ifá* priests were compensated or rewarded and not directly by charging for the professional services rendered. This is also the case, “following the Jewish observance, they take care to remain a good part for themselves. Goats, fowls, pigeons, dogs and sometimes cows and horses are offered up while human sacrifices are almost unknown” (Clarke, 1972, p. 279).

*Ìbejì* is equally adored because of their supernatural power to help the poor in Yorùbá belief. It is noted that, twins are rarely given birth to by the rich or wealthy people. They associate (by birth) with the poor. This is expressed in panegyric code of *Ìbejì* that:

*Èjìrẹ̀ sọ̀ alákiṣà di aláṣọ̀*

*Ó sọ̀ alágbe di olúnjẹ̀*

*Ó sọ̀ ọ̀tòsì do ọ̀lórò* (Dáramólá and Jéjé p. 282).

Twins turn the rag users to users of two hundred cloths,

turns the beggar to food owners.

turns the poor to the rich.

The fame of the unpopular family is “announced” by the birth of twins to that family. The parents are simply called by the majority by the name *iyá* and/or *bàbá ìbejì* (mother or father of twins). The other children names are “assimilated” or monopolised by the twins.

The *Ìbejì* are believed to be special advocators of the poor. This attribute is believed to have been derived from *Ifá* as explained earlier. The symbolism and spirituality in *Ìbejì*, is not only associated with Yorùbá religious belief alone, but also with Saints Cosmas and Damian. Twins, serve as connecting beings between the human and spiritual world. They act as “spiritual intermediaries and advocators.”

The symbolism of twins as ancestral figures that inhabit transitional spaces where the worlds meet becomes a central example as Bellegarde-Smith aptly notes, “Houlberg’s essay situates itself at Kongo, Haitian, Cuban, and Brazilian mythology, embedded in diasporic narratives. Haitian Vodou is one of the many African religions in the New World that Venerates twins in Brazil, the Yorùbá attitude toward twins is salient in the Afro-Brazilian religious of Candomblé, Mucumba, and Umbanda, where twins are called *beji* (ellipsed from the Yorùbá *Ibeji*). Twins are also sacred in the context of the Afro-Cuban religion Santeria, which closely follows the Yorùbá model (Adogame 2009, p. 93).

This opinion accounts for the reason behind praying or interceding with the names of *Ifá*, *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian. The possession of their supernatural attributes is regarded with both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian.

The second division, as shown from the model above comprises of three (3) names identified in *Ìbejì* as *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* and *Ìdògbé* and in Catholic twins as Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus. On one hand, it is observed from the structure of the names under *Ìbejì* that, they all have the same linguistic features. For instance, these three names- *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá*, and *Ìdògbé* have three syllables with low-low-high (LLH) tones. On the other hand, the three names after Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism- Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus have the same final syllables- “us.”

The three names after *Ìbejì*- *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* and *Ìdògbé* came into being as a result of the birth of Yorùbá *Ìbejì*. Likewise, the three names after Saints Cosmas and Damian- Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus came into being as a result of Catholic twins. Therefore, in both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian, the three individuals are inseparable from the twins in Catholic faith and in Yorùbá *Ìbejì*. In other words, their lives or existence is meaningless without the twins, in both Yorùbá *Ìbejì* and Catholic twins- Saints Cosmas and Damian. For instance, the

Catholic Encyclopedia reports that, “three brothers, Anthimus, Leontius, and Euprepus” were children born after Saints Cosmas and Damian and “were inseparable from them throughout life.”

The names under *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are human symbols, believed to be supernatural beings associated with *Ifá* implementation order and agents. This opinion is supported by the beliefs of the African generally and Yorùbá in particular that ancestors, gods and supernatural beings are not dead as they reincarnate to the families they belong. “Ancestors from previous generations, who have died, become spirits and yet who retain an interest in their families.... They can influence living members of the family (Robinson, 2008, p. 2). To the Africans, the ancestors, gods and supernatural beings are regarded as “living dead” as their presence are felt in various aspects of the living family members (Òkèwándé 2016). “The attitude of the Yorùbá reinforces the belief that the dead are alive and have an interest in the affairs of the living” (Amponsah 1977, p. 108). This belief equally influences the beliefs of the Yorùbá people that have religious affinity with the Yorùbá people. For example, it has earlier been established in this study that the Igala people of Nigeria share the same belief with the Yorùbá about *Ifá*. The pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice, *ẹbọ*, in *Ifá* divination connects individual or *Ifá* client or supplicant with the ancestors, gods and the supernatural beings, to God the Supreme Being. The spirituality of *ẹbọ* is implied as symbolised with human in this study. The Igala people believe about *ẹbọ*, “as divine principle, *ẹbọ* connects the Supreme Being (*Ọjọ*) the ancestral spirits (*ọjọ*) and the earth deity-*anẹ*” (Ahiaba 2016, p. 1).

The names under *Ìbejì* and Catholic twins are symbolic and memories of the individuals connected with the spiritual (religious) events. In other words, the memories of the individual names, regarding the five names under this study are brought into reality among the Yorùbá people and the Catholic faith. “The Yorùbá concept of existence transcends the time when the individual is on the surface of the earth. It goes beyond that period and includes the memories which a man leaves behind after his death” (Abimbọla 1975, p. 417). However, *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian possess supernatural powers; the attributes that makes *Ìbejì* to be regarded as divinity and Saints Cosmas and Damian as Saints-the holy ones. “Yorùbá deities were preserved under the names of Catholic saints” (Abdias do Nascimento 1977, p. 74). In other words, *Ifá* and *Ìbejì* divinities are preserved under the names of Catholic saints such as that of Saints Cosmas and Damian.



Till date, among the Yorùbá people, *Ìbejì* are celebrated and worshipped just as Saints Cosmas and Damian among the Catholic believers. For instance, the Catholic encyclopedia reports about Cosmas and Damian as an “early Christian physicians and martyrs whose feast is celebrated on 27<sup>th</sup> September” of every year. However, *Ìbejì* (*Táyéwò* and *Kéhìndé*), *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá*, *Ìdògbé* and Catholic twins (Cosmas and Damian), Anthimus, Leontius, Euprepus are related with *Ifá*. In other words, the religious influence, values and impacts of *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian and their related characters emanate as a result of *Ifá*.

The global dimension of indigenous African religions is manifest in varied forms, being introduced to new geo-cultural contexts through migration, tourism and new communication technologies. The African Diaspora influences cultures in Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti; partly leading to the development of African-derived religions across the Americas. In 1981, the act of parliament in Trinidad and Tobago raised the Yorùbá religion to the status of the official religion. In the diasporic context, *orisa* veneration has developed on different levels. While the veneration of a singular *orisa* may have produced a distinctive group or clientele linked to Ogun, Shango, *Òrúnmìlà*, *Oya*, or *Oṣun* there is a certain tendency in which *orisa* veneration, as compared to that in Africa, is becoming increasingly institutionalized and universalized (Adogame 2009, pp. 85 &6).

One of such venerations of *òrìṣà*, in this case, *Ifá* (*Òrúnmìlà*) is “institutionalized and universalized” by *Ìbejì* and Saint Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism.

### Summary and Conclusion

*Ifá* symbolism in form of *ẹbọ idáfá* (*Ifá* divination sacrifice) is a consultation fee offered by the *Ifá* client to the *Ifá* oracle through the *Ifá* priest. The sacrifice opens channels or lines of network to address the issue(s) that brought him or her to the *Ifá* oracle through the *Ifá* priest. Sacrifice makes client to be connected with the invisible agents. This is why it is referred to as pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice. The sum of this fee in number is five (5) realised in two forms. On one hand, two- *eéjì adibò*: (2) for lots cast. This is symbolised by *Táyéwò* and *Kéhìndé* in *Ìbejì* and by Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholicism. On the other hand, three- *ẹ́ẹta itení*: (3) for mat spreading. This is symbolised by *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* and *Ìdògbé* in *Ìbejì* and in Catholic twins as Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus. The works (functions) played by these individuals is proportional to what they “signified” in *Ifá* divination. These semiotic significations indicate that, the names under both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith are related. The functions of the associated symbols in monetary form are extended to the roles of *Ìbejì* among the Yorùbá people and Saints Cosmas and Damian among the Catholic faith.

The symbolism of *Ìbejì* in the Yorùbá belief and Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic faith are evinced from *ibò Ifá* symbolism.

In achieving these objectives, symbols in religion discharge two unique roles, signifying what they mean in religion and its practice. The first is functioning as something that “represents,” “stand for,” or “signifies” something else.” The second is functioning as “the means by which the people orient themselves to the symbol’s referent” In combining these two inclusive functions, religious symbols provide religious followers the pathway to understanding and negotiating the meeting points between the mundane world and the ultimate reality – thus encompassing corporate and individualistic connotations in relation to the two spaces (Aderibigbe 2016, p. 60).

This study concludes that, the pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice symbolised by humans is brought into memory by the presence of the individual associated with these names. The five individuals under *Ìbejì*- *Táyéwò*, *Kéhìndé*, *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* and *Ìdògbé* and Catholic twins- Saints Cosmas and Damian, Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus are human that possess spiritual attributes. In other words, Saints Cosmas and Damian of Catholic saints such are preserved under the names of *Ifá* and *Ìbejì* divinities. These names are “human in divine” (Ahiaba 2016, p. 107). “It is necessary to recall again that, the past is not a mystery and that although the future (the unborn) is yet unknown, it is not a mystery to the Yorùbá but co-existent in present consciousness...The stage of transition is, however, the metaphysical abyss both of god and man” (Şoyinka 2009, p. 368).

The divinity power of *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian is connected and derived from *Ifá* symbols as demonstrated in this study. For example, both *Ìbejì* and Saints Cosmas and Damian are celebrated just like any other divinity among the Yorùbá people and *Ifá* worshippers as demonstrated in the study. Symbolism entails “standing for” or “representing” something in some capacity. In this case, Yorùbá *Ìbejì* (*Táyéwó* and *Kéhìndé*), Catholic twins (Saints Cosmas and Damian) are symbolised by *Ifá* symbols of Pre-*Ifá* divination sacrifice-*eéjì adìbò* (2 for lots) as well as *ẹ́ẹ́ta itẹ́nì*-three for mat spreading: *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá*, *Ìdògbé* and Catholic twins (Cosmas and Damian), Anthimus, Leontius, Euprepus are the *Ifá* divination oracular sacrifice.

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## ***Ifá* Symbolism and the Concept of Reincarnation: A Challenge for the Catholic Christians**

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### **Abstract**

Unarguably, Life after death has been a contentious subject of research among scholars and humanity. The belief on the concept of reincarnation, that, there is possibility for a dead person to come back to life has generated a lot of debates among Catholic denomination notwithstanding that, the concept of reincarnation has been criticised, mostly on the basis that, it does not give consideration of eternal hope to Christians. *Ifá* is, believed to be the foundation of Yorùbá culture. This study is aimed at investigating the concept of reincarnation from the perspective of *Ifá* theology as insights to the understanding of the concept of reincarnation; as many scholars did not make use of any religious symbol, especially *Ifá*, to substantiate their positions. The study adopts semiotics, which is a science of signs; because, symbolism is basic of *Ifá* divination. It is found out that, *Ifá* epistles testify to the existence of the concept of reincarnation and provide the time and cycle of occurrence of reincarnation. Similarly, the misconception about reincarnation by some Christian faithful, especially Catholics, as being against eternity is erroneous and misleading. This study concludes that, reincarnation as supported by divinations from the biblical and *Ifá* is a concept ordained by God as a means of actualising God's purpose for mankind.

Keywords: *Ifá*, reincarnation, Catholic faith, *odù*, symbolism

### **Introduction**

Until recently, scholars have raised valid queries on the concept of reincarnation as God's ordained means of actualising the purpose of human existence. Reincarnation, which is the belief that, "after bodily death, souls are reborn in yet another body—has returned as a New Age fad, backed by marketing hype. And the doctrine is spreading so quickly that it is raising the eyebrows of many in the Church" (Aquilina 2017, p. 1). The concept has been sometimes tagged to be "unbiblical" "heresy" "unscriptural." However, despite various objections by some Catholics on the concept of reincarnation, they are holding to their faiths on the belief of reincarnation.

The controversies and divisions on the concept of reincarnation prompted a Catholic world conference; to debate, discuss and take a position on the subject. This conference- “a 1990 Gallup poll found that 25 percent of the Catholics in the United States believe in reincarnation. And it’s not just America. Another recent survey, by the University of London, concluded that, 28 percent of the people in France believe in reincarnation, ...The Vatican called scholars from around the world to a March 17-20 conference on the subject, “Reincarnation and the Christian doctrine” (Aquilina 2017, p. 1). The outcome of this conference was against the adoption or belief on the concept of reincarnation, because, major Church leaders emphasised that, “reincarnation is incompatible with Christian doctrine” (p. 1). One can say, from the above opinion that: (i) the belief on the concept of reincarnation is a religious world concept (ii) the percentage of Catholics in favor of the concept (25 percent) in America and, in France (28 percent) cannot be overlooked. (iii) the period of the opinion poll on outcome of the conference on reincarnation has been long and (iv) the resolution against the concept of reincarnation was not based on opinion polls but, resolutions of the Church leaders and (v) there are pro-reincarnation and anti-reincarnation Catholic Christians. This study therefore, aims to discuss the challenges facing the Catholic Christians by investigating into the existence of concept of reincarnation as established in *Ifá* and examine biblical interpretations of the concept of reincarnation within the knowledge of *Ifá* theology. “Ifá is a divination system created by the Yorùbá people of South Western Nigeria some 2000 years ago. In the course of succeeding centuries, The Ifá priests (Babalawo) have developed the original form bequeathed them by **ORUNMILA**, the reforming prophet of the **ODUDUWA ERA** of Yorùbá history (5000B.C. – 500A.D.) in many ways but have kept its canons essentially unchanged to this very day” (1908 translated into English by Emanuel, 2010, p. ix).



Some human problems and among the Yoruba are resolved through *Ifá*. “*Ifá* literary corpus is very extensive in the range of subjects it covers as well as the scope and depth of the treatment of each subject.” This is why *Ifá* is described as, “*àmòìmòtán*” (Morákinyò 1983, p. 66). That is, “that which is in capable of being completely known” (Akiwọwọ 1983, p. 43). *Ifá* corpus also talks about the concept of reincarnation, the knowledge of which is helpful to the better understanding of the controversial concept among the Catholics.

### **Yoruba Concept of Reincarnation**

Reincarnation, the belief that, “the dead could reincarnate into the family” (Káyòdé (1984, p. 5) has accommodated into Yorùbá belief system. The Yoruba people believe that, since the soul of man is immortal, it is capable of returning to earth through rebirth. “The Yorùbá, for instance, strongly believe that reincarnation is a royal route by which departed ancestors return to earth” (Fátókun 2005, p. 134). To the Yorùbá, the journey of an individual began from heaven to the earth and the circle of existence rotates in death and living.

There is the belief in the metempsychosis which is the passage of someone’s soul after death into the body of another person or animal. “The theory of reincarnation is irrefutable since it is a metaphysical theory” (Adébòwálé, 2012, p. 183). The belief is substantiated by three events connected with the Yorùbá beliefs on reincarnation. First, the belief is associated with some Yorùbá names given to the new born children, born immediately after the death of the grandfather or grandmother such as Babátúndé, Babajídé and Babárindé (father returns), Ìyábò and Yéjídé or Yétúndé (mother returns). Second, the Yorùbá belief on the *àbíki* (born to die) as in names like Mólòmó, Kòsókó and Dúrósinmí assert the Yorùbá belief on the rebirth of the dead child. A form of *àbíki* can be realized in form of *Elèrè/Emèrè*; that is “wandering spirit of children given to the prank of entering into pregnant women and being born only to die or sheer

relish of the mischief” (Ìdòwú 1962, p. 126). Also, the Yorùbá belief on *àkúdàáyà*, the belief that, “the souls of those who died mid-life may go and live in distant towns and assume a quasi-physical existence there” (Adébòwálé, 2012, p. 180).

There have been different opinions about the originality of the concepts of immortality and reincarnation of the soul with the Yoruba people. While some scholars are of the opinion that, the concept is probably original to the Yorùbá, others think the concept was borrowed. “It has been controverted that the Yorùbá may not have the concept of immortality of soul from Plato, Pythagoras or St. Augustine” (Mákindé 2007, pp. 140 – 143). Makindé is of the opinion that, the idea of immortality of soul might have been even borrowed from the Yorùbá and that, immortality of the soul among the Yorùbá could be regarded as original with them or at worst, borrowed from some other neighboring African countries south of the Egypt, and certainly not from the Pythagoras or Plato (Mákindé 1983). Makindé’s opinion was not however emphatic that, the concepts of reincarnation and immortality of soul are undoubtedly original to the Yorùbá tradition; probably because, such argument was not substantiated with Yorùbá oral or cultural symbols as supported in this study with of *Odù-Ifá*. Although, Makinde observes that, lack of documentation has denied African countries of written evidence of their cultural values and beliefs, he failed to explore the oral evidence from *Ifá*.

Interpretation of symbol is as important to the understanding the meaning of a sign, symbol or text, especially, the interpretation of religious symbols associated with the concept of reincarnation. “Interpretation is the discursive result or output of positing meaning in any sign system. ...Interpretations often take the same form as the set of signs being interpreted” (Irvine 2004, p. 5). There is no doubt that, the interpretations of the concept of reincarnation needs to be undertaken with different approaches so as to investigate and establish what really the concept is.

This attempt is believed to account for what the concept of reincarnation symbolises. The questions about whether the spirit of the dead (as a good or wicked person) inhabits in an animal, plant or human at reincarnation is outside the purview of this study but, rather seeks to respond to the questions on the existence of the concept of reincarnation and describe how the concept operates within the rubric of *Odù-Ifá* oracular system. *Odù-Ifá* is a medium of communication between the *Ifá* Oracle to the *Ifá* client. All the messages of *Ifá* are coded in *Odù* and interpreted by an initiated *Ifá* priest.

### ***Ifá's* Relation to Catholic Belief**

The relationship of *Ifá* with Catholic faith have been addressed by scholars. *Ifá* is regarded as the spokesperson not only for the gods but also for the living. It is regarded as the foundation of Yorùbá culture (Abímbólá 1977a). The messages of *Ifá* encapsulate the past, present and the future of the Yorùbá people in particular and humanity in general. As a result of this, *Ifá* has gained prominence; not only among the Yorùbá nations but globally. “Variations of the *Ifá* System are found used in several other parts of Nigeria besides Yorùbáland and in some of the countries bordering on Nigeria” (Abimbola 1976; p. 3). In addition, “the one practiced by the Yorubas, however, seems to be the most sophisticated and highly developed” (McGEE 1983, p. 99). *Ifá's* nomenclature has cut across nations and tribes around the world. For instance, *Ifá* “is considered as the god of divinization in Igala culture. It is believed that, *Ifá* carries messages from the other world to this world. *Ifá* is also a medium of dialogue between the living and the ancestors” (Negedu, nd, p. 5).

The variation in *Ifá's* objects of divination is equally related in historical development with the Hebrew's form of divination found in the bible. For instance, “the worship of *Ifá* is one of the principal branches and based on the great inestimable value of the palm nuts...With this

system is connected the priest of Ifá and we think may be added the Urim and Thumm,<sup>56</sup> as in it is supposed to reside oracular vision or prophetic power of foretelling future events” (Clarke 1972, pp. 279 – 280). The connection or similarities in the oracular objects- Urim and Thumm are further demonstrated to be related with that of *Ifá*. Urim and Thumm (as mentioned in relations with Ifá) are mentioned in several places of the bible: Nehemiah 7 verse 65, Numbers 27 verse 21, Exodus 28 verse 30 and ISamuel: 28 verses 3, 6, 13, and 14.

Exodus talks about the mysterious Urim and Thummim that were to be “put in the breastplate of judgment” which would “be over Aaron’s heart when he goes in before the Lord.” **The Bible and various Jewish writings frequently refer to the Urim and Thummim which was used for divining guidance.** According to Yoma 73b, **the High Priest would consult this device on special occasions to determine the will of the Lord for the people...**The Hilchot Kelai HaMikdash (10:11) makes an unusual statement regarding the Urim and Thummim...A prophecy in Ezra indicates that the Urim and Thummim will finally be restored to Israel for guidance when Elijah and the Messiah appear: “They should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim “ (Ezra 2:63) (Jeffery 1991, p. 298 – 299) (bold mine).

One can deduce from the above that, divination is God’s ordained method of knowing his mind on any matter that requires divine wisdom and guidance. The consultation of Urim and Thummim was strictly performed by the Priest as *Ifá* consultation is equally performed by the *Ifá* priest. The opinions above also show that, both the Urim and Thummim and *Ifá* divinations perform the same religious functions. In addition, the debate reveals the biblical equivalence of *Ifá* with Urim and Thummim. According to the student Bible Dictionary by Dockrey et al (2000), “Urim (Yoo rim) and Thummim (Thum im). Objects used by the high priest to try to find the will of God (Ex. 28<sup>30</sup>; Is. 28<sup>6-25</sup>). The objects of unknown shape and size were carried in the high priest’s clothing Urim and Thummim may have been stones, serving as a type of lots” (p. 238).

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<sup>56</sup> Objects mentioned in the Old Testament in connections with the breastplate of the high priest.

The parallel biblical symbolism of *Ifá* with Urim and Thummim with stones is a relationship. The ancient medium (objects) of *Ifá* divination has been pebbles or stones. For instance, Setilu<sup>57</sup> practiced his *Ifá* divination with “16 small pebbles...In process of time, palm nuts, pieces of iron and ivory balls were successfully used instead of the pebbles. At the present day, “palm nuts only are used as they are considered more easily propitiated” (Johnson 1887, pp. 40 – 41). The equivalence in *Ifá* divination symbolism with biblical reference shows there is nexus between the two religion positions on the concept of reincarnation. Similarly, it shows that, African religious symbols such as *Ifá*, is relevant to solving some religious issues confronting the present believers. The value of an object is proportional to its use in cultural expressions– symbolism.

The opinions above equally show the universality of the functions or roles of the religious symbols with the belief systems. In another words, the form of biblical media of enquiry with the use of Urim and Thummim are related with *Ifá* in various forms. For example, Orímóògùnjé (1993, p. 58) reports that:

*Tí a bá wo Urim áti Thumim tí Olódùmarè sọ pé kí àwọn ọmọ Héberù fi máa bèèrè nńkan lówó Ọun*<sup>58</sup> *nígba tí ikú Mósè súnmọ etilé, a lè so èyí mó ilàna yẹnwò ti àwọn Yorùbá , tí a bá sì tún tẹlé nńkan tí àwọn onímọ sọ, pé Ifá jé ọrọ ẹnu Ọrúnmilà àti Olódùmarè àti pé Ifá gan- an ni Olódùmarè, a lè sọ pé ó bá nńkan tí ihìnre ti Jòhánù n fihàn pé “Ní àtètèkọse ni ọrọ wà, ọrọ wà, ọrọ wà pẹlú Olórun, Olórun sì ni ọrọ náá*<sup>59</sup>

Looking at Urim and Thumim that God, the *Olódùmarè* commanded the children Hebrews to perform divination to inquire from him when the time of the death of Moses was near, we can relate this to the Yorùbá form of divination and if we follow the opinions of the scholars that *Ifá* is the voice of *Ọrúnmilà* and *Olódùmarè* and that, *Ifá* is *Olódùmarè*, we can say that, it is the same with what is contains in the Gospel according to Saint John that “in the beginning there was the word, and the word is God.”

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<sup>57</sup> Some authors such as Johnson (1887) believed he brought *Ifá* divination among the Yoruba.

<sup>58</sup> Numbers 27.

<sup>59</sup> John 1:1.

The relationships between the two forms of divinations equally show that, they are divine media for divinations.

Likewise, the Yorùbá divinities have some associations with Catholic Saints. That is the two beliefs have some things in common. For example, the “African worship was mostly directed at Saint Barbara, Saint George, Saints Cosmas, and Damianus, Saint Jerome, Saint Anthony, Saint Lazarus, Saint Rochus, Saint Anne, Saint Our Lady of Candelmas, and above all Our Lord of the God End (o senhor de Bomfim). The true reason for this devotion of the Saints at that to the Nago-Yorùbá these names of Catholic Saints represented those of their principal Orisha” (Fatunmbi 1977/8, p. 24).

Interpretation and association of symbols with meanings has to do with the knowledge of the individual intelligence. Such association and interpretation should also be backed up with evidences and facts to substantiate such links between the two elements in contrasts in terms of their semiotic relationships. “Much in the same way as the Yorùbá deities were preserved under the names of Catholic Saints, other African etho-cultural groups preserved their deities within system of correspondences between deities. In Bahia, for example, there are Candombles of Angolan and Congo origin which have burrowed their ceremonial rituals and ecclesiastical organizations from Yorùbá practice” (Nescimento do Abdias 1977/8, p. 66).

Investigating into *Ifá* symbolism in relation with the Catholic belief will significantly improve our understanding on the concept of reincarnation, its values and influence among or with religions.

### **Theoretical Framework: semiotic approach**

Semiotics is the science of signs. Semiotics, which is the study of science of signs, is adopted by this study because, *Ifá*, the central element in this work communicates in signs and symbols through the interaction of divination objects. Semiotics can be traced to the pioneering works of Charles Sanders Peirce (1931), the American philosopher and Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), the Swiss Linguist.

Three modes- icon, symbol and index of significations are regarded to be sufficient to describe any form of sign. In an iconic mode, the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified in one way or the other. One can perceive a direct resemblance between the signifier and the signified (Peirce 1931). In symbol mode, there is no resemblance or connection between the signifier and the signified, that is, the object and what it stands for. A symbol's connection with its object is a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. In an indexical mode, the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some ways (physically or casually) to the signified.

In symbol mode, there is no resemblance or connection between the signifier and the signified, that is, the object and what it stands for. A symbol's connection with its object is a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. Such symbols, rules and convention between the signifier and the signified must be learnt. In Yorùbá tradition, it can be realised in form of *Àrokò* (symbolism), as such an object or something stands for something or somebody in real life. Other semiotic modes, as proposed by Peirce in addition to codes are icons and index. However, the symbol mode adopted in this study. Symbolism is when, "something that "represents," "stand for," or "signifies" something else." The second is functioning as "the means by which the people orient themselves to the symbol's referent." In combining these two

inclusive functions, religious symbols provide religious followers the pathway to understanding and negotiating the meeting points between the mundane world and the ultimate reality – thus encompassing corporate and individualistic connotations in relation to the two spaces” (Aderibigbe 2016, p. 60).

It is noted that, *Odù* are associated with human. The *Ifá* symbols are connected in various ways with the Yorùbá system of living. Those symbols are relational; as the past, present and the future of the Yorùbá people is brought together to attain and achieve continuity. *Ifá* oracular system can be studied from different approaches because of its cultural contents and contexts of use. Therefore, there is the “necessity for systematic and in-depth study of the literary corpus associated with *Ifá* brings to focus a number of methodological issues” (Morákinyò 1983, p. 66).

Semiotics can be applied to all human aspects of life. For example, bio-semiotics is science of signs in relation to human-beings. “We have two meanings of ‘semiotics’; semiotics as a discipline or general science of signs and semiotics as specifically human semiosis” (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2007, p. 3). The human semiotics is relevant to this study as its knowledge relates to human-beings. Symbolism is central to *Ifá* divination. It “underlies Ifa divination system, the core of which is the recitation of the ẹ̀ṣẹ̀ Ifá pertinent to the problems of the person consulting the babaláwo” (Ọlatunji 2005, p. 135). In any form of semiotics, whether bio-semiotics, computational semiotics, socio-semiotics among others, the value of an object is proportional to its use in cultural expressions– symbolism. That is, “the essence of an object is that which finds expression in the concept which the object embodies, the concept under which it must be identified if it is to be or remain what it is” (Ọlajide, 2017, p. 9). The symbolism of *Odù-Ifá* is perceived to be relevant to the understanding of the concept of reincarnation in this study.



## Analysis

The links of the Yorùbá belief system with *Ifá* are coded in *Odu*. Investigating *Odu-Ifá*'s symbols to different aspects of Yoruba life in particular and humanity in a way that gives a better understanding about Yoruba belief system. This is because, there is no human problem and solution that is not proffered by *Ifá*. The links of *Odu-Ifá* visitations with one another is discovered in this study to be. That is, the symbolisation of each of the 16 principal *Odu-Ifá* with its corresponding number of times of visitation is linked with reincarnation process.

All the 16 major *Odu-Ifá* symbolise the dual nature of gods. That is, world is composed of the physical and spiritual elements. These elements are also contained in any scriptures- *Ifá* or the Bible. Yoruba people believe that all the *Odu* had at a time lived as human on earth. Therefore, linking the *Odu* with the human reincarnation in this study should not be seen or regarded as strange. Like human-beings, the journey of *Odu* began from heaven and ends there. That is, “the Yorùbá concept of existence transcends the time when the individual is on the earth” (Abimbola 1975, p. 417).

The concept of reincarnation should be based on the visitations of the major *Odu-Ifá*, which every human-beings is believed to have links with the 16 basic names of *Odu Ifá*. For example, the life span of human life has been projected and established with this formula: “ $kC(16, 1) = P(16,16)$ , total possible number of life form living on earth at any one time” (McGEE, 1983, p. 112). That is, the projections on the pre-existence, existence and post-existence of human-beings can be evinced from *Ifá*. Therefore, this study is additional knowledge, not only that, *Ifá* accounts for the concept of reincarnation but, in addition, the possibilities of times or occurrences the circle of reincarnation can rotate.

The table below, showing the arrangement of the visitations among the sixteen major *Odù-Ifá* is helpful to demonstrate the concept and process of reincarnation.

30 =	2c (15, 1) =	2p (15, 1)	Èjì Ogbè
28 =	2c (14, 1) =	2p (14, 1)	Òyèkú Méjì
26 =	2c (13, 1) =	2p (13, 1)	Ìwòrì Méjì
24 =	2c (12, 1) =	2p (12, 1)	Òdí Méjì
22 =	2c (11, 1) =	2p (11, 1)	Ìrosùn Méjì
20 =	2c (10, 1) =	2p (10, 1)	Òwónrín Méjì
18 =	2c (9, 1) =	2p (9, 1)	Òbàrà Méjì
16 =	2c (8, 1) =	2p (8, 1)	Òkànran Méjì
14 =	2c (7, 1) =	2p (7, 1)	Ògúndá Méjì
12 =	2c (6, 1) =	2p (6, 1)	Òsá Méjì
10 =	2c (5, 1) =	2p (5, 1)	Ìká Méjì
8 =	2c (4, 1) =	2p (4, 1)	Òtúrùpòn Méjì
6 =	2c (3, 1) =	2p (3, 1)	Òtúá Méjì
4 =	2c (2, 1) =	2p (2, 1)	Ìrètè Méjì
2 =	2c (1, 1) =	2p (1, 1)	Òsé Méjì
0 =	2c (0, 1) =	2p (0, 1)	Òfún Méjì

(McGEE, 1983, p. 104)

Looking at the table above (in the first column), one notes that, the arrangement is in a decreasing geometric progression, by 2 from 30 to 0. Every *Odù* has a dual nature, a male and a female. This informs why the *Odù* symbols on the right must be duplicated on the left hand on the divination board. Therefore, the 2c and 2p as indicated in the second and third columns with their visitation times become necessary. The fourth column shows the *Odù*. *Odù* in *Ifá* is, believed to be human-being (as earlier explained). Therefore, the process of the visitations among the *Odù* have human relationship. That is, “the numbers in each group are derived from the successive visits and return visitations of the deity whose name is associated with that group in the next deity in line, starting from the second deity to the sixteenth” (McGEE 1983, p. 104).

Reincarnation that occurs in the 16<sup>th</sup> generations is symbolised by *Èjìogbè* corpus that has the highest number of visitation. The second *Odù* corpus is associated with the reincarnation that occurs in the 15<sup>th</sup> generations with *Òyèkú Méjì*. The visitation numbers decrease (as indicated on the first column) from *Èjìogbè* that has “thirty *Odù* while the second section contains twenty-

eight. The number of *Odù* in each section decreases in an irregular pattern, giving a total of two hundred and forty” (Abímbólá 1976, p. 28) and (Àjàyí 2009, p. 21). The 16<sup>th</sup> *Odù*: *Òfún/Òràngún Méjì* has the least number of visitation because, the “cannot visit himself, we write C (0, 1), which indicates that the last deity visits himself once (McGEE 1983, p. 104). By this, reincarnation does not occur in the first generation, as the individual cannot reincarnate into himself. Going by the table of visitation of the *Odù* above, reincarnation that occurs in the 13<sup>th</sup> times or visitation are associated with *Ìwori Méjì* corpus, 8<sup>th</sup> with *Òkànràn Méjì*, 5<sup>th</sup> with *Ìká Méjì* and 4<sup>th</sup> with *Òtúúrùpòn Méjì*. “The 16 major *odù* are conceived as kings paying visits to those next below and having their visits returned. A total of 240 visits, the number of the minor *odù* is made” (Olátúnjí 2005, p. 127). The Yorùbá belief on reincarnation is semiotically established in *Ifá* symbols. For example, the beginning of reincarnation is suggested to be realised in two (2), within which an individual soul reincarnates.

This study shows that; the reincarnation in Yoruba does not start from the 16<sup>th</sup> generation as canvassed by some authors. “In all, there is the theory that a person comes back to life sixteen times, from the time of his first restful death... We therefore hold that in Yorùbá thought, the reincarnation begins after the 16<sup>th</sup> time; i.e., after 1120 years” (Mákindé 1983, p. 40). The visitation of *Odù Ifá* reveals that, the reincarnation process terminates at the 16<sup>th</sup> times, that is, 16<sup>th</sup> generation. Some authors are of the opinion that; the reincarnation process starts from 16<sup>th</sup> generation rather than second generation (Dieffenbach 2010). This study however shows that, *Odù-Ifá* visitations begin from 2: the second deity and ends with the 16<sup>th</sup>. This is in line with “the belief on reincarnation is linked to the ancestor’s belief. In Yorùbá religion, it is thought that, about two generations after death, every human soul has a chance to return to earth in the body of a new born, mostly within the same family” (Leroy 1995, pp. 132 – 136). The opinion that,

reincarnation has no terminal period but can occur at any time may not be supported with *Ifá* epistle. That is, the concept of reincarnation is “inexpressible longing to live forever” (Aquilina 2017, p. 2).

These opinions may look obscure to some individuals and belief systems; such opinions are influenced or swayed by human emotions, thoughts and premonitions. The view of Valbuena is here relevant to buttress the present submission. Human limited knowledge about nature may account for our ignorance on some natural existence and events about things. “When something in nature seems ridiculous to us, absurd or bad, is because we just have a partial knowledge of things, because we generally ignore order and the coherence of nature all together, and because we need that everything is disposed according with the dictations of our own reason; although what our reason declares bad is not bad according to the order and laws of universal nature but only according to the laws of our own nature separately considered” (2005, p. 37).

Death does not put an end to the existence of individual. “Physical death does not put an end to existence” (Káyòdé 1984, p. 5). The present generation is linked to the past by the process of immortality and reincarnation of soul. The ancestors or *oriṣas* play a ‘gap bridging’ between the living and the dead. This belief is supported with the journey of the divinities, including the Saints, and religious messengers. For instance, Jesus Christ declares that, before he was born (on the surface of the earth), he had been with the father (God) in heaven. This shows that, his earthly ministry only continued on the surface of the earth. He ended his journey in heaven as well.

The biblical references in support of the concept of reincarnation, interpreting the concept from the biblical context becomes difficult. For example, one of the context that is argued and interpreted rather against the concept than in its favor is the event that brought Jesus Christ together with his disciples on the clarification and affirmation of who Jesus Christ is, when Jesus

asked his disciples in Matthew 16<sup>13&14</sup> (verses thirteen and fourteen), according to the biblical report:

<sup>13</sup>when Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, whom do men say that I the Son of man?

<sup>14</sup>And they said, some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, E-lia; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

From the opinions above, the Apostles of the Lord Jesus are not addressing the question from Jesus by their own experience of the knowledge of Jesus Christ; but, rather express the society's knowledge (Jewish cultural belief) about the peoples' knowledge on who the Lord Jesus Christ was. This is why some disciples responded "some say that thou art..." This could be interpreted that, the discussion had been going on among the people (not even among the disciples of Jesus Christ) that, Jesus Christ was likely to have been John, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets that have returned-reincarnated. This is related to the Yoruba belief and thoughts that,

a great ancestor, say warrior, who had lived a just, good and famous life, may come back to the earth reincarnated through one of his generations of sons or daughters. This is often noted when a particular child grows up with a certain characteristics similar to those of his ancestors. In some cases, the grown up child behaves the same way and achieves similar, if not greater, success in the field of his ancestor whom the Yoruba believe to have come back to life through one of his favoured sons or daughters (Makinde 1983, p. 48).

The bible says, "out of the abundance of mind the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12<sup>34</sup>). The disciples spoke out their minds in line with the peoples' belief. Even though, their response was not in line or answer to what Jesus symbolises; however, it has helped us to associate their response to their religious belief that, somebody can reincarnate. Likewise, Jesus Christ did not quickly silence them (his disciples) that, their response was unscriptural or heresy; but rather says, even though, that is the belief of the people about him, what of their own belief as his disciples? If the response of the community, expressed by the disciples to Jesus could "make

them fall from his grace”- heresy or unscriptural of the bible; Jesus would have thought them against the backdrop of the belief immediately.

Interpretation of the concept of reincarnation in support of the biblical tenet and doctrine has been severally canvassed from group of supporters of this doctrine.

The evidence of reincarnation as the correct interpretation of the “reincarnation of the Dead” on judgment Day is overwhelming. Jesus himself taught reincarnation as revealed in the Bible, the Jews believed in reincarnation during Jesus’ lifetime, the early Christians believed and taught reincarnation, the doctrine of reincarnation can be found throughout early Church history, and the doctrine can be found throughout Christian history before the Church officially declared it a heresy. Many early Christian texts had references to reincarnation (Williams 2017, p. 7).

The doctrine of reincarnation, referenced by the return (coming back of Jesus Christ) is related beyond the biblical or Christian religious context. For example, in the Islamic religion, reference is made that, “the Koran repeats many New Testament prophecies about **the return of Jesus** to save the Jewish people from the invasion of the Antichrist’s army. All of these writings will prepare Muslims to finally understand who Jesus truly is during the Great Tribulation period” (Jeffrey 1991, pp. 170 & 1) (bold mine). The use of “return” indicates rebirth or reappearance, which is all that the concept of reincarnation teaches. In another related context, referring to the teaching of Jesus that, Elijah did come, one of the opinions against citing this event in favor of reincarnation that, “in this place [when Jesus said Elijah was come and referred to John the Baptist] **it does not appear to me** that by Elijah the soul is spoken of, **lest I fall into the doctrine of transmigration**, which is foreign to the Church of God, and not handed down by the apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the scripture –Origen, A.D. 248” (Aquilina 2017, p. 4) (bold mine).

In the opinion above, the response is intentional and was not addressed objectively with fairness and unbiased mind. The grammatical interpretation of the bold phrases and sentences attest to this claim. He (the speaker) responded thus, having known that, accepting or conceding

with the other interpretation as an alternative will end him into the belief or doctrine he is kicking against. The opinion also expresses his own thinking and assumptions and, not constructively or critically argued in line with biblical foundation or basis.

One of the reasons why reincarnation is unacceptable, especially within the Catholic faith is the opportunity of unlimited chances of repeated life offered by, or associated with the concept of reincarnation. Again, Christians generally and, the Catholics in particular should rather argued against the concept of reincarnation based on the precept, ordinance and doctrine of the bible; and not allowing their (human assumptions) to sway them. Any attempt to give way to human presumption or assumption may be metaphorically end with “unscriptural or unbiblical” analysis. For instance, Arinze opines that, “belief in reincarnation **must not be regarded** as a minor mistake for people who profess the Christian faith indeed **it is a major challenge**, if not a conscious or unconscious undermining of the Christian worldview... Pope John Paul II acknowledged in his 1994 apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (“As the Third Millennium Draws Near”) that the belief in reincarnation expresses the human “inexpressible longing to live forever” (Aquilina 2017, p. 2) (bold mine). The interpretations of the opinions against the concept of reincarnation above is “suggestive”, this is why it must be regarded as “an enemy”; but, the concept undeniably still pose a major challenge to the Christian and Catholic faiths. In fact, the challenge it poses “is nothing new in the Church or in the world. It is an error as old perhaps, as human desire” (Aquilina 2017, p. 2). However, if the concept of reincarnation is an error as old as humanity, should it not be corrected and “laid to rest” rather than to just criticise it and, live it to “cause further havoc” to the Catholic faith?

Today, reasonable percentage of the Catholic and Christian faiths are increasing in favor of the concept described as alien to the bible; because, of their experience with the reality of the

concept and because, such dissenting opinions have not been convincingly done away with, within the ambit of the biblical teachings, knowledge and experience about the concept. However, the *Ifá* epistle does not prescribe an indefinite or infinity to reincarnation cycle as an apprehension to the opinion of Pope John Paul 11, that, reincarnation is borne out of the opinion for “the human inexpressible longing to live forever.” This opinion is contrary to the *Ifá* prescriptions and teachings about the concept of reincarnation. This is supported by the opinion that, there is possibility for individual to reincarnate between two (2) and sixteen (16) generations (2-16). By this analysis, the reincarnation process rotates within 2 and 16. This can also be expressed as  $>1 <16$  (Òkékéndé 2017a).

. There is terminal or limit to the possibility or probability of reincarnation and not in infinity. Assuming that, the concept of reincarnation offers repeated opportunities of existence, it has been interpreted to be the actual plan of God to mankind. Not all human undergo reincarnation (as explained earlier) but, those that have not met God’s standard(s) of entering his kingdom,

they are offered the option to return to another Earth life for further soul growth unless they have entered the Kingdom of God in the highest heaven. It is God’s will that no one perish (2 Peter 3:9) and no one can thwart God’s will; and God has provided a way of salvation for everyone through Christ, even those in hell. See (1 Timothy 2:3 – 4) (1 Timothy 4: 10), (Lamentation 3:31-33), (Isaiah 52: 10), and (Luke 3:5-6). I reached the same conclusion many others have: reincarnation is actually a gift from God allowing humans to have as many opportunities as necessary to become permanent residents of the highest heaven. “Hell” means having to dwell in lower, hellish after life realms, then reincarnation to be subject to death repeatedly until eternal life in heaven is attained. These hidden of mysteries of Jesus were not limited to Jesus or to Judeo-Christianity (Williams 2017, p. 7).

As explained earlier that, interpretation is, one of the challenges of associating meaning to symbols. In other words, the major problem confronting Catholic faith is the inability for to resolve biblically on the concept of reincarnation. For instance, there are within the Christian faiths who are disciples of the concept of reincarnation.



The eminent Christian leader who championed this interpretation of the resurrection was the early Church Father Origen (185-232 A.D.) who was the first theologian after Paul to develop a system of theology around the teachings of Jesus. Origen headed the famed Catechetical School of Alexandria founded by Mark the Apostle where he learned the secret teachings of Christ. Unfortunately, Origen's teachings on preexistence and its corresponding principle of reincarnation were later declared heresy and condemned at the Synod of Constantinople in 543 A. D. and was ratified by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 A. D (Williams 2017, p. 6).

Besides Origen, many research works in support of reincarnation as that, “of Dr. Ian Stevenson whose 40+ years of research yielded much scientific evidence suggestive of reincarnation. Dr. Kenneth Ring also studied reincarnation in NDE studies. Then there is my own reincarnation research where I provide evidence for the reincarnation of Abraham Lincoln” (Williams 2017, p. 7).

Another biblical interpretation on the concept of reincarnation within the Catholic belief is that,

the mystery of the “Resurrection of the Dead” on judgment Day when Christ appears has been misunderstood by the Church ever since reincarnation (rebirth) was declared a heresy in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. ...The mystery of the “Resurrection of the dead” on the judgment Day is one of these mysteries. The organized Roman Church rejected any of these mysteries for varieties of reasons; but mostly because after hundreds of years since Christ's death, the Church leadership was greatly influenced by doctrines from the public at large who were not completely privy to these mysteries which they considered heresy. The Roman Church advocated a misinterpretation of resurrection as corpses ‘sleeping’ in their graves until judgment Day when Christ appears and corpses come out of their graves and regain their physical bodies including genitals. But the secret teachings involve two forms of “resurrection” (John 3:5):

(1) a spiritual ‘resurrection’ or spiritual regeneration by the Holy Spirit known as “born of the Spirit” (John 3:7-8), and

(2) a bodily “resurrection’ or the rebirth of a human spirit in a new physical body – becoming ‘born of water” (John 3; 3-6), symbolized by baptism, known as reincarnation. Once a person is born of a woman (by water”, reincarnation) then born by the Holy Spirit, spiritual “resurrection” as Jesus taught, they can enter the Kingdom of God (John 3;5). Reincarnation is the result of not being “born of the Holy Spirit” (spiritual regeneration).

The eminent Christian leader who championed this interpretation of the resurrection was the early Church Father Origen (185-232 A.D.) who was the first theologian after Paul to develop a system of theology around the teachings of Jesus (Williams 2017, p. 6).

To demonstrate the existence of the concept of reincarnation further, “there are mysteries and secret oral traditions that came directly from Christ and the apostles which were not given to the public at large” (Williams 2017, p. 6).

In Africa generally, and among the Yorùbá in particular, oral genres are societal commodities in which, their cultural values are guaranteed and more flavored in orality. “orality was the means by which Africa made its existence, its history long before the colonial and imperial presence of the west manifested itself. In this sense, orality needs to be seen not simply as ‘the absence of literacy’ but as something self-constitutes *Sui generis*” (Gunner 2007, p. 67). In Yorùbá tradition, “*Ifá* divination protocols are the closest an ‘oral’ society could develop to fulfill the requirement of genuinely divine writing and speaking” (Adéèkó 2010, p. 288). Tradition of the people is believed to have a vital role in peoples’ life, including religion. The Catholics and Hebrews, Jews or Greeks are traditionally influenced by religion. For example, Okonda reports about tradition and Catholics that, “the Catholic Counter-Reformation, on the other hand, traditionally understood the words and actions of Christ and the Apostles transmitted orally and the liturgy. It wanted to mark the difference between the apostolic tradition, the singular, and the traditions of the people, in the plural” (2017, p. 57).

The opinion above demonstrates that, Africans generally and the Yorùbá in particular hold oral tradition in high esteem. The Catholic belief is equally associated with orality, as a dependable source of information. As a result of oral dissemination of history, there is the possibility that,

there is significant evidence that much of the original material about Jesus Christ, which was initially in the Talmud, was removed and censored during the Middle Ages. **This was done in an attempt to eliminate inflammatory passages that were misused by bigots as an excuse to assault Jewish ghettos in Europe.** As you would expect, this censored material included both positive and negative comments about Jesus. **Even**

**negative comments are very helpful, in terms of establishing the historical truth of the life of Christ** (Jeffrey 1991, p. 187) (bold mine).

Removal some messages from the account of the ministry of Jesus Christ has been criticised by some authors and scholars on the ground that, it denied people the freedom and right to worship- it was much less individualistic. In other words, for people to have freedom, they

must have access to all information and arguments that may be relevant to its ability to discuss public affairs fully and to assess in a competent manner the conduct of the officials it chooses... This approach can be considered to provide the foundation or the assurance that has been so critical to modern argument against censorship (John 8: 32): “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”. Further biblical authority against censorship may be found in such “free speech” dramas as that described in (Acts 4: 13-21). Perhaps the most dramatic form of censorship in Christendom was that displayed in the development by the Roman Catholic Church of the *Index Librorum prohibitorium*, a list of proscribed books; the origin of which go back (in a primitive form) to the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE and which continued to have official sanction well into 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most spectacular instance of silencing of thinker of note may well have been the restrictions placed upon Galileo in 1633 (Encyclopedia Britannica 2002, p. 2).

There is the possibility of the direct reincarnation to have been affected- be censored out of the bible. However, there are parallel words and events that point to the likely presence or recognition of the reincarnation material in the bible and in its dictionaries and concordance, including the word as a linguistic symbol for the concept of reincarnation.

The purpose of God for mankind is impartial, unbiased of religion or faith. Religion is a way to actualising or fulfilling the purposes of God for mankind. Can African religions views be outside God’s purpose for mankind? Has the Christianity religious belief on the concept of reincarnation been accurately or correctly interpreted? Can’t there be move towards all religions or worldview on the controversial concept of reincarnation?

The term *worldview* may sound abstract or philosophical... but actually a person’s world view is intensely practical. It is simply the sum total of our beliefs about the world, the “big picture” that directs our daily decisions and actions. And so understanding worldviews is extremely important to how we live—to know how to evaluate everything from the textbooks in our classrooms to the unspoken philosophy that shapes the message we hear...The basis for the Christian worldview, of course, is God’s revelation in Scriptures. Yet sadly, many believers fail to understand that Scripture is intended to be

the basis for all of life...Genuine Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study, and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing a system of doctrines about God. **Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending all reality** (Colson and Pearcey 1999, pp. ix) (bold mine).

The understanding of the reality of biblical message and teaching on reincarnation or its symbolism to Christianity and, its impacts on their Christian race is a desirable challenge.

Understanding of life's laws is what Scripture calls wisdom. "Wisdom in Scripture is, broadly speaking, the knowledge of God's world and the knack of fitting oneself into it," says Cornelius Plantinga Jr., president of Calvin Theological Seminary. A wise person is one who knows the boundaries and limits, the laws and rhythms and seasons of the created order, both in the physical and the social world. 'To be wise is to know reality and then accommodate yourself to it.' (Colson and Pearcey 1999 pp. ix – x).

The universality of God's intention to mankind is unvarying as there are varying belief systems or doctrines about the intention of God towards mankind. The reality is that, there are physical evidences that support the belief of reincarnation, especially in Africa and among the Yorùbá in particular. In addition, the biblical arguments against the belief till the present time are insufficient, unconvincing and inadequate to substantiate the concept of reincarnation as unscriptural. Certainly, the belief on reincarnation has not been "the common ground shared by religions" but, rather has been "complex ground of battle and conflict" among religions and within the Christian and Catholic faiths. Therefore, what we presently have is the intra-religious misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the concept of reincarnation. This is why it is desirable to look outside the Christianity religion, such as in this case, *Ifá*- the religion of the Yorùbá people, which have been in various ways associated with the Catholic belief and, take a position based on the biblical consensus prescriptions on the concept of reincarnation.

### **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study has provided *Ifá* epistle about the concept of reincarnation. The study shows that reincarnation is a concept associated with and established in *Ifá*. The reincarnation circle rotates in-between the sixteen principal *Odù*. The process of reincarnation is anchored on the

visitation of *Odù-Ifá*. This study canvasses and concludes that, the proper interpretation of the doctrine of bible being relied on by some Catholics on the concept of reincarnation is yet to be understood and comprehended. This study recommends that, “We must also have some understanding of the opposing worldviews and why people believe them. Only then can we present the gospel in language that can be understood. Only then can we defend truth in a way that is winsome and persuasive” (Colson and Pearcey 1999, pp. ix - x) (bold mine). In other words, “a person must act virtuously but must personally choose to do so; he must be prepared to be exposed to alternatives, as inevitably he will be, and he must choose rightly if he is to merit and secure eternal salvation” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2002, p. 2) (bold mine). After all, every believer of a religion chooses to or not to steal, fornicate or kill; having known all the do and don'ts attached with these vices.

### **Biography**

Olúwolé Tẹ̀wọ̀gbọ̀yẹ̀ Òkẹ̀wándé holds a doctorate degree in Yorùbá literature and culture. He has been lecturing in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages since 1998. His research interests include African Religion and culture, stylistics and semiotics. He has published in reputable local, national and international journals.

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**Justice for the Rich, Judgment for the Poor: ‘Elite Immunity’, Rampant Impunity and the Administration of Criminal Justice in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

In Nigeria today, some aspects of our constitution give immunity clause to serving political office holders which prevents them from being prosecuted in a court of law over alleged offences against the state committed while in office until after their tenure. This immunity clause has led to an alarming rate of executive lawlessness and official corruption in the corridors of power by Nigerian political ruling class as they continually abuse these privileges with high sense of impunity. Their associates and friends also enjoy unofficial immunity as they recklessly flaunt existing laws. This, many a times, goes without any form of punishment to serve as deterrent to other potential offenders. It often precipitates more abuse in the polity. Yet, while the Nigerian courts mockingly and seemingly ruthlessly deal with the poor, the rich are patronizingly pampered and most times, evade justice. Though the Nigerian constitution guarantees justice and equality for all citizens, a lot of people, especially the poor and vulnerable, are still unable to get access to justice in the country. While the poor get rotten in prison for many years in the course of trial, soft landing mechanism is devised for the rich- just to return a fraction of the looted money and go home. This study therefore, interrogates the content and context of *elite immunity* and its attendant culture of impunity that permeates the political environment in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Immunity, Impunity, Constitution, Prosecution, Corruption

**Introduction and Background to the Study**

The challenge of systematically studying the African power elite and the mode by which it governs has become urgent not only because of the conceptual/theoretical dead-ends to which much of current received wisdom leads, but also because a better understanding of the nature, composition and renewal of the elite is critical to our understanding of the governance of the public sphere (CODESRIA, 2003). A focus on political elites is a focus on the primacy of political interests. As both Mosca and Pareto underscore in their works, members of the elite act in order to preserve their position within their societies. Specifically, political elites’ action is aimed at the preservation of their political power. As Thomas Schwartz argues, members of the political elite are ‘ambitious people seeking office for individual recognition, career advancement, and the power to affect societies’ (Schwartz 2009, cited in Tardelli, 2013:88-89). While some mature natural states institutionalize relations among elites so that privileges are

regularized in a way that they begin to become transformed into rights; put another way, privileges move from being personal and idiosyncratic to being impersonally applied equally to all elites (Weingast, 2008:7), in some other climes, elites have been regarded as the Chief threat to the survival of democracy. Their existence has been taken to be the very denial of democracy. Elites which have exceptional access to key positions in the society or which appear to wield control over critical and crucial policies disproportionate to their numbers can understandably seem to be living contradictions of the notion of government by the people (Duru, 2012). As pointed out by Gumede (2010), small group of elites which dominate politics, intellectual capital and business are at the heart of failures of most African countries since independence. As a result of this, minorities have become richer and more entrenched while the poor segments of the African societies have become poorer.

It is in this context that the administration of justice- central to the survival of democratic government- is analysed in this essay in relation to elite immunity and its attendant rampant impunity in Nigeria. It is argued that if the criminal justice system, due to its inbred unaccountability, is unable to efficiently and speedily punish wrong doing, then people will carry out criminal acts with no heed for the consequences. If civil process finds it virtually impossible to enforce commercial contracts, then parties are encouraged to breach them with impunity because there is no certainty of consequences. If institutions, due to their inefficiency, serve the interests of the violator rather than the victim, then impunity is encouraged (Arthur-Worrey, n.d). Put differently, the most common failing in the criminal area is the impunity of well-connected individuals. The privileged may include politicians, elected officials, high ranking military personnel, members of the dominant social class, and wealthy elites.

Given the allegation of corrupt practices against some of these office holders there have been calls for the removal of the immunity conferred on them by the Constitution, so as to make way for their possible prosecution in court while in office. Others have argued for the retention of the immunity provision, otherwise called the immunity clause (Arishe, 2010:274). It is worrisome that public officials abuse these privileges with high sense of impunity. This often goes without any form of punishment to serve as deterrent to other potential offenders. It often precipitates more abuse in the polity. Yet, while the Nigerian courts mockingly and seemingly ruthlessly deal with the poor, the rich are patronizingly pampered and most times, evade justice. Though the Nigerian constitution guarantees justice and equality for all citizens, a lot of people,

especially the poor and vulnerable, are still unable to get access to justice in the country. While the poor get rotten in prison for years while awaiting trial, soft landing mechanism is devised for the rich- just to return looted money and go home. This study therefore, interrogates the content and context of executive immunity and its attendant culture of impunity that permeates the political environment. It contends that the immunity clause not only sanctifies, *abinitio*, criminal behaviour by the said public officials but also gives them every incentive to be vile and depraved to their heart's content- to turn immunity into impunity.

### **Conceptualizing Immunity, 'Elite Immunity' and Impunity**

There are different types of immunity and these will be briefly discussed here. One, is the doctrine of sovereign immunity, which is of antiquity. It is basically founded on the anachronistic legal principle of *rex non potest peccare* (the king can commit no wrong). As the king enjoyed absolute immunity, he could neither be impeded in his own courts nor subject to any foreign jurisdiction. Maneleus of Sparta confirmed that the king was above the law of the Realm, when he said "when a king takes spoils, he robs no one; when a king kills, he commits no murder, he only fulfils justice" (Falana, 2016). Another type is legislative immunity; also known as parliamentary immunity. It is a legal doctrine under which legislators or parliamentarians are accorded or granted *partial immunity* from prosecution or from being made answerable to a civil action. We also have the concept of executive immunity. And that refers to a system in which, in some countries, presidents and vice-presidents and other people at the top of a government are protected from any kind of criminal arrest or punishment or charges.

Judicial immunity is granted to judicial officers (and to those who are called upon to perform quasi judicial functions) to protect them against civil liabilities that may emanate from or relate to the exercise of their powers and performance of their duties, essentially to embolden them to dispense justice, independently, without the phobia of being challenged in a civil action, and "without fear or favour affection or ill will" (Ogunye, 2016). Diplomatic Immunity is a principle of International Law that provides foreign diplomats, their families and their 'contingent' with protection from legal action in the country to which they are posted as diplomatic envoys. The provisions that constitute this principle are contained in the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961*, and subsequent Conventions, and in municipal statute of each country, which guarantees diplomatic privileges and immunity in such a country.

In Nigeria, the *Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges Act, Cap D9, Vol. 5, LFN 2004*, provides for diplomatic immunities and privileges for foreign envoys and consular officers (ibid).

Essentially for the executive, the first major reason for immunity is that criminal suits would ultimately result in disqualification or discharge of the executive head from his/her duties. All constitutions ensure the executive stability of the head of government in his or her tenure in office until removed or impeached as mentioned in the law. The second reason for executive immunity is to give the executive freedom of action to perform its duties in the public interest. It is the foremost job of any executive to execute and enforce the laws of a nation. Thirdly, it seems undemocratic for non-elected judges to oust an elected person. The executives are not ordinary 'citizens' as mentioned in the law, particularly when they are in office. Disqualification from office is the highest form of punishment for an elected person. In stable democracies, such as in the US and western European countries, even members of legislatures are not disqualified by the Courts. The fourth and fifth reasons to give immunity to executives are time and energy. Being an executive requires tremendous energy and exposure. Just as judges are immune from any litigation, the executive also has immunity. They should spend a reasonable amount of time on matters of public, not personal, interest. They must protect the people in both peace and war (Khan, 2012). Despite the fact that those with power have certain natural inclinations towards impunity, contemporary international norms, according to Pinto-Jayawardena, Gunatilleke and Abeywickreme (2013), clearly recognise the general obligation of States to take effective action to combat impunity. Accordingly, principle 1 of the UN Principles on Action to Combat Impunity declares:

Impunity arises from a failure by States to meet their obligations to investigate violations; to take appropriate measures in respect of the perpetrators, particularly in the area of justice, by ensuring that those suspected of criminal responsibility are prosecuted, tried and duly punished; to provide victims with effective remedies and to ensure that they receive reparation for the injuries suffered; to ensure the inalienable right to know the truth about violations; and to take other necessary steps to prevent a recurrence of violations

The concept of elite immunity as used in this essay basically connotes a situation where associates and friends of public office holders also enjoy unofficial immunity as they recklessly breach existing laws which many a times, goes without any form of punishment to serve as deterrent to other potential offenders. The abuse of immunity clause has given rise to unresolved cases of high profile political killing, fund misappropriation and graft in high places. Law

enforcement agents have, more often than not, reached “dead end” in their investigation of such cases as they always discover that the power that be is behind such crimes. As this practice goes unchecked, the political ruling class has extended the same kind of privilege to their cronies and stooges who are at their beck and call. We have often heard of cases of friends of political gladiators who were caught in one crime or another. It is on record that some close allies of former governors, senators, ministers and commissioners of past administrations in the country have broken bounds with recklessness just because their friends were in government. This has created a new culture in the country which is the culture of impunity. Court orders are being flouted without any fear of the repercussion, law enforcement agents at road blocks are being intimidated by calls to powerful government officials.

On the other hand, impunity is a global phenomenon that permeates governmental structures of States. Impunity in its strict, technical dictionary definition means freedom or exemption from punishment or recrimination or penalty or harm, in spite of doing a wrong, whether legal or moral. It also means freedom or exemption or immunity from unpleasant consequences. It is evident in ministries, departments, agencies and various institutions. However, the degree of its manifestation varies from one State to another, depending on the extent of the entronement of the rule of law by a State (Human Development Initiatives, 2014:4) Impunity also manifests in blatant acts of corruption, bad governance and human rights abuse by public officials (governors, ministers, senators, military personnel, etc.). These acts are reported daily in the media. Occupants of public offices in Nigeria, see their tenure as an avenue for personal aggrandizement and as a means of getting their own share of the national cake. Thus, they steal from the public treasury with reckless abandon (Ibid, 2014:5).

There is also the issue of the type of impunity that bespeaks immunity from the consequences of not performing an obligation or duty, and this involves impunity in relation to responsibility and accountability. This usually relates to the failure of public officials or institutions to carry out statutory duties efficiently or at all, or even private individuals in their dealings and interactions with such institutions failing to comply with the law or regulations or legitimate professional expectations, preferring to negotiate their way to the front of the queue, and even if these may not always amount to legal wrongs they are certainly administrative or moral wrongs with damaging effects to society; but the institutions and their officials and these private individuals continue to act with impunity mainly because of complicity or silence

(Arthur-Worrey, n.d). It is observed that once impunity is entrenched in a state, the state, its agencies and machineries become incapable of meeting the benchmark of investigating rights and laws 'violation, as well as taking important steps towards bringing offenders to book in ways that would serve as deterrents to others, thus bringing justice to the state.

### **Governance, Corruption and Enforcement of Law: The Socio-Political Ecology of the Nigerian Society**

One of the classical sociological theorists of the 19th and 20th century was Karl Marx. He explained through his theory that human cultural values are important for a society. He explains that power and money shapes the social structure through developing the struggle among the classes to attain the best. According to him, the urge of attaining wealth and power not only bring a negative aspect of society but the positive side also emerges only if the class's difference of upper and lower is put on an end and if there are equality and inclusiveness in the society. He emphasised that materialism and power make the differences in the society and these differences come out in the form of urge and availing the right and wrong opportunities by the people. He showed materialistic view of the history that people earn for food, shelter, home, and clothing and works for their living. This struggle shapes up the social structure of the society by creating the labours and owners. These two divisions of people create the differences as the owners gain profit but pay less to the labour than the worth of the work, which leads to exploitation of the society. This exploitation further brings political domination creating classes in power who are economically strong and so gain the power of controlling the country (Read more: <http://www.ukessays.com/essays/sociology/sociological-theories-and-corruption-sociology-essay.php#ixzz42YtoRedo>).

A social problem connotes an act or a form of behaviour which constitutes concern to a significant proportion of the society to warrant a common solution by that society. The structural-functionalists regard social problems as serious behavioural deviations hindering the functioning of society; social problems are regarded as inhibiting the needs and goals of society. The sociological perspective does not regard a particular form of behaviour as the problem of the individual, but regards the individual behaviour as emanating from the social order in which the individual lives. This agrees with the Durkheimian postulation that all behaviour is socially generated.

There is a growing academic literature on the nature and character of the socio-political ecology that germinates the degree or variant of corruption that exists in a particular society, and how other factors combine to nurture it. Its (corruption's) root, given experiences, can be found deep and has often been rightly located, in the unavoidable interplays of bureaucratic, corporate and political institutions and/or within the institutions as independent entities. With reference to Nigeria, corruption has almost become a culture; a situation which has negatively impacted heavily, not only on the country's development, but even on its image. Indeed, it has retarded its development to such an alarming point that the vast majority of the populace now live in abject poverty, having serially lost their commonwealth to a deeply connected and entrenched band of thieving elite. Little wonder, corruption has assumed the most topical issue of discourses on governance in Nigeria today. Corruption is so pervasive in the country that it has turned public service into a kind of criminal enterprise. Graft has fueled political violence, denied millions of Nigerians access to even the most basic health and education services, and reinforced police abuses and other widespread patterns of human rights violations

It is common knowledge that corruption thrives in an environment where the corrupt practices are undertaken by the political leadership at the highest levels of government. In such a situation, two major fallouts are noted. First, the corrupt practices of the leaders 'pollute' the morality of the citizens as the latter emulate the negative corrupt practices of the former. Secondly, and most detrimental to the development of the country, is the reluctance of the political leadership which forms the major culprits to aggressively and whole-heartedly prosecute the laws on corruption where they exist. The latter fallout can be appreciated by the fact that a thief does not do a good job when he doubles as a security guard (Ogbodo, 2011:134).

From the political perspective, political systems in many developing countries are increasingly influenced by some form of bribery and corruption which undermine the capacity of the State to make the right policy choices, and to provide overall good governance. From the social perspective, at all levels of society, an increasing number of people are being forced to adapt to new contexts in which corruption of some sort is part of a new way of life, whether they like it or not. Too often, otherwise honest people are forced to resort to corrupt means to carry on with their daily lives. This creates the ethical dilemma of forced coexistence with individuals and groups who operate on the basis of different moral standards and expect all those with whom they interact to adopt their lifestyle; this can cause insecurity and instability to social systems

that weak States can least afford. From the human security perspective, as corruption creates parallel and competing agendas and subverts the rule of law, an increasing number of people are faced with a daily struggle for personal physical security that governments are unable, and in some cases, unwilling to guarantee. Perhaps the worst-case scenario is when the government is captured by a crime syndicate (Hassan 2004:27).

In Nigeria, years of military dominance in governance created and entrenched the culture of impunity. The military ruled with absolute disregard for the rule of law and so created a national psyche of ‘militarization’. This has persisted till date, despite more than a decade of steady democratic governance, where it is expected that public conscience and accountability would drive development. However, the reverse is the case. Impunity has acquired its unique Nigerian meaning (Human Development Initiatives, 2014). Without doubt, the unpardonable failure of the political leadership class managing the affairs and wealth of the country had inevitably brought severe misery to many voiceless and helpless Nigerians. It must also be mentioned here that Nigeria’s post-independence political bureaucratic and military elites had terribly pillaged the nation’s common wealth and national patrimony with impunity, thereby denying Nigerians access to economic prosperity and quality living condition (Ogbeidi, 2012:18). In other words, the country’s picture and identity is replete with confused, factionalized and extremely corrupt elites with a limited sense of nation. These elites lacking strong and viable base in production, turns the state as its primary instrument of primitive accumulation. In the end, the state is mangled and rendered impotent in the quest for nationhood, growth and development, much less democracy (Ihonvbere, 1999). As pointed out by Arthur-Worrey, (n.d):

No one wants to live an ordinary, simple life anymore once they are appointed to a high position or have come into money. They have become disruptive influences taking up more public space than they would enjoy in a normal society. They must have numerous aides, they cannot do anything for themselves any longer, and, aping the antics of those in power, they too drive in convoys, as if there weren’t enough traffic on our roads and parking spaces, use policemen as drivers and domestics, blare sirens and breach traffic laws, forgetting that they are, by so doing, contributing to the disorder and demeaning the very institutions that are supposed to establish order. And incredibly, the police institution lends itself to this lawless behaviour by providing its officers to all manner of people, even establishing a VIP protection unit with no clear rules or code of conduct for its officers, thereby



and perhaps unwittingly, undermining its own authority and making its work of enforcing the law much more difficult.

Democracy in Nigeria has been plunged into crisis by its failure to ensure accountability of the ruler to rule as well as the inability of the state to make officials accountable for their actions and bring corrupt Public officials to justice. This is not to suggest that there are no institutions established to ensure accountability and checkmate corruption, but the best of these institutions has only earned the country the status of being rated the second and later third most corrupt country in the world and, among African states, slowing down the pace of the battle against corruption (The Guardian, February 12, 2005:12). It is a truism that democratic legitimacy derives from a consensus among citizens that laws, as administered, represent the collective will. That consensus fades unless laws are applied equally to all persons, regardless of their class, sex, ethnicity, or other characteristics. There cannot be the rule of law without application and enforcement of laws. Even if laws are legitimately derived and equally applied, equality under the law will not occur unless the laws are consistently enforced and applied.

Unequal application of the law regularly occurs in Nigeria especially when the poor and the disadvantaged are victims or the accused. The legal system often does not give such cases the same attention as those cases in which elites are the victims or the accused. In addition, unequal treatment occurs in civil matters, such as land titling, debt collection, taxation, landlord-tenant disputes, mortgage foreclosures, and enforcement of liens and security interests. The poor and disadvantaged often have scant possibility of winning civil cases against the well-connected. The trends and patterns of this development are discussed in the next section.

### **The Content and Context of How Immunity Perpetuates Impunity**

By section 5 of the 1999 Constitution, the executive power is conferred on the President at the federal level and on the Governor at the State level. Section 308 provides for the scope of executive immunity as far as Nigeria is concerned:

(1) Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this constitution, but subject to Subsection (2) of this section-

(a) no civil or criminal proceedings shall be instituted or continued against a person to whom this section applies during his period of office

(b) a person to whom this section applies shall not be arrested or imprisoned during that period either in pursuance of the process of any court or otherwise; and

(c) no person of any court requiring or compelling the appearance of a person to whom this section applies, shall be applied for or issued;

Provided that in ascertaining whether a period of limitation has expired for the purpose of any proceedings against a person to whom this section applies, no account shall be taken of his period of office

(2) the provision of subsection (1) of this section shall not apply to civil proceedings against a person to whom this section in his official capacity or to civil or criminal proceedings in Which such a person is only a nominal party

(3) this section applies to a person holding the office of president or vice president, governor or deputy governor; and the reference in this section to 'period of office' is a reference to the period during which the person holding such office is required to perform the functions of the office.

From the above Section, it is evident that the scope of this immunity clause applies to anybody holding the office of President, Vice President, Governors and Deputy Governors for the period of their office, the period of their office is a period within which they hold the office in the respective capacity. It follows that immunity clause will not shield the aforementioned persons who have left office.

The overall effect of Section 308 of the 1999 Constitution is that the elected officers mentioned in Subsection (3) of the section are protected from arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, civil and criminal proceedings while their tenure lasts. And if there has been a case standing against any of them before being elected into office, such a case shall terminate or at least be put in abeyance during the continuation of their tenure in office. By section 5 of the 1999 Constitution, the executive power is conferred on the President at the Federal level and on the Governor at the State level. The immunity granted to the officers named in section 308 is personal and not official. It is also an absolute one; one that covers all criminal and civil claims against the beneficiary during his/her tenure in office. The sole justification for immunity is that the heads of state and government should enjoy absolute immunity to enable them to perform official duties without distractions. In other words, such public officers should not be harassed or distracted in the performance of their duties by fear of civil or criminal litigation.

The constitutional practice has always been that the president or governors cannot be prosecuted and even imprisoned while they are still in office and prior to their impeachment.

This is logical in law. Immunity of the President and the Governors from criminal proceedings can also be justified on the ground their subjection to the jurisdiction of the courts would be inconsistent with their position as heads of the Executive branch. Because of their unique powers to supervise executive branch and assert executive privilege, the constitutional balance generally should favor the conclusion that a sitting President or Governor may not be subjected to criminal prosecution. This is because; the possession of these powers by the President and the Governors renders their prosecution inconsistent with the constitutional structure. However, the commencement of constitutional amendment by the National Assembly has thrown up a lot of issues of national importance to the court of public opinion. The proposal to give presiding officers of National and State Assemblies immunity and life pension is generating ripples in the polity According to Falana (2016):

Apart from the President of our country, the vice president, governors and their deputy, who are protected under immunity in Section 308 of the constitution, others are now insisting that immunity be conferred on them. In particular, the legislators in our country are asking for immunity, but unfortunately, this is not the best time to make that request because right now, some of the leaders of the parliament in our country are standing trial for false declaration of assets, for forgery and conspiracy and some are even under threat of possible deportation to the United States to stand trial for rape and other related offences

One fundamental reason why lawmakers should not have thought of amending the constitution to give their leaders pension and immunity is their refusal to be influenced by the hard facts of the nation's financial crunch. It is no longer news that governments at all levels in the country are facing deep economic and financial crisis as a result of collapsing price of oil and unbridled stealing of public revenue garnered during the years of plenty in the petroleum sector. According to Sekoni (2016:14), it is unpatriotic for lawmakers to ignore failure of 27 states governments to pay salaries of workers on minimum wage of N18,000 per month. On record, Sekoni posits further, Nigerian lawmakers are the most highly paid lawmakers on the globe. They obtain, among other perquisites, wardrobe allowance; housekeeper's allowance, driver's allowance, furniture and even constituency allowance to perform executive functions while working part-time on legislative duties for which they were elected.

It is argued that immunity from prosecution is subject to abuses; just as every other law or rule is subject to abuse and adulteration by persons with such disposition to manipulate and corrupt laws and rules for their personal benefit, instead of public benefit. It is the case, therefore, that a governor or president, desirous of subverting public interests and public good for

evil and personal gain, could engage in actions that serve personal or parochial interests, which of course amounts to perversions of public and national interest (Tajudeen, 2013:191). In spite of its good intentions, the application of the constitutional provision on immunity for certain categories of elected public officers in Nigeria arguably has more negative than positive implications for democracy and democratic consolidation. It is particularly identified with lack of transparency, embezzlement, lack of accountability and other forms of abuse of power that detract from the beauty and essence of democracy. The implications of the above for democratic consolidation in Nigeria are quite threatening. That a sitting governor or president cannot be prosecuted for crimes committed against the state simply puts such individuals above the law. It would be a means of breeding criminals in power (Olaoye, 2012:100). The utility of the executive immunity contained in the Nigerian constitution was called to question during the tenure of Nuhu Ribadu as Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) when he was reported to have said he had concluded investigations on about 24 serving governors who would be arrested on the expiration of their term in office on the 28th of May, 2007, on alleged economic and financial crimes. This opened a torrent of attacks on the immunity clause in the 1999 Constitution with some arguments to the contrary however (Arishe, 2010:296). As clearly observed in the Guardian Editorial (2007):

Hiding behind the fortress proffered by the immunity clause, so many of such officials, only a handful of whom have now been arrested and are being tried, allegedly perpetrated barefaced thefts and acts of money laundering. At the end of the day, so many of them became multi-billionaires with great financial and fixed asset investments in and outside this country. In the event, most of the ex-governors reportedly left empty treasuries for their successors, with scant traces of accomplished developmental projects to show for their huge spending.

Allegations of bare-faced looting of the nation's common patrimony, is done under the protection of the 'immunity clause' as it is popularly called. Even when it is very obvious to the governed that their collective resources are being mindlessly squandered by the very people that are custodians of their resources, there is very little or nothing that can be done. Obviously, elected leaders have found a perfect shield in section 308 of the constitution to commit all manner of atrocities against their people, public affairs analysts say. They say apart from contract inflation and receiving of kick-backs, some of the formulae perfected by many governors to steal their states' treasury dry are security votes and ecological funds, which no one can question them about. Security vote is an unconstitutional allocation of money to governors, especially, to,

ostensibly, enable them 'secure' their states. But, it is axiomatic that insecurity is Nigeria's "chiefest enemy", to quote William Shakespeare (Omoike, 2015). Even the application of the concept of plea bargain originally meant to save time and enhance effectiveness of the judiciary has been abused. As rightly observed by Daramola (2013):

The problem is not with plea bargaining but with the way it has been used to shield high-profile criminals from the full consequences of their actions. The rationale for plea bargaining is to save time but that instrument has been used injudiciously in Nigeria. It is giving the wrong impression to members of the public that once you steal billions of naira, you can escape justice and the full weight of the law by doing plea bargaining

The application of the immunity clause in the 1999 Constitution particularly in the Fourth Republic, has elicited varying responses from groups, institutions and individual members of the public. These responses have varied from the moderate to the radical. The National Judicial Commission (NJC) made a recommendation to the National Assembly Committee on the Review of the 1999 Constitution that the clause be amended to confer immunity on concerned political office-holders on civil matters only, and not on criminal matters, as a way of mitigating its negative outcomes (Olaoye, 2012:97). In the process of amending the Constitution, the House of Representatives once passed 85 new clauses to the 1999 Constitution (as amended), among which was the rejection of immunity for the President and state governors facing criminal charges. According to the report on the immunity clause, 225 constituencies voted for Section 308 to be amended to the effect that the President, vice president, governors and deputy governors be covered by immunity in civil proceedings alone while in office. About 132 opposed the removal of the clause. Three others did not vote.

The section does not protect any sitting member of the National Assembly from facing criminal or civil trial. The report also showed that majority of those who took part in the exercise rejected the blanket immunity conferred on the President, Vice President, governors and deputy governors in the 1999 Constitution. Those who believe the clause should be removed cite what they call the high level of corruption since the return to democracy about 16 years ago. It has prevented Nigerians from benefiting from the dividends of democracy. To them, the removal of immunity will prevent the president, vice president, governors and deputy governors from acts that would undermine their office and the Constitution (Emakpe, 2013).

It is an open fact that, in spite of the establishment of anti-corruption agencies and their seeming commitment to fight the social menace, corrupt practices grossly remain an albatross to

the nations' development efforts. Corruption and white-collar crimes are widespread at every level. While the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) was designed to deal with fraud and other economic crimes, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), on its part, was set up to deal with corruption, in the public service and by operation also has the power to deal with private persons who come in contact, or aid, or facilitate these corrupt practices. Even the discovery of large-scale fraud committed by a 'powerful man' is never a guarantee that sanctions will follow. The individual, if well-connected, can often be provided an escape route or what is commonly referred to as a 'soft landing' or 'political solution' in Nigeria. The process typically involves some form of subterranean negotiations or lobbying, spearheaded by 'concerned friends' or 'elders', usually made up of traditional rulers and leading politicians from the community of the accused (Adekoye 2005; The Punch, 7 April 2005 cited in Enweremadu, 2012:105).

The country's elite has learned how to use the complicated legal system, its drawn-out legal processes and overburdened courts to develop successful defenses against accusations of corruption or crime. Despite structures introduced to curb it, corruption continues to thrive in Nigeria because the policies and measures were not backed with the necessary political will and sincerity. They are spontaneous mechanisms that often lose steam after attempting to curb deep-rooted or pervasive corruption (Nna and Jacob, 2012:123). Put differently, there is a huge disconnect between the state and the people. There is a wide gulf between the rich and the poor. Rights and privileges are disbursed not on equal terms but on how deep the pocket is. The law may be an ass but it knows where to apply the brakes: while the goat thief gets maximum sentence with hard labour, the billion dollar thieves often negotiate their way to their loot (Odunuga, 2012). Thus, an atmosphere of impunity encourages venality. The growth in the culture of impunity in public life in the last sixteen years or more must have induced the recklessness of thieves in public service, to the extent that the most recurrent topic among citizens today is corruption of men and women in power (Sekoni, 2016:14). It is therefore, easy to understand why the public sector is characterized by pension crisis, arrears of salaries of civil servants, huge debts to government contractors and suppliers of goods and services, a boom and burst cycle of revenue and expenditure, misallocation and excessive mismanagement of resources, etc (Gashinbaki, n.d:3).

### **The Vulnerable Poor as Scapegoats**

As earlier observed, the Immunity clause in the Nigerian constitution was originally designed to protect government officials in the discharge of their legitimate function. But alas, it has been turned upside down and now used to protect criminals in government. While several past governors facing corruption charges have yet to be convicted, former presidents never get to face the law, even for a day (The Leader, 2015). Yet, while the Nigerian courts mockingly and seemingly ruthlessly deal with the poor, the rich are patronizingly pampered and most times, evade justice. Though the Nigerian constitution guarantees justice and equality for all citizens, a lot of people, especially the poor and vulnerable, are still unable to get access to justice in the country. While the poor get rotten in prison for years while awaiting trial, soft landing mechanism is devised for the rich- just to return looted money and go home. Meanwhile, the issue has thrown up mixed feelings among Nigerians who have argued for and against any form of soft landing for looters returning money. Observers, however, describe plea bargain and soft landing as the same, saying none of them has a place in Nigerian constitution.

In countries where corruption is pervasive in the administration of justice, the implementation of a country's laws as well as efforts to reform them are impeded by corrupt judges, lawyers, prosecutors, police officers, investigators and auditors. Falana (2013) submits that "a criminal justice system which railroads the poor to jail and excludes the rich from prosecution cannot last for too long. It is observable that public officers and rich private individuals are above the law. Such practices compromise the right to equality before the law and the right to a fair trial. They especially undermine the poor's access to justice, because they cannot afford to offer or promise bribes". Importantly, corruption contributes to a culture of impunity, since illegal actions are not consistently punished and laws are not consistently upheld. Indeed, more often, many of the wealthy suspects get perpetual injunctions from court restraining the anti-corruption agencies from probing graft allegations levelled against them.

Some newspaper headlines compiled by this author (See the Table below) confirm that the poor are often jailed for little offences while the rich or influential public office holders continue to perpetrate impunity after lenient punishments (returning a fraction of the stolen money, usually in billions of naira these days) via plea bargain. This approach, no doubt, makes a mockery of Nigeria's judicial system. Even under the present administration, reprieve seems to be coming the way of treasury looters who voluntarily return those monies to the nation's coffers as the Federal Government is considering some form of 'soft landing' for them. Citing its

interview with the Presidential Spokesman, Femi Adesina, BusinessDay (2015) notes that that “those who make deliberate efforts to return monies would have some form of concession, although he could not confirm what Buhari is specifically planning for this set of treasury looters”.

Since news of the Dasukigate scandal broke, some angry members of the public have been crying for blood like spectators at the old Roman gladiatorial shows. This public vibe must have been felt by the Federal Government, prompting it to state earlier that it would not consider an option of plea bargain for treasury looters and their cronies. The Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami, had in December 2015, said that the government would not “allow criminal cases to be compromised” and that his office would “not advocate plea bargain for anyone” (The Punch, 2016). Confirming that the Federal Government may have changed its stance on the issue, the Chairman of the Presidential Anti-corruption Advisory Committee, Prof. Itse Sagay, in a statement, said some people had started returning looted funds and that there would likely be a ‘soft landing’ for them (ibid).

The application of plea bargaining, according to Mudasiru (2015) in several countries such as Canada, Malaysia, United States of America, Spain, South Africa, Zambia, India, Central African Republic and a host of others come with legal frameworks which originated from the constitutions of these countries and in most cases, it is being done away with. For instance, in India, plea bargaining has been rejected in several cases at the level of the country’s Supreme Courts. Also in Malaysia, it is reported that the legal system in Malaysia does not recognize the concept of plea bargaining. Nevertheless, there are indications of negotiations in the criminal procedures of the country. This has since been jettisoned as new legal provisions in the country did not allow the use of the concept in its criminal justice system. Even in the USA, where the practice had been in use since 18<sup>th</sup> Century, it is no longer fashionable to apply the concept of plea bargaining in the criminal proceedings in the country. In South Africa, several Committees were raised to investigate the issue of plea bargaining before it was entrenched in the Constitution of the country. This is not without modifications and procedure on the sentencing (South African Law Commission, 2001 cited in ibid).

<b>The Vulnerable Poor</b>	<b>The Influential Rich</b>
<b>Bus Driver Sentenced to Death for</b>	<b>Nigerian Official Convicted For Stealing N</b>



<p><b>Stealing N68, 000</b>, Vanguard, April 22, 2016</p>	<p><b>32.8 Billion Gets Two Years in Jail, Or Option Of N750,000 Fine</b>, SaharaReporters, January 23, 2013</p>
<p><b>Access to justice: Only the Rich Benefit, the Poor Suffer</b>, Newswatch Times, May 13, 2014</p>	<p><b>Court Sentences ex-NIMASA Boss, Omatseye to 5-year Imprisonment Over a N1.5bn Contract Scam</b>, Vanguard, May 20, 2016</p>
<p><b>Man to Die by Hanging Over N14,570 Robbery</b>, Vanguard, December 4, 2015</p>	<p><b>Cecilia Ibru Gets Six Months in Jail</b> (on a three count charge of negligence, reckless grant of credit facilities running into billions of dollars) <i>Vanguard</i>, October 9, 2010, <i>Nigerian Elites Forum</i>, October 9, 2010</p>
<p><b>Man Jailed for Stealing N3,060 in Abuja</b> Daily Post, May 25, 2016</p>	<p><b>N1.4bn Fraud: Court Sentences Ex-Kogi Lawmaker to 154-year Jail</b>, (two years on each of the 77 counts to run concurrently), <i>Premium Times</i>, April 25, 2016</p>
<p><b>18-yr-old Man Sentenced to 4 Years Imprisonment for Stealing N28 Thousand</b>, <a href="http://pulse.ng/gist/like-seriously-18-yr-old-man-sentenced-to-4-years-imprisonment-for-stealing-n28k-id4474326.html">http://pulse.ng/gist/like-seriously-18-yr-old-man-sentenced-to-4-years-imprisonment-for-stealing-n28k-id4474326.html</a></p>	<p><b>Nigerian Ex-Police Chief Sentenced to Six Months in Prison</b>, (arrested and put on trial for about N5.7billion official corruption), BBC News, November 22, 2005</p>
<p><b>45 Years for Man who Stole Aregbesola's Phone</b>, The Nation, April 30, 2013</p>	<p><b>Former Governor, DSP Alamiyeseigha Pleads Guilty-Jailed 2 Years!</b>, (He was detained in London on charges of money laundering in September 2005, Metropolitan police found about £1m in cash in his London home. Later they found a total of £1.8m</p>

	<p>(\$3.2m) in cash and bank accounts. He was found to own real estate in London worth an alleged £10 million)</p> <p>SaharaReporters, July 25, 2007</p>
<p><b>Two Men Bag 17 Years in Prison for Stealing, Duping with Governor Aregbesola's Cell Phone</b>, Daily Post, March 1, 2014</p>	<p><b>Money Laundering: Michael Igbiniedion Gets Six Year Jail Term- an Option of N3 Million Fine.</b> (over alleged laundering of N25 billion fund belonging to Edo state government), SaharaReporters, April 30, 2015</p>
<p><b><u>Petty Thief: Housemaid Jailed for Stealing Mistress Pants - Nigeria News</u></b>, January 17, 2016</p>	<p><b>Enugu High Court Convicts Lucky Igbiniedion, Fines him N3.5 million</b> ( Having being accused of looting about N 4.4 billion)</p> <p>Daily Sun, December 19, 2008</p>
<p><b>419: UNILAG Student Bags 19-Year Jail Term</b>, <a href="http://nigeriavillagesquare.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-30667.html">http://nigeriavillagesquare.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-30667.html</a></p>	<p><b>Bode George: 2 Years Jail-Term Scandalous for Offence Committed.</b> (Inflation of Contracts to the Tune of N84 billion with five other NPA Board Members)</p> <p>Vanguard, November 1, 2009</p>
<p><b>Convicted Internet Fraudster To Spend 10 Years In Jail</b>, <a href="http://www.naijaloaded.com.ng/2016/06/17/convicted-internet-fraudster-spend-10-years-jail/">http://www.naijaloaded.com.ng/2016/06/17/convicted-internet-fraudster-spend-10-years-jail/</a>, June 17, 2016</p>	<p><b>Ibori: Entangled Victory in Corruption Trial</b> (freed of the initial 170-count charge essentially of money laundering against him).</p> <p>Daily Trust, December 26, 2009</p> <p><b>James Ibori: "Innocent" in Nigeria, Guilty Abroad</b>, National Mirror, March 4, 2012</p>
<p><b>Nigerian Secondary School Student To Die By Hanging For Stealing Phone And Recharge Cards</b>, <a href="http://www.informationng.com/2013/11/stud">http://www.informationng.com/2013/11/stud</a></p>	<p><b>Nigeria: Odili, former Gov. of Rivers States, Secures 'Perpetual Injunction' Against Arrest</b>, (The anti-corruption body has been investigating his finances and has said he is</p>

ent-to-die-by-hanging.html	suspected of embezzlement, money laundering and gross abuse of office), SaharaReporters, March 12, 2008
<b>Oluremi Olayinka Sentenced to 266 Years Imprisonment for Stealing N8m, The Guardian, April 23, 2015</b>	<b>Disgraced Fmr Speaker Salisu Buhari of "Toronto University Forged Certificate" Now in UNN Governing Council,</b> <a href="http://www.9jabook.com/forum/topics/disgraced-fmr-speaker-salisu-buhari-of-toronto-university-forged-">http://www.9jabook.com/forum/topics/disgraced-fmr-speaker-salisu-buhari-of-toronto-university-forged-</a>

Source: Compiled by the Author

From the table above, it is glaring that the Nigerian reality remains widely poisoned by a climate of arbitrariness, corruption and impunity. For instance, when the EFCC brought 170 criminal counts against former governor James Ibori, a judge sitting in Ibori’s home state threw out every single count- including evidence that Ibori paid EFCC officials \$15 million in an attempt to influence the outcome of the investigation. The judge ruled that the EFCC had failed to produce a written statement by the man who allegedly conveyed the bribe corroborating their version of events and that the prosecution’s proffered eyewitness testimony would inevitably amount to “worthless hearsay evidence” (Human Rights watch, 2011). Ibori was eventually jailed on the same criminal charges in the United Kingdom. Many high profile cases in Nigeria have suffered similar fate in the past. It has always been justice for the affluent few and cruel judgement for the downtrodden. Yet, the political leadership, over decades, has failed to address these fundamental challenges just as the gap between the governing elite and the masses continue to expand. In the words of El-Rufai (2013), Nigerian masses have been successfully divided by the elites along ethnic, religious and regional lines. This chasm has been so deep and successful that it is impossible to have any sensible discussion with most people in Nigeria about any issue without the intervention of these evil lenses. He observes further:

In Nigeria, our elites have forgotten that, and not only is the gap between the classes growing wider, it seems that the country now has two economies – one

for the majority that have to scrounge just to put food on the table, and an exclusive economy for the less than 1% of the population that comprise public servants and their hangers on who live in a different Nigeria – of private jets, exclusive estates, international schools, German healthcare at public expense, dedicated water supply systems, private security guards and imported champagne.

Occupants of public offices in Nigeria, see their tenure as an avenue for personal aggrandizement and as a means of getting their own share of the national cake. Thus, they steal from the public treasury with reckless abandon (Human Development Initiatives, 2014:6). This trend threatens the integrity of the judiciary and the protection of individual rights in the country. The executive controls the police and it is the police that enforce court judgment in Nigeria. The dependence of the judiciary on the executive for the enforcement of judgment allows the executive leeway to flout court rulings. The public and interest groups do not have a powerful and coordinated voice that can compel adherence to court rulings by the executive. Requirements of due process are not adhered to and the court is not in a position to enforce its judgment assuming such a case comes before the court. The complexities of Nigerian political environment have made it difficult to ensure the protection of the rule of law (Lawal-Rabana, 2007).

For the Nigerian political (ruling) class, the state is nothing but an instrument of accumulation. This informs its centrality as the locus of struggle for material resources for personal advancement and class security (Gilbert and Barigbon 2015:117). Since the formation of States in human socio-cultural development, all other forms of power have almost always been subordinated to political power and are controlled by it. This explains the attractiveness of political power and why, in a morally decadent society like Nigeria, politicians are willing to acquire state power through any means (Anele, 2010). The character of the State in Nigeria rules out a politics of moderation and mandates a politics of lawlessness and extremism because the very nature of the State and the perquisites of office make the capture of State power irresistibly attractive. As noted by Ake (2000:91) where attempts are made to seek development, policies tend to be hampered by social and political contradictions such as the divorce of public policy from social needs. The lawless struggle for power by those who control the state against other interests leads to endemic political instability which has been highly detrimental to economic development.

## **Conclusion**

Equality before the law is a major driver of development and impunity prevention. This is why it is commonly expected the law must be blind to status, creed, tribes, class and every other sentiment. Once humans are no longer seen as equal in the justice system, a fundamental problem of impunity and underdevelopment develops (Human Development Initiatives, 2014:38). The rule of law protects fundamental political, social, and economic rights and defends the citizen from the threats of tyranny and lawlessness. Democratic governments exercise authority by way of the law and are themselves subject to the law's constraints (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011:20). It is established in this essay that the rule of law as a basis for democratic governance includes not only the supremacy of the law, but a democratic basis for law that makes the law legitimate. That basis, according to USAID (2010:7), is that laws represent the collective will. In societies where the rule of law is observed, virtually all citizens obey laws, even when doing so contravenes their personal interests. This willingness is not based solely on the threat of sanctions; it also arises from the citizens' recognition that laws are arrived at in a manner set out in a constitutional order and subject to social input.

This essay subscribes to the fact that an independent and impartial administration of justice contributes to strengthen constitutional norms and rule of law in the society. An efficient judiciary contributes towards strengthening the state institutions and promoting good governance. This is possible only when state organs and institutions perform functions by remaining within their allotted spheres. Musa (2013) contends that no combat against crime, corruption and other social vices plaguing the country can either be credible or complete unless at the end of the day there is in place an independent, effective, and robust judicial system to count on. A properly administered judicial system capable of guaranteeing individual rights and freedoms, protecting victims from the arbitrary exercise of power, and punishing criminal offenders; is an essential catalyst for good governance and uplifting of the socio-economic wellbeing of Nigeria and her citizens.

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**THE EARLY CHURCH CONROVERSIES AND THE PROBLEM OF ECUMENISM IN  
NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

As in every religion, the history of Christianity is encapsulated in division as the fact remains that no religion is devoid of disagreement and oppositions that led to diversities of groups with different labels of identification. It was soon after the physical demise of Christ, the acclaimed founder of Christianity, that the Christian faith turned into shreds of beliefs that metamorphosed into denominations. This is known in history of the Christian church as the “church controversies”. This topic: “the early church controversies and the problem of ecumenism in Nigeria” therefore examines the extent of the early church crisis (controversies) of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries from the historical perspective. It is observed that since 1910 when the call of ecumenism took a center stage in world Christian history, the need for Christianity in her multifarious denominations to present herself as a formidable force in defense of the basic tenets of her faith has remained the focus. This work therefore is not only poised to examine the relationship of the early church controversies with the contemporary Christianity, but also to investigate the extent at which ecumenism has helped the church in Nigeria to achieve the goal of unity. What are the possible factors militating against the success or otherwise the anticipated unity through the ecumenical bodies in Nigeria?

**INTRODUCTION**

The church at its embryonic stage, here known as the early or “primitive” church was less concerned about doctrinal issues; it was rather an advocate of simplicity with its focus on the spread of the gospel. The worship pattern was simple; made up of prayer, singing of psalms and hymns, reading of the law and the prophets (scriptures), words of exaltations and the breaking of bread from house to house (Acts 20:20 NIV). In fact, the primitive church had neither liturgical form nor ecclesiastical order, and was devoid of denominational identifications.<sup>1</sup> Greater attention was devoted to the preaching of the resurrected Christ to those who were yet to know him and his resurrected power. Every possible non- confrontational step was taken to prevent

any rancor that would truncate and sideline the breakthroughs being recorded as the gospel was preached such as led in the appointment of the deacons in Acts 6:1-7. It was for this focus on the spread of the gospel that there was no need to formulate any guiding principles for the community of faith.

However, the early church Christianity took a new dimension with the introduction of Paul into the Christian faith as a game changer whose missionary endeavors were greeted with great exploits.<sup>2</sup> As a result of his missionary strategy, the Christian message found a receptive audience in the non-Jewish communities of the Roman Empire, including Greek, -speaking Gentiles who were trained in classical philosophy. This introduced the Greek intellectual culture into the heart of Christianity which led Christian leaders to explain the core Christian beliefs in line with their intellectual training. Consequently, theological controversies were launched out of the attempts to define and design the understanding of this “new” movement’s faith foundation on such issues as the nature of God, Christ/incarnation, the Holy Spirit and their relationship (the trinity) in the God Head. As these controversies escalated in various degrees till the seventh century, Christianity is said to have come out, although in fragmented segments, but stronger in doctrinal practices and ecclesiastical forms and in classification of its standard of unity in diversity.

Nigeria is said to have over 40% of her population professing Christianity even in its denominational forms. However, since the 1910 when the call for ecumenism took a new dimension in world Christian history, the need for Christian denominations to present themselves as a formidable force not just for the propagation of the gospel but also for proper defense of the basic tenets of Christianity has remained paramount. Therefore, the concern of this paper is an attempt to providing possible answers to the questions of ecumenism in contemporary Nigeria.

This paper also seeks to explore into the origins of these theocratic concepts that grew out of the early church controversies which span up to about the first council of Nicaea in 325AD. Subsequent to these theological currents and waves, Christianity began to take a form and shape to what is known today as orthodoxy. Africa, being caught in the web of the controversies, served a breeding ground for the emergence of these heresies and the subsequent orthodoxy. In Nigeria, the gospel has come of age and as a result, beyond the denominationalism introduced by the western missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the church in Nigeria seems to have realized the need for the unity of faith. Yet, it is observed that in the face of this anticipated unity advocated

through the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the church in Nigeria is yet to stand stronger as was the case with the early church in the early controversies.

### **Controversies and the early church**

The period of theological controversies which led to the formation of the early church councils was a fascinating era in Christian history. Just as the New Testament canon developed in response to the needs in the church, so did the creeds also developed. Prior to the formulation of the canon which came at the time when only few copies of the New Testament books were in circulation, the Christian church required some standards to keep them on the part of orthodoxy. There was also the need for a guide by which to checkmate heresies. This led to the formulation of the rule of faith between the 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries of Christianity which in turn, gave rise to the famous “apostles creed”; that Christ the son of God, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified and died, was buried, rose again, and ascended into heaven for the remission of sins.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, other creeds were later formulated in an effort to resolve the controversies that divided the church into opposing factions in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It was hoped before then, that when “organized Christianity” gained the power to enforce its decisions, there would be an end to controversies. Unfortunately, never had controversies raged as fierce as in the fourth and subsequent centuries.<sup>4</sup> But as the already existing parties came up with great increase of polemical energy, new parties emerged. Therefore, the time was now set for the church to clarify her position on basic doctrinal questions. The controversial issues were thoroughly debated in councils which were attended by the majority of church leaders from different theological perspectives. The decisions of these councils (especially the first four councils) popularly called the ecumenical councils were combined into creeds which are still accepted by the Christian church today.<sup>5</sup>

For the purpose of charity, these controversies and their resultants councils are here summarized into six periods according to Newman.<sup>6</sup>

- ❖ On ecclesiastical discipline- the Donatist controversy.
- ❖ On the relationship of the Godhead- the Arian controversy
- ❖ On the teachings of Origin- the Originistic controversy
- ❖ On the doctrine of the person of Christ (Christology)- the Nestorian, Eutychian and Monothelite controversy.

- ❖ On anthropology (the nature of man)- the Pelagian and Semi-pelagian controversies.
- ❖ On controversies involving protests against the paganizing of Christianity- as practiced in Asceticism, the veneration of saints, relics and images – the Iconoclastic controversies.

It was these controversies that paved the way for the seven ecumenical council's, called as attempt to settle the controversies. Such councils and their decisions according to Obineche and Vilawa<sup>7</sup> citing Boer,<sup>8</sup> include:

- i. The council of Nicaea 325- which declared the son (Jesus) homoousios (of the same nature and substance with the father).
- ii. The first council of Constantinople in 381- confirmed the decision of the Nicaean council that concluded the Arian controversy.
- iii. The council of Ephesus in 431. This council rejected Nestorius and endorsed the Alexandrian view of the relationship between the two natures of Christ.
- iv. The council of Chalcedon in 451. This council finalized discussion on the relationship between the two natures of Christ with the words, unmixed, unchanged, unseparated and undivided.
- v. The council of Constantinople (2) in 552. This council rejected the three prominent Antiochian theologians (the three chapters), and endorsed the cyrillian understanding of Chalcedon.
- vi. The council of Constantinople (3) in 680-681--- Accepted two wills in Christ.
- vii. The Nicaea council (2)-787. This council declared the veneration or reverencing of pictures, images, and pictures of divine realities as legitimate.

### **The Catholic Church and the early controversies**

Jerusalem was the birth place of Christianity owing to the death of Jesus in the vicinity and the consequent Pentecost that followed. However, as the movement went farther from Jerusalem, the lesser the control of the centre on the outposts became. The lack of control does not represent an anomaly since the first century Christians were “tolerant of great diversity” and thus paid little attention to the uniformity of belief and practice that was characteristic of the second century. This tolerance may have been occasioned by the early Christians’ belief that “they are in the world but not of the world.” They may have been captured in the euphoria of this “world” that is neither of the Jews nor of the gentiles; but one’s personal faith in the birth, death, son-ship of

Jesus and the brotherhood of the community to which one belongs. This was characteristic of the apostolic age which came to end in *c.*75 CE, and was marked by a form of uniformity in faith and the leadership of charismatic preachers in the name of apostles. Administratively, the ground was prepared for the development of different ideologies, implantations and heretical errors soon after the apostles died.

However, the Episcopal age tried to arrest the situation. The destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Roman Empire gave Judaism a new outlook. From a core temple religion, Judaism was reduced to a religion of the synagogue. Christianity towed along this same line. Each (Christian) synagogue was developed to the point that it could be described as a community, under the office of an *episcopos*, bishop and overseer, who exerted as well a quasi-monarchical power over her subjects. It was during this period that communal rules like the *Didache* were composed to define the dos and don'ts of the communities and guide the behavior and development of both old and young Christians in matters like rules of faith and conduct, infanticide, divorce, idolatry, lying, stealing, etc.<sup>9</sup> More so, the urge for uniformity of beliefs and practices must have created room for this development. Moreover, each bishop exercised his ecclesiastical power over his jurisdiction from the angle he defines a particular Christian belief and practice. Their development along this line of belief and practices that coexisted as various forms of Christianity in the bishoprics, as every community developed its rules and systems of mutual support. While some in these communities craved for a form of uniformity of beliefs and practices, some others attempted to search out some "hidden truth" in the Bible and life of the apostles. In almost every aspect, says Goodman<sup>10</sup>, "it was possible to find some individuals who defined themselves as Christians and yet conducted themselves differently". Following these exclusive divergences in beliefs and practices, there came to be what was described latter as heresies by the various councils of the church. Consequently, Christianity was unguarded against the antics of even individuals who may have developed the ulterior quest for power and control.

The conquest of Alexander the great (334-326 B.C.) spread Greek as the official language of the empire far and wide. Greek became the best medium for the expression of philosophical and religious thoughts. When Rome took over ruler-ship, it established Latin as a language of the nobles through which the rich arts culture of the empire gained prominence. Cities such as Alexandria, Carthage, Egypt, Rome, etc, became centers of learning for philosophy and theology; hence the influence of men like Plato resonated in the North African worldview. With

this background, the influence of Greek philosophy and Latin culture on the Doctrinal development of Christianity became obvious. Against this backdrop and the outside war of persecutions faced by the Christians, Christianity also, faced internally, the spurge of different teachings emanating from varying interpretations of the apostle's and biblical teachings. Persons of different philosophical and cultural inclinations, banking on one or another assumed spiritual experience, or exegetical ability, came up at intervals with a form of 'revelation' about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Salvation, Baptism, evil, etc.

It was the conversion of Paul and his subsequent ministration among the Gentile nations that added another colour to Christianity and a twist to its history too. Christianity before the conversion of Paul was in a strict sense neo-Judaism. The first Christians were Jews who attended the temple at Jerusalem, read the Jewish scripture, kept the Sabbath, and adhered the Jewish dietary and religious practices. Hence, the first challenge that hit the 'new' religious movement was a matter of welfare and lacked any doctrinal undertone. Luke records it in Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7 that

... In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report full of the Holy Ghost and Wisdom, who we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the numbers of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. (KJV Holy Bible).

Soon after this, Apostle Paul was converted through an encounter in which he 'met Christ', whom he claimed commissioned him to preach the gospel by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Because of his apparent rejection by his Jewish brethren (out of the fear created by his role against the persecution of the Christians before his conversion), Paul settled to preach the gospel among non-Jewish nations with the support of Barnabas. The conversion of Gentiles was greeted with troubles among the Jews as to what extent are the gentiles bound by the laws and ceremonies of Judaism? The Judaizers moved to enforce a strict adherence to circumcision and all the Jewish laws. A Christian therefore must first become a Jew before becoming a Christian.

Some Christian converts resisted the move. Paul on his own side was accused of preaching against the Law of Moses, and was threatened with death. A council was therefore summoned in Jerusalem in 49 A.D., concerning the enforcement of the Law of Moses on the Gentile converts to Christianity. A conclusion on the matter was reached thus

...we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstained from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. (Acts 15:19-21 KJV).

If ecumenism entails the demonstration of the unity in diversity of the church, this gathering deserves to be accepted as the first Ecumenical Council in the history of Christianity, chaired by Apostle Peter and James the Elder. It was the first kind to be concerned with doctrinal issue. After this, came pockets of inside 'challenges for the church, such as the trouble from the Nazarenes and Ebionites. With the besieging and invasion of Jerusalem and the subsequent disorganization of the temple structure and rituals; Christianity followed and developed along the trails of Jewish synagogues. Apart from the Arian controversy, other controversies appeared, but did not attract an ecumenical gathering of the 'fathers' of the church for consensus decision. The bishops of different churches as located in different cities rose to quell the fire of the supposed heresies. Below are some of the controversies that hit the early church and the attempt to deal decisively with them.

### **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism was one of the philosophies that flourished in the world into which Christianity came and was deeply concerned with redemption even though Gnosticism lacked the essential Christian content; Philosophy could only satisfy the minds of the intellectuals but had no message for the masses, state religion showed more patriotic elements than religious character, and nature religion could not measure up with the developing civilization in the empire. As a result, mystery religions like Gnosticism became popular with its origin from the east India, Babylonia, Persian and Egyptian mythologies. Gnosticism claimed to provide the true but secret knowledge (gnosis) about the divine, man and redemption<sup>11</sup>. Since the name "Gnostic" came from the Greek word for knowledge, Gnosticism claimed to be endowed with all knowledge that allows man to transcend his mortal, material bodies to return to the heavenly original realm.<sup>12</sup> They taught that this world of matter was not created by the one true God, but by inferior, lower



and often ignorant deities who designed this world as a place of entrapments for elements of the divine.<sup>13</sup>

Their theology based on the concept of two Gods: the God of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. While the former was described as “God of the Jews” with its tough and harsh covenant, punitive and hateful nature which made him the inferior creator- god of this world; Jesus was seen as the manifestation of the God of the new testament who neither died nor resurrected,<sup>14</sup> but rather appeared to have died.<sup>14</sup> They taught that Jesus was only sent to provide knowledge required to break free from this world. They practiced mystery cults based on the idea of “knowing” the divine with entirely different theology about God, salvation and evil. However, Gnosticism reached its peak in the second half of the second century, but declined greatly afterwards. This decline was led by two major factors; the church bishops rejected Gnosticism and its teachings while the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian were strongly against them.<sup>15</sup>

#### **MONTANISM:**

Montanism was a second century apocalyptic movement that originated by Montanus, a native of Ardabau in Mysia. He began his preaching in phrygia between 154 and 172 AD. He was associated with two women, Prisca and Maximilla. They held to a speedy out pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church.<sup>16</sup> This movement began with a Christian character as if to revive the church from its spiritual coldness and against the teachings of Gnosticism. Although it believed in God as creator, and Jesus as the redeemer, the church did not accept it as a Christian movement because of its hyper ecstatic view about the work of the Holy Spirit, prophesy, and spiritual gift.<sup>17</sup> They taught that forgiveness of sin could only be done by the three leaders of the movement (Montanus and the two women); and by (if possible) others who possessed the Holy spirit in a marked way. In their teaching on total separation from the world, Montanists claimed to be the custodian of church discipline within. For these, they were opposed by the church leadership, especially the bishops.

In spite the opposition, however, Montanism spread like wildfire beyond Asia Minor, to Europe and North Africa. While some embraced this movement as a sign of the end-time, others accepted it at a time when the church was becoming more worldly than spiritual. To such adherents, the movement was a symbol of revival and a return to the strictness of the early Christian community. Prominent among the converts was Tertullian, the great North African

theologian, who became a Montanist in about 207.<sup>18</sup> In summary, Montanus and his prophetesses professed the authority to impose stricter discipline on the church, encouraged martyrdom, condemned concealment or flight in persecution as a denial of Christ and his cross, promoted fanatical severity in asceticism and church discipline, stood against second marriage, taught the superiority of the celibate to the married, and asserted the universal priesthood of Christians, both males and females. They proclaimed the eminent approach of the age of the Holy Spirit and of the millennial reign in Pepuza, a small village of Phrygia, upon which the expected New Jerusalem was to be realized. Montanists emphasized the possession of the spiritual gift as a mark of a true Christian and as qualification for appointment into the office of a teacher. By this, they stood against the principle of ordination as the formula for succession into the episcopate.<sup>19</sup>

On its influence on the church and its ecumenism, Boer reiterated that like other movements (Gnosticism and Marcionism), Montanism had some lasting influence on the Catholic Church; although the Church opposed it, but still accepted church discipline as the prerogative of the bishop. The scripture became more fixed and a yardstick by the church with which it lived and judged all new movements. On the other hand, Montanism became a deterrent against the abuse of spiritual gifts and fanaticism in the church as a wakeup call for the church to allow the spiritual freedom for the expression of leadership of the Holy Spirit in the church.<sup>20</sup>

### **Neo-Platonism**

Neo-Platonism was a philosophical idea of a man called Plotinus (c.205-270) and his successors; Prophyry, Lamblichus and Proclus (410-485). They sought to provide a sound intellectual basis for religious and moral life.<sup>21</sup> It was seen as the grand synthesis for progressive Christian and Gnostic ideas with the traditional platonic philosophy as a modern construct or ideology. This movement was founded by Saccas in 245, in response to the challenge of accounting for the emergence of a seemingly inferior and flawed cosmos from the perfect mind of the divinity by declaring strictly that all objective existence is but the external self-expression of an inherently contemplative deity known as the one (to hen), or the good (ta Kalon).<sup>22</sup> Neo-Platonism taught that God was a simple, absolute, perfect existence from whom the lower existence emanated. That salvation is obtained in the rising of the soul in mystic contemplation to God.<sup>23</sup> That the cosmos is not a created order, planned

by a deity on whom we can pass the charge of begetting evil: the cosmos is the self-expression of the soul which corresponds roughly to Philo's *logos prophorikos*, the *logos endiathetos* of which is the intelligence (nous). Rather, the cosmos to him is to be understood as the concrete product of the soul's experience of its own mind (nous). Although Neo-Platonism had some influence on the church, it could not attract the expected followership by many.<sup>24</sup>

### **Donatism:**

As the reign of emperor Diocletian (284) brought peace and stability in Christendom after the era of persecutions, internal strife engulfed the community of faith. With the recognition of Christianity by the edict of Milan (313), the North African church had to deal with the problem of the restoration or otherwise, of the lapsed. This divided Christianity into two opposing views; while some Christians felt they should be restored upon the confession of repentance, others thought they should be rebaptized before they could be readmitted.<sup>25</sup> It was in this that the North African schism arose over the consecration of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage in 311 by Felix, who was accused of having surrendered copies of the scriptures to the civil authorities during the persecution. This led to the subsequent consecration of Majorinus and Donatus by two opposing bishops. To Bettenson, Donatism was a schism rather than a heresy<sup>26</sup>. Donatism raised the question whether the validity of the sacraments, as distinct from their effectiveness, depended on the worthiness of ministers or recipient. It was for this that Donatism arose, though orthodox in their teaching, but did not recognize the Catholic Church. The Donatists claimed that the sacraments administered by an unworthy priest or by one who was consecrated/ordained in an unworthy manner were invalidated.<sup>27</sup> However, St. Augustine refuted this view in his taught that the power of the sacraments does not reside in the character of the priest but in the character of the church. Augustine though did not by this, approve of an immoral or unspiritual ministry, rather, he prepared the way for the rise of a ministry in which moral and spiritual worth was in danger of becoming less important than it ought to be.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Arian controversy**

The Arian controversy was led by Arius (c 250-336), a Christian presbyter, ascetic of Berber origin, and priest in Baucalis Alexandria. His views on the nature of the Godhead

emphasized the divinity of the father over the son in opposition to what would become the dominant “homoousian” Christology.<sup>29</sup> Arius harped on the supremacy and uniqueness of God the father; that the father is infinite, eternal and almighty, hence, must be greater and of higher essence than the son. He taught that the son had a beginning, contrary to origin, who taught that the son is less than the father only in power, but not in space and time. Arius maintained that the son possessed neither the eternality nor the true divinity of the father, but was rather made “God” by the father’s permission and power, and that the Logos was rather the very first and the most perfect of God’s productions before ages. In vehement condemnation and rejection of the speech of Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, which he called and interpreted as a revival of Sabellianism, Arius argued that: “if the father begat the son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the son was not. It therefore necessarily follows that the son has his substance from nothing”.<sup>30</sup> It is evident thus far that Christian ecumenism is synonymous to the origin of Christianity and has continued to be a Christian history with its positive and negative impact. While the early Christian ecumenism led to imprisonment, punishment and even persecution and death, the modern ecumenism in its refined form, had not only brought a bitter unspiritual politics and rivalry into Christendom, but has maintained the age long identity as a "divided people of God”. At the end, the rancor, and division has led to the speedy spread of Christianity to the very ends of the earth.

### **The concept and origin of ecumenism**

The word “ecumenism” is one of the prominent words in the contemporary religious vocabulary. Hert Beverly Beach defined ecumenism from its etymological connotation as derived from the Greek word *oikoumene* which means the world or the inhabited planet earth. He opined that the word ecumenism was first used by Herodotus who was known as the father of history. Herodotus in the fifth century, defined ecumenism as a geographical expanse or jurisdiction, and later by Aristotle and Demosthenes.<sup>31</sup> The word *oikoumene* or ecumenism was not originally used as a religious or theological word, but rather, with a secular connotation; politically, to address the rulers of empires as the kings of the whole universe. It is also used for social functions of association of actors and international sports such as appeared in the imperial inscriptions on coins and those that spoke of the “holy ecumenical competitions” among others.<sup>32</sup>

Visser't Hooft further identified eight meanings or concepts of ecumenism in all its historical, development:

- 1) Pertaining to the whole inhabited earth (2) pertaining to the whole Roman empire (3) pertaining to the whole church (4) that which has universal ecclesiastical validity (5) pertaining to the world wide mission outreach of the church (6) pertaining to the relationship between the unity of the churches or Christians of separate confessions (7) consciousness of or desire for Christian unity. (8) An open friendly nonsectarian spirit, favorable to rapprochement and dialogue in dealing with the other Christians and their beliefs.<sup>33</sup>

In biblical times, ecumenism (*oikoumene*) was used to refer to the world controlled by the Greco-Roman civilization in contrast to others referred to as the “Barbarians”. Origen was the first to conceive the church as an *oikoumene*; to represent the entire world as environment for the gospel. The early church councils were also called ecumenical because they were summoned by the emperor of the *oikoumene* as it represented the geographical world recognized by the entire church. It was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century ecumenical movement that the term ecumenism switches its meaning from ecumenical as “universal” (geographical or ecclesiastical) to ecumenical as denominational unity- the consciousness of worldwide Christian fellowship across ecclesiological boundaries.<sup>34</sup>

However, the conceptual framework of the word ecumenism especially from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is traceable to the prayer of Jesus Christ for the church “that they may be one” (John 17:20-22 NIV). Therefore, ecumenism has come to represent a vision, a movement, a theology, and a mode of action. It denotes the universality of the people of God and affects the way Christians think and go about their faith, the church and the world. In as much as it is practically impossible for all the denominations to converge into one denomination, ecumenism, analyzed in line with the prayer of Jesus, is an expression of unity in diversity.

### **The History of Ecumenism in Africa/Nigeria**

Globally, the history of ecumenism remains the product of the much seen denominationalism that has pervaded almost every facet of the once, one indivisible and united catholic church. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the need for a global front that would concern itself with the preaching of the gospel beyond denominational affiliations became high. Christians like the young Men Christian Association (YMCA 1844), the Evangelical Alliance (1846) and the Students Christian Federation (1880), saw the need and potential for unity. As the fragmentation of the church

denominations continued, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, denominations began to form their ecumenical councils as their churches spread beyond the national frontiers. Theological discussions featured prominently in the quest as the much desired Christian unity loomed large. After the stimulus of the Edinburg Missionary Conference in 1910,<sup>35</sup> the concern to confront divisive issues of doctrine, polity and practice gave birth first, to the establishment of the International Missionary Council that gave the impetus to the creation, of the Universal Christian Conference on life and work in 1925. This led to the first world conference “Faith and Order” which met in Lausanne in 1927. These two bodies were fused into the World Council of Churches (WCC). Livingstone further submitted that the initiative for the movements between 1910 and 1927 came majorly within the western Protestantism. By 1937, the Eastern Orthodox and the so called ‘younger churches’ of Asia and Africa were playing important role until the early 1960, when the Roman Catholic participation was expressed through interested individuals. At this boom of ecumenical interests, the International Missionary Council was formed in 1921, to assist various boards and interests in coordinating their separate and competing activities all for the oneness of the body of Christ.<sup>36</sup>

The International Missionary Council later held five conferences in Jerusalem (1929), Madras (1938), Whithy (1847), Willingenc (1952) and Ghana (1957), where they finally agreed to join the membership of the already established World Council of Churches in 1961.<sup>37</sup> As the search for Christian unity became prominent in the polities of nations, Baur<sup>38</sup> narrated the view of “protestant- catholic scandal in Africa”. He opined that the missionary message was burdened by four centuries of old sin; inherited and imposed on the Africans like a “second original sin” because the missionaries came to Africa with their national animosities against each other under the cover of religion. This animosity translated into denominational biases and sentiments that led to hatred among members of different denominations even in Africa. The appeal made by Fr. Vincent Donovan for denominational unity (ecumenism) found answer in his Kilimanjaro region (Arusha) from 1960 when some 13 Lutheran Pastors and 13 Catholic priests had monthly interdenominational discussions.<sup>39</sup>

Falk recalled that the first All African Christian Conference (AACC) was held at Ibadan, Nigeria in January 1958. Among the attendants in this conference were the representatives of the protestant churches who felt the conference provided valuable fellowship that contributed to their understanding of the churches in Africa and so recommended the appointment of a continuation

committee to implement the report of the conference that instigated the formation of AACC as permanent ecumenical body in Africa.<sup>40</sup> Nigeria is not left out of this religious development, as the wind of ecumenism started blowing about the same period when this ecumenical wave was sweeping across the global Christianity. Precisely in 1911, the Presbyterian missionaries in Nigeria initiated a conference that brought three major denominations together; Presbyterian, Methodist and Anglican missionaries. The supposed aim of this conference was to obliterate the border lines of the denomination based gospel. Ekechi summarized the aim of this all important conference as:

To secure uniformity for discipline within the native churches founded by the different missionary societies, (and) discuss such matters as the relationship of the church to manage under native law, the baptism of women themselves, Christians married to polygamous husbands, the definition of spheres of influence in the untouched missionary fields.<sup>41</sup>

This supposedly implies that the missionaries to Africa in general and Nigeria in particular were not unaware that the denominationalism they planted in the name of Christianity created rivalry, division and enmity rather than love and unity among the Christians. Ogbu Kalu further observed that while this movement was said to be a ploy to cage “denominational competition,” the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) was said to be the unannounced target: that the conference was convened in order to break the Roman Catholic monopoly of the mission fields in Nigeria.<sup>42</sup> To corroborate Kalu’s position, Baur<sup>43</sup> and Eke<sup>44</sup> remarked that for protestants, the ecumenical movement has been restricted to a search for unity among the protestant churches, sometimes as a strengthening bond against the so called Roman Catholic danger. Hence, when the RCC was approached for the ecumenical body, they out rightly turned it down. However, Nnebedum<sup>45</sup> citing Grooves,<sup>46</sup> observed that the 1911 conference came up with a resolution that bordered on unity of the Christian faith:

The conference solemnly declares the aim of missionary effort to be the establishment of one church of Christ. The conference resolves that to attain this unity, there should be mutual and full recognition of the discipline of the churches of southern Nigeria. That an effort be made to obtain corporate unity of native Churches. That immediate steps be taken for the corporate union of native churches not episcopally ordained.

By 1923, the evangelical union of southern Nigeria was formed by the churches and denominations that were willing to join in the ecumenical movement.<sup>47</sup> Lana pointed out the formation of national ecumenical body in Nigeria, the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) in 1930 in Lagos as the first organized ecumenical body in Nigeria had its main aim as the common

concern for unity.<sup>48</sup> In 1947, another missionary conference was held at Onitsha, attended by five denominations; Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Qualboe, and Sudan United Mission (the missionary body working in northern Nigeria with the earlier name as Sudan Interior Mission). Although the Sudan United Mission withdrew from the conference because the colonial policy then did not favor her, yet this second attempt ended in futility but for the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) that was formed in 1948 that re-invigorated the interest of the member churches toward success.<sup>49</sup> Subsequent efforts led to the scheduling of December 11, 1965 for the inauguration of the then agreed forum, *the United Church of Nigeria* which never held. Among the various reasons given for this failure include, lack of clear-cut ideology, inadequate mass education, personality conflict, ethnic sentiments to interdenominational antagonism among others.<sup>50</sup>

About the same period, other denominational ecumenical bodies were formed such as the fellowship of churches of Christ in Nigeria in 1955 (comprised of the churches that are free from the missionary control from the west, but distinct from the independent churches) and the Nigerian association of the Aladura churches established in 1960.<sup>51</sup> Since the attempt for a national church union failed, its motivation led to the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). This today is the largest ecumenical body in Nigeria that encapsulated five ecumenical groups or blocks:

1. Catholic secretariat of Nigeria (CSN)
2. Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN)
3. Christian Pentecostal fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) or Pentecostal fellowship of Nigeria (PFN)
4. Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC)
5. TEKAN and ECWA fellowship of Nigeria

The basic aim and objectives of CAN is stipulated in Article 5 of the constitution of CAN as follow:

- a. To serve as a basis of response to the unity of the church especially as contained in our lord's pastoral prayer "that they all may be one" (John 17:21).
- b. To act as a liaison committee, by means of which its member churches can consult together and when necessary, make common statement and common actions.



- c. To promote understanding, peace and unity among the various people and strata of society in Nigeria, through the propagation of the gospel.
- d. To act as watch man of the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation. As the first ecumenical umbrella to include the Roman Catholic Church and the protestants and Pentecostals missiologically together, Adebayo sums up the place of CAN:

The Christian Association of Nigeria holds a great future for ecumenism in the world, first as a national body; it has the privilege of promoting robust Interfaith and intra-faith dialogue on theological and service issues. It can serve as a rallying point for the West African sub- region and sub- Saharan Africa for ecumenical Movement that discourse at the global level as this vision will place CAN in a broader Ecumenical relevance.<sup>52</sup>

### **The problem of ecumenism in Nigeria**

Although, the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) seemed to have been out of pressure; yet it achieved a purpose: In principle, the Christian church in Nigeria has formed an ecumenical body. This has given the church in Nigeria the ample opportunity and a forum to sit together irrespective of their denominational differences, to discuss issues that affect Christianity in Nigeria. CAN today is a voice through which the entire Christianity (church) can speak concerning herself, the society and the government. In this way, the Christian body can collectively make some great and positive impact in the governance and welfare of the nation. It is also true that these goals may have not been realized in practical terms, but they remain achievable goals. Nevertheless, ecumenism in Nigeria is engulfed with some perennial problems which tend to cripple the effective performance of effective ecumenism in Nigeria. One of the major determinant factors on how the various churches and Blocs that makeup CAN demonstrates their support towards the ecumenical body is denominational allegiance. This is manifested in such a way that despite the fact that CAN is the central ecumenical body for the church in Nigeria, it has no control over the member denominations and churches. Instead, the churches pay their total allegiance to the blocs that represent them before CAN, and as a result, they give a divided loyalty to CAN. This structure has affected negatively, the ability of CAN to determine and decide issues of the ecumenical body, since the major source of funding CAN as a body is through the dues accrued from the blocs. CAN is therefore starved of funds when the blocs fail to remit their dues to CAN as the result of the above organigram. With this, CAN has

no other option for survival than to turn to the government and probably spirited individuals who would want their interest protected by the religious body for funding. This renders CAN incapacitated and makes her renege in her sacred responsibilities both to Christianity, the society and the government because “he that pays the piper dictates the tune”. No wonder CAN has kept mute over the religious, social, economic and political decadence in contemporary leadership in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is observed that one damaging disadvantage of denominationalism is the sectoral belief in one’s supremacy over another. This has been the unfortunate situation Christianity has found itself in the history of Nigeria. For instance, the Roman Catholic church (RCC) refused to join the early move for an ecumenical body in Nigeria until the second Vatican council embraced ecumenism.<sup>53</sup> Before then, many Catholics see ecumenism as a step to syncretism and as such, renowned Catholics like Abbe George De Nante condemned the Vatican II Council’s document in ecumenism.<sup>54</sup> This may not be far from the Catholic feeling of ecclesiastical superiority that divides Christianity into the church “(catholic church), and the churches” as they pray for the later to one day return to Rome.<sup>55</sup> There is also the observable trend of *holier- than – thou* attitude explicated by most church denominations in Nigeria like the Seventh Day Adventists who see ecumenism as a bane by their standard of faith and belief.<sup>56</sup> The same applied to most of the Pentecostal churches against the AIC bloc, mostly made up of the white garment churches as towing the lines of the denominational gospel introduced in Nigeria by the white missionaries. Similar to this factor is the dual citizenship of the churches whose founding denominations are outside Nigeria. Such churches in their dilemma end up confused between the need to be loyal to their ecclesiastical authority abroad, and the urgency to remain in the commonwealth of the brethren (CAN). This creates a level of double loyalty which leads to unintentional disloyalty to CAN in attempt to serve two masters at a time. Within these extremes also is the fear -intimidation and demo-superior churches or blocs in CAN.

Doctrinal conservation has remained part of CAN politics and problem, and a bane affecting the fabrics of ecumenism in Nigeria. Hence, the constitution of CAN is silent on issues of doctrine to avoid controversy. While the mainline churches remain mostly conservative in doctrinal issues, others demonstrate greater dynamism. To the mainline churches, this attitude by the other churches towards the indomitable doctrines of Christianity that make them possess their orthodoxy and retain their status quo, is a clear demonstration of unchristian tendencies. At the

same time, the new generation churches see the mainline churches as dwelling in the archaic past; and have lost the flavour of time and the dynamism for making the gospel relevant in the modern generation. While this affects CAN's message of oneness, it also remains the strength of the church in Nigeria.

Proliferation of churches is another problem facing ecumenism in Nigeria. The concern and beliefs in proliferation has different dimensions; some protestant groups and Pentecostals justify proliferation of churches as church planting in fulfillment to the biblical mandate for evangelism. To others, especially the mainline denominations, church proliferation is nothing but time bomb that will definitely explode since CAN has no control over it. Nnebedum has argued that "proliferation of churches in Nigeria has continued to hinder the dream of Christian unity". Moreover, the nonchalant attitude of the government towards the practices of religions and in this case Christianity, is not helping matters in ecumenism.<sup>57</sup> The Nigeria constitution clearly declared Nigeria a secular state that allows the freedom of worship. This implies that the state has no right to interfere in the affairs of any religion, but reserves the power to determine how these religions operate within the law. Yet the government through the corporate affairs commission (CAC) registers and issues certificates to the proliferating churches to operate. It can be assumed here that the Nigerian government is aware that a united Christianity will positively affect the socio-political unity of the country hence; the Nigerian government/ politicians divide the country into religious and tribal lines as a tool for political gain. Also, since CAN looks up to the government for financial support, the government has a significant role to play in conjunction with CAN for a better ecumenism to thrive in Nigeria.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, ignorance towards the context of ecumenism among Christians in Nigeria is identified as one of the factors that hinder the efforts towards a successful ecumenism in Nigeria. The attitude of Christians, particularly, the pursuit of self-interest by the church leaders, holier than thou attitude, persistent fighting and character assassination among the hierarchy and lay faithful of Christians, are clear evidences that a greater number of those "gathering together in God's name" are not aware why they should gather, rather, they often gather for their selfish interests.<sup>59</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The history and development of Christianity and Christian ecumenism has remained undulated from its beginning. Several heresies and heretical groups have arisen from the time of

Christ to sow the seed of discord and to form the gate of hell against the church. It is observed that the greatest foes of the church have remained the foes within- the church fighting against itself. It was for this reason that the great controversies of the early church for which the early councils were called, brought to fulfillment, the prayer of Christ for the unity of the church, “that they may be one”. However, in the face of these doctrinal crises within the ranks and file of Christianity, the remarkable result was the formation of ecumenical movements, to defend and define the orthodoxy of the religious movement. It was these consolatory movements that gave Christianity a doctrinal foundation of one faith, one creed and on scripture. In this same way, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is the ecumenical body in Nigeria formed in 1976 to give a united and formidable voice to Nigerian Christianity.

There is no doubt that it has pioneered the protection of the interest of Christians in Nigeria and tried to foster peace and unity among the various Christian denominations in Nigeria. However, in the discharge of its duties, it has fallen short from its expectations. Paramount is the fact that while it claims to be ecumenical; the divisions, courtesy of internal religious bigotry among its members have remained obvious. This paper has not only attempted to identify some of the challenges militating against the success of CAN as an ecumenical body in Nigeria, but has also proffered some possible solutions. The controversies in the early Church bequeathed a consolidated and formidable church to the subsequent Christian generations because of the effort of the ecumenical councils which stood firm in defense of the “unity” of the body of Christ, the church. In like manner, CAN should endeavour to replicate this role and legacy so as to also bequeath to the subsequent generation of faith, a better “united” and formidable church that will keep the banner of faith flying in the midst of all modern religious, political and social odds.

### **Recommendations**

With the constitutionally provided purpose and objective of CAN and its role of leading the nation and her people to partake of Christ’s salvation, CAN should fundamentally, and as a matter of urgency, take the clear lead as the regulatory body, for the anticipated orderliness in the body of Christ. It is her responsibility also to develop strategies that would help it monitor and checkmate the activities of its member churches. There is the need for CAN to develop and strike a balance between its neutrality or otherwise on doctrinal matters, and also set out some guiding norms and standards to identify what qualifies a church. It should then work in synergy with the government with such policies to checkmate the proliferation of religious groups that hide under

the clock of Christianity to perpetrate evil in the society, and heresies in the body of Christ-the Church.

CAN should be proactive in its role as watchdog in national matters. Although Nigeria is a secular state with Christianity and Islam as the two dominant religions, the government finds it expedient to collaborate with their leadership in drawing the roadmap for the development of the nation. CAN should at all times embark on awareness campaign for Christians to be partners in progress especially in national issues. CAN, as the ecumenical body of Christians, should actively play regulatory roles in maintaining peace and tranquility among her Christian members. There is the need to obliterate the imaginary but existent times of insubordination in the association so that the Christendom that is more united in brotherly love and unity will gradually replace the denominational sentiments, antagonism and rivalry in the present Christianity in Nigeria.

Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17:21 presuppose that there is need for ecumenism and ecumenical unity in Nigeria since unity is a gift from God. Eke opined that spiritual ecumenism finds its expression in public and private prayer for the unity of Christians.<sup>60</sup> The necessity of this prayer is what Kasper describe as the beauty of ecumenism.<sup>61</sup>

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- <sup>52</sup>Adebayo
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- <sup>55</sup>Baur, John (1994) *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*. Kenya: Paulines Publications.
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- <sup>59</sup>Eke, Vitus Chibisi (2016) "Development and Challenges of Ecumenical Movement in Nigeria." *Roczniki Yeologiczne Tom Lxiii, Zeszyt. 221-237*. <https://tnkul.p//files/RT2016,Eke.pdf>
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## Christianity and Indigenous Languages in Sub-Saharan Africa

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### Abstract

Sub-Saharan Africa has seen growth in its Christianity. This Christianity was introduced, especially, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by the missionaries. The majority of these missionaries were Europeans. Questions have been raised as to what extent this missionary Christianity as well as the Christianity in Africa today has contributed to the development of Sub-Saharan Africa. This is more so when cognizance is taken of the fact that in socio-economic terms, the region appears to be lagging comparatively behind. But development comes in different shapes and sizes. The work argued that Christianity has contributed to the development of Sub-Saharan Africa by laying, in this case, the foundation for the growth of its indigenous languages. But there are arguments in some quarters to the contrary; that rather than help, Christianity only succeeded in hindering the growth of these languages while promoting the European languages of the missionaries. Hence, the work pointed out the creation of orthographies, dictionaries and grammar of these same languages, among other things, as evidence of the help. Even today, Christianity has not relented in the sundry contributions she makes to the evolution of the indigenous languages. The work, therefore, calls for a sustained dialogue among scholars on the encounter between Christianity and the Sub-Saharan Africa, a dialogue that will eventuate in a much more balanced appraisal of the role of Christianity thereof.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Indigenous Languages, Sub-Saharan Africa, Missionaries.

### Introduction

Talking about Jesus in Luke's Acts of the Apostles, Peter had noted how, "He went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). The religion, or, even better, the Way (cf. Acts 9:2; 24:22) that came to be named after Him, that is, Christianity, could not have done otherwise. It could not have stood at a place when Christ Himself "went about." And, truly, Christianity has always been on the move. This to the extent that Akintunde Akinade calls it "a migratory religion."<sup>60</sup> This work

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<sup>60</sup> Akintunde E. Akinade, "Musings on the Ebb and Flow of World Christianity", in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*, eds. David O. Ogungbile and Akintunde E. Akinade (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2010), xvi- xxiii, xviii.



aims at evaluating the encounter between this “migratory” Christianity and indigenous languages in Sub-Saharan Africa – with Sub-Saharan Africa standing, as it were, for that part of Africa south of the Sahara and made up of almost all the other countries in Africa except, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. Although the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti, is often grouped under this bloc, that is, Sub-Saharan Africa, it will be excluded in the consideration of the same in this work. It is hoped that the work would add to a growing list of others that call for proper and objective assessment of the role that Christianity played and continues to play in the development of Sub-Saharan Africa, and in this case, in the development of its indigenous languages.

### **A Brief on the Encounter of Christianity with Sub-Saharan Africa**

In the aforementioned migration of Christianity to Africa, three phases, going by John Baur’s observation in his book, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, could be delineated. Only two, the second and third, however, may precisely be said to concern Sub-Saharan Africa. The first phase spanned AD 62-1500. Here, Christianity, or better, Christian mission, was limited to the countries north of the Sahara and the African Horn: North Africa, Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia.<sup>61</sup> Among other reasons, it was cut off by Islam from the 7<sup>th</sup> century and was never renewed for the next eight hundred years.<sup>62</sup> There is then the second phase that lasted from 1500-1800. It was during this phase that Christianity reached Sub-Saharan Africa on a comparatively larger scale. The third phase actually began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, all through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. This is the phase that, precisely speaking, laid the strong foundation for the Christianity that is found today in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was introduced mainly by European missionaries who carefully wrapped it, parcel-like, in their culture and worldview. And before long, Christianity became inseparable from the cultural inheritance of these missionaries, and their converts could not but acquire many cultural traits that had nothing to do with religion.<sup>63</sup>

But having taken on itself the task of gradually removing these acquired cultural traits (ACTS), not oblivious, of course, of the difficulties involved, Christianity is deepening its root in Sub-Saharan Africa. Today, it can no longer be deemed an exaggeration to say that Christianity

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<sup>61</sup> John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), 20.

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), 120.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 46.

has become almost Sub-Saharan African. “The undisputable fact”, says Baur, “is that statistically by 1990 Christianity had become the majority religion in most countries south of the Sahara.”<sup>64</sup> Of course, there would always be need for caution. Numerical strength of Christianity may not have fully translated into a settled spiritual allegiance as far as the life of Christians here are concerned.<sup>65</sup>

### **A Brief on the Indigenous Languages in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Africa is a continent of languages. The greatest number of these languages, however, is concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa. These indigenous languages in and of Sub-Saharan Africa, well over 1680, fall into four main groups or families. The first is the Niger-Congo. It is the largest of the groups and is made up of 1,436 languages among which include Igbo, Yoruba, Swahili, Zulu, Shona, Wolof, Fulani, etc. Then, there is the Khoisan. This is the smallest of the group with about 35 languages and characterized by click sounds. It is spoken in Southern part of Africa and comprises such languages as Khoikhoi and San. As a matter of fact, Niger-Congo and Khosian language families are spoken solely in Sub-Saharan Africa. The third group, Afroasiatic, boasting of over 371 languages throughout Africa of which only a portion (over 150) are spoken in Sub-Saharan Africa, has Hausa, among other languages, as its representative. Nilo-Saharan, the fourth, has about 196 languages in Africa in general and, just as in the case of the Afroasiatic, only a portion is found in Sub-Saharan Africa. The following languages, Kanuri, Acholi, Maasai, Luo, Songhay, etc., fall under this group. At least, two things stand out about the languages seen in the aforementioned groups. One, in a country, two or more languages from the same group or even from two or three groups could be found together. That is how a country like Nigeria can boast of over 450 languages, Cameroon, 250, Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 200, Ghana, almost 100, Uganda, over 40, etc. Two, a language from one of the groups could be found spoken in many countries. For instance, Hausa, obviously from the Afroasiatic family, is spoken in Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Niger, Cameroon, etc. and Swahili, an example of Niger-Congo, is spoken in Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, etc.

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<sup>64</sup> Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Bishops of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province, “*Put out into Deep Waters*”, *A Pastoral Letter on the First Centenary Celebration of the Advent of Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria* (Onitsha: 1986, 11-12). See also Eduard Achermann. *Cry Beloved Africa! A Continent Needs Help* (Munich-Kinshasa: African University Studies, 1996), 23.

### Indigenous Languages in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Case Against Christianity

In Okot p' Bitek's *Songs of Lawino*, Lawino had confessed: "I do not understand\The ways of foreigners\But I do not despise their customs."<sup>66</sup> But Chinua Achebe, writing in his *Things Fall Apart*, had placed on the table the following exchange between Okonkwo and his friend, Obierika: "'Does the white man understand our custom[...]?' 'How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says our customs are bad.'"<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it has often been said that some white men, just as the one Okonkwo pointed out above, - and here missionaries are not excluded - though they did not understand the African culture, went ahead, unlike Lawino, to despise it. Thanks to a certain kind of superiority complex that some of them carried like excess baggage on their bodies and under their clothes as they struck out, like the Price's family in Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, for Africa.<sup>68</sup> And one of the things that they despised in and of the African culture was the reality of language which forms part and parcel of the same culture.

Yes, it was William Barclay, who had noted that, "to the Greeks the barbarians were people who said *bar-bar*, that is, people who spoke an unintelligible foreign language and not the beautiful Greek language."<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere, he would come out in full force: "In the Greek world[...t]here was the division between the Greek and the Barbarian. The Greek was the man who spoke Greek, that beautiful, flexible, meaningful language of which men did well to be proud; and there was the man who said 'bar', who uttered uncouth sounds in a strange tongue. The Greek began by looking with contempt on the man who knew no Greek."<sup>70</sup> And to some of these missionaries also, Africans were barbarians speaking only *bar-bar*. May be, that could actually account for why Africans in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as Achebe observed, were making unintelligible noises. Achebe writes: "It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the 'rudimentary souls' of Africa. In place of speech they made 'a violent babble of

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<sup>66</sup> Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 41.

<sup>67</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Harlow, Essex: Heinemann, 2008), 141.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 15.

<sup>69</sup> William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009), 221.

<sup>70</sup> William Barclay, *The Parables of Jesus* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 46.

uncouth sounds.’ They ‘exchanged short grunting phrases’ even among themselves. But most of the time they were too busy with their frenzy.”<sup>71</sup>

Since the white man, and in this case the missionary, spoke a language different from the bar-bar of the Africans, some of them, it is often said, decided not to do two things. One, to waste their time learning it. And how often this led to confusion in the missions and then in administration! For instance, writing about his teacher, Anthony Gogo Nwedo, the first indigenous Catholic Bishop in Nigeria, one of his students, Theophilus Okere, had noted:

The tall figure, the small head, the big rolling eyes, the long neck, the lean ascetic, the perfect genuflection. This was Anthony Gogo Nwedo for us [...] and by 1958/59 was named bishop of the new diocese of Umuahia [...]. I recall an incident at Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu at the announcement of the new appointment by Fr. Donal O’Sullivan C.SSp. As seminarians were summoned to hear the announcement, the name of the new bishop was not (surprisingly) clearly pronounced ‘Nwanebo’ precisely Monsignor Joseph Nwanegbo, the brilliant translator, pulpit orator and illustrious first priest of Owerri diocese. Then we dispersed, chatting away and running our commentaries on the news and its implications for the church and for us. But within thirty minutes, the bell rang, and we were assembled again. There was a correction to be made: the actual name of the new bishop was ‘Anthony Gogo Nwedo C.S.S.P’. We all remember the ensuing confusion and the reported reaction of the great Nwanegbo himself to this reversal of name and fortune: *Odika awuwo abatago na ya!* It seems intrigue has entered into the process! Sources of Error: European missionary ignorance or disdain of our language leading to ignoring of the nuances of tone of vowels and consonants that make the difference in names.<sup>72</sup>

Secondly, because some of the missionaries spoke a language different from the bar-bar of the Africans, they also did not make any efforts to see that the Africans’ “bar-bar” ever grew. To start with, they made it almost a rule not to baptize any of their converts in and with indigenous names. May be, for them, such vernacular names were not “holy” enough to enter the Church, or,

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<sup>71</sup> Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*”, in *Postcolonial Criticism*, eds. Bart Moore-Gilbert et.al (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 112-125, 117.

<sup>72</sup> Theophilus Okere, “Nwedo From the Eyes of a Student” in *Bringing Good News to the Poor: Essays in Memory of Bishop Anthony Gogo Nwedo*, eds. Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu (Umuahia: Lumen Press, 2012), 14-18, 14-15

as Benezet Bujo puts it, they, the names, that is, “were unworthy of Christian faith.”<sup>73</sup> This got to the extent that baptism, in those days, could be described as the sacrament of being given a new, foreign and often-difficult-to-be-pronounced name!

This practice would soon find its way into the schools run by the same missionaries. Some of the teachers at those schools were of the habit of giving the students and pupils English, French, Spanish or Portuguese names, since they believed, it is often said, that their native names were not “civilized” enough to enter the four walls of the classrooms. For instance, in the short story, “The Headstrong Historian”, by Ngozi Chimamanda Adichie, one is told of the character, Nwamgba, who had taken her son, Anikwenwa, first to the Anglican School and then to the Catholic one. Adichie writes: “They [Nwamgba and Anikwenwa] went first to the Anglican mission. [...]. What dissuaded her completely from sending Anikwenwa to the school, however, was that the instruction was done in Igbo [...]. But she had come in search of English, and so she walked past him and went to the Catholic mission. Father Shanahan told her that Anikwenwa would have to take an English name, because it was not possible to be baptized with a heathen name. She agreed easily. His name was Anikwenwa as far as she was concerned; if they wanted to name him something she could not pronounce before teaching him their language, she did not mind at all.[...] Father Shanahan looked at Anikwenwa[...]and guessed that he was about twelve[...].As he poured some water on the boy’s head, he said, ‘Michael, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>74</sup>

If Adichie was fictionalizing above the situation of things in those days in the Eastern part of Nigeria, down the continent in South Africa, Nelson Mandela would soon narrate a similar personal experience: “On the first day of school, my teacher, Miss Mdingane, gave each of us an English name and said that from thenceforth that was the name we would answer to in school. This was the custom among Africans in those days and was undoubtedly due to the British bias of our education. The education I received was a British education, in which British ideas, British culture, British institutions, were automatically assumed to be superior. There was no

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<sup>73</sup> . Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: St. Paul’s Publications-Africa,1992), 45.

<sup>74</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Headstrong Historian”, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (Lagos: Farafina, 2009), 198-218, 207-209. Earlier in her novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, she had also pointed out the same reality: “When the missionaries first came, they didn’t think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized.” (*Purple Hibiscus* [Lagos: Farafina, 2004], 272).

such thing as African culture. Africans of my generation - and even today - generally have both an English and an African name. Whites were either unable or unwilling to pronounce an African name, and considered it uncivilized to have one. That day, Miss Mdingane told me that my new name was Nelson. Why she bestowed this particular name upon me I have no idea.”<sup>75</sup>

Once fully admitted into the school, the child who was still to overcome the trauma of having had his\her native African name changed by the school authorities, not minding that such African names were not just given for the love of their sound but instead because they had a history and embodied the bearer’s story,<sup>76</sup> would be faced with another. His\her class prefect or, “monitor”, as they were often called in those days, would, true to his\her name, become a “monitoring spirit” sent by the school authorities to “observe” and report to them, the classmates that spoke the vernacular instead of the English, French, Spanish, or Portuguese, which was the official language of instruction and communication. In the dormitories and chapels, etc., there were other “monitoring spirits” that would spy on him\her as he\she conversed with others. And when caught committing the “Original sin” of speaking the vernacular, he\she “would face physical punishment such as flogging, hard labour or the payment of fine or both.”<sup>77</sup> The Ivorian writer, Bernard Binlin Dadié, in his book, *Climbié*, corroborates the foregoing as he narrates how the decision was made to outlaw the use of dialects in the primary schools in the then French West Africa:

The decision was therefore made, and circulars were distributed to all corners of the bush and even to the smallest village schools. ‘The speaking of dialects on school property is hereby forbidden.’ It was precise. The zones were clearly demarcated. On that day was born the token – a piece of wood, a box of matches, anything. It was entrusted to the top student in the class, whose duty it was to give it immediately to anyone caught speaking his own dialect. From the day the token first appeared, a coldness settled over the school. The students sang as well at the beginning of classes as they did at the end, but without the same abandon, the same gusto, the same fire. And the breaks once so happy and lou [...] they too felt the effects of the new rule. [...]. Because of the

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<sup>75</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (New York: Little, Brown, 1995), 13-14.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, *Songs of an African Bard* (Calabar: Print House, 2016), 20.

<sup>77</sup> Ifejirika E. Echezona, “You Are ‘Dead’ Without Your Language: Allaying the Fears That the Igbo Language Will Go into Extinction,” *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3, 2(April, 2014):333-347, 336.

token, the students liked to get as far away as possible from the schoolyard as soon as the final bell rang. They waited anxiously for the time to leave and watched the shadows grow smaller.<sup>78</sup>

On the whole, therefore, the seed was gradually sown into the child to see the indigenous language as something to be looked down upon and not spoken at all, or if spoken, to be done only in secret for fear of being shamed or punished. The well-known African freed slave, Olaudah Equiano, had narrated in his book, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, the effect that learning to speak English had on him; how it made him come to see the white not as spirits but as men superior to him and his likes and how he had “the stronger desire to resemble them; to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners.”<sup>79</sup> Likewise, many Africans who had passed through the missionary schools or had converted to Christianity soon had the strongest “desire to resemble them; to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners”, and this time, in disdaining the African culture in general and the language in particular. And sometimes, it appeared that the profundity of the disdain some of them had for things Africana was a measure of the profundity of their faith.

May be, that could account for why Oduche, one of the sons of the Chief priest of Ulu, Ezeulu, who had become a Christian, in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, at the instigation of Mr John Jaja Goodcountry, the Catechist at St. Mark’s CMS Church, Umuaro, would attempt to kill the sacred python, by trying to suffocate it in his box<sup>80</sup>; why a certain Enoch whose father was the snake-priest and who had converted to Christianity in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, would not only kill and eat the sacred python but also would do the abominable by unmasking the *egwugwu* in public<sup>81</sup>; why a certain Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son, (and now called Isaac following his conversion to Christianity), would deny that Okonkwo was his father<sup>82</sup> and why in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili’s father, Papa (Eugene Achike), who had lived with the missionaries, would cut off relations with his father, Papa-Nnukwu, for being, as he said, “a heathen.” Adichie’s Kambili notes: “Papa-Nnukwu had never set feet in it[Kambili’s house], because when Papa had decreed that heathens were not allowed in his compound, he had not made an exception

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<sup>78</sup> Cited in Moradewun Adejunmobi, *Vernacular Palaver: Imaginations of the Local and Non-native Languages in West Africa* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), 1.

<sup>79</sup> Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*, ed. Angelo Costanzo (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 93.

<sup>80</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1986), 44

<sup>81</sup> Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 148-149.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

for his father.”<sup>83</sup> And the old man would soon express regret at what his son had become: “I should not have let him follow those missionaries.”<sup>84</sup> And it was the same disdain for African culture, but this time, more precisely, for the African language, as shown by her husband, Ocol, that made Lawino in p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* to say:

My husband rejects me  
Because, he says  
I have no Christian name.  
He says  
Lawino is not enough.  
He says  
Acoli names are *Jok* names  
And they do not sound good.  
They are primitive, he insists,  
And he is a progressive man.

Ocol wanted me  
To be baptized ‘Benedeta’  
He has christened  
One daughter ‘Marta’

[...] My husband rejects Acoli names  
Meaningful names,  
Names that I can pronounce  
He says

They are *Jok* names  
And he was[sic] nothing  
To do with *Jok*  
He says  
He has left behind  
All sinful things  
And all superstitions and fears  
He says  
He has no wish  
To be associated any more  
With the devil.

Pagan names, he says  
Belong to sinners  
Who will burn  
In everlasting fires:

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<sup>83</sup> Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, 62-63.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.



Ocol insists  
He must be called  
By his Christian name!<sup>85</sup>

Kambili's father, Papa, in Adichie's aforementioned novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, presents another example of this disdain for the indigenous language. Kambili, talking about her father, Papa, had observed: "He hardly spoke Igbo, and although Jaja and I spoke it with Mama at home, he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English. Papa's sister, Auntie Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonial product. She had said this about Papa in a mild, forgiving way, as if it were not Papa's fault, as one would talk about a person who was shouting gibberish from a severe case of malaria."<sup>86</sup> And just as he liked his children to speak English, so he liked the villagers as well: "Papa liked it when villagers made an effort to speak English around him. He said it showed they had good sense."<sup>87</sup>

Apart from the aforementioned reasons, one could cite others often marshalled out by such persons as Lawino, but especially, as Papa, who would prefer that their children and wards speak English, French or Portuguese, or even Spanish, to speaking the vernacular. For one, such offers them an opportunity to show their otherness, an otherness that is, according to them, superior. Indeed, a story is told of a man who was staying overseas. It was not long when his father died and thank God he actually came home for the burial. As the father was about to be lowered into the grave, his siblings could be seen crying. But the man was unmoved. He was chewing gum. An old man from the village approached him afterwards to inquire why he didn't show any emotions or cried as his siblings did. He is said to have told the man, with airs, that he had forgotten how to cry in their native language and that the foreign language he was at home with then could not make him cry. So the dichotomy between "him" and "them"! And that is also how things are here: Some of those who do not speak the indigenous languages wish to pass the message that actually they are different from the majority who do; that they are really the "men" and "women", the educated ones. Hence, speaking any of the 'foreign languages' and not the vernacular would soon become the parameter for knowing how learned, civilized or educated a person is!

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<sup>85</sup> p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*, 81-82.

<sup>86</sup> Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, 13.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Again, others think that the native languages do not contain enough to enable them to put across their ideas. This appears to be the path taken by Ocol in yet p'Bitek's *Songs of Lawino*, as the wife, Lawino, makes known in the following lamentation:

My husband  
Has read at Makerere University.  
He has read deeply and widely.  
But if you ask him a question  
He says  
You are insulting him;  
He opens up with a quarrel  
He begins to look down upon you  
Saying  
You ask questions  
That are a waste of time!

He says  
My questions are silly questions,  
Typical questions from village girls.  
Questions of uneducated people,  
Useless questions from untutored minds.

My husband says  
I have a tiny little brain  
And it is not trained,  
I cannot see things intelligently,  
I cannot see things sharply.  
He says  
Even if he tried  
To answer my questions  
I would not understand  
What he was saying  
Because the language he speaks  
Is different from mine  
So that even if he  
Spoke to me in Acoli  
I would still need an interpreter.

My husband says  
Some of the answers  
Cannot be given in Acoli  
Which is a primitive language  
And is not rich enough  
To express his deep wisdom.  
He says the Acoli language  
Has very few words

It is not like the white man's language  
Which is rich and very beautiful  
A language fitted for discussing deep thoughts.<sup>88</sup>

But it is not the poverty or “primitiveness” of the indigenous languages that apparently make them unsuitable for expressing “deep wisdom” or for “discussing deep thoughts” as Ocol alleged above. Instead, it is the poverty of opportunities, attention given to and hard work done on the indigenous languages by the users of the same and then by those who are vested with power and authority to make policies and initiate programmes that would have seen to the promotion and development, in sundry ways, of the indigenous languages.<sup>89</sup> No wonder, Okeke notes: “No language is born with a silver spoon. All languages started under the same physical conditions of serving as instruments of communication for a given language community. The rate of their growth has not in any way been predetermined by nature nor has any one of them been placed above others in any historical manner. It is therefore the owners of language that make it what it becomes, that give it a befitting social status or leave it in a moribund state.”<sup>90</sup>

Still, there are others who think that learning and speaking a language other than the vernacular confers on one a kind of influence as well as make things possible for the same one. Adichie, in her aforementioned short story, “The Headstrong Historian”, presents three reasons that made Nwamgba decide to send her son, Anikwenwa, to school after her friend Ayaju, had sent her own son, Azuka. Among these three reasons, the most cogent is the fact that it enables Anikwenwa to learn the white man’s language and then be able to go to court and defeat his cousins and to bring back their piece of land which they had taken from her.<sup>91</sup> Nwamgba’s decision soon paid off as the son later got their land back, even if, it must be pointed out, that it came at a great cost. Adichie writes: “When it was time for his *ima mmuo* ceremony, he said he would not participate, because it was a heathen custom for boys to be initiated into the world of the spirits, a custom that Father Shananhan had said would have to stop. Nwamgba roughly yanked his ear and told him that a foreign albino could not determine when their customs would change, so until the clan itself decided that the initiation would stop, he would participate or else

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<sup>88</sup> p’Bitek, *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*, 87-88.

<sup>89</sup> Paulin J. Hountondji, “Manufacturing Unemployment: The Crises of Education in Africa,” in *African Voices in Education*, P. Higgs et al. (Lansdowne: Juta, 2000), 39-46, 43; V.O. Okeke, “The Philosophy of Language Empowerment,” *Academia* 1, 1(June 2003): 82-92, 88.

<sup>90</sup> Okeke, “The Philosophy of Language Empowerment,” 83.

<sup>91</sup> Adichie, “The Headstrong Historian,” 206-207.

he would tell her whether he was her son or the white man's son. Anikwenwa reluctantly agreed, but as he was taken away with a group of other boys she noticed that he lacked their excitement. His sadness saddened her. She felt her son slipping away from her, and yet she was proud that he was learning so much, that he could become a court interpreter or a letter writer, and that with Father Lutz's help he had brought home some papers that showed that their lands belonged to him and his mother. Her proudest moment was when he went to his father's cousins Okafo and Okoye and asked for his father's ivory tusk back. And they gave it to him."<sup>92</sup>

Related to what is said above is the fact that there are others who think that the native languages do not offer them employment opportunities as against the learning of foreign ones. Such persons, however, usually do not make such statements from nowhere, or decide to take such a position out of nothing. The historical realities especially during the colonial period which almost coincided with the time of the missionaries proved them right. In those days, only those who could speak the foreign languages stood better chances of getting comparatively better jobs. And since knowledge of the vernacular or native languages could not open equal opportunities for their speakers, there was logically no need, many thought, of continuing to learn them when their immediate economic-cum-utilitarian values were obviously not encouraging. Hence, the seeds of nonchalance and subtle disregard for the native languages were sown whose unfortunate fruits lasted for long. And some of the missionaries have even been accused of indirectly supporting this same logic that so to say stunted the growth and development of the indigenous languages. Although there has been a refutation to that effect,<sup>93</sup> Adiele Afigbo accuses Joseph Shanahan, the Irish-born former bishop of Onitsha diocese in Nigeria, of possessing such a mentality. Afigbo presents the following as Shanahan's words in his conversation with Igbo elders:

Why was the European D.O. in charge of tens of thousands of Ibos? Was it because he had more money or more wives or more influence? No, the answer was that he was more educated. Why was the interpreter so contemptuous of local views and so insistent on heavy bribes before he could explain a case properly? Because he knew English which he had learnt at school, and because no local knew enough English to follow what he was saying. And look at the Court clerk and court messengers, the most influential and most feared men in the district. Why were they

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-211.

<sup>93</sup> See Luke Nnamdi Mbefo, "Bishop Shanahan and the Schools," in Luke Nnamdi Mbefo, *Theology and Aspects of Igbo Culture* (Enugu: Snaap, 1997, 60-71.

chosen for their jobs? Simply because they had been to school and understood English. Why, they all knew the Court Clerk could distort and recast every written word, while their titled men could not read a single line?<sup>94</sup>

Finally, in Sub-Saharan African countries colonized by the French and Portuguese, learning and mastering the indigenous languages was often considered an impediment: to one becoming an *evolue* (a Europeanized native African in French colony) or an *assimilado* (a Europeanized native African in Portuguese colony).<sup>95</sup> “Why master a language”, most people then tend to ask, “that would not catapult one to a higher social rung when a good knowledge of French or Portuguese would?”

### **Christianity and the Case for Indigenous Languages in Sub-Saharan Africa**

It is expedient to point out immediately that there is no intention whatsoever here to absolve Christianity, or better, some strands of missionary Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa, of culpability in some of the issues raised above, no matter how little, or even, how exaggerated the accusations may be. What, however, one wishes to underscore here is that while the accusations are carried in one hand, positive contributions, no matter how little also, engendered, as it were, by that same encounter between Christianity and indigenous languages in Sub-Saharan Africa, should be carried in the other. This is necessary for at least two reasons. One, because of a tendency seen in some quarters whereby attention is so fixed on the accusations as to forget the positive points. Two, - and that is the other extreme to be avoided - whereby the positive points are so highlighted as to overshadow the accusations, or even, come to see the accusations as the “grumbles” of some who are unappreciative of the wonders wrought by the missionaries in Africa. Promising a more balanced and realistic approach, as hinted at the beginning of this work, the aim of this subsection is to have a look at some of the ways, in the first place, that missionary Christianity helped, and then, Christianity today in Sub-Saharan Africa, is helping in the growth and development of the indigenous languages.

To begin with, while it is a fact that Sub-Saharan Africans were speaking their hundreds of languages before the missionaries came, it is also a fact that not too many of them were written

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<sup>94</sup> Adiele Afigbo. “The Place of Igbo Languages in Our Schools: A Historical Explanation,” in *Igbo Language and Culture*, eds. F.C. Ogbalu and E.N. Emenajo (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1975), 78-79. Cited in Mbefo, “Bishop Shanahan and the Schools”, 60-61.

<sup>95</sup> O. R. Dathorne, *African Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 2.

down. It was the missionaries who took the pains to write them down. This they did by developing the orthographies of such languages, then the grammars and dictionaries. In doing this, they laid the foundation for what these languages became later. Of these missionaries in Sub-Saharan Africa, mention must be made of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who could well be termed a walking dictionary of African languages. He, a liberated slave of Yoruba descent living in Sierra Leone, was on the Niger Expedition of 1841. According to Christopher Oshun, “while on the 1841 Niger expedition he had to learn Hausa along with Rev. Schon as a necessity on the trip. Crowther began translating the Bible into Yoruba and compiling a Yoruba Language Dictionary. By 1843, Yoruba Grammar book was published and a year later it was followed by a Yoruba version of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. In 1852, he published A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language in London, which included many local proverbs. Other languages were also codified. In 1857, he produced a primer for the Igbo language and one for the Nupe language in 1864. The first translation of the bible into Igbo language, that is, the Onitsha version is also traced to him. He was also fascinated into working on other languages other than the Yoruba language. He also supervised the translation of the Yoruba Bible (Bibeli Mi mo) which was completed by the mid-1880s.”<sup>96</sup> He would later become the first African-born Bishop of the Church of England.

There is also Rev. J. F. Schon. He was a German missionary. As indicated above, together with Crowther, he had accompanied the said 1841 expedition. He spent almost a decade in Sierra Leone learning African languages. Hausa was one of such languages and in 1843, he produced *A Vocabulary of the Hausa Language with Grammatical Elements Prefixed*, 14 years later in 1857, he would produce *A Primer of the Hausa Language* and followed it up five years later in 1862, with *A Grammar of the Hausa Language. A Dictionary of the Hausa Language*, would appear in 1876 and five years later the first volume of *Magana Hausa: Native Literature, Proverbs, Tales, Fables and Historical Fragments in the Hausa Language*, appeared, with the second volume coming five years later in 1886. While he also produced *Oku Ibo: Grammatical Elements of the Ibo Language* in 1861, he would later be succeeded in his base in Sierra Leone, by S.W. Koelle. The latter was an expert in Vai and Kanuri languages and in 1854, produced the *Polyglotta*

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<sup>96</sup> Christopher Oshun, “Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther in African Church History: An Overview.” (Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Association for Christian Studies(NACS), Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary, Igbein, Abeokuta, Ogun State, October, 27-30, 2015), 10.

*Africana, or a Comparative Vocabulary of Nearly 300 Words and Phrases in More Than 100 Distinct African Languages.* Information for the work is said to have been gotten from liberated slaves in Sierra Leone

—even as he was able to record, at the same time, the length of the informants' absence from their home countries.<sup>97</sup>

Also, worthy of mention here is Rev John Christopher Taylor who was appointed by Crowther to be in charge of the Onitsha mission of the CMS. He was a son of Igbo ex-slaves in Sierra-Leone. By 1860, he had translated the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles to the Corinthians and to Philemon into Igbo. And six years later in 1866, he completed the translation of the whole New Testament into 'Isuama' Igbo dialect. He later left for Sierra Leone, but his love for the Igbo Language did not leave him. Hence, he would teach same at the famous Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone. There is also Archdeacon Thomas John Dennis. He was an Englishman. Between 1906 and 1913, he was busy translating the bible into Igbo. While Taylor's aforementioned translation of the bible was not accepted because it was too dialect-biased, Dennis produced a bible that had a comparative wider acceptance. He was helped by T.D. Anyaegbulam and A. C. Onyeabo (he would later become the first Anglican bishop of Owerri). Along the Calabar axis, a Presbyterian missionary, Hugh Goldie, was also busy at his table. Soon in 1862, he translated the New Testament into Efik and within a space of six years, did the same for the Old Testament, hence the emergence of the complete Bible in Efik. He produced as well in 1862, *Principles of Efik Grammar and Specimens of the Language*. There was also from him a *Dictionary of the Efik Language*, a compilation of Efik proverbs and in 1890, *Calabar and its Mission*, a history of the Presbyterian mission in Calabar in the first forty years.

Outside Nigeria, one can mention, among many other missionaries, Johannes Gottlieb Christaller. He was a Basel missionary from Germany. Arriving in Ghana in the 1850s, in 1871, he translated the bible into the Twi language, and four years later in 1875, he produced *Grammar of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi Chwee, Twi*. Like Godie above, he would come up, in 1879, with a compilation, *Twi Mmehusem Mpena-Ahansia Mmoano: A Collection of Three Thousand and Six Hundred Tshi Proverbs in Use among the Negroes of the Gold Coast*

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<sup>97</sup>Cf. Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850, Vol. 2* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 393.

*Speaking the Asante and Fante Language. A Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Twi* would appear two years later in 1881. And of his work in general, Noel Smith had this to say: “Christaller’s work achieved three things. It raised the Twi language to a literary level and provided the basis of all later work in the language; it gave the first real insight into Akan religious, social and moral ideas; and it welded the expression of Akan Christian worship to the native tongue.”<sup>98</sup> Little wonder then that Kwame Bediako, later named his Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology (ACMC) obviously after him and his Ghanaian successor, Dr Clement Anderson Akrofi.<sup>99</sup>

There is also John Ludwig Krapf. He was actually a German Lutheran pastor but worked for the Church Missionary Society(CMS) of England. Having been expelled, around 1842, from Ethiopia, like other Western missionaries, and that was after he had learnt some of the Ethiopian languages and translated the bible into Galla, he left for what is known today as Kenya. Here, this first Protestant missionary in East Africa, soon put his flair for language into use, learning, among other languages, Swahili. Thereafter, he produced the first-ever Dictionary of the Swahili language, a Grammar in Swahili and then made translation of the New Testament into the same Swahili and some Mijikenda languages. On the importance of the aforementioned bible translations of his into Swahili, Bengt Sudkler and Christopher Steed, in their *A History of the Church in Africa*, say: “His work on the Gospels into Swahili and on a dictionary of this language and related East African languages was important for Bishop Steere’s New Testament translation and this again was to be a basis for translations into other leading East African vernaculars such as George Pilkington’s Luganda translation in the 1890s.”<sup>100</sup>

But then, it is a fact that the interest of the missionaries in learning the indigenous languages and translating the bible and other related documents into the African languages was to enable them push forward their proclamation of the Word of God. But in doing the translations, especially, some accusations have been made. For one, it has been said that some of them in the process had forced African sounds and words into preconceived categories and structures of their

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<sup>98</sup> Cited in Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2004), 5.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>100</sup> Cited in Viera Pawlikova-Vilhanova, “Biblical Translations of Early Missionaries in East and Central Africa: Translations into Swahili,” *Asian and African Studies* 15, 1(2006): 80-90, 83.



own.<sup>101</sup> Others made accusations whose essence is better captured in the poem, “Questions From A Worker Who Reads” by Bertold Brecht(1898-1956):

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?  
The books are filled with names of kings.  
Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?  
And Babylon, so many times destroyed.  
Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima's houses,  
That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?  
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished  
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome  
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom  
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song.  
Were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of the legend  
The night the seas rushed in,  
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.

Young Alexander conquered India.  
He alone?  
Caesar beat the Gauls.  
Was there not even a cook in his army?  
Phillip of Spain wept as his fleet  
was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?  
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War.  
Who triumphed with him?

Each page a victory  
At whose expense the victory ball?  
Every ten years a great man,  
Who paid the piper?

So many particulars.  
So many questions.<sup>102</sup>

That is to say that for them, even as the missionaries made use of the natives in their translations, some of them often failed, at the end of the day, to acknowledge the contributions of these same native Africans. Others maintain that in their translations, many African words and even experiences, were wrongly translated, a consequence, perhaps, of a word-for-word kind of translation that sometimes belittled the import of a meaning-based translation. For instance, while Lamin Sanneh had observed that, “Bible translation helped to preserve local names for

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<sup>101</sup> Aylward Shorter, *Christianity and the African Imagination* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996), 44.

<sup>102</sup> Bertold Brecht, “Questions from A Worker Who Reads,” in Bertold Brecht, *Poems 1929-1938*, eds. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), 252.

God”<sup>103</sup>, Okot p’Bitek tells of how it sometimes helped instead to preserve the wrong local names for God. p’Bitek narrates the following story of how the Christian God came to be called ‘Rubanga’ in Acholi: “In 1911, Italian Catholic priests put before a group of Acholi elders the question ‘Who created you?’; and because the Luo language does not have an independent concept of ‘create’ or ‘creation’, the question was rendered to mean, ‘Who moulded you?’ But this was still meaningless, because human beings are born of their mothers. The elders told the visitors that they did not know. But, we are told that this reply was unsatisfactory, and the missionaries insisted that a satisfactory answer must be given. One of the elders remembered that, although a person may be born normally, when he is afflicted with tuberculosis of the spine, then he loses his normal figure, he gets ‘moulded.’ So he said ‘Rubanga is the one who moulds people.’ This is the name of the hostile spirit, which the Acholi believe causes the hunch or hump in the back. And, instead of exorcising these hostile spirits and sending them among pigs, the representatives of Jesus Christ began to preach that Rubanga was the Holy Father who created the Acholi.”<sup>104</sup>

Still on Uganda, but now according to Sanneh himself, one is also told of a “translation gone wrong” in the Luganda version of the bible: “In the Luganda version of the Bible, for example, the word ‘charmer’ or ‘wizard’ was rendered as *basawo*, as in Deuteronomy 18:10-11: ‘There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or daughter to pass through the fire, or to useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or wizard, or a necromancer.’ When later medical missionaries arrived in Uganda, they were also called *basawo*. With the bible in hand, the local people claimed that the Scripture prohibited the practice of medicine.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite the aforementioned weaknesses of the translation business of the missionaries, it must not be forgotten that it was the same translation business of theirs, especially, in their translation of the bible, hymns and John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, that led the foundation for the birth of indigenous writing in general and literature in particular. For instance,

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<sup>103</sup> Lamin Sanneh *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 218.

<sup>104</sup> Cited in Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 165.

<sup>105</sup> Lamin Sanneh, “Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. 4: From 1750 to the Present*, ed. John Riches (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 83-122, 119.

around 1927, the Methodist Missionaries were said to have translated Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into Igbo.<sup>106</sup> While Achebe in his book, *There was A Country*, names it among the books in his father's small library,<sup>107</sup> writing elsewhere, he had the following to say about it: "I was lucky in having a few old books around the house when I was learning to read. As the fifth in a family of six children and with parents so passionate about their children's education I inherited many discarded primers and readers. [...]. I remember also my mother's *Ije Onye Kraist* which must have been an Igbo adaptation of *Pilgrim's Progress*. It could not have been the whole book; it was too thin. But it had some frightening pictures. I recall in particular a most vivid impression of *the valley of the shadow of death*. I thought a lot of death those days."<sup>108</sup> And the first novel\fiction to be written in the Igbo language is *Omenuko* by Peter Nwana. It was published between 1933 and 1935. The influence of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* could be noticed thereof and, curiously, it was the Methodist Missionaries who, as said above, translated *Pilgrim's Progress* into Igbo, that organized the literary competition that saw to the birth of Nwana's *Omenuko*.<sup>109</sup>

Much earlier in 1866, the Anglian pastor, David Hinderer, had translated the same *Pilgrim's Progress* into Yoruba. Tiyo Soga, the first black South African to be a Church minister, had in 1867 translated it into Xhosa and Robert Moffat, a Scottish missionary, translated not only the bible but also the same *Pilgrim Progress*(1848) into Setswana, saying as he did so: "I am at the present moment dressing Bunyan's Pilgrim in Sichuana[Tswana] garb, and if he does not travel this land through and through I shall be much mistaken."<sup>110</sup> Already, in the early part of the twentieth century, the influence of the *Pilgrim Progress* could be seen in Thomas Mofolo's *Moeti oa Bochabela* (The Traveler of the East) written in his Sesotho language and published in 1907. Hence, Dathorne concludes: "According to one education secretary in Bechuanaland, Rhodesia and Zambia between 1930–1931, 'The books that were in the greatest demand were Bibles,

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<sup>106</sup> Ernest Emenyonu, *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1978), 24.

<sup>107</sup> Chinua Achebe, *there was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 10.

<sup>108</sup> Chinua Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, et al (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 143-145, 144.

<sup>109</sup> Cf., Adiele Eberechukwu Afigbo, ed., *F.C. Ogbalu and the Igbo Language* (Onitsha: University Publishing., 1995), 255.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of 'The Pilgrim's Progress'* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 68.

hymn books and catechisms. They were regarded by the people as so clearly a part of the necessary apparatus of a Christian that they purchase them without demur. *The Pilgrim's Progress* enjoys a steady sale in almost every African vernacular into which it has been translated, and in some renderings it is a most entertaining book'. It might now be considered unfortunate that Africans were introduced to written European literature through Christian propaganda, but it is a historical fact, and if it had not taken place, vernacular literature would have taken far longer to emerge."<sup>111</sup>

But it was not only just the vernacular literature that the translations of the missionaries influenced its birth, it also influenced the birth of what came to be called "African Literature." Reason: Among those regarded as its founders were also those who read the translations of the same missionaries, especially, the bible. The bible, as it is known, had a huge impact on the literary enterprise of Achebe,<sup>112</sup> Ngugi,<sup>113</sup> etc. Little wonder, Shorter observes: "African writers [...] are deeply influenced by the impact of Christianity and themes borrowed from the Bible or Christian hymnology. Even in their most impassioned criticism of the missionary, these writers bear witness to the cultural liberation which has been one of the consequences of the Christian evangelization."<sup>114</sup>

Be that as it may, once they learnt the indigenous languages, a good number of the missionaries would have ordinarily continued their instructions and activities in the vernacular. For one, those who sent them actually instructed them to learn and use the same languages. One could cite the example of Charles Lavigerie (1825-1892). He was the founder of the Missionaries of Africa and the Sisters of Our Lady of Africa. Writing in 1878 to his missionaries working in what was then called Equatorial Africa, he had said: "I desire that, as soon as such a thing is possible, and not later than six months after arrival in the mission, all missionaries shall speak with each other only in the language of the people among whom they live."<sup>115</sup> And of the Presbyterian mission along the Calabar axis, one is told: "Only in the first months of the mission was teaching was[sic] done in English – and only because the missionaries had not learnt to

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<sup>111</sup> Dathorne, *African Literature in the Twentieth Century*, 2.

<sup>112</sup> Cf., Achebe, *There was a Country*, 10-11.

<sup>113</sup> Shorter, *Christianity and the African Imagination*, 76.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>115</sup> Cited in Shorter, *Christianity and the African Imagination*, 44.

speak Efik.”<sup>116</sup> But two factors propelled some of the missionaries in Sub-Saharan Africa then to do otherwise.

One, the desire and eagerness of the Africans themselves to learn the English language or any of the other foreign languages. They just wanted to communicate directly with the missionaries and other foreigners, without the need of interpreters. Secondly, - and this was the situation in the then British West Africa - the British Government came out in 1882 with an Ordinance, the first in education in this colony. In it, no provision was made either for teaching the indigenous language or teaching in the same indigenous languages. Everything was to be almost done in the English language. Grants-in-aids were to be accessed by mission or denominational schools based on the degree of their “discipline and good organization, the number of attendance, and the results of examinations”<sup>117</sup> and then it could be added as well, their readiness to focus more attention on the English language than the vernacular! This, a kind of, galvanized the study of the English Language but softly dwarfed the study and growth of the indigenous languages. Some mission schools that adopted the policy and the accompanying grants – and coupled with the above-mentioned desire of Africans to learn the English language – saw the number of their students skyrocket. Hence, a good number of others had to follow suit in order not to be “frozen out” of existence by the other schools.

With the power of hindsight, however, one could say that such was an important step or even “compromise” on the part of the missionaries. This is because it helped to achieve something else: It provided a means whereby the different ethnic groups and tribes that came to make up the different countries in Sub-Saharan Africa could communicate. For instance, in Nigeria, with over 450 languages as even the country’s first National Anthem acknowledged: “though languages and tribes may differ...”, the question of how people from these same tribes could have come together, talked and reached an agreement on any issue, should not be underestimated. The Babel experience of the Book of Genesis (Gen.11:1-9) would have been child’s play. But the condition is salvaged by the fact that the English language is used as a lingua franca. The same obtains in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, where French, Portuguese and Spanish, are used. Again, the introduction of such “foreign languages” has today made Sub-Saharan Africans participants

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<sup>116</sup> William H. Taylor, *Mission to Educate: A History of the Educational Work of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in East Nigeria 1846-1960* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 69.

<sup>117</sup> Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886-1950* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 71.

at global events. This, - it could be said - the indigenous languages would not have done easily. Indeed, the English language, for example, is today almost regarded as the language of the world. As Farooq Kperogi captures it:

Trying to ignore the English language in today's dizzyingly globalizing world is like trying to avoid daylight: you can do it, but with an effort so exacting it reaches the point of absurdity. The English language is, for all practical purposes, the world's lingua franca. It is the principal international language in the fields of communications, information technology, entertainment, science, business, diplomacy and so on. Its status as the language for aerial and nautical communications and as one of the languages of the United Nations, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the International Olympic Committee, and most other international organizations enjoys official recognition, prompting one scholar to characterize the English language as the "Latin of Globalization". Most importantly, it is the language of scholarship and learning [...]. So most academics in the world either have to publish in English or perish in their native tongues. In addition, it has been noted in many places that between 70 and 80 percent of information stored in the world's computers is in English, leading a technology writer to describe the English language as the 'lingua franca of the wired world.' These facts explain why English is spoken by hundreds of millions of non-native speakers in the world today.<sup>118</sup>

This means, therefore, that a good number of people from Sub-Saharan Africa may not actually "get lost" anywhere, anyway and anyhow in today's world! Although, one is not oblivious, at the same time, of the other side of what is just said above: If the indigenous languages had been given all the "support" they needed, may be some of them could also have achieved an international status close to any of the aforementioned languages! And saying this as well, it is good not to forget that when there were plans to make some of the indigenous languages in Sub-Saharan Africa the lingua franca, it was speakers of the other indigenous languages not considered that often kicked against it and called for any of the "foreign languages" to be taken instead as the lingua franca. For instance, in Uganda during the colonial times, when Swahili was to be introduced as the official language, those from Baganda had resisted the move. In Kenya, the same scenario would also play out when the resistance came from the speakers of Gikuyu.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Farooq A. Kperogi, *Global English: The Changing Face and Forms of Nigerian English in a Global World* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), ix-x.

<sup>119</sup> Cf., Adejunmobi, *Vernacular Palaver*, 38.

Nevertheless, John Pobee, had pointed out that, “Ideally, African theologies should be in the vernacular. Language is more than syntax and morphology; it is the vehicle for assuming the weight of a culture. Therefore, this attempt to construct an African theology in the English language is the second best.”<sup>120</sup> His position has been supported by some other theologians. One of the reasons given for this is the fact that such theologies would be better understood by the audience since they are being done in ways, categories and language they are familiar with. “A helpful way”, says Bediako, “of growing in understanding is to read and listen to the Word of God in our own languages. In matters of religion, no language speaks to the heart, mind and innermost feelings as does our mother-tongue. The achievement of Christianity with regard to this all-important place of language is truly unique.”<sup>121</sup> But the talk of and about African theologies being done or even being written in the same vernacular would not have arisen in the first place, or better, would not have arisen when it did, if not for the work some of these missionaries did in the development of the indigenous languages.

Today, the Church has not relented in her efforts at promoting the indigenous languages. For instance, it was the English Anglican missionary, Henry Townsend, who in 1859 in Abeokuta, Nigeria, came up with *Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba* (or simply, *Iwe Irohin*), which became not only the first Yoruba language newspaper, but also the first newspaper in Nigeria. Writing about the founding of the paper, Townsend had said: “I have set on foot a Yoruba newspaper [...]. My objective is to get the people to read [...] to beget the habit of seeking information by reading.”<sup>122</sup> Elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, it was also the missionaries, precisely, the Anglican missionaries under the auspices of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) that produced the first Swahili newspaper: *Msimulizi* [“The Story Teller”] in 1888 and *Habari za Mwezi* [“News of the Month”] around 1894. These would be followed by the *Pwani na Bara* [“The Coast and the Hinterland”] by the German Protestant Mission in 1910, with the Catholic missionaries producing *Rafiki Yangu* [“My Friend”].<sup>123</sup> And ever since, the publication of the Church in indigenous languages has never stopped. Seminarians of the Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri, Nigeria, for example, produce an annual Igbo language magazine

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<sup>120</sup> J.S. Pobee, *Toward an African theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 23.

<sup>121</sup> Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel*, 32.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in Luke Uka Uche, *Mass Media, People, and Politics in Nigeria* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1989), 93.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Pawlikova-Vilhanova, “Biblical Translations,” 86-87.

called OBAOKWU ONOI. The Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri produces an Igbo language newspaper called Òzísà. The same Archdiocese has for years now been organizing the annual Odenigbo lectures that attract the best of the Igbos. These lectures are rendered wholly in the Igbo language. Among lecturers here have been Prof Emmanuel Nonue Emenanjo, Chinua Achebe, Dora Akunyili, etc.

Again, unlike Father Shanahan who in Adichie's short story, "The Headstrong Historian", had told Nwamgba that her son, Anikwenwa, had to take an English name, because it was not possible to be baptized with a heathen name, almost all the churches in Sub-Saharan Africa today have no problems in the use of vernacular names in baptizing new members. And earlier in her well-known novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, the same Adichie had had the following to say about another priest, Fr Benedict, the parish priest of St Agnes, Enugu: "Even though Father Benedict had been at St. Agnes for seven years, people still referred to him as 'our new priest.' Perhaps they would not have if he had not been white. He still looked new. [...] And his British nose was still as pinched and as narrow as it always was, the same nose that had had me worried that he did not get enough air when he first came to Enugu. Father Benedict had changed things in the parish, such as insisting that the Credo and kyrie be recited only in Latin; Igbo was not acceptable. Also, hand clapping was to be kept at a minimum, lest the solemnity of Mass be compromised. But he allowed offertory songs in Igbo; he called them native songs, and when he said 'native' his straight-line lips turned down at the corners to form an inverted U."<sup>124</sup>

Here, too, unlike this Fr Benedict who, as seen above, allowed the use of Igbo language for some parts of the Mass and not for others, today, there is no part of the Mass, including the homily, that is not said or recited in the indigenous language - even if people may also decide to use Latin or English or French, Spanish or Portuguese. The same holds in the case of songs; there is no song today that cannot be rendered in the indigenous languages. The Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa appear to have realized the importance of what the Fathers of the Vatican II had said in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:

Religious singing by the faithful is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as in liturgical services, the voices of the faithful may be heard, in conformity with the norms and requirements of the rubrics. In certain countries, especially in mission lands there are people who have their own musical tradition, and this

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<sup>124</sup> Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, 4.



plays a great part in their religious and social life. For this reason, their music should be held in proper esteem and a suitable place is to be given to it, not only in forming their religious sense but also in adapting worship to their native genius [...]. Therefore, in the musical training of missionaries, great care should be taken to see that they become competent in promoting the traditional music of those peoples both in the schools and in sacred services, as far as may be practicable.<sup>125</sup>

Similarly, in the past, Christianity contributed to the development of the same indigenous languages by training or having had a hand, directly or indirectly, in the training of some of the champions of the native languages. For instance, Frederick Chidozie Ogbalu that really played important role in the development of Igbo language through the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) that he founded, actually lectured in the Church's own school, Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha. D. O. Fagunwa who produced the first full-length novel in Yoruba, *Ogboju ode ninu igbo irunmale*, in 1938 (and translated in 1968 by Wole Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*), was a church-school headmaster.<sup>126</sup> Today, as well, the Church continues to lend a hand in the development of the indigenous languages by allowing some of her priests, religious and lay members to specialize in these languages up to the doctoral level. And in some of the seminaries in Sub-Saharan Africa, indigenous languages are also taught alongside Latin, Hebrew, Greek and the modern European languages, though the medium of instruction remains the lingua franca: English, French, Portuguese or Spanish, as the case may be. For example, at the Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, Nigeria, Igbo language is taught by a priest who has doctorate in the same language.<sup>127</sup> No wonder, Okeke concludes: "If the government did half as much as the Church in language promotion efforts, vernacular languages would compete with modern languages in all matters of communication and cultural knowledge."<sup>128</sup>

### **Christianity, Indigenous Languages in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Challenges Ahead**

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<sup>125</sup> Vatican Council II, The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December, 1963), 118-119.

<sup>126</sup> Wendy Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 2000), 31.

<sup>127</sup> Bigard Memorial seminary, Enugu, <http://www.bigardenugu.org/lecturers.html>, accessed 25\10\2017.

<sup>128</sup> Okeke, "The Philosophy of Language Empowerment," 91.

Despite the various positive attempts listed above and others that Christianity has undertaken in the promotion of indigenous languages, there will also be need for improvement. To start with, theology is a function of the Church. And when the Church is involved, its theology is also directly, or indirectly, involved. The challenge thrown to the Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa is, in a way, a challenge thrown to the theologians of the same Churches. These theologians should, in the first place, try and pay a lot more attention to the use of vernaculars in the articulation of their thoughts. The time for measuring the degree of one's learning\formal education by how far one has forgotten one's indigenous language or is unable to speak the same is over. Speaking of one's particular language, and even writing in the same, despite the number of degrees one has got, does not dilute the importance and potency of the degrees acquired. Neither, does the opposite also hold true: Speaking and even writing the indigenous languages does not mean that one cannot acquire any degree, in any field, that one wishes to. Therefore, African theologians should learn how to sprinkle their writings with the vernacular or do such works entirely in the vernacular. Doing such in a language which they speak daily will surely help to bring out all the more the originality, vitality and profundity of their thoughts. The translation into English or any of the other 'foreign languages' of such works can come later. Of course, it will require hard work but such hard work has never killed! In fact, nobody who has gone through p'Bitek's *Song Lawino* would fail to feel the life, fire and vitality at the centre of the book. And that was a book he first wrote in his Acholi language and later translated into English.

Again, it was Evans-Pritchard who had made the observation: "Translating the Bible into an African language is a tough enough task, and one is lost in amazement at the naivety of people who add to it by trying to translate also the English hymnal with all its cultural idioms, metaphors and nuances into a language which has quite different ones."<sup>129</sup> And truly, it is, but then the Church should not allow itself to be overwhelmed by this reality. Admittedly, the bible has been translated into many indigenous languages in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is said that as at 2015, out of the 2000 languages and about 3,000 dialects in Africa as a whole, the bible in full

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<sup>129</sup> Adrian Hastings, "The Choice of Words for Christian Meanings in Eastern Africa," Adrian Hastings, *African Catholicism: Essays in Discovery* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 98-121, 98.

or just the New Testament or portions of it, has been translated into over 800.<sup>130</sup> And thanks, of course, to the missionaries and then a good number of Africans who, of late, have taken the bull by the horns following in the footsteps of the missionaries of old. Here, mention must be made of John Mbiti who “became the first African to translate the Bible singlehandedly from the original languages [Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek rather the European languages] into an African language.” He actually translated the Greek New Testament into Kikamba, his mother tongue in Kenya.<sup>131</sup> While all these are commendable, one thinks that the Church in Sub-Saharan Africa expects more from her biblical scholars, theologians, sociologists, linguists, philologists, etc.

But then, there is something more interesting here. One thinks that the question now should not just be when the bible will be translated into the remaining indigenous languages in Sub-Saharan Africa, but instead when adequate use will be made of the same bible already translated into the other languages. This is because not too many Christians generally and theologians in particular make use of these bibles. Preference is most of the times shown for the bible in English and in the other ‘foreign languages’. Mbiti captures the scenario better:

African theologians are taking the Bible seriously at an academic level. I do not know, however, to what extent they are actually utilizing translations of the bible in the African languages. Many of them are, in any case, well versed in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, in addition to European languages like Latin, English, French and German. We are forced by circumstances to write our theology in essentially ‘foreign languages’ which, for some of us, are working languages, at least in academic matters. Serious theological research and output in African languages (at least in those into which the bible has been translated) still awaits to be done.<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, Uzochukwu Njoku raises some critical questions: “The New Catechism of the Catholic Church was published in 1994. The apostolic constitution empowering the publication of this catechism indicated among other things that this catechism ‘is meant to encourage and assist in the writing of new local catechisms, which take into account various situations and cultures while carefully preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic doctrine.’ When will this adaptation be made to our local culture and realities? Is it not heartrending that many years

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. John Mbiti, “Main Features of Twenty-first Century Christianity in Africa,” *Missio Africanus Journal of African Missiology* 1, 2(January 2016): 72–88, 74.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>132</sup> John Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 60-61.

have passed since the publication of this new catechism, yet there is no translation of this catechism to indigenous languages not to talk of adapting the catechism to local cultures and realities?”<sup>133</sup> While it is accepted that ever since that observation was made some years back, some steps have been made, one thinks as well here that more needed to be done. But just like in the case of the translation of the bible into the indigenous languages and the poor use to which they are made, here, also, not too good use is often made of the few catechisms, or portions of the same, that have been translated into the vernacular. Often, preference is made over them for those written in ‘foreign languages’.

Be that as it may, the need to promote the indigenous languages will equally challenge the Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa, on at least, two other scores. One, in the Church’s involvement in the school apostolate. In these Church-run schools, a way should be found in which students are to be asked, especially in places this is not yet done, to learn their own mother tongues or those of the places in which they live and are at home with. Of course, this does not mean that the use of the English language or any other ‘lingua franca’ in Sub-Saharan Africa will be jettisoned. No. But the emphasis here is necessary for a reason. Children tend to learn better when taught in their mother tongues or at least, when that is not forgotten entirely in the act of teaching them. “The use of alien languages”, notes Kodjo, “to express views about African existential conditions not only distorts African realities and diverts attention from what gives a sense to them but it prevents Africans from having a fair and reliable information on the same realities. Education demands that the language of its instruction be fully accessible to its students and be rooted in their cultural ideological and political development.”<sup>134</sup> Secondly, the Churches in their school apostolate should endeavour to accord respect and due place all the more to those teaching the same indigenous languages. The situation where some of these teachers are rated low or disrespected by the school authorities, colleagues and even students should not be

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<sup>133</sup> Uzochukwu J. Njoku, “Catholic Social Teaching and Nigerian Concerns,” *The Nigerian Journal of Theology* 16, (June 200):7-25, 18.

<sup>134</sup> Cited in Justin Nnadozie Ekennia, *African Modernity Crisis* (Benin: Barloz Publishers, 2000), 221. And it is equally this that the teacher that Nwamgba met at the Anglican Mission school in Adichie’s short story, “The Headstrong Historian”, insinuated. Adichie writes: “What dissuaded her completely about the school, however, was that the instruction was done in Igbo. Nwamgba asked the first teacher why. He said that of course students were taught English – he held up the English primer – but children learned best in their own language, and the children in the white men’s land were taught in their own language, too.” (208).

allowed. Students are usually observant. They are influenced by what they see. When they see such acts of disrespect, they often conclude that they do not want to study such courses so as not to finish up as this or that teacher\lecturer. Hence, an opportunity is lost for one who may have been the “expected messiah”, the one whose contributions would have set the language in question on the path of greater growth.

Related to the foregoing is the fact that the Churches should also help create awareness among their members, especially the parents, for two reasons. One, for parents to let their children and wards who show some flair for the indigenous languages to study them up to the universities and colleges. Admitted that there is widespread unemployment, there is the possibility, however, of finding job here. Secondly, the same parents - and they should do this before what is said above - ought to see it as their duty to teach their children and wards these languages. They should not be at the vanguard of what is often observed nowadays when parents gloat over the fact that their kids cannot speak their mother tongues. Often, such parents forget that such an attitude is pregnant with implications. Yes, a Sumer legend has it, thus: “‘What became of the Black People of Sumer?’ the traveler asked the old man, ‘for ancient records show that the people of Sumer were Black. What happened to them?’ ‘Ah,’ the old man sighed. ‘They lost their history, so they died.’”<sup>135</sup> And it is just the same way a people die when they lose their language, when children and the younger ones are not taught by elders the language of their people. Reason: Language is an egg containing the yolk of a people’s identity. According to Joseph Ki-Zerbo, it is like:

a bank or museum in which, over the centuries, each ethnic group has deposited all it has built up and accumulated in the way of mental and material tools, memories and resources of the imagination. By means of an in-depth and wide-ranging study of the language(both infra-and supra-linguistic), through religious documents, fable and legal customs, medical and educational prescriptions, instructions in craft and technical skills, it is possible to uncover the entire grid pattern underlying a culture or civilization: how they behave in society, what their attitude is to animals, plants and nature in general, their conceptions of war, love, the hereafter, human dignity, and so on.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Iam A. Freeman, *Seeds of Revolution: A Collection of Axioms, Passages and Proverbs, Vol. 2* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2014), 249.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph Ki-Zerbo, ed., *General History of Africa: Methodology and African Prehistory* (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1990), 94.

When that egg is broken and the yolk is damaged, - or, even, to use Ki-Zerbo's own metaphor - when that bank or museum is invaded and plundered of its valuables - the people is usually left without any identity. They simply become ruthlessly rootless. And what a tragedy that would be! No wonder, the observation of William Sharp, writing as Fiona Macleod, about the Gaelic race would also hold true, here: "The last tragedy, and the saddest, is when the treasured language dies slowly out, when winter falls upon the legendary remembrance of a people."<sup>137</sup> And rather than allowing things to get to this point, there are two models that may be followed. One, biblical, and the other, historical. Biblically, the story of Paul has something interesting to say, here. Paul, a Jew, was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 21:37-39). That is to say that he was a Jew in diaspora, a Hellenistic Jew, a Greek-speaking Jew. But in his letter to the Philippians, he had called himself, "A Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil.3:5). What does that mean? He was trying to emphasize here that though he was a Jew in diaspora, he was, however, that kind of Jew in diaspora, who, though he spoke Greek, did not forget, at the end of the day, the language of his people: Hebrew\Aramaic.<sup>138</sup> And that is why in Acts 21:40, one is told: "So Paul standing on the steps, motioned to the people with his hand and, when they were silent, he began to speak to them in Hebrew." The other model, the historical one, is offered by the liberated African slaves in Sierra Leone. It is said that while their children learnt English at School and used it in Church, that did not stop the same children from speaking the languages of their parents with fluency<sup>139</sup> - of course, they could not but have been tutored by their parents!

Finally, the Church is missionary. What has been said here so far challenges also her missionaries of today. Some of these missionaries are still coming into Africa from outside. They are thus challenged to try to learn the language of the places they are posted to. But there is a change that has occurred in the last few decades in the missionary landscape. A reverse kind of missions! Today, missionaries are being sent out of Africa to even the birthplaces of the missionaries that evangelized Africa. This could be called "Mission ad gentes." But there is also

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<sup>137</sup> Cited in Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154.

<sup>138</sup> William Barclay, *The Mind of Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 18. See also, Mireille Brisebois, *Saint Paul: Introduction to St. Paul and His Letters* (Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1986), 16.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Andrew F. Walls, "Christianity and the Language Issue," in Andrew F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2017), <https://books.google.com.ng/books>, Accessed 19\10\2017.

what could be called “Mission inter gentes” whereby missionaries from one country in Africa are sent to another African country and from one place to another within a given African country. Such missionaries, each, in his\her capacity, are challenged to try to know the languages of these places. The importance of stressing this hinges on something. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke presents Paul, a Hellenistic Jew, as pointed out above, as he addressed the Jews in Hebrew (Acts 21:40). And because they were so addressed, the Jews could not but become quiet and listened to him: “Brothers and fathers, listen to what I have to say to you in my defence. When they heard him speaking to them in Hebrew, they become more quiet. So he went on.” (Acts 22:1). And that is the way it is here, also. People tend to listen all the more to missionaries when they speak to them, or even, try to speak to them, in their native languages. Hence, Mandela could not have been any more right when he said: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”<sup>140</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The work evaluated the fate of the indigenous languages in Sub-Saharan Africa following their contact with Christianity. It found out that true to some of the accusations levelled against Christianity, some of these languages did not fare better during the time of the missionaries. Three factors often occasioned this. One, a certain superiority complex that made them look down on anything African, including the language. Two, a complex supported by a then prevailing sociology, philosophy, and, indeed, scholarship, that denied Africans of any civilization, religion and morality. Three, an almost total embrace by some of them of the conditions provided by some colonial administrations that saw them looking for an “easier way” to manage the colonized\natives. But beyond all these, however, the work was able to establish that the same missionaries did contribute a lot to the evolution of these indigenous languages. Not only by creating their orthographies, but also their dictionaries and grammar. Today, Sub-Saharan African Christianity, a child of the missionary Christianity, continues to champion the cause of these indigenous languages. Not only does it speak, preach, catechize and celebrate its sacraments in them, it also conducts its “extra-ecclesial” intercourse with the wider society in the

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<sup>140</sup> Cited in Micheal Le Cordeur, “Mandela and Afrikaans: From Language of the Oppressor to Language of Reconciliation,” in *Nelson Mandela: Comparative Perspectives of his Significance for Education*, ed. Crain Soudien (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2017), 45-61, 54.

same. All these to the extent that it is often said, not without justification, that the positive health of some of these indigenous languages today is only thanks to the wealth of support received from Christianity.

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**Pre-marital pastoral counselling/go *Laa* on issues of gender and human sexuality:**

**Naomi//Laban Showers in Gaborone, Botswana**

**By**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to assess pre-marital counseling offered by the women during Naomi/Laban showers. The study will also assess the content of counseling about gender roles and responsible sex in Christian marriages in Gaborone, Botswana. The paper proposes the use of African Pastoral counseling in providing premarital counseling. This theory is suitable for Naomi/Laban bridal showers because it helps focus premarital counseling on issues that affect their counselees (Barlow, 1999:6). It also offers an opportunity for preventing marital conflicts and marriage failure (Antoine, 2012). The paper utilized the data collected from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2016 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2017 in Gaborone and its surrounding villages of Kanye, Tlokweng, Mochudi and Ramotswa. It aims at examining how Naomi-Laban showers might offer effective premarital counseling to couples intending to marry and their in-laws for the purpose of building strong marriages.

**Key words:** Sexuality, gender and age good focus and interesting questions

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**Introduction**

Research conducted in Botswana reveals that divorce is on the rise (Ahmed & Letamo, 1989 and Bakadzi, 2015). Chief Justice Maruping Dibotelo says divorce is a matter at the heart of the fabric of the society and indeed the cohesion of the family unit (Dibotelo 2017). He revealed that 1, 301 divorce cases were registered at the High Court in the period between January and December, 2016, of which 1, 435 cases, including those carried forward from 2015 were completed compared to the 971 cases recorded in 2012 (The Midweek Sun, Wednesday, March 11, 2011). From the months of January and February 2011, 200 cases have so far been registered at the High Court. The High Court Deputy Registrar Jacob Manzunzu indicated that in total they are 40 901 cases from 2006 to 2011(The Midweek Sun, Wednesday, March 11, 2011). Divorce is growing at an alarming rate and in the process, impacting the lives of children negatively. According to Bakadzi (2015),

Throughout the world, divorce continues to ravage homes both inside and outside of the church, and the number of divorce cases is increasing at an alarming rate each year. Couples face many challenges to building and sustaining a strong

marriage. The overwhelming outcomes of divorce do not only affect the parties in the relationship but also the children involved, friends, the general well-being of both families, the church members and the society as a whole (p. 272).

This is a worrying experience to the people of Botswana especially given that just like in many societies, marriage in Botswana is considered a life-long and consecrated union. The need for premarital counseling has been recognized by churches and family therapists for years. Several denominations have included instructions to pastors about the necessity of preparing couples for marriage, but detailed steps to follow are not provided. The wording in denominational policies is vague as to the purpose and content of premarital counseling (Barlow, 1999:3).

Naomi-Laban showers were designed to provide space for married people to interact and provide pre-marital counseling to the new couple and parents to accept their children in their families. The first step of Naomi-Laban bridal showers is to inform the couple preparing for marriage about what to expect in marriage followed by discourses on in-law relations with their children and as parents. The pastoral pre-marital counselors, motivated by their experience in marriage and the Christian faith, address parents and the premarital couple publicly and emphasize on reconciliation, especially in areas where there are conflicts. During Naomi-Laban showers, pre-marital counseling that is done by elderly women whom most of them have never gone to class to learn about it. But have enough experience that enables them able to give guidance to others. Indeed, the church has a responsibility to prepare couples to build strong marriages from the beginning, then mend broken ones. Barlow (1993:3) indicated that,

Christians are slightly more likely to experience divorce than non-Christians. In fact, fundamentalist Christians have a higher percentage of being divorced than the others. In light of these statistics, the church has a responsibility to help prevent the increasing number of divorces. A preventative measure which seems to be overlooked in today's churches is premarital counseling.

Premarital counseling is a service offered to individuals engaged for marriage. This paper focuses on pre-marital pastoral counseling services offered by Pentecostal Pastoral Counselors during Naomi/Laban showers. It can be observed that Pastoral Counselors do more marriage counseling than other helping professionals. They work with District commissioners in Botswana to provide marriage counseling as well as premarital counseling. Just like most of the African

societies, Naomi-Laban showers counselors view marriage as not a two people affair, but as an inter-family affair.

### **Methodology**

The study used both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to investigate the phenomenon in detail within the participants' own context (Kombo and Tromp 2006). Quantitative data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire from individuals who were attending the different showers. Quantitative research involves the use of methodological techniques that represent the human experience in numerical categories, sometimes referred to as statistics. Conversely, qualitative research provides detailed description and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience. However, there is much overlap between the two, both in practice and theory (Marvasti, 2004:7).

Data from Naomi/ Laban showers was collected from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2016 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2017 in the capital city Gaborone and its semi urban villages of Kanye, Tlokweng, Mochudi and Ramotswa. Altogether 10 Naomi//Laban showers were attended involving 145 participants. The methods of data collection were mainly, questionnaires, interviews, document review and observation. Data for this study were collected through in depth-open –ended- individual interviews which took approximately thirty minutes per person. The interview guides were employed in order to ensure that the same general areas of information were collected from each respondent as proposed by Turner (2010).

The idea of using both interviews and observations was meant to allow the two methods to complement each other. The informants were the organizers of the showers, the recipients of the shower and the people who attended Naomi/Laban showers. Data gathered through interviews allowed for the direct interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer. This facilitates data collection, because the researcher can clear up obscurities and ask for more information if necessary. The researchers used a field notebook to comment and describe the respondents' unique behaviors. A questionnaire was also used to collect data. The questionnaire is a self-report data collection tool that each research participant fills out as part of a research study. The method is suitable for getting quantitative and qualitative information, depending on how the questions are phrased (Turner, 2010:34). Researchers made use of open ended questions in order to give respondents the opportunity to answer in their own words and to express their thoughts and ideas.

Researchers started preparing for data analysis in the first quarter of 2017 with statistical analysis through using SPSS. Statistical data for the three showers was analyzed and presented in tables, pie charts and graphs. In the case of interview data, the interviews were transcribed and stored electronically and on paper. The researchers analyzed the data and identified themes that emerged from it. The next section deals with data analysis and discussions of themes that emerged from the data.

### Findings and Discussion

**Table 1: Age of participants**

	Frequency	Percent
1. 20-25	2	3.0
2. 26-30	2	3.0
3. 31-35	4	6.1
4. 36-40	2	3.0
5. 41-45	11	16.7
6. 46-50	19	28.8
7. 50+	26	39.4
Total	66	100.0

Table 1 above demonstrates that the majority of people who attend showers are elderly women, above the age of 41-50. The youth are low in number, reflecting only 3% compared to 16.7+% of the elderly folks. Age variable is thus brought in so that the researcher may assess whether it had contributed to varying views on maintaining a healthy marriage. Among the varying ages, this research aims at establishing who were mostly vocal during counseling in and who were most liberal in the age groups. During Naomi-Laban showers, main counselors were elderly women and were mainly the ones who were contributing during the counseling sessions.

**Table 2: Gender of participants**

	Frequency	Percent
Male	7	10.6
Female	59	89.4
Total	66	100.0

Table 2 shows that 7 (10.6%) respondents were males while 59 (89.4%) were females. This shows that Naomi-Laban showers are female dominated. Men and women were interviewed in order to establish whether gender plays a role in the differing views of maintaining a healthy marital relationship. Only 7 men took part in the research because showers of this nature are known as a safe space of women in Botswana. However, the Naomi/ Laban is a space for parents of premarital couples. It invites and welcomes both men and women even though men do not come. This is problematic though, since men have a potential in guiding their children to have strong marriages who are exemplary both culturally and biblically.

*Theme 1: Naomi-Laban showers bring people together*

In the interview, participants were asked to explain in detail the purpose of Naomi- Laban showers in urban space. One of the participants responded, “*to build a relationship between daughter in law and mother in law.*” The other one mentioned that the showers are supposed to develop a healthy relationship between a premarital couple and both of their parents. The results obtained from this study indicate that Naomi- Laban showers bring people together. They mould or build up the community as well as for families and the attendants to know each other. It is important for people to come together, share their experiences and stories in order to help the uniting families and the couple to avoid marital conflicts. Naomi-Laban showers give an opportunity for parents of premarital couples to gain knowledge on how to avoid being main causes of problems in their children’s’ marital conflicts. Premarital couples are also oriented on how have healthy relations with their parents for the sake of peace and unity.

During Ledumadumane shower, the first counsellor reflected on Genesis 2: 24 (Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh) with an attempt of curbing conflicts between mothers in law and daughters in law. While reflecting on this Genesis text, it was advised that a couple, “*should stick together like superglue and should be inseparable. The word of God says they are bound together and the two shall*

*become one.*” Parents were also advised to let go of their children in another shower at Phakalane. This relational pattern facilitates couples’ independence from their respective parents. Notwithstanding this, counsellors also emphasized on co- independence in the above shower, *“They will honor you as they will come back to you to seek wisdom.”* With this advice, Naomi/Laban counselors in Gaborone were trying to cultivate a healthy relationship between a mother in law and a premarital couple. As an elder and as an experienced person, a mother in law should be able to guide, support and counsel her children.

Moreover, in Mochudi, a semi urban area, the counselors out rightly emphasized on the need for close and mutual relationship between parents in law and their children in law. A mother in law was advised, *“You should go with her wherever you go. Introduce her as your daughter not as a daughter in law.”* A daughter in law was advised to cling to her mother in law and a mother in law was advised to embrace her as her daughter. In reflecting on both urban and semi urban showers, it could be concluded that a mother in law is the key to either successful or failing or marriages. There are however conflicting opinions from counselor on how parents in law should relate with their children. Other counselors recommend the independence model while others recommend the co-independence model as models for sustainable marriage. This is the area that needs to be attended by Naomi- Laban counselors. There is a need for the facilitation of consistency across all Naomi- Laban showers in Botswana. Ampim (2003) advises that premarital pastoral counsellors should appreciate that the African worldview entails interdependence, collective sharing and survival. This is one aspect not carefully and thoroughly threshed during Naomi- Laban showers.

In traditional Setswana context, one should be informed or influenced by traditions, customs, beliefs, morals, values and practices of the community. Therefore, counselling approaches should be in line with socio-cultural influences like communalism for it to be efficient.

***Theme 2: Showers are important because they reflect Botho/Ubuntu***

The findings show that the majority of informants think that Naomi-Laban showers are important because they reflect Botho/Ubuntu. Botho/ Ubuntu is affiliated with the maxim that “a person is a person through other persons.” Mbiti says, “I am because we are and since we are therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1988, 108). In Botswana, the concept of Botho derives its expression in Setswana saying “*motho ke motho ka batho*” which translates into “a human being is a human being because of other human beings” (Gaie and Metz, 2010:273). A reflection on the concept of

*Botho/Ubuntu* underscores that the main objective of an African is to live a life of harmony with humanity. Given that the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic seeks to build positive relationship in the community and to empower all members to live in full human dignity, it is to be seen in the preparation and arrival of a new daughter-in-law and son-in-law.

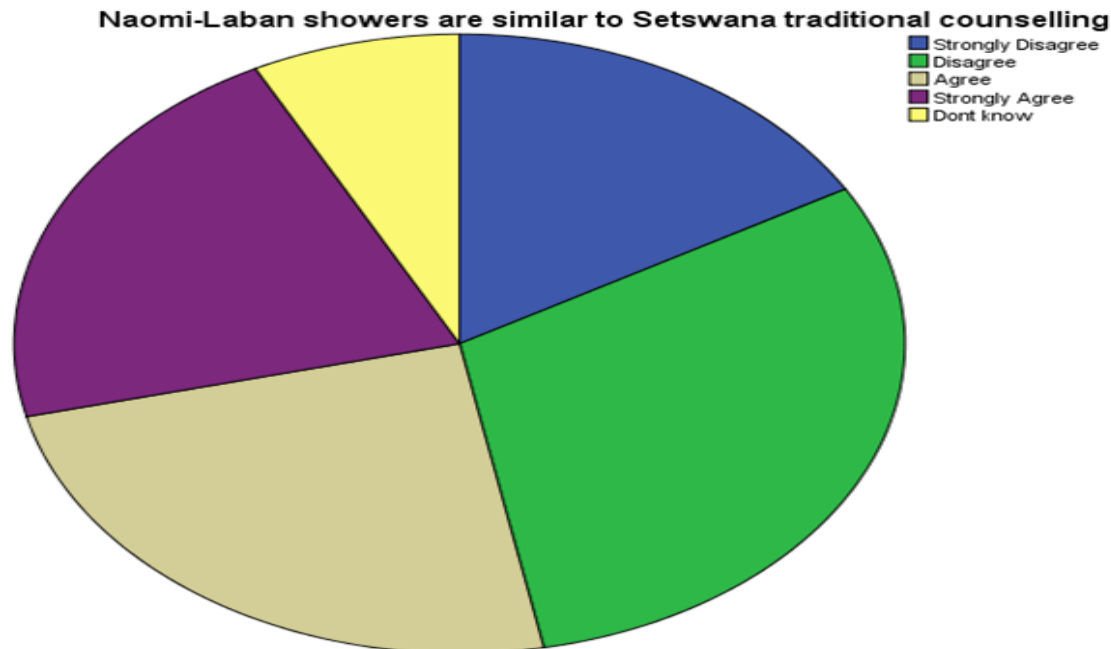
*Botho/ Ubuntu* acknowledge interconnectedness, interrelatedness and harmoniousness of human beings (Venter, 2004:156). A community that has *Botho* emphasizes on the need for one to be aware of his/her responsibility towards the other (Beets and le Grange 2005). *Botho/ Ubuntu* also connote principles of sharing and caring for one another (Ramose, 2002). This implies that everyone has a duty to his/ her family. This includes many extended members, such as in-laws, uncles and cousins (Gyekye, 1997; Masolo, 2004). During this age of economic downturn, the Naomi- Laban group found it imperative to work together to lessen socio-economic problems collectively as a family of God. In the interview, the respondents were asked, “What is expected from those who attend?” In summary, the respondents answered that those who attend are expected to offer moral, physical, spiritual, material and financial support. Indeed, the showers promoted socio-economic activities that combine social support with economic support to reflect *Botho* as well as building the community together. The people showed solidarity towards the other by being there for those who are about to get married; they came with presents; and offered money and counselled those who were about to unite as a new big family. Some of those presents were to be used during the actual wedding while other presents were to be used by the newlyweds in their family.

Apart from material support, the informants also indicated that the showers offer moral support and recommended counselling as a tool to building new couples and ensuring harmony, peace and acceptance of new couples with their in-laws.

***Theme 3: Naomi-Laban showers are similar to Setswana traditional counseling***

Informants stated that the Naomi-Laban counseling approach by facilitators borrows positive values from Setswana traditional culture and the Bible as a whole. Refer to the chart below:

**Chart 1:**



***Theme 4: Prerequisites for Counseling during showers***

Naomi//Laban facilitators-counsellors indicated that their approach to premarital counselling is different from the Setswana practice that was strictly conducted by aunts/*rakgadi* and *malome*, who would tell the daughter-in law that *monna gaa botswe kwa a tswang kgona ke selepe oa adimanwae* (you should not ask your husband about his where about. He is like an axe that can be shared). According to Naomi//Laban premarital counselling, they underline consultation and transparency as ingredients to a happy marriage. They argue that the husband is not an axe for sharing, faithfulness to marriage is encouraged for all god-fearing couples.

***Theme 5: Interference of siblings in marriages***

Counsellors during Naomi/ Laban showers deliberated more on the interference of siblings in marriages. One of the counsellors in Phakalane suggested that it is the responsibility of the marrying couple to protect each other from any harm, from either side. It was advised that a woman should have a relationship with her partners' siblings and parents. In that way she would reduce the amount of tension between her and her new family. One of the organizers, who was the first counsellor during Kanye shower read Numbers 12:1-8 to advice against interfering in sibling's marriages. "Siblings, do not be like Marriam and Aaron. You should not interfere in the marriage of your brother. Accept this woman as one of you." According to her interpretation,



Miriam and Aaron attacked Moses for the wife he married. God is the one who created marriage and no one should be against marriage. Miriam was consequently cursed with leprosy for interfering in her brother's marriage. The same text was used in Gaborone West to advise against the interference of both parents' laws and siblings in a new marriage.

***Theme 6: Blaming the mother in-law***

All showers generally focus blame on the mother in-law than on the father in law and siblings. When dealing with this kind of relational problem, Olutola (2012:12) suggests that it is important to understand that the behaviour patterns of the mother in-law had developed overtime therefore cannot be easily changed. The mother in-law should also accept that her son is with a new woman and she should just let him go instead of being over protective, she should cooperate with the daughter in-law for the good of her son.

The above suggestion holds water because in as much as people have common problems that may be addressed in a communal setting, there are some problems that are uniquely to the counselee. Therefore, it is important for counsellors to understand and address their counsees according to their needs. Pastoral counselling should offer an opportunity for guidance and healing. Knowing people's individual problems and adequately addressing may consequently guide and heal the mother in law who has problems that may lead to conflicts within her children's marriage.

***Theme 7: Sexuality, gender, age factors in Naomi//Laban counseling***

Naomi/ Laban counsellors discussed how a pre-marital couple should relate as sexual beings.

The term sexuality provides for a comprehensive understanding:

A central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (*WHO, 2006a*).

From this definition, it is clear that sexuality has to do with diverse combinations of physical, emotional, and relational interactions or how people express themselves as sexual beings within the concepts of biological sex, gender identity and presentation. Gender identities and roles make up a small component of sexuality.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines gender as “socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women” (WHO, 2017). Thus, males and females are considered as sex categories, while masculine and feminine are gender categories (WHO, 2017). Given that the definition of gender includes the types of behaviours that are deemed to be culturally and socially appropriate for men and women, it would seem likely that gender, or sex-roles could be linked to relational conflict.

Naomi-Laban premarital counselling facilitates conversations on gender expectations in an attempt to facilitate conflict resolution between parents, siblings and the premarital couple. In a traditional Setswana society, women had been held responsible for their husbands, children, parents, their husband’s parents or any other dependent member of their family. After marriage, the daughter in-law moves to her husbands’ home, where she is expected to take care of the household and caring tasks of course in collaboration with other women of the family if they are there (Poiret, 1996).

Some women had been culturally conditioned to think that being a daughter in-law means to work, cook, wash their clothes, and do other household chores for the in-laws. The family of the daughter in-law would come in to examine if their daughter is pleasing the in-laws and if she is doing what is expected of her. “Failure to do this may lead to divorce or polygamy” (Sabalele 2010:50).

Different speakers during Naomi- Laban showers advised against a tendency of abusing daughters in law. During Gaborone West Naomi- Laban shower event, one of the counselors advised the mother in law, “Do not treat her as your maid but as your daughter. She was advised to treat her daughter in law as her own daughter. The counselors emphasized that the Godly instruction is that both man and wife should cling together as one body. This biblical instruction as extracted from Genesis 2:24 is against any form of abuse by in-laws. In trying to address this problem, all mothers in law were advised to start calling their daughters’ in law their daughters instead of calling them *ngwetsi* (daughter in law).

Genesis 2:24 was also used at Phakalane by the first counselor to advise against abuse of one’s daughter in law. She mentioned that most people in Botswana are deliberately biased in their understanding of this text. They think the text means that a woman should go and join her in-law’s family where she is at most expected to do all chores in the family. She mentioned that

Batswana at most have a tendency of abusing their daughter's in law. They think having a daughter in-law is more like having a maid. She was also using the Bible to reconstruct the following Setswana song:

*Mmamosetsanyana* x2(Mother to the daughter)

*Sala o di bona tsa lapa la gago se ile seponono* (take care of the domestic chores in your home, the pretty lady is gone)

*Se ile, se ile* x2(She is gone, she is gonex2)

*Se ile, se ile se ile seponono* (She is gone, the pretty one is gone)

Although staying in a different world of modernization, some mothers' in-law may expect their daughters' in-law to serve them as per the expectations of the traditional Tswana society, possibly leading to strained relationships. Naomi-Laban premarital counsellors emphasizes, "*She is a valuable addition to the family, "A gift from God and should be welcomed wholeheartedly."* The same was said about a son in-law. Mothers-in-law were encouraged to take care of their daughters' in-law. They were advised to *cut the chain*. This means that they were not to revenge on their daughter in law for they suffered from their mothers in law. This form of abuse must stop with them.

One of the counsellors mentioned, "*Sego se a tlhokomelwa. Se a babalelwa.*" literally meaning, "*A calabash should be taken care of with protection.*" A calabash is a very important item in a Setswana traditional society. It could be used for different purposes including storing milk, drinking water and traditional beer and even for decoration.

*Picture 1: Sego sa Setswana (Setswana calabash) with traditional beer*



<https://www.google.co.bw/pictures>

Even though a calabash could be used for many purposes, it is a fragile item that can get broken. It should be taken care of because it is playing a major role in the family. It unites people in the family; the family can drink from the same calabash. It could be used for diverse purposes; life becomes easy at home. It is a beautiful item that could attract more attention and could please the eye yet fragile.

As indicated, a calabash could be used for different purposes. Just like a calabash, a woman has diverse roles; she serves her family her spouse as well as the professional world. She has greater emotional involvement in the lives of all of her dependents and is likely to be more emotionally affected than men (Kessler & McRae, 1984). This means that diverse caring networks may leave a woman vulnerable to stresses such as illness, unemployment and divorce.

Counselors in Kanye, another semi urban area, tried to address the above problem by performing a ritual of white shawl wearing. A white shawl was wrapped around the waist of a mother in law who was made to embrace her daughter in law. The facilitator recites, *“I put this white shawl around you – so that you receive Maduo with a pure, loving heart. Welcome Maduo, receive.”* Whiteness is a sign of purity. Therefore, a mother in law was advised to have a pure heart and receive her daughter in law with gladness.

At Phakalane, however, a mother in law was clothed with a blanket. *Go apesa mosadi kobo* (clothing a woman with a blanket) is a symbol of taking a vow of silence about one’s family matters. A mother in law was advised to learn to keep family secrets, not to share them with other people. Mothers were taught not to trust other people but God with their marital problems.

The picture below shows a woman dressing a mother of the groom to be with a shawl at Phakalane.

*Picture 2: A woman dressing a mother of the groom to be with a shawl at Phakalane.*



The narrator was reciting the following words as she was dressing her; -

*“O mmaagwe bana. Otlile go nna nkuku wa bana. Mme kang ya gago e tona, re go apesa tjale e gore ka ha teng ga tjale ena, diphiri tsa lelapa la ga Dipuo tse di tlisiwang ko wena di helela hela ka ha. Wena o bo o diisa kae? ko Modimong.”* This means that as a mother, you are going to mother all children and as a mother of all, you will be loaded with lots of secrets of those that you are mothering including your grandchildren. You should take all those secrets to God. Therefore, wrapping the shawl or gathering it around her shoulder and locking it through a safety pin (*Sekopelo*) is a symbol of taking a vow of silence especially on the matters of her family. Women are responsible for holding the family together, just like a shawl being gathered around her shoulder. They are expected to develop very strong relationships with their children and other family members and to maintain unity.

Therefore, they should develop a mature character. The Ledumadumane shower placed more emphasis on the change of character, the marital bride was advised to be humble and have a godly character. In another instance, Kgalemang (personal communication; 06/05/2017) reported that during Naomi-Laban showers at Kanye, women made it clear that a woman who had gone through shawl wearing and pinning should *rutubala/imamela*. *Rutubala* meaning relaxed or taking it easy or be calm and collected at all times. This means that as someone who has the responsibility of handling everyone’s problems, she should be calm at all times, not only for the sake playing her role effectively, but also that should be seen in her character.

McGoldrick mentions that as the keeper of family secrets, a woman, whether, as a mother in-law or as a mother is often put in the position of talking about the issues of other members of the family and then blamed again when things wrong. She is likely to be blamed because she is emotionally attached to each and everyone one of the family. When something goes wrong, even if it has nothing to do with her, she remains a scapegoat. She therefore remains “a natural arena for displacing tensions in the couple or in the family of origin of each spouse” (2005:245).

This means that most couples are more likely to abuse their mothers emotionally. They run to them when they need help and blame them when things go wrong. Mothers in-law are not always guilty parties; they are also exposed to emotional abuse by their children. A mother is normally regarded as a confidant but she is human after all. Some of the secrets may slip out of her mouth during the process of counselling when she attends to one of her children’s problems. As the family’s bag of secrets, she is exposed to more networks stresses and is much more emotionally affected (Kessler and Mc Rae, 1984).

Therefore, to avoid this pitfall, as per the advice of Naomi women, she should take it to the Lord in prayer. Being able to be emotionally attached to members of one’s family is a maternal gift; gifts that only mothers possess. This is one characteristic that could give a woman a central position of power. This degree of power could be reflected in the alliances mothers often build with children against strict fathers who are perceived to be lacking in understanding of emotional issues. This is one area that was not touched during Naomi-Laban premarital counselling sessions primarily because men hardly attended these showers. The topic of mothers having emotional attachment to their children was addressed across all showers. Women were advised to let go of their children in order to avoid being the cause of conflict. The Naomi-Laban women also advised the marrying couple not to be extremely close to or at a great distance from either family of origin. The couple should always address each other’s emotional needs, depending on external sources may create more marital problems or conflicts.

It could be argued that women are realizing how inequalities in power structure limit the options of women for the rest of their lives (Dowling, 1996). This awareness may give a sense of liberation to women in marital relationships. Some of the practices/concepts that are reconstructed through Naomi-Laban premarital pastoral counselling are gender roles and the traditional societal expectations of daughters in law.

During Naomi-Laban pre-marital pastoral counselling session at Phakalane, the second counsellor of the day used John 4:16-18 in an attempt to address sex within marriage. This is basically an account of a Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at a well of water. Jesus and the encounter with the Samaritan woman, exposed/revealed her lifestyle of marital or sexually intimate sin and disregard, and imparted His message of hope for effectively changing her life for the better.



**Figure 1: John 4: 16-18**

<https://www.google.com/search?q=a+woman+at+the+well> (Retrieved on 09/05/2017)

During counselling at Phakalane, a vagina was likened to a well and drinking from a well was figurative language used for sexual intercourse. While advocating for loyalty and against multiple sexual relationships, the counsellor was using figurative language mainly because traditional African cultures do not verbalize taboo subjects like sex, disease and sexuality. One of the counsellors said that the well must be kept clean and safe; there should be one person to drink from her well (advising the premarital bride). Other counsellors including the mother to the bride to be also used an image of well to address issues of sex in marriage. It was advised against the misuse of the well. Even though it is not clear how this image of a well is related to sex, it is only clear that the message behind the text underlines the need to abstain from sexual immorality.

Moreover, one of the counselors during Naomi/Laban showers at Gaborone West referred to 1 Corinthians 6 in addressing issues of sex in marriage and faithfulness. She emphasized that the body of the wife is to the husband and the body of the husband is to the wife. The premarital



couple was advised not to abuse their bodies. It was advised, “Her body is yours and his body is yours. Take care of your bodies for one another.”

The latter shower indeed came up with an image of equality in sexuality in order to develop sexually gratifying partnership relationships. McGoldrick advises that counselors should do away with the usage of images of sexuality that are to do with a dominant and a submissive female. Couples should be freed from gender stereotypes by counselors (2005: 243). Moreover, couples should share the experience of sexual pleasure and gratification. Dominionian (2014) asserts that men and women should give themselves to one another. This means that there should be ultimate mutual devotion in all aspects of the couple’s live. Human sexuality by nature is communal. Nelson and Longfellow define human sexuality as the blend of emotions, passion, behaviors, and physical involvements of human beings related to their sexual nature (1994: xiv). Human beings are sexual beings and only express their sexuality with the other.

*Theme 8: Showers and the exclusion/marginalization of LGBTIQs*

Naomi-Laban counselors only talked about above issues within heterosexual relationships. A second counselor during the Phakalane shower even used the Sodom and Gomorrah story in Genesis 18:16-19:29 to instruct against homosexual tendencies and not looking back. A daughter in law was advised not to look back where she comes from and let go of her history. Green (2012:157) defines homosexuality as a relational and sexual orientation towards a member of the same sex. Naomi-Laban women were rather exclusive in their dealings on this matter and did not appreciate the possibility of having homosexual people amongst their midst, other people, even those who are living in heterosexual relationships are not necessarily heterosexual. They are only claiming to be heterosexual because the Church in which they want to belong to is against homosexuality.

Halpern argues that sexuality is a cultural production. He maintains that sexuality is determined and must conform to the expectations of a society. He says, “Masculinity is the aggregate combining the congruent functions of penetration, activity, dominance and social precedence [while] femininity signifies penetrability, passivity, submission and social subordination” (Halpern, 1990:130). It could therefore be maintained that as much as Naomi-Laban showers intend to reconstruct culture for the benefit of women, they should even advocate for the inclusion of all sexes and genders. *Botho/Ubuntu* advocates for respect of human dignity,



community and oneness, liberation and justice as well as the assessment of our relationships for the sake of harmony (Dube, 2009:202).

We learn that each person is an image of the Lord who proclaims that “as you have done unto the least of these you have done unto me.” (Mt 25:40) In other words, there is an apophatic dimension to each person whose real being is “hid with Christ in God” (Co. 3:3) and ultimately remains beyond the experience of the counselor. Therefore, Naomi-Laban counselors could be advised against the use of exclusive language during their sessions and rather to use a holistic inclusive approach in their counseling. Counseling is pastoral if it respects and appreciates the complexity and uniqueness of each person.

***Theme 9: Ruth portrays an ideal mother in law – daughter in law relationship?***

The book of Ruth was used across all showers in an attempt to cultivate the spirit of love, tolerance and unity between mothers in law and daughters in law. One of the facilitators during Naomi- Laban bridal showers at Block 6 used the Book of Ruth as a resource for mother-in law relations. She underlined that although Naomi is the main character, the book’s attention focuses on Ruth as a real daughter in law. In Ruth 1:16-18

*...Entreat me not to leave you or return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there I will be buried...And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.*

Using the above text, Naomi- Laban counselors emphasized that Ruth has taken a decision to be in solidarity with her mother in law; she has a new identity and has renounced her native religious affiliation. They mentioned that it shows massive commitment to the welfare of the family she has joined in marriage above her personal interest. It takes so much sacrifice to leave to a foreign country especially if you are not sure of security. Naomi took that risk nevertheless. The story of Ruth is explicitly about a woman committing to another woman. As indicated, Naomi-Laban showers are female-centered events that are organized by women who are mainly married for other women and all that women care about as seen below: -

***Table 2: Counseling only given by married women***

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	21	31.8
Agree	16	24.2

Disagree	15	22.7
Strongly Disagree	9	13.6
Don't Know	5	7.6
Total	66	100.0

Table 37 shows that respondents agreed while 24 disagreed with the given statement. Marital status is therefore the variable that had been used to establish the main providers of premarital counseling during Naomi-Laban showers. This is an event where experienced married women share their experiences with other women for the sake of maintaining good relationship between a mother in law and a daughter in law. Naomi- Laban shower focuses on Naomi and Ruth to almost the exclusion of Laban. Their focus of Naomi and Ruth seeks to create a smooth and supportive relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. They are trained for solidarity rather than competition. This solidarity allows them to challenge patriarchy that socializes women to compete with each other. The mother in-law need not see the daughter-in-law as a threat. Rather, she should see her as her own daughter and place her on the pedestal of power in the home, community and her professional pursuit, to ensure her success.

However, in her commentary on Ruth, Levine notes that while Ruth vows to cling to her mother in-law forever, “Naomi never acknowledges her daughter-in-law’s fidelity (1992:80). Following Ruth’s speech, she is silent. Does this mean that Naomi does not commit herself to Ruth? Moreover, Naomi- Laban subvert patriarchy; by almost ignoring the man and his role in the new family and community. Naomi instructed her daughter-in-law to prepare herself (wash and anoint yourself, put on your best clothes) and follow Boaz to the threshing floor. She had to wait until he had eaten and was drunk and slept at his feet (Ruth 3:8-10). At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet was a woman! She answered I am Ruth, your servant; spread your clock over your servant, for you are next of kin. May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.

Ruth sleeping at the feet of Boaz indicates her proposition for his hand in marriage as the next of kin. The metaphor used, *spread your clock over me, for you are next of kin*, emphasizes Ruth’s determination to have sexual intercourse with Boaz, he congratulates her that “you have not gone after the young men, rich or poor.” This text places women in a position of power. With their

feminine gifts, women can choose whom they want to be with and can plan and initiate love making sessions. Indeed, Ruth could be said to be an ambassador of women in Botswana; she is a model of empowerment. She breaks the patriarchal taboos by asking Boas to marry her.

It takes a lot of courage to propose a man for marriage, not to mention for sexual intercourse. Women have to learn to take control of their bodies especially in this era of HIV and AIDS. This part was not threshed well during the showers. The elderly women avoided talking explicitly on sex and use symbols and imagery of ‘drinking water from one’s wells, digging one’s own well etc. Agrippa advocates for demystifying sex and breaking the silence on sexuality in the church and in theological domains (2003:45). This hidden communication, that is symbolic and metaphoric, requires facilitators to unpack it openly to provide effective counseling to couples preparing for their journey in marriage. Since sexuality, sexual pleasures, eroticism play a critical role in marriage, failure to open the lid is to provide ineffective counseling therapy. The cultural and spiritual barriers prohibiting any discussion on sexuality must be revised. Discussing sex, which is very much part of us, will go a long way in helping us grapple with the scourge of HIV/AIDS in a meaningful way (Agrippa 2003:6).

This could however, be the result of the age gap and generation gap between the youngsters getting into marriage and the elderly women who are custodians of culture and tradition, which treats speaking about sex a taboo especially in public or in church. If Naomi- Laban premarital counseling is to be effective, sessions should be in the language that today’s generation can relate with.

Survival tactics of Ruth and Naomi should also be emulated. Even single women who attend Naomi- Laban showers could learn a lot from those. Naomi and Ruth were not solely dependent on men for their survival. They walked alone for miles without any male protection; they managed to survive despite of their economic deprivation. All women, widowed, single, and married or transgendered therefore should emulate Naomi and Ruth during economic hardships. It is therefore imperative for Naomi – Laban counselors to go through exegetical training in order for them to be able to address all types of women who attend their showers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on a model called African Pastoral Counseling. The model appreciates that counselors should be able to understand human behavior from different perspectives including psychological, spiritual and from a Biblical point of view (Kanokanga, 2002; Hove, 2007).

According to Lartey, pastoral care giving should be provided by the African or Church community. The services that the Church community extends to the need should address all aspects of human existence, hence holistic. Moreover, pastoral care and counselling must be facilitated by the African community and extended family (1991:50). It is more structured and focused on a specifically articulated need or concern for the sake of harmony and peace in the community. According to Msomi, African Pastoral Counselling is concerned with “a quest for a liberation of the person himself or herself, as well as passionate zeal that others be liberated in Christ in their own context, instead of being enslaved in a Christianity that is not their own” (1992: 12). The model is effective because counselors are expected to be equipped spiritually to systematically follow the therapeutic procedure in dealing with the root cause of the problem towards problem solving. Counselors are also expected to know the Word of God and be able to interpret and recommend appropriate scriptural texts for each marital case. This is because the usage of biblical teachings may actually assist in the alleviation of human suffering; the teachings and narratives may address one’ existential challenges and problems (Schipani, 2003). In addition, counselors should be contextual; in an African context, they should be able to appreciate the interconnectedness and the interrelatedness of human beings. In that regard, counselors should facilitate that understanding and instill it in their counselees (Mtetwa, 1996; Ackermann, 1993). This is the area that is missing in the teachings of the showers.

### **Conclusion**

Naomi-Laban bridal showers indisputably present an important forum where women primarily offer premarital pastoral counseling to parents in laws prior marriage even though men rarely turn up to this event. This is crucial due to increasing high rates of divorce in Botswana, particularly in the Church. This counseling intervention, need to be cognizant of the importance of addressing problems accurately; they should be able to borrow some psychological and biblical tools in their dealings with the people. Their approach should be inclusive holistic and communal in nature in order to be relevant to our context in Botswana. African Pastoral Counseling provides an ample time to thrash and address internal and external problems of parents in laws; it facilitates a systematic counseling process and it prevents cultural, age and gender biasness in counseling.

Given the findings of this study, it could be argued that Naomi- Laban counselors need to be provided with detailed steps towards effective premarital counseling. It is imperative that

counselors should know their counselees prior the shower event in order to be able to authentically address their issues on point. It had come to my knowledge that some counselors only come to meet their counselees during the shower. This is problematic because the issues that they may discuss might be completely irrelevant. They should have the background of the counselees in order to understand them psychologically and that could be done through sessions with their counselees prior the shower. In short, there is a procedure to be followed. That procedure facilitates step by step counseling, almost accurate dealings with post marital distress and the need for social networks. On this note, I wish to recommend Naomi- Laban showers to be offered a short training on African Pastoral Counseling. This model is holistic in nature; it seeks to address, guide, and heal a person psychologically, spiritually with the usage of the Bible. This is just what parents in law need prior to their children's' marriages. This orientation may further assist in facilitation in dealing with the root cause of the problem instead of shallowly dealing with symptoms of the problem during the day of the event.

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**First Sunday Worship in the Place the Lord Has Chosen as His Own: Reading  
Deuteronomy 12:13–19 in Honor of His Eminence Cardinal Dominic Ekandem of the  
Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene**

**Michael Udoekpo**

**Abstract:**

Deuteronomy 12 emphasizes the idea of centralized worship at the place where YHWH (the LORD) has chosen to place his name. Verses 13–19 constitute one of the four parallel laws concerned with this cultic centralization. This essay focuses on Deuteronomy 12:13–19, with Deuteronomy 12 as an exegetical text of departure. The discussion is based on the larger context of the Deuteronomistic History (Josh–2 Kgs). It examines the passage historically and theologically exegetes it verse by verse in order to highlight its pastoral and spiritual benefits for the practice of monthly First Sunday central worship, which Cardinal Ekandem, a father, a leader, a shepherd, a missionary and a prophet initiated in the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene

**Introduction**

It is a great privilege to contribute this exegetical-theological essay in honor of His Eminence, Cardinal Dominic Ekandem, and the first Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese, from whose precious hands I received the Sacrament of Confirmation in Inen Parish.<sup>141</sup> Like the biblical Moses, Cardinal Ekandem was a father, a leader, a shepherd, a prophet, a missionary, a holy man of God, an advisor, and a preacher. Through our formators, parents, and teachers, he directly and indirectly impacted our priestly and theological formation in the 1980s and 90s.<sup>142</sup> Though he passed away in 1995, soon after my seminary formation and ordination, I was privileged to be at his funeral and wished him farewell as he rested in Abuja Cathedral. As Paul the Apostle would have it “he fought a good fight and kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7).

As the first Bishop of Ikot Ekpene, many of his pastoral achievements include structuring and establishing parishes throughout the diocese where worship of one God (*Abasi Ibom*), manifested in his Son, Jesus Christ and in the working of the Holy Spirit, took place centrally on

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<sup>141</sup> Other “great first” of His Eminence worthy of note is listed in Michael I. Edem, *Dominic Ignatius Ekandem 1917–1995: The Prince Who Became a Cardinal, the Vanguard of Catholicism in Nigeria* (Nigeria: Xlibris, 2016), lv–lvi.

<sup>142</sup> Matthew Hassan Kukah in his “Preface,” to Cosmas K. O. Nwosuh (*Cardinal Dominic Ekanem and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria* (Charleston: Great Space Publication, 2012), iv–v describes Cardinal Dominic Ekandem as “a prophet who appeared at the dawn of the history of both the Catholic Church in Nigerian and the Birth of our new Nation.” Also in John Cardinal Onaiyekan’s “Preface” to Edem, *Dominic Ignatius Ekandem*, xxxiv, “His life is certainly the material of which saints are made.”

every first Sunday of the month. Today, such central worship continues to shower many pastoral blessings upon the faithful, religious, and priests of the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene, including oneness, monotheism, unity, justice, peace, love, hope, forgiveness, mercy, inclusiveness, sharing, joy of obedience, and mutual support. This central worship is biblically founded and evokes the theology of cult centralization in Deuteronomy 12.<sup>143</sup>

Deuteronomy 12 emphasizes the idea of centralized worship at the place where YHWH (the LORD) has chosen to place his name. Verses 13–19 constitute one of the four parallel laws concerned with this cultic centralization. This passage focuses on the practical consequences and requirements for cult centralization. It prohibits sacrificial worship at random altars (v. 13), stipulates an exclusive single altar for sacrifice to YHWH in the place he has chosen (vv. 14, 18), sanctions secular slaughter (v. 15), and prohibits offerings and donations in towns as well as the

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<sup>143</sup> Scholars who have discussed Deuteronomy 12 and its focus on cult centralization as the basis for the Deuteronomistic History (Deut–2 Kgs) include: W. M. L. de Wette, *Dissertatio critica, qua Deuteronomium a proribus pentateuchi libris diversum alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus esse monstratur* (1805), reprinted in *Opuscula Theologica* (Berlin, 1830), 149–168; Julius Wellhausen, *Prologomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin, 1883), ET *Prologomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburg, 1885), 17–51; G. Hölscher, “Komposition und Ursprung des Deuteronomium,” *ZAW* 40 (1922): 183; T. Oestreicher, *Das Deuternomische Grundgesetz* (Gütersloh, 1923); A. C. Welch, *The Code of Deuteronomy* (London, 1924); W. Stärk, *Das Problem des Deuteronomiums* (Gütersloh, 1924); Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1981), 145; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 274–289; G. Von Rad, *Deuteronomium Studien* (Göttingen, 1947), 30–31; A. Alt, “Die Heimat des Deuteronomiums,” *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* 2 (Munich, 1954): 250–275; H. G. Mitchell, “The Use of the Second Person in Deuteronomy,” *JBL* 18 (1899): 61–109; G. Minette de Tillese, “Sections ‘tu’ et sections ‘vous’ dans le Deutéronome,” *VT* 12 (1962): 29–87; C. Begg, “The Significance of Numerushwechsel in Deuteronomy: The Pre-History of the Question,” *ETL* 55 (1979): 116–124; E. W. Nicholson, “The Centralization of the cult in Deuteronomy,” *VT* 13 (1963): 380–389; Moshe Weinfeld, “Cult Centralization in Israel in the Light of A Neo-Babylonian Analogy,” *JNES* 23 (1964): 202–212; R. E. Clements, “Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition,” *VT* 15 (1965): 301–312; Baruch Halpern, “The Centralization Formula in Deuteronomy,” *VT* 31 (1981): 20–38; Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

consumption of blood (vv. 16–17). This passage also addresses the inclusiveness of the Levites, the marginalized society, and one's household (v. 19).

This essay focuses on Deuteronomy 12:13–19, with Deuteronomy 12 as an exegetical text of departure. The discussion is based on the larger context of the Deuteronomic History (Josh–2 Kgs). It examines the passage historically and theologically exegetes it verse by verse in order to highlight its pastoral and spiritual benefits for the practice of first Sunday central worship, which Cardinal Ekandem initiated in the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene.<sup>144</sup>

### **Backgrounds of Cardinal Ekandem and Deuteronomy 12**

The religious backgrounds of Cardinal Ekandem and of the book of Deuteronomy have somethings in common. For example, prior to his Christian baptism, His Eminence grew up in an African Traditional Religion (ATR) worship setting that acknowledges the worship of the Supreme God (Abasi Ibom) and includes multiple cherished shrines and the worship of other gods and deities. This setting is reflective of ancient Israel's worship situation as addressed in Deuteronomy 12.

As comprehensively documented by Michael I. Edem, one of the Cardinal's biographers, His Eminence was born on April 16, 1917 in Obio Ibiono in the present day Akwa Ibom State. As Edem writes, "he was born to a pagan, polygamous, and traditional ruler, Chief Ekandem Udo Etok and Madam Nwa Ibong Umana Essien."<sup>145</sup> This time (1917) was a time when the world was witnessing many significant events, including: World War I; the Balfour Declaration of the Palestinian home for the Jewish people (Nov. 2, 1917), which led to the 1948 creation of the Jewish State; the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia (Oct. 1917); and the apparition of our Lady of Fatima (May 13, 1917).<sup>146</sup> This was also a time of the coming of the "Maynooth Fathers, St. Patrick's Society, and the erection of Calabar Prefecture."<sup>147</sup> During this time, "Tom Ino

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<sup>144</sup> The most up-to-date history of Ikot Ekpene Diocese is found in *History of the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene*, edited by Joseph Udodata et. al. (Ikot Ekepne: Ritman Press, 2013).

<sup>145</sup> Michael I. Edem, *Dominic Ignatius Ekandem 1917–1995: The Prince Who Became a Cardinal, the Vanguard of Catholicism in Nigeria* (Nigeria: Xlibris, 2016), xlix–lvi.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 1–15.

Ekandem, who was to become a Cardinal Ekandem, was some three years old, a pagan and a prince by circumstance of his birth.”<sup>148</sup>

Like many other traditional Ibibios of his time (especially his parents), Tom—whether by birth or sociological circumstances—worshiped the Supreme God (*Abasi Ibom*) of Exodus 3:14–15, but he also recognized other deities (e.g., *Abasi Obot eyen*, *Obot udia*, *Ndem-ekpoyong*, *Ekandem and Afianwan*), who were assigned locations and shrines for worship.<sup>149</sup> Time without number, a God-fearing “Obong Ekandem, the father of the future Cardinal, sacrificed to this deity whom Cardinal Ekandem later testified to when he said they used to eat the yams and goats and cocks sacrificed to the deity.”<sup>150</sup>

The turning point of the would-be Cardinal and the first Bishop of Ikot Ekpene was not only his love for early education, his Christian baptism in 1926, and his subsequent seminary training for the priesthood, but also his inner biblical conviction, as summed up in the re-hermeneutics of his name: “Ekandem, to mean *Ekan Ndem* that is, Ndem (‘water spirit’ or ‘deity’) has been defeated or overcome in the context of Christian Initiation-Baptism.”<sup>151</sup> In appealing to Deuteronomy 5:6–9 as it relates to Deuteronomy 12, Michael I. Edem affirms that His Eminence, with his Christian baptism and throughout his pastoral ministries, saw himself as one “who overpowers the minor deities with the help of God.”<sup>152</sup> This informs his love, his devotion to the service of the people, and his true sense of worship of one God—especially on every first Sunday of the month in the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene.

Interpreters’ views of the religious background and formation history of Deuteronomy often revolve around the circumstances of its dating and issues of worship in Israel. Many interpreters argue that the themes of covenant, obedience, law for life, holiness of life, worship of one God, and sense of unity characterize Deuteronomy, and they point to the pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic periods as proposed dates for its formation.<sup>153</sup> Proponents of the pre-exilic date

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>153</sup> The following works offer good summaries of the multitude of studies on the formation history of Deuteronomy: A. J. Bewer, “The Case for the Early Date of Deuteronomy,” *JBL* 47 [The Problem of Deuteronomy: A Symposium] (1928): 305–321; L. B. Paton, “The Case for

for Deuteronomy 12 base their arguments on the thesis of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, who argues that the “book of the law” found in the temple of Jerusalem in the eighteenth year of King Josiah’s reign (640–609 BC) was substantially the content of the book of Deuteronomy (2 Kgs 22–23). Second Kings 22–23 record that in the eighteenth year of King Josiah’s reign, while the Judaeans were conducting repairs in the temple (2 Kgs 22: 3), the God-fearing King Josiah sent the scribe Shaphan on an official trip to Hilkiyah, the high priest, with instructions concerning the financing of the ongoing repair work. Hilkiyah gave Shaphan a “book of the law,” which he found in the temple. Shaphan read it and brought it to King Josiah (2 Kgs 22: 8), who, upon hearing its contents, was greatly alarmed. King Josiah sent a deputation to the prophetess Huldah, who consulted the oracle of YHWH concerning the threat that the content of the book evidently reflected (2 Kgs 22:10).

In response, Huldah pronounced doom upon the people and the land because of their apostasy and idolatry at various shrines (2 Kgs 22:15–17). She promised Josiah safety from the forthcoming disaster because of his penitent and humble reaction to the threat communicated in the newly discovered book (2 Kgs 22:18–20). Josiah, having convoked an assembly, resolved to abide by the covenanted contents of the new book (2 Kgs 23:1–3). He followed this up by inaugurating reforms designed to implement the demands of the law book (2 Kgs 23:4). All the cult objects pertaining to the worship of Baal, Asherah, and the host of heaven were removed from the temple (2 Kgs 23:4). The paraphernalia of the Assyrian Shamash cult was destroyed (2 Kgs 23:11). The Phoenician, Moabite, and Ammonite cult centers, which Solomon is said to have built southeast of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 11: 5–7), were destroyed (2 Kgs 23:13). Idolatrous priests who had been installed at shrines throughout Judah were deposed (2 Kgs 23:5). Cult

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the Post-Exilic Origin of Deuteronomy,” *JBL* 47 [A Symposium] (1928): 322–357; George Dahl, “The Case for the Currently Accepted Date of Deuteronomy,” *JBL* 47 [A Symposium] (1928): 358–379; E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, 1–132; R. E. Clements, “Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition,” 301–312; Baruch Halpern, “The Centralization Formula in Deuteronomy”; Levinson, *Legal Innovation*; Reuter, *Kultzentralisation: Entstehung und Theologie von Dtn 12*; A. Rofé, “The Strata of the Law about Centralization of Worship in Deuteronomy and the History of the Deuteronomy Movement,” in *Congress Volume: Uppsala 1971* (ed. H. Nyberg et al.; VTSup 21; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 221–26; Y. Susuki, “‘The Place Yahweh Your God Will Choose’ in Deuteronomy,” in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. H. Sun and K. Eades; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 338–52; H. Weippert, “Der Ort den Jhwh erwählen wird, um dort seinen Namen wohnen zu lassen’: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Formel,” *BZ* 24 (1980): 76–94.

prostitution (2 Kgs 23:7), the Molech cult with its human sacrifices (2 Kgs 23:10), and the demon cults (2 Kgs 23:8) were rooted out. Pagan cults and altars innovated by Ahaz and Manasseh were destroyed (2 Kgs 23:12). YHWH's sanctuaries throughout Judah were destroyed, and their priests were brought to Jerusalem, where cultic worship was now centralized (2 Kgs 23:8–9). The reformation was extended to Bethel in the Northern Israel (2 Kgs 23:15).<sup>154</sup>

An examination of the remaining arguments requires more space and is beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, in the religious background of both the book of Deuteronomy (especially chapter 12) and Dominic Cardinal Ekandem prior to his Christian-Baptism, we can see an attempt to move away from random sacrifices to other gods, deities (*ndem*), and idolatrous practices, and toward the worship of YHWH alone (*Obong Abasi Ibom*) in one central place. In light of Deuteronomy 12:13–19, the exegesis that follows highlights the joy and spiritual and pastoral benefits of the central worship of God and his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, which His Eminence initiated in the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene on every first Sunday of the month.

### **Exegetical Analysis of Deuteronomy 12:13–19**

In addition to the preceding review of the historical background of the book of Deuteronomy and of His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, Deuteronomy 12:13–19 emphasizes worship of God in one central place. Scholars who study this scene often do it within the general context of the book of Deuteronomy. There are as many proposed structures for this book as there are exegetes.<sup>155</sup> Nelson proposes a six-part structure: (1) first discourse (Deut. 1:1–5, 6–3:29; 4:1–40); (2) second discourse (Deut. 4:44–49; 5:1–21; 6:4–5; 9:7b–10:11); (3) legal section (Deut. 12–26); (4) curses and blessings (Deut. 27–28); (5) Moses' insistence on faithfulness to the covenant (Deut. 29–30); and (6) Moses' last words, blessings, and death (Deut. 31–34).<sup>156</sup> These six units can be reclassified as:

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<sup>154</sup> Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, 2–3.

<sup>155</sup> Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 16, reminds us that the book of Deuteronomy has 34 chapters, 955 verses, and 71 pages in BHS. P. Kleinert, *Das Deuteronomium und die Deuteronomiker: Untersuchungen zur alttestamentlichen Rechts- und Literaturgeschichte* (Bielefeld and Leipzig, 1872), 167; N. Lohfink, "Der Bundesschluss im Lande Moab: Redaktionsgeschichtliches zu Dt 28:69–32:47," *BZ* 6 (1962): 32–56, esp. 32–33; Ska, *Pentateuch*, 38–39 divide Deuteronomy into four units using key titles such as "Words" (Deut 1:1), "Laws" (Deut 4:44), "Covenant" (Deut 28:69), and "Blessings" (Deut 33:1).

<sup>156</sup> Ernest. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 18–19.

1. Historical review and notices (Deut. 1–4)
2. God’s commandments (Deut. 5–11)
3. Deuteronomic laws/code (Deut. 12–26)
4. Curses, blessings, and God’s favors (Deut. 27–30)
5. Final notices and Moses’ death (Deut. 31–34).

Within the above structure, Deuteronomy 12:13–19 is located within the third and central block of Deuteronomic Laws (Deut. 12–26), which is literally bound together with features and the repetition of “statutes and ordinances (*“ewuho ye me item”*) ... be careful to observe” (Deut. 12:1; 26:16). Chapter 12, with its extensive statement about the need to worship God in one central place, is woven into what precedes and links it to what follows. Deuteronomy 12 begins with *“ewuho ye me item”* (v. 1) and concludes with the same expression *“ewuho ye me item”* (Deut. 26:16). It follows through both a chiasmic structure (Deut. 11:31–32) and a bridging structure (Deut. 12:30–13:1). When closely examined, these second person plural verses both seem to conclude the parenthesis of chapters 6–11 and the scene for the law code that follows (Deut. 12).

The introductory “when” (*kî*; *“koro”* in Efik) in Deuteronomy 11:31 is also a significant point of contact to the following texts. It states the time and place for worship and obedience to the law in the book of Deuteronomy. In fact, this same particle of connection (“when,” *“koro”*) links the entire parenthesis (Deut. 5–11), a text cited earlier by Michael I. Edem, to the law text (Deut. 12:1) in a chiasmic fashion. It reads: “when (*kî, koro*) you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and occupy the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you” (Deut. 11:31), “be careful to observe all the statutes and decrees that I set before you” (Deut. 11:32). Then Deuteronomy 12 opens with: “these are the statutes and decrees” (Deut. 12:1) and closes with “every command that I enjoin you...” (Deut. 13:1–4).

Deuteronomy 12 is bound together in the following chiasmic fashion:

- A** Polemic of purification (vv.2–7)
- B** Temporal conditions for centralization (vv.8–12)
- C** Centralization/secular slaughter and practical consequences (vv.13–19)
- B'** Geographical conditions for secular slaughter (vv. 20–28)



A' Polemic for purification (vv. 29–31).<sup>157</sup>

This chiasmic pattern unfolds logically. It stresses where to sacrifice (vv. 2–7), when to sacrifice (vv. 8–12), the innovation of former practices (vv. 13–19), and the limits and cultic purity (vv. 20–31).<sup>158</sup>

Our distinct textual unit (Deut 12:13–19) contrasts the merely human perception of sacred places of worship with divine choices and explores some practical considerations of central worship (cultic centralization). When read and examined verse by verse, whether in Hebrew, English, or Efik (the primary native language of Cardinal Dominic Ignatius Ekandem), it further contrasts what is to be done in the sanctuary (vv. 13–14, 18–19) with what is permitted or forbidden locally (vv. 15–17).<sup>159</sup>

### An Invitation to be careful (v. 13)

Verse 13 invites God's people to be faithful and careful in their choice of the place and manner of worship:

*Hiššāmer lakā pen-ta 'āleh 'ōlōṭeykâ bəkol-māqôm 'āšer tirā 'eh/ **kpeme idem mbak afo ediwa edifop uwa fo ke kpukpru ebiet eke afo okutde.*** (v. 13).<sup>160</sup>

This invitation aligns with the traditional and typical class of genre assigned to Deuteronomy (homiletic, exhortative, sermon, Moses' reflective speeches and advice). This prohibition of sacrificial worship at random altars begins with “take care/be careful

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<sup>157</sup> For addition commentary on this chiasmic pattern, see Georg Braulik, *Die Deuteronomischen Gesetze un der Dekalog: Studien Zum Aufbau von Deutronomium 12–26*, SBS 145 (Stuttgart: Catholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 23–30.

<sup>158</sup> This logical order was observed in Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 150–151.

<sup>159</sup> See also Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 24, for an impressive study of the thematic structure of the centralization laws of Deuteronomy into four laws: (1) cultic unity against Canaanite plurality of altars (vv. 2–7), (2) condition for centralization (vv. 8–12), (3) requirement for centralization (vv. 13–19) with concession for secular slaughter (v. 18), and (4) conditions for inauguration of secular slaughter.

<sup>160</sup> Transliteration in this study is from the MT. My English translations (vv. 13–19) are left on the footnote (e.g., take care lest you offer your burnt offering at any place that you see, v. 13). Otherwise, other English quotations are from the NRSV. The Efik version is taken from *Edisan Nwed Abasis Ibom* (Apapa: The Bible Society of Nigeria, 1985), but with slight modification.

(*kpemeidem*), lest you offer burnt offering at any place” (*hiššāmer ləkā pen-ta ‘āleh ‘ōlōteykā bəkōl-māqôm*). Moses’ tone here is advisory, imperative, and exhortative. Those who knew and heard His Eminence preach and counsel when he was here with us physically could hear him in this verse, forbidding and preaching against random sacrifices both in African traditional shrines and parishes on every first Sunday of the month.

This verse has few or minor textual issues. Apart from the MT text of the Hebrew Bible, a few other variants of this verse (e.g., the *Samaritan Pentateuch* and the *Targum Jonathan*) read *bəkōl-māqôm* (“in all places” or “at any place”) with a definite article—that is, as *bəkōl-hāmāqôm* (“at all the places”). Jean-Louis Ska notes that this reflects an older text of Exodus 20:24 that has undergone Deuteronomic redaction and innovation, since laws in ancient Israel were constantly reread and corrected in light of present-day circumstances and needs.<sup>161</sup> The LXX’s *senpanti topō* translates the Latin *omni loco* (“in all places”).<sup>162</sup> But when *’āšer tirā’eh* (“which you see,” *kpukpru ebiet emi afo okutde*) is added, it becomes clear that *bəkōl-māqôm* in v. 13 is in reference to the Canaanite shrines and places described in Deuteronomy 12. The Israelites must “demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispose serve their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills and under every leafy tree” (v. 2). This verse clearly forbids Christians from worshipping or making sacrifices or burnt offerings at African traditional shrines, including the types that His Eminence grew up with before his Christian baptism in Obio Ibiono. Verse 13 improves on older traditions (Exod 20:24) on behalf of Christians. It foreshadows the holiness of His Eminence Dominic Ekadem and prohibits random sacrifices. It fosters unity and solidarity among believers, as the Cardinal championed. It anticipates the divine choice of a worship place (v. 14), allows for non-sacral slaughter (v. 15), and foregrounds the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of Mass on every first Sunday in the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene.<sup>163</sup>

### **Divine Choice of the Place of Worship (v. 14)**

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<sup>161</sup> Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 188. See also Levinson, *Legal Innovation*, 27–28.

<sup>162</sup> Interestingly in *HALOT* 2:626–27 *māqôm* is described variously depending on the context as a location, place, site/place, room, locality and sacred site (Deut 12; 14:23–25; 1 Kgs 8:29; Isa 60:13; Ps 24:3; Ezra 9:8). The latter is most relevant to our place of first Sunday worship in Ikot Ekpene Diocese and to our study here.

<sup>163</sup> The New Testament theology of this, especially in the Letter to the Hebrews, is beyond the scope and space of this essay.

Verse 14 intensifies the prohibition of random sacrifices to deities. It further promotes central worship of the one true God of Israel, YHWH. In this verse, places chosen for worship are of divine choice:

*Kî 'im- bammāqôm 'ăšer-yibəhar 'ădōnāy bə'aḥad šəbhāteykhâ šām ta'ăleh 'ōlōteykhâ wəšām ta'ăseh kōl 'ăšer 'ānōkî məšawekâ/* **edi ke ebiet emi Obong Abasi edimekde ke esien fo kiet, do ke afo ediwa edifop uwa fo, do nko ke afo edinyung anam kpukpru se ami nwukde fi.** (Deut 12:14).<sup>164</sup>

This notion of divine choice is in line with the Cardinal's faith that it was only by the grace of God that he was able to overcome the minor deities throughout his pastoral ministry as a Christian, Seminarian, Priest, Bishop, and Cardinal. For him, no matter the challenges and sufferings that come our way, God is the one who inspires those good pastoral choices we make. Just as v. 13 prohibits sacrificial worship at random places and altars, v. 14 intensifies this prohibition by stressing that worship, sacrifices, and offerings must be made exclusively at a single place chosen by God out of all the tribal communities and villages (**ke ebiet emi Obong Abasi edimekde**). The parishes and dioceses, especially Ikot Ekpene, which the Cardinal served with holiness and great sense of oneness in worship as its first Bishop, are composed of many tribes and villages.

The exegetical and theological significance of v. 14 is often compared with that of v. 5 ("but you shall seek place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation"). In v. 5, the law concerning the centralization of cult worship is formulated in plural, while in v. 14 it is formulated in the singular.<sup>165</sup> Whereas v. 5 has "from or out of all your tribes"

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<sup>164</sup> In English we have: but only in one of the places which YHWH will choose in one of your tribes. There you shall offer your burn offering, and there you shall do all that I commanded you (v. 14).

<sup>165</sup> The frequent shifting from singular to plural between second person verbs and nouns and pronominal suffixes in the book of Deuteronomy is called *Numeruswechsel*. This phenomenon is not only found in chapter 12, but also in chapters 4 and 18. It is a grammatical issue that must be evaluated in each context. On one hand, it shows different redactional processes and layers of the final text. On the other hand, it serves as a rhetorical device to highlight certain elements in the text. It can also be caused by insertion of traditional or quotation formula from other passages. According to Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 5–6, Deuteronomy "uses collective singular to address the entire community, but shift to plural to focus on the individuals who make up the community in order to stress personal

(*mikōl-šibhāteykhem*), v. 14 has “in any one of your tribes” (*bə’ahad šabhāteykhâ*).<sup>166</sup> Many scholars who debate these expressions agree that both phrases aim at prohibiting worship at shrines and places (*kî ’im-bammāqôm*) other than those specifically sanctioned or chosen (*’ăšer-yibəḥar ’ădōnāy*) by the Lord.<sup>167</sup>

In the case of the various tribes, villages, and station-church communities that comprise Ikot Ekpene Diocese, the choice of the central place of worship has always been divinely inspired through our successive bishops and pastoral leaders, since the time of His Eminence. This divine choice is also mingled with divine blessings for all.

### Divine Blessing for All (v. 15)

Verse 15 witnesses these divine blessings to all by permitting secular slaughter for meals outside the central place of worship. To every rule there is always an exception. Verse 15 reads:

*Raq bəkōl-’awath naphəšəkâ tizabbah wə’ōkalattā bāsār kabhirəkkat ’ădōnāy  
’ēlōheykhâ ’ăšer nathan-ləkhâ bəkōl-šə’āreykhâ hattāmē’ wəhattāhōr  
yō’khəlennū kašibhî wəkhī’ayyāl/ **Edi nto ofuri ima esit fo edide, afo eyekeme  
ndiwot nnyung nta unam, nte ekemde ke ufon eke Obong Abasi fo fongnde fi,  
ke kpukpru obio fo: owo eke edehede ye owo eke asanade ekeme ndita enye,  
kpe nte edop ye okoyo.** (v. 15).<sup>168</sup>*

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responsibility.” For additional studies on *Numerushschwechsel*, see Georges Minnette de Tillesse, “Sections ‘tu’ et sections ‘vous’ dans le Deutéronme,” *VT* 12 (1962): 29–87; Christopher Begg, “The Significance of Numeruschewechsel in Deuteronomy: The Pre-History of the Question,” *ETL* 55 (1979): 116–124.

<sup>166</sup> A phrase similar to that in v. 5 is found in 1 Kgs 8:16; 11:32; 14:21; 2 Kgs 21:7, as “from all the tribes of Israel.”

<sup>167</sup> These scholars include De Tillesse, “Sections ‘tu’ et sections ‘vous,’” 66–68; A. C. Welch, “The Two Descriptions of the Sanctuary in Deuteronomy,” *EXpt* 36 (1924): 442–444; Th. Oestreicher, “Dtn xii 13f im Licht von Dtn Xxiii 16f,” *ZAW* 52 (1934): 246–249; Roland C. Clements, “The Book of Deuteronomy: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander Keck, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 386–387.

<sup>168</sup> In English we have: yet wherever you desire you may slaughter and eat the flesh according to the blessing which YHWH your God has given you within any of your tribes. The clean and the unclean, may eat of as they would of gazelle or deer (v. 15).

What governs this exception is the word “only” or “yet,” known as “restrictive *raq*.” According to McConville, it is assumed that meat (i.e., of clean animals that are fit for human consumption) can be consumed only if slaughtered as part of a sacrificial ritual (Lev. 17:2–9). The permission given here is new, since Deuteronomy is quite humanitarian and meant to correct and update earlier laws. Verse 15 allows all people to eat meat without first offering it in sacrifice.<sup>169</sup> That is to say, v. 15 treats ritual cleanness as immaterial so that the larger social circle can share in YHWH’S blessings by eating meat (v. 15b).<sup>170</sup> In Ikot Ekpene Diocese, first Sunday worship is also marked with food, meat, and meals outside the sacrificial altar. These meals are shared among friends and families who have traveled from stations and village communities to one central place of worship: the parish center.

### **Blood Prohibition (v. 16)**

In addition to addressing random sacrifices and granting those who attend worship permission to eat meat not meant for sacrifice, v. 16 prohibits the consumption of blood, thus upholding the sacredness of life.

*Raq haddā lō’ tō’khlēlū ‘al-hā’āreṣ tišappākennū kammāyīm/ **Edi mbufo ekudia iyip; mbufo eduok enye ke isong nte mmong.*** (v. 16).<sup>171</sup>

Significant here is the restrictive *rag* (“only”). This word introduces both the sanction and the instruction that blood must be treated respectfully: Those handling it must pour it on the ground like water. That is not performed as a ritual in the older sense or earlier Levitical tradition (Lev. 17:8–9). In Acts of the Apostles 15:20, the council of Jerusalem had also ruled that Christians were to avoid eating blood. Christians who attend first Sunday worship and Holy Masses in Ikot Ekpene Diocese are not only aware of Christ’s once and for all sacrifice on the cross, but also of the sacredness of life as a gift from God.

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<sup>169</sup> See J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 226.

<sup>170</sup> Levinson, *Legal Innovation*, 31.

<sup>171</sup> In English we have: Only the blood you must not eat; pour it out on the ground like water (v.16).

## Demands of Deuteronomy 12:17–19

In a rhythmic and chiasmic form, vv. 17–19 somehow repeat vv. 13–15:

*Lō'-túkhal le'ěkhōl bišā 'āreykhâ ma'āsar dāganākhâ wātîrōšākhâ wāyīšāhārekhâ ūbhākōrōth bāqārākhâ wāšō 'nekhâ wākōl-nādāreykhâ 'āšer tiddōr wānidābhōteykhâ ūtārūmath yādekhâ/ Kuda oyoho ubak ibokpot fo duop, mme eke obufa wine fo, mme eke aran fo, mme eke akpa eyen anang ye erong fo, mme eke akanga for baba kiet eke afo eikangade, mme eke uwa ima esit fo, mme eke edimenere uwa ubok fo, udia ke ebiet fo (v. 17). Kī 'im-liphānē 'ādōnāy 'ēlōheykhâ tō'khālennū bammāqōm 'āšer yibhāhar 'ādōnāy 'ēlōheykhâ bō 'attāh ūbhīnākhâ ūbhittēkhâ wā'abhāddākhâ wā'āmātekhâ /edi ke iso Obong Abasi fo ke afo edidia enye ke ebiet emi Obong Abasi fo edimekde, afo, ye eyen-eren fo, ye ofin anwang fo, ye mme Levite emi edungde ke obio fo; ndien dat esit ke iso Obong Abasi fo ke kpukpru nkpo eke afo anyande ubok fo ke esit (v. 18). Hiššāmer lākā pen-ta 'āzōbh e'th-hallēwī kōl-yāmeykhâ 'al-'adāmātekhâ/adanga ini nte afo edidude ke isong fo, kpeme idem for mbak afo ediduok mme Levite. (v. 19).<sup>172</sup>*

This passage, beginning with v. 17, offers a list of sacrifices (grain, wine, oil, firstborn of herds and flocks) given as continuation of various manifestations of God's blessings upon the people (cf. v. 15). It demands that these offerings be brought to the place chosen by the Lord for the common good, indiscriminately. This aligns with the theology of Deuteronomy, which, among other things, emphasizes humanitarianism and “promotes a sense of social responsibility to fellow Israelites.”<sup>173</sup> These “fellow Israelites” include sons and daughters, males and females, as well as slaves and Levites (vv.18–19). In other words, vv. 13–19 not only demonstrate and call for exclusive worship of God in one central place, but also bring joy and a sense of inclusivity to the divided tribes and families of Israel. They also encourage fair distribution of food and resources among members. Showing fidelity to God and overcoming minor deities are major lessons which, as consistently stressed by Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, come as a blessing from God.

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<sup>172</sup> In English we have: Nor must you eat within your tribes the tithe of your grain, and your wine, your oil and the first born of your herds; and any of your votive offerings, which you vow and your freewill offerings, and the donations of your hand (v.17); But only in the presence of the Lord Your God, at the place that the Lord your God will choose, you and your son, and daughter, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who are at your towns, you shall rejoice in the presence of the Lord your God in all the deeds of your hands(v. 18), and take care lest you neglect the Levites as long as you live in your land(v.19).

<sup>173</sup> Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 10.

## Conclusion

This study discussed, in honor of His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem — a man of simple piety, Deuteronomy 12:13–19 prohibit sacrificial worship at random altars (v. 13). It stipulates that sacrifice should take place exclusively at a single altar designated by YHWH (v. 14). It sanctions secular slaughter of domestic animals not meant for sacrifice; this could be done wherever and whenever the people desired this meat for meals, in any of their towns (v. 15). Cultic blood should not be consumed, and random cultic offerings to deities—common today in African traditional settings, including towns and villages—should be abolished (vv. 16–17). Deuteronomy also demands repeatedly that worship activities inclusively take place in one central location to protect Israel’s relationship with God and sense of oneness and national unity (vv. 18–19).

The relevance of Deuteronomy 12:13–19 to Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese and its first Sunday worship, initiated by His Eminence Cardinal Ekandem, cannot be overemphasized. As a religious society in the larger Nigerian or African context, Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese is plagued with multifaceted socio-political, economic, and religious problems, including a proliferation of shrines, competing deities [*ndem*], divisiveness, tribalism, poverty, and the effects of global isolationism and selfishness. Central worship and Holy Masses in parishes all over the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene provide the faithful with a renewed sense of oneness, trust in divine providence, and fidelity in their one and true God, who is ever-present in the midst of a joyful people, despite daily challenges. It gives them a sense of solidarity with one another (the poor, the rich, males, females, foreigners, and their priests), irrespective of class, village, or town. It is a moment to teach, preach, share, and feed the family of God’s people as a parish with the Word of God, cherished by Cardinal Ekandem.

As is also characteristic of the honoree, His Eminence Dominic Ignatius Ekandem—a father, prophet, advisor, teacher, leader, and a holy man of God—Deuteronomy 12:13–19 urges everyone in the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene to respond, to gather together on every first Sunday, and to choose obedience, friendship, and fellowship and thus to receive the benefits and blessings that come from God through our successive Bishop, Priests, family, and pastoral leaders, by worshiping God in a place the Lord has chosen as his own.

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**‘You Cannot Stop Receiving the Body of Our Lord’: The Eucharist in Chimamanda**

**Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus***

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**Introduction**

In her book, *Ministry Unplugged: Uncommon Calls to Serve*, Susan Willhauck had observed: “Many novels contain theological themes and truths that speak to us and broaden our understanding.”<sup>174</sup> In Africa, many of such novels exist. Apart from Chinua Achebe’s well-known *Things Fall Apart*,<sup>175</sup> mention, among others, must be made of *Purple Hibiscus* by the Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.<sup>176</sup> Published in 2003, the novel contains many theological themes and truths on the family,<sup>177</sup> the church, the priesthood,<sup>178</sup> the Trinity, missions, Eucharist, etc. But this paper deals, precisely, with the theme of the Eucharist and how it “can speak to us and broaden our understanding” of the same. In saying that, one is not oblivious of the fact – and it is necessary to point this out at once - that the same Eucharist is and will remain, as it were, the ineffable Sacrament!<sup>179</sup> Besides, the paper also considers the implications that Adichie’s theme of the Eucharist would hold, particularly, for the Church in Africa, today.

**The Theme of the Eucharist in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*: A Synopsis**

One of the realities in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* is the fact that a majority of what she had to say about the Eucharist and, *ipso facto*, her theology of the Eucharist, was done in relation to the

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<sup>174</sup> (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2010), 59.

<sup>175</sup> Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator has brought out some of the theological themes in his book, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine from an African Perspective* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008).

<sup>176</sup> (Lagos: Farafina, 2004). Henceforth, all citations from this book are to be documented by page number within the text.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, “The Image of the Family in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and its Implications for Families in Today’s Africa.” *The International Journal of African Catholicism* 7.1(Summer 2015): 157-182.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, “‘Did You Say He is a Fada?’: The Image of the Priest in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and its Socio-Religious Implications for Priests in Contemporary Africa.” *The International Journal of African Catholicism* 7 (Winter, 2016)2, 49-70.

<sup>179</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptoris Hominis* (Rome, March 4, 1979), 20.

character, Papa (Eugene Achilike). It simply deals with what this Papa holds and believes “about the Eucharist in this day and age based on the living traditions of our faith expressed in a privileged and unique way in the liturgy of the Eucharist.”<sup>180</sup> And Papa is the father of the narrator of the novel, Kambili, a 16-year-old girl, her elder brother, Jaja (Chukwuka Achilike) and, of course, the husband of the character, Mama (Beatrice Achilike). Papa is a “devout” Catholic. But his is a fanatical brand of Catholicism. Little wonder, it makes him do many things and practice his faith in an out-of-the-way manner. Hence, it is necessary, before going any further, to make at least two things clearer. One, that there is no attempt here at supporting Papa’s fanatical Catholicism. Most of the things he did, or better, his reactions to people not doing what he wanted as far as the Eucharistic worship was concerned, stand condemned, no matter the perspective one looks at them. Two, it is a fact that abuse does not destroy use. That Papa abused the faith, and, in this case, the teaching of the Church on Eucharistic worship, does not, however, destroy the use, significance and relevance of the same faith and teaching of the Church on Eucharistic worship as expressed in the novel.

Be that as it may, it was in his little book, *Bread From Heaven*, that Malachy Cullen had told the story of the little boy, Tarsisi. He lived in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero. The latter did not hide his dislike for Christians since they refused to worship him. Hence, he killed many of them and put others in prison. One of those Christians in prison was going to be killed the next day. He sent a message to the Christian community in Rome that he needed to receive the Body of Christ before his death. This was to make him strong and brave. The Christians were afraid to go. But the little school boy, Tarsisi, volunteered. Reason: He was so small that nobody would notice him. So, he was given the Holy Communion in a little sliver box. He hid it under his shirt, very close to his heart. On his way to the prison, he met a group of “pagan” boys playing football. They asked him to join them. He declined, telling them that he had something to do. One of the boys asked him to show them what he was hiding under his shirt. He refused. They tried to take it from him, but he was not one to give in too easily. He fought them back. Soon, one of those pagan boys told others that he knew what Tarsisi was hiding: The Holy Thing of the Christians. ‘He is a Christian’, he said, and, he should, therefore, be killed. Hence, they knocked him down, kicked him, stabbed him and left him almost dead. But he still refused to let go the

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<sup>180</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist* (New York/Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005), 32.

box. Before long, a Christian soldier came along and drove the boys away. Tarsisi was bleeding profusely and dying. Now, in the arms of the soldier, he mustered all the strength he could and told the soldier what he was carrying. He begged the soldier to help him give the Communion to the prisoner. And soon after, he died.<sup>181</sup>

To the question, therefore, as to why Tarsisi died, Cullen had said that he died to save the Holy Communion because he knew that it was the Living Body of Our Lord Jesus.<sup>182</sup> And he was definitely right. But it could also be said in another way: That Tarsisi had died because of his love and devotion to the Eucharist. And removing Papa's fanaticism, it could be said that he had a similar love and devotion to the Eucharist. Earlier on in the novel, Adichie, through the narrator, Kambili, had presented the following scenario involving Papa and his son, Jaja:

Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion [...]. 'Jaja, you did not go to communion,' Papa said quietly, almost a question. Jaja stared at the missal on the table as though he were addressing it. 'The wafer gives me bad breath.' I stared at Jaja. Had something come loose in his head? Papa insisted we call it the host because 'host' came close to capturing the essence, the sacredness, of Christ's body. 'Wafer' was too secular, wafer was what one of Papa's factories made - chocolate wafer, banana wafer, what people bought their children to give them a treat better than biscuits. 'And the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me,' Jaja said. He knew I was looking at him, that my shocked eyes begged him to seal his mouth, but he did not look at me. 'It is the body of our Lord.' Papa's voice was low, very low. [...]. 'You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that.' 'Then I will die.' Fear had darkened Jaja's eyes to the color of coal tar, but he looked Papa in the face now. 'Then I will die, Papa.' (4-6)

Papa's insistence in the above scenario that the right name for the Holy Communion – "host" rather than just "wafer"- be used is hinged on something else: The fact that he knew, as it is said in Latin, that *nomen et omen*, name is a sign. Yes, William Shakespeare's Juliet had asked: "What's in a name?"<sup>183</sup> But she knew that she was asking a rhetorical question. Name matters. There is so much in the name one, and in this case, a thing, bears. And the giving of "bad" name to something or somebody is usually the beginning of its desecration or, even, its destruction. For instance, before the Jews were killed during the Holocaust, the Nazi had first given them the

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<sup>181</sup> Malachy Cullen, *Bread From Heaven* (Jos: Augustinian Publications Nigeria, 1980), 4-5.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.

“bad” name: “rats”!<sup>184</sup> And before the Tutsis were killed during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the Hutis had first given them the “bad” name: “cockroaches.”<sup>185</sup> Hence, Christoph Gestrinch concludes that when “things no longer have any splendour, their destruction is imminent. People who are headed for destruction are first deprived of their honor, stripped of their rights, and their outward appearance takes a pathetic, ugly form.”<sup>186</sup> Hence, Papa’s insistence that Jaja called the Communion “host” rather than mere “wafer” was to prevent what was going to be the next step: Jaja’s desecration of the Eucharist that he, Papa, loved so much.

Again, as seen above, Papa had reminded Jaja that if he didn’t eat the Body of Christ, he would die. That is pure Catholic theology with scriptural background. In John’s Gospel, Jesus had said: “Truly, I say to you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood live with eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day. My flesh is really food and my blood is drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood, live in me and I in them.” (6:53-56). It is the same belief he had in the inevitability of death that awaits one who did not receive the Holy Communion that made him, Kambili narrates, report with concern to his expatriate Parish priest at St Agnes, Enugu, Father Benedict, “when a person missed communion on two successive Sundays.” According to Kambili, “He always encouraged Father Benedict to call and win that person back into the fold; nothing but mortal sin would keep a person away from communion two Sundays in a row.” (6)

Being this conscious of how sin could keep one away from communion and, of course, of Paul’s observation in 1Cor. 11:27 that, “if anyone eats of the bread or drinks from the cup of the Lord unworthily, he sins against the body and blood of the Lord. Let each one, then, examine himself before eating of the bread and drinking from the cup. Otherwise, he eats and drinks his own condemnation in not recognizing the Body,” Papa usually did two things. One, he made sure that he and his family members went for confession. “In Father Benedict’s house [...]”, states Kambili, “Papa talked with Father Benedict in the adjoining study room. Papa emerged and asked us to prepare for confession; he would go first.” (104). Two, he made it mandatory for his

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<sup>184</sup>Cf. David Living Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave and Exterminate Others* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2011), 15, 146.

<sup>185</sup> Immaculée Ilibagiza, *left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (New York: Hay House 2006), 37.

<sup>186</sup>Christoph Gestrinch, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 1.

family to observe the Eucharistic fast: “The Eucharistic fast mandated that the faithful not eat solid food an hour before Mass. We never broke the Eucharistic fast; the table was set for breakfast with teacups and cereal bowls side by side, but we would not eat until we came home.” (100-101).

Furthermore, according to the Fathers of Vatican Council II, “Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they[the faithful] offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It.”<sup>187</sup> And Papa, as already obvious, did take part in the Eucharistic sacrifice. But he appeared to have had a preference. Much earlier in the book, Kambili tells the story of newly ordained young priest who celebrated Mass at their Parish of St Agnes, Enugu. It was on a Pentecost Sunday. According to her, halfway through his sermon, he had broken into an Igbo song: “*Bunie ya enu...*” (28) The congregation were amazed, they “were used to Father Benedict’s sparse sermons, to Father Benedict’ pinch-your-nose monotone. Slowly they joined in” (28). Papa did not join and made sure that his children didn’t either. Later, he had this to say: “That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him.” (29) That young priest would turn out to be Father Amadi, a member of the Missionary Fathers of the Blessed Way (303-304), working at St. Peter’s Chaplaincy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Kambili has the following to say of another Mass of his that she attended, now at St. Peter’s Chaplaincy:

I imagined the plain wooden crucifix above the altar swinging back and forth as Father Amadi raised the host at consecration. His eyes were shut, and I knew that he was no longer behind the altar draped in white cotton, that he was somewhere else that only he and God knew about. He gave me communion and when his finger grazed my tongue, I wanted to fall at his feet. But the thunderous singing from the choir propped me up and strengthened me to walk back to my seat. After we said the Lord’s Prayer, Father Amadi did not say, ‘Offer to each other the sign of peace.’ He broke into an Igbo song instead. ‘*Ekene nke udo - ezigbo nwanne m nye m aka gi*’ ‘The greeting of peace - my dear sister, dear brother, give me your hand.’ (241)

Against this Father Amadi, Papa preferred Father Benedict’s Mass. Little surprising for someone who could be called his spiritual director. And in this Father Benedict’s Mass, there was an insistence that “Credo and kyrie be recited only in Latin; Igbo was not acceptable. Also,

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<sup>187</sup> Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 11.

hand clapping was to be kept at a minimum, lest the solemnity of the Mass be compromised.” (4) Only offertory songs were allowed in Igbo, offertory songs that Father Benedict called, according to Kambili, “native songs” (4)

Yes, it is said that “the celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass is the origin and consummation of the worship shown to the Eucharist outside Mass.”<sup>188</sup> Papa saw it like that, too. While he took part, yes, in the sacrifice of the Mass, he still participated actively in the “worship which is shown to the Eucharist outside the Mass.” Kambili narrates that after Mass on Sundays one of their activities was to go back to the Church for benediction (31). Again, it was in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* that the observation is made that, “The other sacraments, as well as with every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it.”<sup>189</sup> Since the other sacraments “are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it,” one’s appreciation of any of the other sacraments could be a revelation of one’s appreciation of the Eucharist tied together with it. For instance, when Kambili became sick (remove the fact, at least, for now, that it was the beatings of the same Papa that made her ill), Papa did not hesitate to call Father Benedict to administer the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick on her. As Kambili states: “I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, Father Benedict stood above me. He was making the sign of the cross on my feet with oil, the oil smelled like onion, and even light touch hurt. Papa was nearby. He, too, was muttering prayers, his hands resting gently on my side. I closed my eye. ‘It does not mean anything. They give extreme unction to anyone who is seriously ill,’ Mama whispered, when Papa and Father Benedict left” (212).

While, as a matter of fact, one is not told here specifically whether the Eucharist was administered alongside the anointing, and removing the fact that the sacrament is called by its former name, “Extreme Unction”, the fact that he was able to call Father Benedict for the anointing at that point in time, points to the value he attached to the sacrament and, *ipso facto*, to the Eucharist, with which it is tied.

Apart from the foregoing, there are other actions of Papa that showed his love, reverence and devotion to the Eucharist. Indeed, without any bias as to whether one should stand or kneel to

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<sup>188</sup> Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction, *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (May 25, 1967), 3.

<sup>189</sup> Vatican Council II, Decree, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965), 5.



receive the Body of Christ,<sup>190</sup> and bearing in mind, after all, that “big scapula, no bi big virtue,”<sup>191</sup> Papa’s decision to kneel when, like others, he could have done otherwise, says something here. Kambili states: “Papa always sat in the front pew for Mass, at the end beside the middle aisle, with Mama, Jaja, and me sitting next to him. He was first to receive communion. Most people did not kneel to receive communion at the marble altar, with the blond life-size Virgin Mary mounted nearby, but Papa did. He would hold his eyes shut so hard that his face tightened into a grimace, and then he would stick his tongue out as far as it could go.” (4) Similarly, it could be said that it was Papa’s love for the Eucharist that made him spare no resources in things that pertain to the Eucharist. “On some Sundays,” Kambili reports, “the congregation listened closely even when Father Benedict talked about things everybody already knew, [...] about Papa paying for the cartons of communion wine, for the new ovens at the convent where the Reverend Sisters baked the host, for the new wing to St. Agnes Hospital where Father Benedict gave extreme unction.” (5)

### **Beyond Papa’s Eucharistic Worship: The Need For An Authentic Eucharistic Way of Life**

Following from what was said in the preceding section, it should have been obvious now that Papa had - his exaggerations, notwithstanding - a great devotion to the Eucharist. But one thing is to have a great devotion to the Eucharist, another thing is to translate the implications of the same devotion into practice. The German philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, once said that, “Man is what he eats.”<sup>192</sup> And it could be said that Papa’s main problem is that he could not become what he ate; he could not become, that is, the Jesus he received and thus able to say with Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal. 2:20) Earlier on, one is told of his relationship with his father, Papa-Nnukwu. According to Kambili, “Papa-Nnukwu had never set feet in it [Kambili’s house], because when Papa had decreed that heathens were not allowed in

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<sup>190</sup> The afore-cited document, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, has this to say, here: “In accordance with the custom of the Church, Communion may be received by the faithful either kneeling or standing. One or the other way is to be chosen, according to the decision of the episcopal conference, bearing in mind all the circumstances, above all the number of the faithful and the arrangement of the churches. The faithful should willingly adopt the method indicated by their pastors, so that Communion may truly be a sign of the brotherly union of all those who share in the same table of the Lord. (May 25, 1967, 34).

<sup>191</sup> Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, *The Mad Priest* (Ibadan: Caro’Phem Communications, 2007), 53.

<sup>192</sup> Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 413.

his compound, he had not made an exception for his father.” (62-63) Papa-Nnukwu’s sin was that he refused to convert to Christianity as his son, Papa, had wanted. And the latter decided to treat the old man as a ‘heathen.’ For one, he refused to either greet or visit him (62). Only his children, Kambili and Jaja, did. And that was because the members of their *Umunna* had urged him to do so. For the members of the *Umunna*, “every man who was old enough to be called grandfather deserved to be greeted by his grandchildren.” (61-62). Allowing them, then, to go and visit their grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, he gave them injunction not to stay for more than fifteen minutes or to eat or drink anything offered to them by the old man (61). This is to make sure that they did not desecrate their “Christian tongues.” Hence, Kambili exclaimed: “I did not know that tongues could be Christian, too” (69).

But while he did not visit or greet his father, he sent him, Kambili notes, “slim wads of naira through Kevin [Papa’s driver] or through one of our *umunna* members, slimmer wads than he gave Kevin as a Christmasbonus” (62). All put together, therefore, while Papa-Nnukwu wallowed, a kind of, in poverty, or even, in misery, his son, Papa, and his family lived in cornucopia. Little wonder, then, Papa-Nnukwu once complained: “*Nekenem*, look at me. My son owns that house that can fit in every man in Abba [the name of their village], and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate. “(83) And Papa-Nnukwu was convinced he knew what happened to his son: Missionary Christianity and her teachings. “I should not have,” Papa-Nnukwu states, “let him follow those missionaries [...]. I still say it was the missionaries who misled my son.” (83-84) And of the teachings of these missionaries, he pointed to one:

I remember the first one that came to Abba, the one they called Fada John. His face was red like palm oil; they say our type of sun does not shine in the white man's land. He had a helper, a man from Nimo called Jude. In the afternoon they gathered the children under the ukwa tree in the mission and taught them their religion. I did not join them, *kpa*, but I went sometimes to see what they were doing. One day I said to them, Where is this god you worship? They said he was like Chukwu, that he was in the sky. I asked then, Who is the person that was killed, the person that hangs on the wood outside the mission? They said he was the son, but that the son and the father are equal. It was then that I knew that the white man was mad. The father and the son are equal? *Tufia!* Do you not see? That is why Eugene[Papa] can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal.’ (84)

Again, Papa’s inability to have become what he frequently ate, would also show in the kind of relationship he had with his immediate family. His was a family in which there was no

freedom. But John Macquarrie had pointed out that,” it is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from all the other beings that we know on earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man become authentically himself.”<sup>193</sup> And since there was the aforesaid lack of freedom encapsulated, at least in this case, by their inability to take “free and responsible decisions” on anything, the members of Papa’s family could not become authentically themselves. They always appeared suffocated. In fact, Kambili’s observation that, “Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated” (7), seems to have captured the situation of things. But such lack of freedom gave way soonest to domestic violence. For instance, Papa once beat the wife until she lost her pregnancy (248-249), flogged the son, Jaja, until he lost his little finger. Reason: He missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class (145). He equally got Kambili herself terribly beaten. And the reason this time was that she brought a painting of Papa-Nnukwu, a “heathen,” done by her cousin, Amaka, into their house and had the temerity to pick the pieces after Papa had torn it. Kambili narrates what happened next:

He[Papa] started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo, and I thought of Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music that sometimes started off with a calm saxophone and then whirled into lusty singing. I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery. They still had the metallic smell of Amaka's paint palette. The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. Because I could hear a swoosh in the air. A low voice was saying, ‘Please, biko, please.’ More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (210-211)

But then, while all these were going on, while, that is, Papa’s relationship with his father, Papa-Nnukwu, and with his immediate family did cast him in the image and likeness of a “religious tyrant,” to outsiders who never knew what was going on, he was a “perfect” Christian, already counted among the saints marching in! Little surprise, then, that one is told that he was one of the oblates, who, wearing a long gray robe, helped to distribute ashes every Ash

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<sup>193</sup> John Macquarrie. *Existentialism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 4.

Wednesday (3) And, during his sermons, “Father Benedict usually referred to the pope, Papa, and Jesus - in that order. He used Papa to illustrate the gospels.” (4) Again, to his village people of Abba, the different shades of generosity that he extended to them (the same generosity he could not extend to his father), only lent credence to his title, *Omelora*, The One Who Does for the Community (56). And even, one is told that *Amnesty World* equally gave him a human rights award (5).

Hence, it could be said that there is a certain kind of inauthenticity in Papa’s Eucharistic worship. Reason: It could not lead him to a much more love of his neighbour. “The authentic sense of the Eucharist,” observes John Paul II, “becomes of itself the school of active love for neighbour. We know that this is the true and full order of love that the Lord has taught us: ‘By this love you have for one another; everyone will know that you are my disciples’ (Jn. 13:35). The Eucharist educates us to this love in a deeper way; it shows us, in fact, what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God’s eyes [...]. If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person. The awareness of that dignity becomes the deepest motive of our relationship with our neighbour. We must also become particularly sensitive to all human suffering and misery, to all injustice and wrong, and seek the way to redress them effectively.”<sup>194</sup>

Therefore, beyond Papa’s Eucharistic worship there will always be the need for an authentic Eucharistic way of life, an authentic Christian way of life. In fact, the need for not just getting the ritual right, but of getting the life, the Christian life, right!<sup>195</sup>

#### **The Church in Africa and the Theme of the Eucharist in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus***

The preoccupation, here, is to find out the implications that Adichie’s theology of the Eucharist would hold for the Church in Africa, today: a) **Priests:** Removing his exaggerations, Papa’s love and devotion to the Eucharist is one that will always challenge every Catholic in Africa. But the challenge will, somehow, be more on the priests. There is, indeed, an ontological relationship between the Eucharist and the priesthood. This to the extent that John Paul II had this to say: “There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, just as there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.”<sup>196</sup> Priests in Africa are, therefore, called upon to appreciate and

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<sup>194</sup> John Paul II, Letter, *Dominicae Cenaе* (Vatican, February 24, 1980), 6.

<sup>195</sup> Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist*, 330.

<sup>196</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery* (New York: Image Books, 1996), 77-78.

reverence all the more the Eucharist they celebrate since they are born of the same Eucharist!<sup>197</sup> They should always endeavour to overcome that temptation towards a certain kind of “over-familiarity” with the Eucharist that may eventuate in a subtle form of “contempt.”

Likewise, Jaja’s statement that, “the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me,” is one that has something to say to the same priests in Africa. Care should always be taken in the distribution of the Eucharist. Sometimes, in a bid to be fast and finish the Mass on time, such a thing as Jaja complained happens. Maybe, for the older folks, it does not matter, but for the younger ones, like Jaja, it surely does. Hence, the need for caution. Again, Kambili’s revelation that one of their family activities on Sunday was to go back to the Church for benediction is also essential, here. It has something, as well, to tell priests in Africa, today. Many a time, and in many parishes, priests have used the time for benediction to hold meetings. Others use the time to watch football matches. This, therefore, is a wake-up call for priests to get back to those things, like Sunday benediction, that typify Catholic spirituality. Also it may not be bad as well, even during homilies, to talk a little more about the Eucharistic fast; who should and should not be involved in it.

b) **Need for Catechesis:** While from what was said about Papa above, it is obvious that Papa knew much about the Eucharist, it is not an understatement, however, to say that he needed more catechesis on the best way to apply what he knew. And this is something that the Church in Africa should not take for granted. Catechesis, defined by John Paul II, as “an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life,”<sup>198</sup> is part and parcel of the mission of the Church. It is important. It should be ongoing. The belief that catechesis is only for children and those others for the First Holy Communion and Confirmation is what it is: false. It is, as seen in John Paul II’s definition above and in Papa’s own situation, something also for adults. It is, indeed, something for everyone.

c) **Clergy and Laity:** Adichie’s theology of the Eucharist will also pose a challenge to the members of the Church in Africa on another score: to always let the Eucharist they receive

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<sup>197</sup> Stephen J. Rossetti, “Introduction” in Stephen J. Rossetti (ed.), *Born of the Eucharist: A Spirituality for Priests* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2009), 1-5, 2.

<sup>198</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Rome, 16 October, 1979), 18.

illuminate what they do. They should let the love that is in the Eucharist make them love all the more. This is what Papa failed to do. Maybe, if Papa had loved Papa-Nnukwu more, or better, shown much more love to him, he would have voluntarily converted to Christianity. Yes, it was Jon Sobrino who had observed that, “The poor are the authentic *theological source* for understanding Christian truth and practice.”<sup>199</sup> Modifying this a little, it could be said that Papa’s relationship, or better, love-full relationship with Papa-Nnukwu would have been for the latter, as well, a theological source “for understanding Christian truth and practice.” And understanding Christian truth and practice would definitely lead to an understanding, no matter how minimal, of the Eucharist, seated, as it were, at the centre of the Catholic Christian faith. In a way, therefore, it was the kind of Catholicism presented by Papa that put Papa-Nnukwu off. And it is along this line that one can understand better the observation of John Robinson that, “among one’s intelligent non-Christian friends, one discovers many who are far nearer to the Kingdom of heaven than they themselves can credit. For while they imagined that they have rejected the Gospel, they have in fact largely been put off by a particular way of thinking about the world which quite legitimately they find incredible.”<sup>200</sup>

In fact, there is even a way it could be said that Papa-Nnukwu was more “Christian” than Papa. For one, despite all that Papa did to him, when, with his *nzu*, he did his prayer to the gods and the ancestors, he did pray for Papa: Asking that the sun would not set over his prosperity and that the curse they put on him would be lifted (168). And Kambili confesses: “I was surprised he prayed for Papa with the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Auntie Ifeoma.” (168). Papa also prayed for Papa-Nnukwu; but not for God to bless him so to say, but for his conversion:

When we had made the sign of the cross and gotten down on our knees, around the table [...] Papa read from the psalms before saying the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, and the Apostles Creed [...]. Finally, he prayed for the conversion of our Papa-Nnukwu, so that Papa-Nnukwu would be saved from hell. Papa spent time describing hell as if God did not know that the flames were eternal and raging and fierce (60-61).

Yes, it appears that Papa’s only concern and interest in his father was for his “ntoghota” – conversion. And this is akin to the sentiments of those early missionaries to Africa that made

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<sup>199</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 93.

<sup>200</sup> John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, 50th Anniversary edition (London: SCM Press, 2013), xiv.

them compose that famous missionary prayer, “Ekpere Maka Ntoghota nke Africa”, Prayer for the Conversion of Africa, which, a kind of, “encapsulates the missionary vision for Africa at that time.”<sup>201</sup>

### Conclusion

Over the years, there has been the notion in some quarters that literature, and here, African literature, has nothing to do with theology and, *ipso facto*, nothing to offer the theologian. But this is not so. Reason: In the various species of literature, viz. drama, novels and poetry, Africans have a way of demonstrating the importance of the contextual expression of theology.<sup>202</sup> Hence, a theologian, by reading them, will always have something to gain.<sup>203</sup> The preoccupation of this paper has been to look at what an African theologian and, by extension, his\her Church, stands to gain by looking at the theme of the Eucharist as contained in Adichie’s novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. It has been found out that the novel presents, in vivid and practical manner, how some families in Africa, for good or bad, see the Eucharist and how, as well, they are engaged in its worship. The work, therefore, throws open the need, in the Church in Africa, for an ongoing catechesis on and about this great Sacrament that is and will remain, as it were, “the source and summit of the Christian life.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Uzochukwu Jude Njoku, *Who Will Save Africa? Challenging Contemporary Religious Vocations* (Owerri: Edu-Edy Publications, 2010), 13.

<sup>202</sup> Pan-African Conference of the Third World Theologians, *Declaration*, Accra, Ghana, December 17-23, 1977, in Bénézet Bujo and Juvénel Muya (eds.), *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers (vol. II)* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 264-271, 270. See also Tinyoko Sam Malueke, “The Africanization of Theological Education: Does Theological Education Equip you to Help your Sisters?”, in Edward P. Antonio (ed.), *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 61-76, 66.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, “The African Theologian and the Reading of Literature.” *Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies (CAJOLIS)* 19.1 (2015): 98-129.

<sup>204</sup> Vatican II, Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 11.

**MEDIOCRE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: A CRITICAL EVALUATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Like many other ancient writings, the Bible outlives the present and its proper understanding demands some interpretation. But even simple experience confirms that the Bible is also the most misinterpreted text today. The dangers of such misinterpretation – be it totally wrong or mediocre – are enormous and it remains a problem today and proposes to pose a greater problem to faith and future scholarship. But the menace of mediocre interpretation, as half truth, could hold a more serious threat. In response to the need to address the situation, this work is a critique of mediocre Biblical interpretation with a view to discovering, exposing, assessing and evaluating its nature and effects today. Following an expository and descriptive procedure, and delimiting the searchlight to formation in Religious life, we will also employ the simple survey method to evaluate the effect of mediocre interpretation today. An objective evaluation of this mediocre interpretation also demands that we first appreciate the nature and procedures of authentic and other inauthentic interpretation; the avenues of mediocrity in interpretation and then the possible ways-out towards credible interpretation. The findings and conclusions propose to be a great service to faith and Biblical scholarship.

**KEYWORDS:** Bible, Interpretation, Mediocrity, Formation, Contextualism, Fundamentalism

**INTRODUCTION**

Religion is about the only discipline in which people think they do not need any qualification to minister. There are as many, if not more preachers than there are Churches today. Many of these are people with little or no educational background in Biblical scholarship and just a few with very little knowledge of the true meaning of the word of God. What we find is, at best, a mediocrity of preaching, teaching and pastoral direction. The worst of all is that this mediocrity associated with Biblical interpretation harms both the present and the future. This work is a critical inquiry into this trend of mediocrity as it affects Biblical interpretation. For the purpose of integration, we have delimited the scope to the Religious formation houses like the Seminary. Using good and authentic interpretation as a basic point of departure, we will progress by exposing the nature and place of authentic interpretation in order to appreciate possible demerits and dangers of inauthentic interpretation. The specific objective of this work is to determine the nature of, if, and how much worse mediocre interpretation could be compared to actual inauthentic interpretation. Understanding Biblical interpretation as a corporate responsibility of



all people of God – Clergy, Religious and Laity, this work, making use of simple survey method results, will progress by way of evaluation to address the need for credible Biblical interpretation through orthodoxy in Biblical exegesis.

#### EXPLICATION OF TERMS

In order to better appreciate our bearing, it is important to put a few words and phrases in perspective. These include: *Mediocre* and *Biblical Interpretation*.

#### **Mediocre**

Mediocre conventionally means “not so good.” It is a word used to refer to a situation or thing where something expected to be optimally good is disappointingly not so good. It is also used to refer to something “of only average standard.”<sup>205</sup> Even though it may not be so bad, the term *mediocre*, used as a noun or *mediocre* used as an adjective connotes negativity.

As it is used in our work, *mediocre* is an adjective employed to qualify the phrase *Biblical Interpretation*. As an adjective, therefore, the word mediocre thus gives more information about the nature of Biblical Interpretation in question. It points to the fact that the Biblical Interpretation to be discussed is the ‘not so good’ type. More specifically, we would be using mediocre in the context of a type of interpretation that is neither fully good nor characteristically bad. The understanding is that there are some interpreters, who, in their ignorance or self-willed vocation, jump into haphazard or half-baked interpretation. This is what we have decided to call in the work, “mediocre interpretation.”

#### **Biblical Interpretation**

By Biblical interpretation here we mean the exposition of the meaning of/the meaning in the Bible. On the ordinary level of appreciation, it means the interpretation of the Bible. But in this work, Biblical Interpretation will be used in a more scholarly way to accommodate attendant arms like Exegesis and Hermeneutics where the former is the science of interpretation and the latter the rule or procedure guiding such interpretation to be authentic and orthodox. Sometimes these two words are used interchangeably to refer to the same one word – interpretation.

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<sup>205</sup> A. S. HORNBY, “Mediocre” in *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*. New York: Oxford, 2010, p. 923.

It is proper to agree with Gorman that Biblical Exegesis, as Interpretation, is an Investigation, a Conversation and an Art.<sup>206</sup> It is from this point of view that we will approach the research into the meaning and nature of this Biblical Interpretation. As investigation, Biblical interpretation is concerned with finding out the truth about the message of the Bible. As conversation, it pursues its objective in company and not in isolation. For the sake of objectivity, there is an encounter with the findings of other exegetes. But above all, Biblical interpretation is an Art. It is a practical response to some scientific research. In all, the common denominator is the goal of Biblical interpretation – The objective determination of the authentic meaning of the Biblical text. This determination is what we call interpretation.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The theme of Biblical Interpretation, especially since after the Reformation, has, understandably received a lot of attention in scholarly levels. The subject matter is treated in works and articles under synonymous titles like Exegesis, Hermeneutics and sometimes Biblical Theology.<sup>207</sup> Some of the major works<sup>208</sup> include: BRUNS' *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*<sup>209</sup>; GORMAN'S *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*<sup>210</sup>; JASPER'S *Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*<sup>211</sup>; HEDNER ZETTERHOLM'S *Jewish Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient and Contemporary*<sup>212</sup> and FLORENCE'S *Preaching as Testimony*<sup>213</sup>. There are also a number of Articles on the theme of Biblical Interpretation including TRIBLE'S "Wrestling with Scripture"<sup>214</sup>; AVALOS' "In Praise of Biblical Illiteracy"<sup>215</sup>; SANDYS-WUNSCH'S "History of Biblical Interpretation in the

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<sup>206</sup> MICHAEL GORMAN, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2001, p. 11

<sup>207</sup> Ordinarily, Exegesis is the science of Interpretation. Hermeneutics is the rule or procedure guiding such interpretation. Biblical Theology is a theological attempt towards the understanding of the Bible. All of them, in one way or the other, have to do with Biblical interpretation.

<sup>208</sup> It is difficult, if not impossible, to include all works on this theme. These few are randomly picked to demonstrate the level of scholarship on this matter of Biblical interpretation.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. BRUNS, GERALD L., *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1992, pp.1ff.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. GORMAN, M., *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 1ff

<sup>211</sup> Cf. DAVID JASPER, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004 pp. 1ff.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. K. HEDNER ZETTERHOLM, *Jewish Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient and Contemporary*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2012, pp. 11ff

<sup>213</sup> Cf. A. C. FLORENCE, *Preaching as Testimony*, Louisville: KY, Westminster, 2007, pp. 1ff.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. PHYLLIS TRIBLE, "Wrestling with Scripture" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32, no 2 (March/April 2006): 49

<sup>215</sup> Cf. AVALOS, HECTOR. "In Praise of Biblical Illiteracy" accessed from [www.bibleinterp.com](http://www.bibleinterp.com) on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

Christian Church”<sup>216</sup> and ODENDAAL’S “Biblical Interpretation”<sup>217</sup> In the history, development and direction of Biblical Interpretation, scholarship has benefitted enormously from the VATICAN’S *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.<sup>218</sup>

As one would notice from all these works, the major focus is directional. A lot has been said about the need and the way to interpret Scripture. But not adequate, if any, attention is paid to re-evaluating the trend especially in the face of current challenges in evangelization. Brun’s *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* must be given a lot of credit in its historical treatment of Biblical exegesis. But it stopped short of evaluating either the excesses or the inadequacies.<sup>219</sup> GORMAN’S *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* is a perfect guide on how to do exegesis but it does not anticipate nor address the dangers of possible departure from the practice of good exegesis. The same is the case with JASPER’S *Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*. Even the most talked about VATICAN’S *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, is aimed at arming the exegete with the right understanding and tools of exegesis<sup>220</sup>. It does not officially treat the anticipated dangers of poor exegesis. The Articles seem to be more specific and targeted than the books but even those of them that treat the practice of good exegesis are deficient in this area of critical assessment of improper exegesis. SANDYS-WUNSCH’S “History of Biblical Interpretation in the Christian Church” is primarily a trace of the historical background of Biblical Interpretation. We must give credit to AVALOS’ “In Praise of Biblical Illiteracy.” Avalos came close to addressing the possibility of bad interpretation. But he approached it from the point of view of ‘non-reading’ of the Bible and not ‘non-interpretation’ or ‘bad interpretation.’

Considering all the above, while we must necessarily give credit to all these works, there is no doubt that a gap is evident in the practical appreciation of the Biblical Interpretation. There is no direct address of the possibility of and remedies to bad exegesis nay ‘half baked’ interpretation. This gap does not just constitute a potential problem but the problem of Biblical misinterpretation is already here with us as many preachers are doing what we can call ‘mediocre interpretation.’ This situation therefore gives relevance to our work and makes this attempt ever

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<sup>216</sup> Cf. SANDYS-WUNSCH, JOHN “History of Biblical Interpretation in the Christian Church” assessed from [www.bibleinterp.com](http://www.bibleinterp.com) on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2016

<sup>217</sup> Cf. ODENDAAL, JOHN “Biblical Interpretation” in *Quodlibet Journal*, Volume 6 Number 1, January to March 2004

<sup>218</sup> Cf. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Vatican: Rome, 1993

<sup>219</sup> See BRUNS, GERALD L., *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*,

<sup>220</sup> See PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 33

significant. Among others, our objectives will then be: to dig-out and provide useful information on the practice of ‘half baked’ exegesis; to evaluate the merits or demerits of this trend; to proffer ways of addressing this trend towards better Biblical interpretation. This task remains the focus of this work following a descriptive and an evaluative method.

### **BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION TODAY**

In the attempt to locate mediocre interpretation, it is important to explore what could be called Good/Authentic Interpretation. This will help us appreciate not just the nature of Bad Interpretation in general but also the specificity of mediocre interpretation.

#### **Good/Authentic Interpretation**

What we consider good/authentic Interpretation is that which follows from and is guided by an orthodox appreciation of the rules/procedure of proper Biblical interpretation. Every game has its rules. Playing by the rules guarantees success. But there are always people who look for the shortcut. Good/Authentic interpretation can only be a fruit of proper exegesis.<sup>221</sup> In its commendable attempt “to indicate the paths most appropriate for arriving at an interpretation of the Bible as faithful as possible to its character both human and divine,”<sup>222</sup> the Pontifical Biblical Commission, among other things, does not only present various methods and approaches of interpretation but also discusses their strength and weaknesses.<sup>223</sup> In order to appreciate the methods and approaches, it is important at this point to discuss a peculiarity of early exegetical effort which has retained relevant in Biblical interpretation today. This is what could be called the sense of Scripture. Good interpretation must begin from the appreciation of the fact that there is the sense of Scripture. This knowledge can guide towards pursuing authentic interpretation.

By sense of Scripture, we mean levels of meaning or classical models for the interpretation of Scripture. As we will come to see, the text, the reality and the means can be signs leading to authentic interpretation. But the interpreter must appreciate the fact that Scripture is rich in meaning classified by patristic wisdom into models.

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<sup>221</sup> By Exegesis here we mean the systematic deduction of the Biblical message with an attempt not only to reach authorial intention, but also to interpret the divine will.

<sup>222</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 32-33

<sup>223</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 33

Some talk of the fourfold sense of Scriptures while others talk of the three fold.<sup>224</sup> For the purpose of our work, we will adopt the fourfold classification. These modes of interpretation are traced to John Cassian (c. 360 – 435). It became prominent up to and especially in the Reformation. This classification has not lost relevance even today and could be a viable tool to be preconceived in the efforts to interpret the Biblical text. Generally, we can count four but technically, it holds that there are two senses of Scripture – THE LITERAL and THE SPIRITUAL senses. The Spiritual sense is further divided into three: THE ALLEGORICAL (Typological); THE MORAL (Tropological) and THE ANAGOGICAL. The Literal sense is not the literalist sense.<sup>225</sup> In this context, it has to do with what the words of Scripture say in the context of their nearest possible meaning following the rules of sound interpretation. All other senses of Scripture are based on this literal sense. The first Spiritual sense is the Allegorical sense. This is also called typological. It considers types. This is the sense of Scripture which recognizes the significance of events in Christ. For example, the crossing of the red sea can be seen as a typology of the salvation wrought by Christ. The Allegorical sense therefore deals with what the words mean in the context of the larger story of God (Faith). The second spiritual sense is the moral or Tropological sense. This recognizes that Biblical events can lead us to act justly. The burden is to bring out what the words teach regarding how to live our lives morally. The third spiritual sense is the Anagogical.<sup>226</sup> This sense seeks to unravel what the words of Scripture show regarding the ultimate end of history. It sees realities and events in terms of eternal significance. Today, some scholars also talk about the Full Sense of Scripture (*Sensus plenior*). This is understood as “a deeper meaning intended by God but not intended by the human author, that is seen to exist in the words of Scripture when they are studied in the light of further revelation.”<sup>227</sup> Here the interpretation is holistic and takes a lot more theological situations into consideration to discover what the intention and will of God could be for a given passage as it would make meaning to faith and theology today. One very important point to be noted here is

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<sup>224</sup> This is just a matter of point of view difference. While many scholars identify the four-fold classification, there is one classification by Ambrose and Origen which distinguishes a threefold classification. The basics are the same. Cf. R. SOULEN and KENDAL SOULEN. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, pp. 64-65

<sup>225</sup> Literal sense here does not mean word-for-word understanding or taking the Scripture at face value. It refers, rather, to the main contextual meaning of the text deducible through proper exegesis.

<sup>226</sup> Etymologically, this means “leading.” The Anagogical leads the mind to the eternal significance of the text.

<sup>227</sup> R. SOULEN and KENDAL SOULEN. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, p. 171

that the meaning of a Biblical passage cannot be exhausted by a single sense. It confirms that “the Bible is sufficiently profound and complex to comprehend multiple valid senses.”<sup>228</sup>

### Exegetical Approaches to Interpretation

As far as we are addressing good interpretation, it is important to emphasize the import of *exegesis* and not *eisegesis*. Having its etymology in the Greek word – ἐξήγησις – Exegesis, connoting ‘leading out,’ can be understood as a “careful, methodologically, self-aware study of a text undertaken in order to produce an accurate and useful interpretation thereof.”<sup>229</sup>

It is important to note that there has been a long and complicated history behind what we have today as Biblical interpretation. Initially, schools of Scripture started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Alexandria and Antioch. Even the classification of the models of interpretation discussed above, which started in the early Church period and extended to the Patristic era confirms that exegesis has been an age old project of the believing community. The Church, today, is still proud of the commentaries of St. Ambrose (c. 420) and St. Augustine (c. 430). But interest in Biblical interpretation faded till after 1200 when a new focus on the analysis of the Hebrew Scripture arose. This did not still give a comprehensive format of Biblical interpretation. On certain occasions, Church councils issued statements on how Scripture should be understood. But the events of the 15<sup>th</sup> century especially the Renaissance and the Reformation brought renewed motivation to address the issue of Interpretation authentically. In 1545, the council of Trent forbade private interpretation. Many even misunderstood this to mean that Trent was forbidding personal reading of the Scripture. It was by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century that Catholics re-awoke to the need to defend divine inspiration. That was when the Ecole Biblique was founded in Jerusalem in 1890 and the Pontifical Biblical Institute was also founded in Rome in 1909. But again, while Protestant scholars continued to make advances in Biblical scholarship, in 1892, Pope Leo XIII issued the Encyclical on the study of Scripture, *Providentissimus Deus*, and warned that new modes of interpretation could undermine Catholic faith. This further slowed down Catholic Biblical scholarship until fifty years later when Pope Pius XII in 1943 wrote *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and encouraged “study of the Biblical languages, historical and cultural

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<sup>228</sup> R. SOULEN and KENDAL SOULEN. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, p. 65.

<sup>229</sup> R. SOULEN and KENDAL SOULEN. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2001, p. 57. For details on exegetical methods and procedures, among others, see, also, GORDON D. FEE, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2001 and ODIL HANNES STECK, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodologies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998

background and the many forms of Literature found in the Bible.”<sup>230</sup> In 1965, the second Vatican Council, releasing a statement on the Bible in the Catholic Church – The “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” *Dei Verbum*, towed this positive line and gave new light to Biblical study. Specific guidelines for exegesis were developed at Vatican II. Above all, easy access to the Scriptures was to be provided to all and this brought about many Documents, Books, Commentaries etc. Some of them included the Jerome Biblical Commentary (1968/1990) and Documents from the Pontifical Biblical Commission: *The Historical Truth of the Gospels*, (1964), *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993); *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Church*, (2002). The gains have been much. Catholic and Protestant Biblical scholars have shared methods, efforts and findings in Biblical research. Many, including the Eastern Orthodox Church have come to agree that “the Bible is most fruitfully interpreted not only by individual scholars but also with and within a community of faith in which past and present members contribute to the search for meaning.”<sup>231</sup>

Today, many scholars agree with the Vatican document that the major methods and approaches for the interpretation of Scripture include the following:

- The Historical Critical Method
- The New method of Literary Analysis (Rhetorical, Narrative and Semiotic)
- Approaches based on Tradition (Canonical Approach, Approach through Recourse to Jewish Interpretation, Approach by the History of the influence of the Text)
- Contextual Approaches (Liberationist and Feminist)
- Fundamentalist Interpretation<sup>232</sup>

Some of these are good and, when responsibly employed, lead to a balanced interpretation of Scripture but a few others especially the Fundamentalist Interpretation can lead to seriously misguided interpretation.

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<sup>230</sup> cf. MARIELLE FRIGGE, *Beginning Biblical Studies*, MN: Anselm Academic, 2009, p. 32; REYNOLDS EKSTROM, “Exegesis” in *The New Concise Catholic Dictionary*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1995, p. 118-119; MARGARET NUTTING RALPH *et al* (eds.), *Understanding The Bible, A Guide to Reading the Scriptures*, MN: Anselm Publishers, 2008, p. 20-21.

<sup>231</sup> MARIELLE FRIGGE, *Beginning Biblical Studies*, p. 33.

<sup>232</sup> For details of these methods and approaches, cf. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* and some other good text on Biblical Interpretation.

A closer look at these methods and approaches would reveal their peculiar characteristics and show their merits and demerits.

The historical critical method applies a diachronic approach to shed light on the historical nature of the ancient text of Scripture in a scientific and critical progression. It moves from Textual criticism to redaction criticism and tries to determine the meaning of Scripture. While it is very important and indispensable, it also can be limited. “it restricts itself to a search for the meaning of the Biblical text within the historical circumstances that gave rise to it and is not concerned with other possibilities of meaning which have been revealed at other stages of Biblical revelation and history of the Church.”<sup>233</sup>

The New methods of Literary analysis include the Rhetorical, Narrative and Semiotic Analyses. The Rhetorical analysis, as the name implies is a synchronic method that penetrates the core of Biblical language and measuring its impact and trying to read meaning into its persuasiveness. Though a helpful approach, this also is very limited because the danger is leaving Biblical interpretation solely at the level of description and making it reflect only a concern for style.

Narrative analysis presupposes the text as a narrative which can be understood only by analyzing the presumed meaning from the point of view of the implied/real authors and readers<sup>234</sup> While it offers a strong point for interpretation by attempting to bridge the gap between diachronic and synchronic appreciation of the text, it could be deceptive by attempting to reduce every text of Scripture to the mold of narration. Another new method of literary analysis is the semiotic method. In its attempt to reach the meaning of the text, it pays attention to the fact that each Biblical text is a coherent whole and should be analyzed as such. It is helpful in maintaining the unity of Scripture but it can also allow of some unnecessary assumptions.<sup>235</sup>

There are also approaches based on Tradition like the Canonical; those based on Jewish Traditions of interpretation; and those based on the History of the influence of the text. The Canonical approach interprets the Bible from the framework of faith as the Biblical message was received canonically by the community. Though this is helpful, it can generate controversies, for example, when an attempt is made to understand the Old Testament in light of the New. But

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<sup>233</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 40

<sup>234</sup> The Real author is the one who actually composed the narration. The implied author image created by the text. The Real reader is one who reads the text now while the implied reader is the one which the text presupposes. Narrative analysis believes that a critical evaluation of these narrative details can help bring out the meaning of the text.

<sup>235</sup> Some extremes of this method would reject the evident individual personal identity of some Biblical texts.



there are also approaches that make recourse to Jewish Traditions of interpretation. While these are very helpful, they need to be used with discretion because Judaism as a unique religion surely has its peculiarities, which, though may appear subtle, are inconsistent with Christianity. Besides, Jewish tradition reflects a lot of diversity because of the diversity of its rabbinic constitution. There is also the approach to the influence of the Text. Here one seeks to understand the text by analyzing the history of its influence on the individual or community. However helpful, this approach is not sufficiently independent. There are also approaches that use the human sciences like the sociological approach; the cultural anthropological approach and the psychological or psychoanalytical approach. The understanding is that since the word of God is rooted in human situation, employing human scientific approaches could help reveal the meaning of the text. Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology have been employed at different instances in the interpretation of Scripture. While these approaches that use human sciences, no doubt, shed helpful light upon the interpretation process, there is the problem of finding competent exegetes who are also competent human scientists. Besides, it can be harmful to make such approaches absolute. There are also contextual Approaches. This must be differentiated from the contextualist approach.<sup>236</sup> The Liberationist Theology and Feminist Theology, which are examples of this, seek to interpret the Bible, from the point of view of the experience of the people at a particular time, as a source of respite. “If a people lives in circumstances of oppression, one must go to the Bible to find the nourishment capable of sustaining the people in its struggles and in its hopes.”<sup>237</sup> The Feminist movement also is a “movement for the Liberation of women and the acquisition on their parts, of rights equal to those enjoyed by men.”<sup>238</sup> While these have their merits, it is important to ensure that the approaches do not spark up confrontation or power tussle thereby undermining the very message of service the Biblical text proposes.

### **Biblical Contextualization**

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<sup>236</sup> The contextual approach captures the mindset and concerns of individual exegetes. Examples are Liberation Theology and Feminism. On the other hand, the contextualist approach is that kind of interpretation of Scripture which is faithful to the original context of the writer and audience.

<sup>237</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 64

<sup>238</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 67 For details on the three forms of Feminist Theology (Radical, Neo-orthodox and Critical), see PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 66-69

In the pursuit of authentic interpretation, the contextualist approach has been preferred by many. The Church also teaches her faithful to be contextualists especially as a departure from Fundamentalism. Interpretation of Scripture needs to be done in the context in which they appear. A lot of things come into contextualization. Some include: The Literary form; the historical analysis and the process of revelation. Some elementary questions that are necessary in Contextualist Biblical interpretation include: *who said... to whom... and on what occasion...?* The Contextualist should be able to ask: “Is the conclusion I am drawing from this passage compatible with what the Scriptures teach as a whole?”<sup>239</sup> This basic point of departure is what guarantees authentic Biblical interpretation and what generates its gains.

### The Gains of Authentic Interpretation

There is always the need to qualify interpretation. Depending on orientation, manner or approach, interpretation can either be good or bad; authentic or inauthentic. Authentic interpretation, drawing from the contextualist point of view, employs some of the sound methods and methodologies above in a scientific enquiry to determine the true sense and meaning of the text. One point that is certain is the fact that authentic interpretation has a lot of gains just as inauthentic interpretation has a lot of demerits.

The gains of authentic interpretation begin from the fact that, as its fruits, it makes available to believers, the true message of God. This is what the most learned exegete needs; this is what the ordinary man in the Church needs. This is what Biblical scholarship needs. Authentic interpretation also frees the readers from anxiety about the apparent inadequacies of the Biblical text. Authentic interpretation guarantees the appreciation of diverse and creative ways that human authors communicated their experience of the divine.<sup>240</sup>

### **Bad/Inauthentic Interpretation**

Any type of interpretation that does not follow the rules of proper exegesis and hermeneutics is considered to be inauthentic and by implication bad. Today, we have instances of bad interpretation. Two prominent points of departure for bad/inauthentic interpretation include the *eisegetical approaches* and the interpretations drawing from Biblical Fundamentalism.

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<sup>239</sup> MARGARET NUTTING RALPH *et al* (eds.), *Understanding The Bible*, p. 6.

<sup>240</sup> MARGARET NUTTING RALPH *et al* (eds.), *Understanding The Bible*, pp. 24-25

Eisegetical Approaches to Interpretation

Etymologically, *eisegesis* connotes “introducing into.” In the context of Biblical interpretation, eisegesis refers to the “practice of reading into a text the meaning that one wants to get out of it.”<sup>241</sup> This is the opposite of exegesis and it is a clear example of bad interpretation.

The reason why eisegesis is a bad approach to interpretation is because the Bible is the word of God in human language. If it is the word of God, any interpretation is supposed to bring out that which God intended. The Fuller sense of Scripture should be invoked in interpretation. The right phrase would be “bring out...” translating *ex* as in *exegesis* and not *ei* as in *eisegesis*. Any approach to Biblical interpretation that is eisegetical would be a great departure from the divine message which is already communicated objectively in the text.

Today, there are instances of some preachers introducing irrelevant messages into the text to support their self-made positions and doctrines. These just need to see one word in the Scripture which supports their already prepared message and they would erroneously introduce such message into the passage. In that case, it becomes their message and never the message of God. The conclusions would be more human than divine and the results would be more harmful to faith than beneficial.

**Biblical Fundamentalism**

Biblical Fundamentalism is one of the new<sup>242</sup> approaches to interpretation which has received a lot of support especially from some Evangelicals and Pentecostals. This is a method which rejects all aspects of Biblical interpretation following from any scientific analysis of the text. The Fundamentalists only accept the Literalist understanding of the text. They have what could be called an imbalanced insistence on the divine inspiration of Scripture. Fundamentalism “starts from the principle that the Bible, being the word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details.”<sup>243</sup> Because of this wrong ideology and because fundamentalism is opposed to the use of any form of scientific method for interpretation, it is bound to be subjective and erroneous since it ignores the fact that as an ancient text, the Biblical

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<sup>241</sup> R. SOULEN and KENDAL SOULEN. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, p. 52.

<sup>242</sup> Fundamentalism is a 20<sup>th</sup> century religious movement which became very prominent in North America. Its origin can also be traced to the reformation, the enlightenment and the *sola scriptura* of Protestantism. For more on Fundamentalism, see REYNOLDS EKSTROM, “Fundamentalism” in *The New Concise Catholic Dictionary*, p. 129.

<sup>243</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 69

text would need to undergo scientific analysis of the text to bring out the meaning. Fundamentalists ignore the fact that with the presence of different genres in the Scripture, not every passage should be read and understood literally.

As a bad approach to interpretation, it has a number of demerits. Because of its ideology, it does not accept many articles of faith which are Biblically founded. For example, it does not accept the incarnation. Placing undue stress on the inerrancy of Scripture, it rejects Tradition and so gives a wrong orientation to people about the nature of the word of God in human language. Denying Biblical exegesis, it pays no attention to context and ignores the analysis of Biblical languages in the process of interpretation. All these and more, make its point of view narrow and deceptive and hence, inauthentic.<sup>244</sup> Its position makes it anti-ecclesiastical.

### **Mediocre Interpretation**

Recent experience in Biblical interpretation has led to the identification of yet another inauthentic but what could be a more damaging approach to Biblical interpretation. This is what we have decided to call the mediocre interpretation. This is the half-baked interpretation that goes to the negative extreme of both the authentic and the inauthentic approaches to interpretation.

From the point of view of authentic interpretation, mediocre interpretation, either imposes any one easy approach and does the same to every passage irrespective of literary genre or in an attempt to accommodate the different senses of Scripture, mixes up and confuses more than one approach indiscriminately. The result can only be a haphazard or at best a half-baked Biblical interpretation that generates falsehood and confusion.

From the point of view of inauthentic interpretation, mediocre interpretation worsens the case by either dangerously combining it with other approaches – sometimes authentic, or by introducing a new dimension into an already inauthentic approach. Whichever direction it goes, mediocre interpretation departs from a presumed confidence that is not backed up by any authority or literacy. It tries to repair what it does not understand and ends up ruining the situation more.

An example of mediocre interpretation is one who sees the creation account as a factual historical account of how God created the world in six days. You will notice here that beyond being a fundamentalist, such an interpretation departs from a false understanding of the historical

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<sup>244</sup> For more on the characteristics of Fundamentalism, see PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 69

critical method. First of all, he does not understand the way to use that approach. Such interpretation is neither historical nor critical. Secondly he does not know that no one method makes sense in isolation. Thirdly, such an interpretation has refused to accommodate the conclusions of another approach.

This type of half-baked interpretation, unfortunately could come off the lips of very influential and very fluent preachers to the extent that the manner of delivery already leaves the hearer convinced.

#### Ignorance of the Bible as the source of mediocrity

Ignorance of the Bible has cost the faith a lot of embarrassment and led to a number of dangerous conclusions. In the midst of ignorance, some people celebrate mediocrity. Illiteracy or ignorance of the scripture is really a great danger.<sup>245</sup> Findings have shown that most of those who celebrate mediocrity in interpretation are those who have little or no knowledge of the basics of Biblical scholarship. Mediocrity therefore becomes a celebrated exit to cover-up the ignorance. By ignorance of the Bible, we mean ignorance of the workings of the different approaches of Biblical interpretation. At best, when they think they know a little (may be the names of the different approaches), they place wrong emphasis on irrelevant aspects of that method or approach.

Ignorance here also means ignorance of the 'rules of the game.' Biblical interpretation must come as a result of proper exegesis arrived at through the use of the right hermeneutical processes. It takes formation and teaching for one to responsibly occupy the position of an exegete or a Biblical theologian. The possession of a Bible does not make one an exegete or a Biblical theologian. In the course of this research work, I have come close to 41 ministers of God from different Churches and Ecclesial extractions in Obot Akara Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. To my utter dismay, I confirmed that 27 of these have not even had adequate formal education and worse of all had no formal formation for ministry before they made themselves Ministers. What they do is to feel called and begin to preach from common sense or lift and reproduce what they hear other preachers say. We call them mediocre interpreters because, coming from this background of ignorance, they attempt to give everything some subjective meaning but end up multiplying falsehood and more ignorance in their mediocrity.

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<sup>245</sup>HECTOR AVALOS. "In Praise of Biblical Illiteracy" accessed from [www.bibleinterp.com](http://www.bibleinterp.com) on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

Whether it is bad or mediocre interpretation, any type of inauthentic interpretation comes with a lot of demerits for the faith and for the faithful. But the worst possible demerits could come from this type of interpretation called mediocre.

### **The Demerits of Mediocre Approaches to Interpretation**

Biblical interpretation, generally, is supposed to build-up the people of God, increase their faith and elicit further research but this can only happen if the interpretation is authentic. Mediocre interpretation harms both the faith and the faithful but above all, this situation proposes serious danger for the future of Biblical scholarship.

#### The Harm on the Faith

Mediocre Biblical interpretation constitutes a great harm to the deposit of faith. The Scriptures tell us that “Faith comes through hearing...” (Rom 10:17). If what is heard constitutes a falsehood, it is bad enough. But with mediocre interpretation, we have a situation where a ‘half-truth’ is told and such does more harm to the faith. Christian faith is founded on the merits of the risen Christ. When that kerygma is distorted, generations to come, learn the wrong thing. Mediocre interpretation treats the Biblical text superficially. The danger here has to do with the propensity for this half-truth to spread and injure faith.

#### The Harm on the Christian Faithful

There are vulnerable people among Christ’s faithful. These include children and adult who cannot read nor write. It also includes the scrupulously faithful who swallows all that the Minister offers just because it comes from the minister. These are the people who depend solely on the Minister for nourishment with the word of God. If, per chance, this Minister is preaching falsehood or half-baked truth, it means these faithful would be fed with falsehood and would not only live with but also operate from the point of view of such dangerous mediocrity.

Mediocre interpretation destroys the people’s relationship with God. It deceives them to think they have the message of truth where as they do not.<sup>246</sup> It can be a great harm to the faithful.

#### The Dangers for the future of Biblical scholarship

Biblical scholarship is a scientific academic encounter where one conclusion becomes an introduction for further research. The demerit of mediocre interpretation in this regard is that it would either truncate further research since it is presumed that there could be one or two people who would have known that their conclusions are harmfully incorrect; or unassuming and not-

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<sup>246</sup> See PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 72

well-informed self-acclaimed exegetes would try to sustain scholarship from this false background. In either case, a serious danger is imminent for the benefits of future Biblical scholarship.

Mediocre interpretation rejects the scientific character of Biblical revelation and this is injurious to scholarship. By confusing the divine substance of the Biblical message with such human limitations, mediocre interpretation institutes a vicious circle which threatens to rub scholarship of credibility.

#### EVALUATION: TOWARDS CREDIBLE BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

In the words of Anna Florence, the preacher must be awakened to the fact that he or she has a vocation to pass down “a set of traditions about one way God’s people read, speak, live in, and wait for the word.”<sup>247</sup> This set of truths is contained in the revealed word of God found in the Holy Bible.<sup>248</sup> The need for authentic interpretation cannot be over emphasized. But this can only happen in a setting where proper and credible exegesis of the Biblical text is encouraged and upheld. In the face of the unfortunate reality of inauthentic and worse still mediocre interpretation, there is need for an evaluative assessment of the situation and the way forward towards credible Biblical scholarship.

#### The Need for Orthodoxy in Biblical Interpretation

Biblical interpretation is not supposed to be a private affair. In fact, it is not just a community affair, it is a Church affair (a worshipping community’s custody). It is from this point of departure that the Catholic Church interprets the Scripture.<sup>249</sup> But in the wake of mediocre interpretation, there is need to get back to the orthodoxy that characterizes authentic Biblical scholarship.

By orthodoxy here we mean the official standard of appreciating the word of God as treasured, taught, expounded and transmitted by the Magisterium.<sup>250</sup> In applying Andrew Ridley’s scheme for approaching the task of understanding and applying the Bible, Christopher Write captures

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<sup>247</sup> ANNA FLORENCE, *Preaching as Testimony*, p. 120.

<sup>248</sup> The Bible is both Old and New Testament and both sections contain deep truth that need to be interpreted before it is communicated. Especially, the Old Testament as an ancient text needs to be authentically interpreted before its rich message is communicated as the word of God. For more on how to appreciate the reading of and the preaching from the Old Testament, see ALLEN, R. J., and WILLIAMSON, C. M., *Preaching the Old Testament*, pp. xiii-xxi.

<sup>249</sup> See more on the Catholic Church’s interpretation of Scripture in MARGARET NUTTING RALPH *et al* (eds.), *Understanding The Bible*, p. 21ff.

<sup>250</sup> *Magisterium* is the ‘teaching authority of the Church.’ This corresponds with the fact that Biblical interpretation is more a community affair than a private affair. This community is the Church.

‘orthodoxy’ in what he calls the ‘five looks’ of understanding and using the Bible. He opines that we need to ‘*look up, look down, look back, look forward and look here.*’ This, Christopher Write explains, is because the Bible is the word of God; has the words of human beings; God has given us the Bible as a whole in two parts; and because God will speak to us today through his word.<sup>251</sup> This is the right way to do it and all exegetes, Biblical theologians, Pastors and other Ministers who delve into Biblical Interpretation are called to appreciate this need for orthodoxy in their profession or vocation.

### **The Mutual Responsibility of the People of God to Credible Interpretation**

Just as we have hinted above, the task of credible interpretation is a communal affair. It belongs to the Church. But above all, this task must be approached as a mutual responsibility. Every serious faithful must treasure his stake in it. The responsibility to ensure credible interpretation is therefore that of the people of God – Clergy, Religious and Laity. All baptized have a stake here and deserve the best interpretation of God’s word to lead and guide their paths.

#### *The Responsibility of the Clergy*

If we agree that Biblical Interpretation entails expounding God’s word, then it is not difficult to see the very unique role of the clergy here. As a Minister and witness, he needs to know, understand and then teach. The Bishop is called to exercise his pastoral ministry. As co-workers, Priests also have a primary duty of proclaiming the word. Deacons in their own right, especially when they administer the Sacrament, are called to make the unity between word and Sacrament clear. All Ministers have a major role here to preserve and transmit the word of God but it has to be authentic. While many clergymen are doing their best in this responsibility, unfortunately, some have led the people of God astray by preaching half-baked messages from the pulpit.

#### *The Responsibility of the Religious*

Following the example of Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, who pondered on God’s word in her heart (Luke 2: 19), all Religious are called to responsibility in the credible interpretation of the word of God. Religious are formed in their respective charisma and apostolates. All these are linked directly and indirectly to the Scriptures. Many of them are educators in the faith and ministers of the word. In this manner, they are not only to impart instruction but also to assist the faithful “to

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<sup>251</sup> CHRISTOPHER WRITE and JONATHAN LAMB, *Understanding and Using the Bible*, pp. 4-7



understand and discern what the word of God is saying to them in their heart when they hear and reflect upon the Scripture”<sup>252</sup>

*The Role of the Laity*

The word of God is always addressed to a people. The priests and Religious are part of this people of God. But in a special way, it is the Laity that takes this address directly because in most cases, when the clergy or religious administer the word, it is almost always to the benefit of the laity. Just as the Church is addressed by the word, the spirit is also given to individual faithful, including the laity – and among them even the people of the lowly status, to study the Scripture within the context of their own personal lives. In this capacity therefore, they have a right to and they must explore the right to credible interpretation. In the face of today’s deceit and mediocre interpretation, the laity must not allow themselves to be vulnerable. They, from their Ministers, must insist on the orthodoxy which should characterize Biblical interpretation. This is why credible interpretation, while it remains a mutual responsibility, must never lose sight of the objectivity professed by the direction of the Magisterium.<sup>253</sup>

The Need for Credible Instruction

In this wake of mediocre interpretation, there is need for renewed instruction and teaching on the orthodox way of approaching the Scripture for the desired credible interpretation. Again, everybody saddled with, or preparing to be saddled with the responsibility of interpreting the word of God needs formation, reformation and on-going formation. The Teacher is called to know and appreciate the truth in order to be able to teach it. Formators, Pastors and Students in formation to ministry and especially those who have responsibilities over these, must take the apostolate of the word seriously.

*The Role of Formators in the Seminary*

A Formator in the Seminary is not just a Teacher. He is one chosen by the Bishops to help train and consequently ‘form’ the young Seminarians in the rubrics of priestly Ministry. This is why they are chosen from among the best academically but more importantly, morally. They must be seen to impart that needed sense of purpose to the Seminarians. One area that is very important is Scripture. Every Seminary, is expected to have an Exegete on the Staff. His task is enormous and consists in “the study and explanation of Holy Scripture in a way that makes all its riches

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<sup>252</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 98-99.

<sup>253</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 101.

available to Pastors and the faithful.”<sup>254</sup> The Seminary Formators, especially the Scripture Scholars, the Exegetes and the Biblical Theologian, must insist on the right and orthodox way of interpreting Scripture. They must not only be seen to teach but must be appreciated to live a life that would reflect the needed credibility in Biblical scholarship.

*The Right Orientation for Pastors of Souls*

Sometimes, after Seminary formation, some Pastors seem to relax on the rubrics taught in the Seminaries. Some, in their exposition of the word, fall so much below expectation because they would no longer sit down to prepare their homilies. This calls for re-orientation. There is need for ongoing formation for Pastors especially on the new and improved techniques of exegesis and evangelization. This responsibility lies in the hands of the Bishops who, as Chief Pastors of souls must ensure that credible ‘harvesters’ are available for the ‘harvest.’

*The Right Orientation for Students of Scripture*

Students, also, especially those of them who intend to devote themselves to specialization in Scripture must be made to appreciate the orthodoxy needed in Biblical exegesis and its application towards credible interpretation. The right orientation must be given to them by the Bishops, the Seminary Formators and by the more experienced senior clergy in good standing and right standing. Students of Scripture must have credible instructors and the Seminary curriculum must reflect the entire array of Biblical scholarship at least as an introduction to further studies.<sup>255</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

Mediocre interpretation, as a bad approach in the interpretation of the Bible has become rather rampant in recent times because of the reluctance of some people to learn and apply the rubrics of interpretation orthodoxly. Our analysis has shown that this trend, packed with ‘half-truths,’ can even be more harmful than other types or shades of inauthentic interpretation. Mediocre interpretation harms the faith, harms the faithful and harms scholarship.

Mediocre interpretation is not a mistake but an abuse. It is a deliberate abuse because most of the perpetrators are just lazy or not willing to undergo proper formation in hermeneutics. They want

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<sup>254</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 101.

<sup>255</sup> Even at the level of introduction, the Seminarians must be taught the basics in Scripture, Exegesis and Biblical Theology of both the Old and New Testament. This will help them in their homilies even as young priests after ordination and before any further studies.

it the easy way out. This reluctance to overcome ignorance is an abuse of privilege and must not be allowed to continue lest we would lose the credibility of Biblical scholarship.

This work, based on the findings, recommends that scholarship in the Bible be enforced as a condition for pastoring or formation of future preachers. We also believe that seasoned exegetes and Biblical theologians should seek other means of media communication like the Radio to propagate the authentic Biblical interpretation for the benefits of the vulnerable few who have already fallen prey to the antics of amateur preachers. Bishops, Pastors of Souls, Seminary Formators and indeed all others concerned with Biblical interpretation must appreciate the fact that this is primarily the responsibility of the worshipping community and as such, any individual involved in it is doing a service to the Church and must accommodate the direction of the *Magisterium*.

In this contemporary time when the practice of mediocre interpretation seems to be growing with the perceived need for renewed scholarship in the Bible, there is need to adapt and reemphasize, as a strategic direction, Andrew Reid's five looks of understanding and using the Bible. There can be no authentic interpretation without passing through the path of exegesis and Biblical theology to the point of responsible application. Let us join Christopher Wright, Reid's disciple, in projecting the 'antidote' to inauthentic Biblical interpretation by re-echoing with them that every interpreter first look up, look down, look back, look forward before looking here. To this scheme, in the interest of stamping out the abuse of mediocre interpretation, I would strongly advocate that this prospective interpreter should not just look but *look well* and *ensure that he sees well* before applying the Biblical text to the world around him.

It is only in this way that we will be able to arrest this and every other type of inauthentic interpretation. By so doing, the faith, the faithful and scholarship itself would have been saved from serious doom.

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## Appreciating Recent Scholarly Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15:8

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**Abstract** Paul's use of the rare metaphor *ektrōma* in 1 Cor 15:8 to describe the context of Jesus' appearance to him as an apostle has generated numerous interpretations among exegetes. It is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament and that which is certain about the text is the lack of unanimity among scholars as to its generally acceptable interpretation. In the period between 1996 to 2013, four authors have been faithful in insisting on the lack of consensus regarding the meaning and function of the metaphor. Using the descriptive method of study, this work discusses the view of these four authors with a view to highlighting the challenges of understanding Paul's use of the term. It concludes that no single interpretation has attracted a consensus.

**Keywords:** Apostleship of Paul, 1 Corinthians, *Ektrōma*.

### Introduction

In his attempt to defend the orthodoxy and apostolic origin of his Gospel, Paul describes in his first letter to the Corinthians 15 the series of appearances by the risen Lord to the Apostles. He describes himself as the last in the order of appearances; he depicts his status using the rare Greek metaphor *hōsperei tō ektrōmati*. The Greek noun *ektrōma* often refers to a birth that is not consonant with the natural period of gestation. The birth can be the result of a natural premature birth or miscarriage; it can also be induced, in the form of abortion.<sup>256</sup> It also refers to foetus or child that is the outcome of such processes (*abortus, foetus immaturus, abortivus*; 'one born out of due time'; 'an abortive' *foetus abortivus*; 'untimely birth') or to both.<sup>257</sup> These understandings are dominant in Classical Literature and in the Septuagint (subsequently LXX).

In Classical and Hellenistic literature, *ektrōma* and its related terms was used to refer to a miscarriage due especially to prematurity which often led to the death not only of the child but also of the mother. The ancient Greek physicians Hippocrates, Galenus, and Aretaeus often used the verb *ektitrōskein* in their references to the inducement of an abortion. They sometimes also used the words *ektrōsmos* and *ektrōsisto* imply miscarriage and the bringing forth of a stillborn

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<sup>256</sup> Walter Bauer et al., "*ektrōma*," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000<sup>3</sup>), 311.

<sup>257</sup> David S. Hasselbrook, *Studies in New Testament Lexicography* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 118.

child.<sup>258</sup> A similar event is narrated in Exod 21:22. The use of the word depicts especially an untimely birth in the event of which the child may be dead or alive. The emphasis is on the abnormal time of birth, unformed nature and the incompleteness of the one thus born. Hesychius, the Greek grammarian of Alessandria defines it as “a premature dead child thrown out of a woman”.<sup>259</sup>

There have, in recent times been various scholarly interpretations and understandings of the term *ektrōma* in relation to Paul and the passage of 1 Cor 15:8. Authors are however, not in agreement regarding its use by Paul. This depicts the difficulty surrounding the phrase which is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament and constitutes a *crux interpretum* for the passage. This lack of consensus is reflected in the various versions of the English Bible:

“...as to one untimely born” *New Revised Standard Version*

“...as of one born out of due time” *Authorized Version/King James Version*

“...as to one abnormally born” *New International Version*

“...as though I was a child born abnormally” *New Jerusalem Bible*

In the last seventeen year-period between 1996 and 2013, four authors have joined their efforts in the attempt to explain Paul’s use of the metaphor. They include George W.E Nickelsburg 1986, Harm W. Hollander – Gijsbert E. Van der Hout 1996, Emmanuel O. Nwaoru 2011<sup>260</sup> and Andrzej Gieniusz 2013. The choice of these four authors is informed especially by the agreement that exists between George Nickelsburg, Hollander – Van der Hout and Andrzej Gieniusz on the inability of a single author to command a consensus. Nickelsburg sustains that in the context of the entire discussion in 1 Cor 15:8-10 *ektrōma* is about Paul’s appointment as an apostle from the womb and his initial self-imposed obstacle to that call by his persecution of the

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<sup>258</sup> Hippocrates, *De milierum affectibus* 1, 78, in E. Litré, *Oeuvres complètes d’Hippocrate*, vol. 8 (Paris: Baillièrre, 1839-1861), 186-188.

<sup>259</sup> David S. Hasselbrook, *Studies in New Testament Lexicography*, 121.

<sup>260</sup> George W.E. Nickelsburg, “An Ektrōma, Though Appointed from the Womb: Paul’s Apostolic Self-Description in 1 Corinthians 15 and Galatian 1,” *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 198-205; Harm W. Hollander and Gijsbert E. Van der Hout, “The Apostle Paul Calling Himself An Abortion: 1 Cor 15:8 Within the Context of 1 Cor 15:8-10,” *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996): 224-236; Andrzej Gieniusz, “‘As a Miscarriage’: The Meaning and Function of the Metaphor in 1 Cor. 15:1-11 in Light of Num 12:12 (LXX),” *Biblical Annals* 3 (2013): 93-107; Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, “‘The Untimely born’ (1 Cor 15:8): A Portrait of Paul among the Corinthians,” *Koinonia* 5 (2011): 83-87.

Church. Hollander and Van der Hout on the other hand surmise that Paul uses the term to depict himself as one in the most deplorable situation, the most worthless and miserable man on earth who was no more than “a miscarriage”. Emmanuel Nwaoru understands the metaphor as Paul’s expression of the untimely nature of his apostolic calling in the vision of the risen Christ.

Andrzej Gieniusz on the other hand, maintains that Paul’s use of *ektrōma* was to capture not only the quality of being dead but also that of being lethal or deadly. So, from dead Paul became alive and from deadly he became a bearer of life as an apostle working harder than others in bringing the Gospel to many.

Peculiar to these four attempts at understanding Paul is an acknowledgment of the lack of final words on the passage. This work shares the same conclusion and maintains that the exact meaning of the Pauline metaphor in 1 Cor 15:8 is difficult to grasp. It underscores the challenges presented by some passages of the Bible to interpreters and readers.

### **G.W.E. Nickelsburg 1986**

George Nickelsburg seeks to identify the sense in which Paul applies the metaphor *hōsperei tō ektrōmati* to himself. He identifies four categories of interpretations given to the text by authors and provides his assessments of each of the proposals. These interpretations are reflected in the various translations of the text found in the different versions of the English bible indicated above. Nickelsburg therefore concludes that none of the available interpretations and translations of the text can claim to be final; Paul’s use of the metaphor remains a question begging to be answered.<sup>261</sup>

He uses Galatian 1 as an interpretive key to 1 Cor 15:8 and acknowledges the use made of the passage by Johann Munck in relation to Paul’s claim to have been called from his mother’s womb. He takes his clue especially from Munck’s 1954 study of Paul’s call in Galatians 1 and Acts 9:22, 26. With language drawn from biblical texts about prophetic calls evident in Paul’s letters, Munck emphasizes the parallels between Paul’s call and prophetic calls like Jeremiah’s and Isaiah’s. A parallel reading of 1 Cor 15:1-10 and Gal 1:1-4; 11-17 reveals to Nickelsburg that both passages have an identical introductory formula which are meant to remind the readers

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<sup>261</sup>George W. E. Nickelsburg, “An Ektrōma,” Though Appointed from the Womb: Paul’s Apostolic Self-Description in 1 Corinthians 15 and Galatian 1,” *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 198-200.



of the source of the Gospel preached by Paul. Paul received his Gospel through a revelation by the risen Christ who appeared to him. Both passages affirm that Paul was constituted an apostle by the revelation/vision of the risen One. His call as the ‘last,’ compared to that of the other apostles (especially Cephas and James) came, thanks to the grace of God, after he had persecuted the Church of God. Paul’s description of himself as an *ektrōma* is equally reflected in his claim of being appointed (*aphorizō* lit. “separated”) in Gal 1:15 by God as an apostle from his mother’s womb.

A further parallel/relationship between 1 Cor 15 and Galatian 1 consists in their references to Isaiah 49. Isaiah 49:1,5,6 discuss a call/formation from a mother’s womb to be servant and light of the nations. A reflection of this Isaianic message is evident in the reference in 1 Cor 15:10 to the efficacy of God’s grace by which Paul labours more than other apostles. In Isaiah 49:4 the prophet laments of having laboured in vain and received an encouraging response from God who assured him of the imminent success of his mission (Isa 49:5-7). Paul’s claim that the success of his apostolic labours are testimonies to the fact that the grace of God towards him has not been in vain reflects this Isaianic lament/God’s intervention (see also Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 2:1; 3:5). The verb “to be called” *kaleisthai* in 1 Cor 15:9 also reflects “he called my name” of Isa 49:1. It may have been used to denote Paul’s right to the name ‘apostle’ as is often generally interpreted. The parallels in Galatians 1 suggest a technical usage by Paul as is in Gal 1:15. Typical Pauline usage suggests that the verb and its related adjective *klētos* specifically refer to one’s call to be a Christian or to the apostolic call.<sup>262</sup>

On the strength of these parallels between 1 Cor 15 and Galatian 1 and their agreements in relation to Isaiah 49 Nickelsburg proposes that Paul’s self-description as an *ektrōma* is to be interpreted in the context of Paul’s belief that God had intervened during his conception in the womb. Paul is therefore describing himself as having been, to a certain extent, embryonic or unformed as at the Damascus experience; a position shared by Munck and Boman. This Damascus experience is referred to in 1 Cor 15:9. Against Munck and Boman, parallel expression in Gal 1:15 suggests that God’s choice of Paul from the womb and the gracious call by God depicted in 1 Cor 15:8-9 are one and the same. Thus 1 Cor 15:9-10 underscores God’s grace at work in the call of one who by his decision to persecute the Church of God was unfit to

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<sup>262</sup>Ibid., 203.

be an apostle. Summarily put therefore, the two passages of Gal 1:15 and 1 Cor 15:8-10 present for Nickelsburg a thought pattern that runs thus:

Paul was appointed to be an apostle from his mother's womb (as is common in most biblical prophetic calling).

He jeopardized that appointment by his persecution of the Church.

Therefore, in relation to the purpose of his appointment from birth as an apostle he was an *ektrōma*.

Notwithstanding this his anti-appointment stance God revealed the risen Christ to him and made him what he was intended to be from the womb.

Consequently, the metaphor *ektrōma* has a dual function; it revolves conceptually around two poles: one is retrospective and the other prospective. Retrospectively it has in view the positive fact of the promise (appointment from the womb). Prospectively it dwells on the negative fact of the non-fulfilment or non-realization of the promise as at Christ's appearance to Paul. Paul's persecution of the followers implied a miscarriage or an abortion of God's purpose in him as a prospective leader of the Church. This negative aspect is evident in 1 Cor 15:9 where Paul uses quantitative words that help him underscore the deficiency immanent in his chosen metaphor; namely *elachistos* and *ikanos*. Here Paul reflects on his apostleship in the light of his past persecution of the Church. In this apostleship, he is the least *elachistos* of the apostles, who is not sufficient *ikanos* to be an apostle because of his deficient, embryonic, unrealized *ektrōma*.<sup>263</sup>

To the extent one understands of Paul as describing himself as embryonic and deficient or unformed at the time of the Damascus experience, Nickelsburg follows and agrees with Munck and Boman. In relation however, to what is deficient and embryonic he differs. For Nickelsburg the *ektrōma* metaphor "alludes not to Paul's Judaism as embryonic of true religion, nor to his rudimentary faith prior to the Damascus experience."<sup>264</sup> The parallel use of conception language in Gal 1:15 and the argument related to that context suggest that the entire discussion in 1 Cor 15:8-10 is about Paul's appointment as an apostle from the womb and his initial self-imposed obstacle to that call by his persecution of the Church.

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<sup>263</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid.

**Harm W. Hollander and Gijsbert E. Van der Hout 1996**

Hollander and Van der Hout acknowledge, in relation to the Pauline metaphor of *ektrōma*, the place of 1 Cor 15:8 as a *crux interpretum* in the history of exegesis. They state the various available exegetical options offered on the passage which number about six and offer their critique of them. Among these options, Hollander and Van der Hout identify for discussions the then recent positions of George Nickelsburg and Markus Schaefer. They underscore the incomplete and not yet formed nature of an *ektrōma* as the basis for Nickelsburg's comparison between I Corinthians 15 and Galatians 1. They especially question the methodological correctness of relating so strongly two passages from Galatians and 1 Corinthians.<sup>265</sup>

Markus Schaefer is depicted as interpreting *ektrōma* to mean 'a dead embryo.'<sup>266</sup> He is said to have sustained that Paul's use of the term was influenced by Hosea 13:13. He therefore saw Hos 13:13 as the interpretive key to understanding 1 Cor 15:8. Ephraim is compared in Hosea to a foolish child whose refusal to leave the mother's womb exposes it to danger. The comparison underscores Ephraim's refusal to listen to God's call and become converted at the due time. Similarly, Paul regards himself as another Ephraim; given that he was "set apart from his mother's womb" to be an apostle of the Lord (Gal 1:15). He did not listen to God's call and acted against his appointment by persecuting the Church of God. He exposed himself to the deadly danger of losing his future eternal life and dying consequently before he was really born. His 'birth' therefore came, just in time and almost too late, from his encounter with the risen Christ. Against Markus Schaefer's position Hollander and Van der Hout opine that the term *ektrōma* does not occur in Hosea 13:13. In Hosea, Ephraim is compared to a child who at birth time refuses to leave the mother's womb. A 'miscarriage' on the other hand, usually refers to a child born dead in a premature birth. Thirdly, none of Paul's letters indicates that Paul did not listen to God's call prior to the Damascus experience. Thus, the opinion that he was exposing himself to a

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<sup>265</sup> Hollander and Van der Hout, "The Apostle Paul Calling Himself an Abortion: 1 Cor 15:8 Within the Context of 1 Cor 15:8-10," *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996): 226.

<sup>266</sup> Markus Schaefer, "Paulus, 'Fehlgeburt' oder 'unvernünftiges Kind'? Ein Interpretationsvorschlag zu 1 Kor. 15,8," *Zeitung für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 85 (1994): 207-217; cited in Hollander and Van der Hout, "The Apostle Paul Calling Himself an Abortion," 226.

fatal danger before his conversion is unfounded. Hollander and Van der Hout conclude therefore, that the comparison with Hosea13:13 is far-fetched and unfounded.<sup>267</sup>

After assessing past literature on the use of the term *ektrōma* in 1 Cor 15:8, Hollander and Van der Hout sustain that the question still remains unsettled. They consequently attempt to identify the source of Paul's use of *ektrōma*, the point of comparison in the metaphor, and the reason Paul used the *hapax legomenon* in this context. They examine the use of the term *ektrōma* in Greek literature and discover that in non-Jewish or non-Christian environment the term and cognates are used exclusively in a literal sense to refer to the miscarriage of an embryo, usually due to premature birth. Paul's metaphorical use of *ektrōma* is therefore not derived from this environment. Their study of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and early Jewish literature reveals that the term is used almost exclusively in a figurative sense, and the figures are similes. It is used in these texts to refer to people whose lives were miserable and worthless and who were in deplorable position. They identify these features in the use made of the term by Paul in 1 Cor 15:8 and maintain that Paul adopted the term from these Jewish traditions and used it in the same sense. He is depicting his life before his conversion, when he persecuted the Church of God as indicative of a miserable and worthless person to be compared to 'a stillborn child.'<sup>268</sup> Their analysis of the use of the term in early Christian Patristic literature reveals that it is equally used primarily in a figurative sense. It is used either as an expression for human wretchedness and utmost humility or as a metaphor for an immature person or one who is not wholly formed. They however, identify the Patristic Fathers as dependent on 1 Cor 15:8 in their use of the term. This dependence reduces for Hollander and Van der Hout the value of patristic literature as the basis for explaining the exact meaning and use of the term by Paul. This, for Hollander and Van der Hout therefore leaves valid their discovery of Jewish literature as the source for Paul's usage.<sup>269</sup>

They seek to discover Paul's reason for using the term in the context of 1 Cor 15:8-10 by analysing 1 Cor 15:9-10. Paul describes himself in v. 9 as "the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle" because of his earlier persecution of the Church of God. His qualification as an apostle in spite of his self-deprecating description is therefore depicted in v. 10 as the result of the grace of God. Being "the least" and "unfit" for certain divine responsibilities are common in

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<sup>267</sup> Hollander and Van der Hout, "The Apostle Paul Calling Himself An Abortion," 226-227.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 231-232.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 234.

the Old Testament, in Jewish texts, and in early Christian texts. They express the astonishment and sometimes protest that often accompany divine appointments and commission in Jewish tradition. In this tradition, persons commissioned by God often underscore their insufficiency by insisting on their unworthiness or ineptness for the task. These expressions of insufficiency which are depicted as obstacles to the appointment often attract God's intervention and empowerment of the appointee for the successful fulfilment of the said task (cf. Exod 3:11; 4:10,13; Judges 6:15; 1 Sam 9:21; Isa 6:5; Jer. 1:6; 2 Bar 54:9; Eph 3:8; 1 Tim 1:15-16; *Assumptio Mosis* 12, 6-7; the Letter of Ignatius to the Romans 9,2;). This exchange is therefore described by Hollander and Van der Hout as a recurrent element of prophetic calls and is said to be behind 1 Cor 15:8-10. In each of the models, the obstacle is not removed but is made insignificant by the act of God's grace or the promise of his assistance so that God is underscored as the one responsible for the fulfilment of the mission rather than the messenger.<sup>270</sup> The essence of the emphasis on the obstacle motif in vocation narratives is therefore apologetic; it is meant to depict the power of God at work in mere unworthy humans. On this motif, S.J. Hafemann notes: "The negative emphasis in the obstacle motif on the *insufficiency* of the prophet implies and underscores a *positive* emphasis on the *sufficiency* of the prophet as a result of God's grace."<sup>271</sup>

Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 15:9-10 therefore reflects this pattern of "sufficiency in spite of insufficiency." His persecution of the Church of God rendered him unworthy of God's call, therefore he was "the least of the apostles" and only an act of God's grace made him become an apostle. He is in this passage defending his apostleship; like many prophets before him, at the time of his call by God he was insufficient to become God's messenger, but God still found him worthy. This context according to Hollander and Van der Hout provides the grounds for Paul's introduction of the Jewish traditional figurative expression *ektrōmato* denote miscarriage. By this term Paul depicts himself as one in the most deplorable situation, the most worthless and miserable man on earth. As a former persecutor of the Church of God, Paul surmises that he was

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>271</sup> S.J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (WUNT 81; Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 60; see also S.J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit, An Exegetical Study of 2 Cor 2:14-3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (WUNT 2, Reihe 19; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 89-101.

the most miserable and worthless person. But notwithstanding his insufficiency God still appointed him to be his apostle. By Paul's estimation, he was no more than "a miscarriage" he did not deserve the title and responsibility of an apostle.<sup>272</sup>

### Emmanuel O. Nwaoru 2011

Emmanuel Nwaoru suggests that Paul's use of the term *ektrōma* is in relation to other apostles' earlier contact with the risen Lord and in response to demeaning attacks from his opponents in Corinth. While the use of the metaphor is limited to Paul and his text in the entire New Testament, Emmanuel Nwaoru opines that Paul may have depended on the LXX and his familiarity with secular Greek literature. He acknowledges the long history of interpretations associated with the text and the interest it has awakened among scholars. The author seeks to examine what he tags "some of the mainline issues involved in the interpretation of the imagery of the 'untimely born'" and to explain why Paul includes this metaphor among the list of terms he uses as his self-designation.<sup>273</sup> However, while the exact translation of the term remains debatable, Emmanuel Nwaoru in his work appears to settle for the translation 'untimely born.' He identifies the decisive feature of *ektrōma* as the abnormal time of birth and incomplete form of that which is born. His assessment of the history of interpretation of the text leads to the conclusion that determining the basis of Paul's use of the metaphor in relation to his person remains one of the unsolved problems relating to the text. While scholars like A. Harnack and F.F. Bruce among others suggest that Paul used a word of abuse that was directed against him by his adversaries in relation to his new birth as a Christian and as an apostle, other scholars suggest that it was used in relation to his old life before conversion. These include H. Windisch, Matthew Henry and M.W. Mitchell. H. Windisch suggests that it was used by Paul as a self-judgment of his pre-Christian attitude. Matthew Henry sustains that it was used by Paul to depict the suddenness of his new birth in the context of his not having been matured for the apostolic function in relation to the other apostles who had personal converse with the Lord. Paul in this sense was one born out of time for the mission as suggested by M.W. Mitchell.<sup>274</sup> From the point of view of his assessment of self-description as a common feature in Pauline writings, Emmanuel

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<sup>272</sup> Hollander and Van der Hout, "The Apostle Paul Calling Himself An Abortion," 236.

<sup>273</sup> Emmanuel Nwaoru, "'The Untimely born' (1 Cor 15:8): A Portrait of Paul among the Corinthians," *Koinonia* 5 (2011): 83.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

Nwaoru suggests in his turn that self-designation is a genre peculiar to biblical and secular literature of the time. It is used by Old Testament figures like Abraham and the prophets, and by the psalmists to depict a high sense of humility in the face of an overwhelming favour received or expected. Emmanuel Nwaoru therefore concludes that Paul, aware of this genre and overwhelmed by the grace of his conversion notwithstanding his persecution of the Church of God, employs the term *ektrōma* in humility to express and appreciate his nothingness before God.<sup>275</sup>

Emmanuel Nwaoru's interpretation of 1 Cor 15:8 in relation to Paul is evident in his translation of the term *ektrōma* in the title of his work as "the untimely born." He understands the metaphor as Paul's expression of the untimely nature of his apostolic calling in the vision of the risen Christ. He is overwhelmed and humbled by the grace of conversion which came outside the normal time; after the cessation of the appearances. Emmanuel Nwaoru holds that the metaphor was used by Paul's detractors as a scornful reference to his lateness as an eyewitness of the risen Lord. It was used by his adversaries to question the nature of his apostleship. Paul however, appropriated the deprecating metaphor to express what God in his mercy has achieved in him in spite of his being represented as late, untimely and least. So, by softening the tone of his detractors Paul thus used *ektrōma* for himself to express the unique privilege given to him by God to witness the appearance of the risen Christ and be considered an apostle, notwithstanding his being the least.<sup>276</sup>

### Andrzej Gieniusz, 2013

Andrzej Gieniusz seeks to explain the meaning of 1 Cor 15:8 using Num 12:12 (LXX) and Philo's figurative use of the Old Testament text. The LXX text of Num 12:12 employs the same metaphor of *ektrōma* to describe the condition of leprous Miriam. Andrzej Gieniusz analyses the text based on the figurative use made of it by Philo. The term *ektrōma* in this context is understood by Andrzej Gieniusz to mean meaning not only "born dead" or "incapable of living," but also "that which brings death," "something deadly" or "something lethal."<sup>277</sup> The LXX of Num 12:12 and Philo's use of the text tend to underscore mostly the second meaning. In Num

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<sup>275</sup>Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>277</sup>Andrzej Gieniusz, "'As a Miscarriage': The Meaning and Function of the Metaphor in 1 Cor. 15:1-11 in Light of Num 12:12 (LXX)," *Biblical Annals* 3 (2013): 100-101.

12:12 Miriam has become similar to death in the sense of a miscarriage *ektrōma* which devours. In Philo's paraphrase: *amblōthridia kai ektrōmata* of Num 12:12 the sense of the metaphor is that of a miscarriage which devours the flesh of its mother in addition to its own death.<sup>278</sup> The use of the metaphor in Num 12:12 as well as by Philo and in various Jewish revisions of the text allows Andrzej Gieniusz to propose that Paul was aware of the sense of *ektrōma* in the LXX and used it in the same sense to imply "a foetus not only deprived of life, but also deadly; one that is dead and, in addition, is a bearer of death."<sup>279</sup>

He identifies various interpretations given to the Pauline text in the history of exegesis of the text and offers his critique of each. Among these interpretations is one he considers as one of the most prevalent today. One which based on the genius of miscarriage as a being lacking life; applies the metaphor to the pre-Christian Paul as one spiritually dead before his encounter with the risen Christ. Thanks to this encounter which is the grace of God Paul has received new life.<sup>280</sup> He criticizes this hypothesis as defective because it has no answer to why Paul would prefer *ektrōma* to the more direct term *nekros* which, with its precise meaning is peculiar to his writings. Like other hypotheses, this solution according to Andrzej Gieniusz does not overcome the gap between the lexical meaning of *ektrōma* and the one called for by the Pauline text.<sup>281</sup>

In 1 Cor 15:8 Paul considers himself prior to the appearance of Christ as a miscarriage; *ektrōma*, a dead foetus, lacking life and incapable of living. This however applies to all Christians, who, prior to baptism were spiritually dead, but in baptism received new life. Paul's self-description as an *ektrōma* includes the above; but over and against the above it specifically underscores its second characteristic as something lethal identified in Num 12:12 and in Philo. In comparison with others, Paul was not only dead but deadly; by persecuting the Church of God, he was a source of death and for both reason a miscarriage. His choice of *ektrōma* rather than *nekros* was to capture not only the quality of being dead but also that of being lethal or deadly. So, from dead Paul became alive and from deadly he became a bearer of life as an apostle working harder than others in bringing the Gospel to many.<sup>282</sup> In relation to the resurrection discourse of 1 Cor 15, Paul in vv. 8-10 presupposes the final resurrection of all believers. That

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<sup>278</sup>Ibid., 99-100.

<sup>279</sup>Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>280</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>281</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>282</sup>Ibid., 106.



the Lord has affected his (Paul) transition from death to life, and transformation from sower of death to bearer of life implies that he will equally make it possible for those who believe in him to resurrect on the last day.

## Conclusion

George Nickelsburg, Hollander – Van der Hout, and Andrzej Gieniusz rightly identify Paul's use of the metaphor in relation to his past life as a persecutor of the Church of God. The term underscores for them Paul's death/unworthiness either before his second call (Nickelsburg) or his only call to the apostolate (Hollander – Van der Hout). Gieniusz particularly highlights in addition the deadly quality of *ektrōma* which marks Paul's pre-conversion activities as making him not only spiritually dead but also placing him in a position to cause the death of others. In these representations, the three schools of thought do not give preference to the term's notion of prematurity which the process of Paul's rebirth as an apostle may entail. This dimension is picked up by Emmanuel Nwaoru who underscores the term's depiction of the untimely nature of Paul's apostolate. Emmanuel Nwaoru however, does this at the cost of almost ignoring the relationship between the metaphor and the pre-conversion activities of Paul.

Based on the polysemic nature of *ektrōma* as a word and in view of the Lord's appearance to Paul as 'last of all,' and the comparison between Paul and the rest of the disciples/apostles in v. 10, it is possible that the metaphor refers not only to the pre-conversion status of Paul but also to the post-conversion status of Paul as an apostle. This study has tried to expose the attempts of some scholars at understanding Paul's use of the *ektrōma* metaphor in 1 Cor. 15:8. That which has been discovered in the course of this study consists in the fact that there is no agreement among authors on the use Paul makes of the metaphor in the passage. This lack of consensus leaves open the possibility of further hypotheses and interpretations, and underscores the challenges posed by some passages of the bible to interpreters and readers. This does not however imply the absence of a spiritual sense to be deduced from the text by every reader in search of spiritual nourishment; it highlights instead the richness of the Scripture as a sacred text.

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**Biblical Paradigms for the Sustainable Use and Management of Natural Resources in Nigeria: Interpreting John 6:1-15 from an Eco-Theological Perspective.**

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**Abstract**

When studied from an eco-theological perspective, John's Gospel 6:1-15 reveals Jesus' attentiveness to human needs as well as his judicious use, equitable distribution and conservation of resources. These principles constitute models for the contemporary world in its management and use of available resources. The ecosystem provides many services necessary for the survival and well-being of humanity. The proper use and management of its resources in turn guarantee the sustainability of these services. However, with the increasing rate of their depletion due to over-exploitation, overconsumption, environmental pollution and an entrenched culture of waste, the need to sustainably use and manage these natural resources has become very expedient. This paper employs the historical-critical method of exegesis to analyse the text of John 6:1-15 as the heuristic framework for a Christian eco-theology. It also uses the Integrated Natural Resource Management approach to apply the text to the Nigerian context. The paper argues that Nigeria is blessed with enough natural resources which when equitably distributed can meet the developmental needs of every Nigerian. It recommends: involvement of local communities, equity, justice, waste reduction and recycling and concern for future generation, in the management of the natural resources

Keywords: Eco-theology, Resource Management, Ecological Sustainability, Gospel of John

**Introduction**

Religion, especially from the comparative perspective, has shown itself capable of championing environmental cause.<sup>283</sup> Its attempt to articulate a systematic theory and praxis of human interaction with its environment is what is generally referred to as ecological theology. From the perspective of Christian religion, ecological theology builds on the ecological presuppositions of the Christian faith and seeks to harmonize these with the discoveries of modern sciences about the environment. At the centre of this faith is the Bible seen as the record of God's self-revelation and intervention in human history. Biblical hermeneutics can help reveal the ecological insights in the Christian Bible. This paper is an attempt to present some Christian environmental wisdom contained in the biblical story of the miracle of the feeding of the five

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<sup>283</sup>Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, May 24, 2015, art. 64.

thousand in John 6:1-15. It uses the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation as aid to an eco-theological approach. The paper also employs the integrated natural resource management (INRM) approach as a theoretical framework for understanding and applying these Christian environmental principles especially in the Nigerian context. As this INRM approach demands the involvement of the local communities in the management program, appeal to Africa's environmental wisdom so long as they harmonize with the Christian perspective, would also serve to enrich this work. The work first looks at the ecosystem services humans derive from the environment as well as the integrated approach towards the sustainable use and management of these resources. This is followed by an exegesis of John 6:1-15 from an eco-theological perspective. The principles drawn from this text as well as those drawn from the traditional African environmental wisdom are applied to the Nigerian context.

### **Nature: Its Resources and Services**

The earth's ecosystem comprises of all the organisms (biotic and abiotic) in their different spheres; the hydrosphere, the lithosphere, the atmosphere and biosphere make up the natural environment. These spheres mutually interact and influence each other. At the centre of all these spheres is the human being around whom every other thing in the created world exists as an environment.<sup>284</sup>The earth's ecosystem provides four broad based services for human beings. Without these ecosystem services, human life as is known today would not be possible. It is within the framework of these ecosystem services that a meaningful discussion on natural resource use and management can take place.

The First include Provisioning Services: the natural environment provides human beings with resources from plants, animals and minerals such as food, fibre, genetic resources, biochemicals, natural medicines, pharmaceutical resources, ornamental resources, fresh water and all energy resources. They serve as the natural resources from which goods are produced for human use, consumption and general wellbeing. The Second is Regulating Services: the natural environment provides regulating services by making available sinks for the different waste produced from human activities. Most importantly the ecosystem purifies the air, water and soil against pollution. The sequestration of carbon is a good example of this purification process.

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<sup>284</sup>Martino Reneto, "Statement to the United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development," Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 4, 1992.

Bio-degradation of waste through natural processes, the natural regulation of pests, natural buffer zones for erosion control and natural hazard control all come under the regulating services of the ecosystem. The third is Supporting Services: these are so called because they are foundational to all other services man derives from his natural environment. They include: soil formation, photosynthesis, primary production of energy, nutrient cycling and energy flow, water cycling and seed dispersal.

The fourth is Cultural Services: these include all the non-material benefits obtained from the natural environment through spiritual enrichment, conjunctive development, reflection, recreation and aesthetic experiences.<sup>285</sup> These services can also be classified as Source Function Services and Sink Function Services of the natural environment. This classification emphasizes the capacity of the natural environment to respectively provide the resources for humans' use, as well as assimilative and storage services for the waste generated from human activities and use of the natural resources.<sup>286</sup> Technically, the concept is reserved for the non-human biotic and abiotic resources; it is used in this technical sense in this work. The term 'human resources' is on the other hand reserved for only the services rendered by human beings. Natural resources can be classified into raw and processed resources according to whether they have been altered or not by human creativity. They could also be renewable and non-renewable natural resources. The renewable ones could be further subdivided into 'quickly-renewable resources' and the 'slowly-renewable' ones. Non-renewable resources in turn could be both recyclable and non-recyclable. Environmental natural resources include air, water, soil, land while 'flow natural resources' include solar, wind and thermal energy.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), "Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Framework," *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005), 49-70 <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.356.aspx.pdf>. Accessed January 10, 2016

<sup>286</sup> European Commission-Directorate General, "Environmental Analysis of Selected Concepts on Resource Management," March 2002, 6-7. <http://www.ec.europa.eu/environment/natres/pdf/cowlstudy.pdf>. Accessed January 8, 2016

<sup>287</sup> Aart de Zeeuw, *Resource Management: Do We need Public Policy?* (2000), 4-8, <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/waste/pdf/zeeuw.pdf>. Accessed January 10, 2016.

## The Use and Abuse of Natural Resources: An Appraisal of the Global Environmental Crises in Nigeria

The use of natural resources to meet various human needs and development has seriously depleted and degraded the resources and the natural environment as a whole. While depletion refers to the reduction in the overall stock of renewable and non-renewable natural resources beyond their carrying capacity, degradation on the other hand refers to the pollution of the quality of the natural environment and its resources beyond their assimilative capacity. Natural resources depletion and degradation form the basis of all modern environmental problems. Forestalling or mitigating them is the major thrust of all the initiatives and actions for the sustainable use and management of natural resources. In the last two hundred years, as a result of the industrial revolution and increasing human population, there has been an astronomical growth in the prevalence of these two factors.

The unsustainable use of natural resources is the major cause of their increasing depletion and degradation. This unsustainable use is as a result of interplay of multiple variables such as overarching human greed, the culture of materialism, selfish individualism and unbridled capitalism. Undue reliance on the Keynesian economic model of growth and development (where the GDP is the only index of growth and development) has also contributed significantly to the depletion and degradation of these resources. Inefficient production technologies and wasteful consumption patterns have equally given rise to the prevalence of a culture of dirt/ filth and “throwaway culture.”<sup>288</sup> Underlying all these scientific, technological, demographic, institutional, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of anthropogenic causes of environmental problem, is the question of a world which has lost its sense of the value of human life and its sense of morality. John Paul II rightly said therefore that, “the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of man’s moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we would lose interest in others and in the earth itself.”<sup>289</sup> As a result of these the world is witnessing globally today myriad of serious environmental, socio-economic and health related problems.

In the Nigerian context, the causes of the present ecological crises are complex and sometimes paradoxical. Both traditional and modern social structures have been responsible for

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<sup>11</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, art. 20-22.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Message for The World Day of Peace*, 1990, art. 13.

the crises. Traditional structures include the predominantly rural nature of most Nigerian communities, the high level of poverty, the continuous use of wood fuel as the most common source of energy, the persistent reliance on bush burning as the common method of hunting, the continuous reliance on traditional farming methods and unimproved plant and animal varieties. The modern social and economic structures include the activities of extractive industries like the oil and gas industries in Nigeria, urbanization, population growth and globalization, corruption, social injustice and inequality.<sup>290</sup>

Among the most common environmental problems in Nigeria today are climate change, the persistent loss of biodiversity, deforestation, pollution of soil and land quality, desert encroachment, declining marine resources, water pollution and scarcity. According to a UN-REDD Report, Nigeria has lost more than 50 percent of its forest cover since 1990 and currently less than 10 percent of the country is forested. The deforestation rate in Nigeria is estimated at 3.7 percent, one of the highest in the world.<sup>291</sup> The increasing number of oil prospecting companies, automobiles and power generating plants especially in the many urban centres, indiscriminate bush burning especially in villages, gas flares from the oil companies, gaseous emissions and toxic effluents from companies have led to the pollution of the atmosphere, streams, rivers and land. One would not fail to mention the uncontrolled poaching for wildlife otherwise called bush meat in Nigeria.

Cities have become big refuse dumps as un-recycled municipal and industrial wastes, both solid and effluent, are competing for space with people. The menace of erosion and terrible landslide especially in the eastern part of Nigeria are also part of these increasing environmental crises. Poor sanitation and the general absence of appropriate sewage disposal systems in the urban centres as well as unsafe drinking water sources in most of the local communities have contributed to the spread of many diseases like dysentery, cholera, diarrhoea. The mono-sector economy has created an over dependence on crude oil with its environmental consequences. The

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<sup>13</sup> Segun Ogungbemi, "An African Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," in Louis J Pojman (ed.), *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1997), 206; cf. also Kekong Bisong E., *Restorative Justice in Conflict Management* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2008), 173.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries: Readiness Preparation Proposal for Nigeria (UN- REDD+ R-PP), November, 2013,5.

[https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2013/Nov2013/Nigeria%20REDD%2B%20R-PP%20November\\_2013%5B1%5D\\_Final.pdf](https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2013/Nov2013/Nigeria%20REDD%2B%20R-PP%20November_2013%5B1%5D_Final.pdf). Accessed January 10, 2016.

biting poverty in most local communities does not allow for a sustainable use of the environment, neither does the excessive materialism of the affluent and rich encourage a lifestyle that is eco-friendly. Over concentration of basic amenities and jobs in the urban centres, has brought rapid urbanization with its undue strain on the urban environments. The changing patterns of land use to provide food for and accommodate the infrastructural needs of an increasing population has also brought about significant changes in the land cover in many areas with various forms of ecological implications. In the Niger delta region for instance corruption and corporate irresponsibility on the part of government functionaries, community leaders and multinational companies have perpetually kept the region poor and their environment degraded. At the grassroots, there is a gradual erosion of the traditional sense of the sacredness of the earth.

Environmental degradation has made it impossible for many poor people who depend directly on the land, the forests and the rivers/streams for their livelihood to break out from their circle of poverty. In the bid to make ends meet, the poor also engage in unsustainable use of these resources that tend to worsen their degraded or depleted state. The debate on whether poverty is the cause or consequence of environmental degradation has gained scholarly attention in recent times. At the international scene, John Paul II however, calls attention to the fact that in order to develop new products for exports most heavily indebted countries are destroying their natural heritage in a way that irreparably damages the ecological balance in nature. He sustains that assigning blames to the poor alone for environmental degradation in situations like this is wrong. The earth is entrusted to the poor no less than the rich, so the poor ought to be helped to find their way out of poverty. To do this, courageous structural reforms need to be carried out as well as new ways of relating among peoples and states.<sup>292</sup>

In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria for instance environmental degradation has been compounded by the unethical explorative and productive activities of multinational oil companies in collaboration with corrupt and influential Nigerians. In the past sixty years the region has witnessed many cases of oil spills and gas flares with untold consequences like loss of productive land, surface and groundwater pollution and soil contamination. The poor and dispossessed at times vandalize pipe lines in order to make ends meet, thereby leading to further environmental damage and more poverty. Eucheria Nwagbara et al rightly note particularly about the Niger Delta region that, there is no basis of comparison between meagre and recyclable

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<sup>292</sup> John Paul II, *Message for The World Day of Peace*, 1990, art.11.

waste generated by the poor and the huge amount of good consumed and ecologically debilitating wastes generated by the rich class. For instance, the gas flaring and oil spillage in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria that have wrecked untold havoc on land, water and air, were the results of the activities of the rich Nigerians and their multinational corporations' counterparts.<sup>293</sup>

Increasing population in some Nigerian communities means reduction in the number of arable land per capita. As farmers cultivate a parcel of land longer than necessary with little or no fertilizers or even alternative lands to farm, the soil fertility of the available farmland continues to dwindle thereby increasing their poverty level and degrading the land further. The same can be said of other natural resources like non-timber forest products, water quality and availability, air quality. The link between power, wealth, institutional and market failures working side by side have been shown to compound these environmental problems in Nigeria.

### **Sustainable Use and Management of Natural Resources: The Integrated Approach**

Much more than merely acknowledging the presence, the causes and consequences of environmental crises, the proffering of solutions to these problems, is the overriding motif of global environmental consciousness. Today, there is a broad spectrum of initiatives, activities and advocacies in this regard which is collectively known as sustainable natural resource management. The sustainable use and management of natural resources therefore means the optimal use of these resources, especially through increased efficiency in exploration, extraction, production/ processing or manufacture, consumption, reuse, recycling and decrease in their demand.<sup>294</sup> The quest for the sustainable use and management of natural resources has been pursued from the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives of the physical and social sciences and the humanities. Even government policies and regulations bordering on the environment, as well as the activism of many NGOs devoted to the theme of the environment, all come under this initiative. Many approaches have been suggested proffered and used over the years for this purpose. Mention could be made of the regional/community-based natural resource

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<sup>293</sup> Eucheria N. Nwagbara, Raphael P. Abia, Francis A. Uyang and Joy A. Ejeje, "Poverty, Environmental Degradation and Sustainable Development: A Discourse," *Global Journal of Human Social Science, Sociology, Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 12 No. 11 (2012), 6. [https://www.globaljournals.org/GJHSS\\_Volume12/1-Poverty-Environmental-Degradation.pdf](https://www.globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume12/1-Poverty-Environmental-Degradation.pdf). Accessed January 11, 2016.

<sup>294</sup> Daniel D. Chiras, *Environmental Science: A framework For Decision Making*, (Merlo Park: The Benjamin/Cumming Publishing Coys), 1995, 14-33.



management (CBNRM) approach, the Adaptive management approach, the ecosystem approach, the land management approach, the precautionary approach and the integrated natural resource management (INRM) approach.

In this paper, the INRM approach is adopted; it has been defined as

An approach to managing resources sustainably by helping resource users, managers, and other stakeholders accomplish their different goals by consciously taking into account, and aiming to reconcile and synergize, their various interests, attitudes, and actions. These goals include increasing production, enhancing food security, creating value, maximizing profitability, minimizing risk, building up and maintaining various natural and other assets, and conserving the natural resource base.<sup>295</sup>

The INRM approach seeks to meet human needs for survival and development while at the same time maintaining environmental balance and sustainability. Human needs, their livelihoods and their rights, and how these needs interact with management of the natural resources lie at the heart of INRM. This approach emphasizes the finitude, the interrelation, the depletability and degradability of natural resources in the ecosystem. It also emphasizes the involvement of the interests of many stakeholders. These stakeholders include government, private sector, the individual prospector of these resources, the immediate communities where these resources are found as well as the global/international community. The local communities for instance must be made to

feel a sense of ownership and responsibility in the management of the resource, and in the benefits that accrue from its use. Whatever management and control system is put in place is likely to face barriers in implementation, if it ignores the community role and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Oftentimes this creates conflict situations in the management of natural resources.<sup>296</sup>

Integrated Natural Resource Management also takes into account the need to reduce the rate of exploitation of these natural resources, the need to avoid wasting the resource through efficient production and consumption patterns and the need for proper disposal of the final waste

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<sup>295</sup>Peter Frost, Bruce Campbell, Gabriel Medina and Leonard Usongo, "Landscape-Scale Approaches for Integrated Natural Resource Management in Tropical Forest Landscapes," *Ecology and Society* Vol. 11 No.2 (2006), 30. <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol11/iss2/art30/>. Accessed January 26, 2016.

<sup>296</sup>Kwesi Attah-Krah, "Integrated Natural Resources Management and Genetic Diversity: Two Sides of the Coin for Sustainable Livelihoods and Development. Tilahun Amede et. al, (eds.), *Integrated Natural Resource Management in Practice: Enabling Communities to Improve Mountain Livelihoods and Landscapes*, (Kampala: African Highlands Initiative, 2006), 6-9.

arising from the use of the resources. Consequently, there is need to manage these natural resources in a holistic and integrated manner. Such holistic management must pay attention to all dimensions of the ecological crises; bio-physical, socio-economic, philosophical, political, moral and religio/spiritual. The Integrated natural resource management shares conceptual affinities with the integral ecology approach proposed by Pope Francis.<sup>297</sup>

### **Exegesis of John 6:1-15**

The feeding of the five thousand by Jesus in John 6:1-15 is recorded in the four Gospels; a feature which indicates Christian tradition's familiarity with the event. Peculiar to John's account however is Jesus' concern for the wellbeing of the crowd, his engagement of the disciples and the consequent introduction of the boy with five loaves and two fishes (5-9), and Jesus' caution against wasting the left over in v. 12 which pairs with Ex 16:19-20. The pericope is divided into two major sections: the introduction vv. 1-4 and the miracle vv. 5-15; notable challenges in the composition include the transition from v. 4 to v. 5 and the relationship between vv. 3 and 15. The geographical setting and the vagueness of the voyage has equally generated scholarly discussions. The section on the multiplication vv. 5-15 can be further divided into three subunits: first, acknowledgment of the problem of hunger and the quest for solution vv. 5-9; second, Solution vv. 10-13; third, Effect of the sign vv. 14-15.

In the context of the topic the passage is studied under the following headings: people-oriented leadership, efficient management of the resources of the earth, and avoidance of waste. The geographical setting which depicts a unique landscape in the introductory verses (1-4) underscores however, the role of the environment in the ministry of Jesus. The quest for space in nature as an enhancing element in the realization of humanity's goal is depicted in the crossing of the sea, the going up the mountain and the sitting on the mountain. This is capped by the invitation to sit on the green grass in v. 10. The verses therefore depict, in the context of the narrative, the quest for and interaction with nature.

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<sup>297</sup>Pope Francis *Laudato Si*, art.139-162.

**a. Leadership with and for the Community**

The rhetorical question of Jesus directed to Philip underscores Jesus' concern for those who followed him; the text depicts the capacity to detect problems through sensitivity towards the wellbeing of others. It underscores the collaborative task of seeking a common solution to what was perceived by all as a problem to be solved. This display of co-responsible leadership quality is affirmed by the author's commentary in v. 6; Jesus knew the answer (v. 6b) but chose to involve Philip (v. 6a), and by testing him he made the problem the concern of both the members of his inner circle represented by Andrew (v. 8), and of the crowd represented by the young boy (v. 9). The dialogue between Jesus and his disciples over the problem of hunger leads to the discovery of two fishes and five loaves. By acting in communion with the community, community problems are detected and solved. This oneness with the community is alluded to in the introductory verses where Jesus is depicted as sitting with his disciples (vv. 1-4); a gesture which denotes solidarity and companionship. He is represented therefore "as someone who shares with people, who 'sits with them,' and raises them to an awareness of something higher."<sup>298</sup>

The very objective assessment of Philip (v. 7) which recalls Moses' response to Yahweh in the desert (Num 11:13) and the reservation of Andrew (v. 9) underscores the enormity of the problem and the consequent miraculous and overwhelming nature of the solution. Like Elisha's servant (2 Kings 4:42), Philip's and Andrew's physical measuring terms assessment of the situation is exclusive of the divine as the spiritual source of human sustenance; a lack which Jesus, following the prophetic trail of Elisha in 2 Kings 4:43-44, recognizes and makes up for in the giving of thanks *eucharistein* (v. 11). Human attempts at resolving problems that are oblivious of the spiritual source will always objectively be challenged by the absurdity, enormity and apparent insurmountable nature of the problems.

**b. John 6:1-15 and the Management of the Resources of the Earth**

The bread and fish represent the resources of the earth and the work of human hands. Fish is directly a resource which nature produces but it arrives at the table as meal through humanity's use of its ingenuity. Bread is the product of processed raw materials from nature. The best bread

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<sup>298</sup> Thomas L., Brodie, *The Gospel according to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 260.

is derived from wheat while the inferior is derived from barley and used especially by the poor and in time of scarcity. The one used here is of barley (v. 9) and in its inferiority it expands the horizon of insufficiency (proper to the limited available resources: two fishes and five loaves) which mark the setting of and amplify the extraordinary nature of the events. Bread is thus the result of human beings' use of the resource of nature barley or wheat for the production of food to satisfy hunger. The invitation to sit and the indication of the presence of much grass for the sitting (v. 10) expands the space between Jesus, the disciples and the crowd and gives a picture of a wider and accommodating landscape. It touches on the contributory role of grass or green and space for the wellbeing of the human person or the service it offers. It offers a ready atmosphere for picnic, recreation and thanksgiving and is a factor in the multiplication and distribution of the meals. It underscores the abundance of pasture which providence offers in the place of green in Psalm 22 (23):2. The giving of thanks *eucharistein* (v. 11) implies recognition of the source of the produce; it reflects the *berakha* (the Jewish prayer before meals), which consists of the praise of God, and the expression of thanks for the gifts. The multiplication is noted by the author as taking place in the thanksgiving; the thanksgiving makes the limited resources more than sufficient. The resources of nature are traced to God as their source (Psalms 8; 104:24) and in thanksgiving one recognizes God as their origin. The thanksgiving pairs up with the luxury of the green grass to underscore providence's shepherding and provision of abundance and security through nature re-echoed from Psalm 22 (23). Rudolf Schnackenburg maintains that this Psalm forms the background for the Johannine pericope.<sup>299</sup>

The transition clause in John6:4 links the episode to the Passover. The "Bread of Life" discourse after the episode links the miracle to Jesus' anticipated gift of himself as the bread of life on the day before he suffered. For John therefore there is close link between the miracle and the Christian Eucharist today. Christ's incarnation as man transforms the merely material and makes it the gateway to divinity. This gives an added ecological impetus for the respect that humanity owes material nature which the son of God was not ashamed to identify with. Acknowledging God as the source of the resources of nature implies equally the responsibility of human beings in the use of the resources; they become the custodians to whom the resources are given on trust. Consciousness of God's ownership of them implies accountability, care and

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<sup>299</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, Vol. 2, (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 18.

prudence in the use of them. they are not to be destroyed but to be used judiciously so that they may be available for future generation. It is in these contexts that the thanksgiving is made; thanksgiving therefore promotes and underscores the virtues of accountability, prudence and charity in the use of the resources and serves as the basis for the multiplication. Thanksgiving in this context is therefore an aspect in the management of the resources. When the resources of the earth are used with care in the consciousness of God as their origin, the miracle of abundance will take place for humanity's use because "the interaction between the divine and the human is capable of producing something that is of surpassing goodness."<sup>300</sup>The abundance of the event thus fulfils the promise of Psalm 23:1 in which the Lord by his interaction with the elements of the material world shepherds his own, and they in turn are never in need.<sup>301</sup>

### c. John 6:1-5 and the Avoidance of Wastage

The caution against wastage (*hina mē ti apolētai* v. 12) provides the key to abundance and absence of scarcity. It touches on accountability which is equally emphasized by the knowledge of what was before consumption (two fishes and five barley loaves) and what was left after consumption (twelve baskets of fragments from the barley loaves). It is an invitation to care for that which is available in preparation for the future, failure to care for it will in the reverse of Exod 16:19-20 give rise to wastage. While the guard against waste in the Exodus manna event was in the collection of only what was necessary, the caution against waste in Jesus' abundant meal is in the gathering up of what is left. Both constitute prevention of waste which as specified in Exod 16:20 would amount to breeding of worms and pollution; leading to the destruction of the environment. It expresses the Jewish regard for bread as a gift from God which must not be wasted and anticipates the imperishable bread which the miraculous feeding symbolizes.<sup>302</sup> Done in proximity to the celebration of the Passover which is the feast of the celebration of the manna it recalls providence at work who in providing food for the hungry out of the scarcity in the desert makes possible an abundance of food from the limited resources on the mountain across the sea and away from the village.

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<sup>300</sup> Thomas L Brodie, *The Gospel According To John*, 261.

<sup>301</sup> Francis J Maloney, *The Gospel of John*, (Sacra Patina Vol. 4, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 198.

<sup>302</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, Vol. 2, 18.

### **Eco-Theological Principles for Sustainable Natural Resource Management.**

In order to respond adequately to the current environmental threats and injustice, Christianity has tried to retrieve the ecological wisdom latent in her tradition. She has also attempted to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew this tradition in the light of the challenges posed by these environmental crises. This double attempt at offering theological critique of the values, culture and habits underlying the destruction of the ecosystem by human activities is referred to as Ecological Theology (Eco-theology). It also includes a critique of the Christian tradition in the light of the contemporary global environmental crises, awareness and consciousness. Beyond the reinterpretation of Christian theology, eco-theology seeks also to review every aspect of the Christian faith. It seeks to make the entire life of the church to include an ecological dimension and vision. It draws its general principles on environmental sustainability from the bible and Christian tradition and applies them to contextual situations of different environmental problems.<sup>303</sup> Eco-theology has become a viable option in the quests for answers to the contemporary environmental challenges for the following reasons: (i) it appeals to religious sentiments in the care for environment, (ii) it is an extended theology, (iii) it is interdisciplinary, (iv) it is pluralistic, (v) it is interreligious with a global perspective and (vi) it is revolutionary.<sup>304</sup>

Biblical hermeneutics is one area the contributions of eco-theology can very well be appreciated. Its specific Christian orientation makes it one out of the many religious perspectives informing eco-theology. As a science of biblical interpretation, it affords eco-theology the divine perspectives to conceptualize ecological issues even from a purely contextual point of view. An analysis of John 6:1-15 in the context of eco-theology makes this truth very clear. It reveals the following principles which Christian eco-theology can build on for the sustainable use and management of natural resources.

First, all natural resources come from the creative hands of God for human wellbeing. This is underscored in Jesus' giving of thanks (*eucharistein*) before the distribution of the five loaves and two fish. Precisely because it comes from God, creation as a whole does not intrinsically belong to the human person to be used and abused according to its selfish whims and dictatorial

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<sup>303</sup>Ernest M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research*, (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2006), 3-4 <https://www.africansunmedia.co.za>. Accessed December 20, 2016.

<sup>304</sup>Kekong E. Bisong, "Anthropocentric Castles and the Imperatives of Eco-Theology," Ugochukwu Njoku and Simon Anyanwu (eds), *Shepherd and Teacher* (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015), 165-181.

caprices. Human beings are mere custodians or stewards of creation. They are to apply the fruits of creation for the benefit of the common good. It is therefore the creator and rightful owner that must set the standard for the right use of these natural resources and not humans. To go against this divine standard constitutes “a grave sin against the natural environment, one which weighs on our consciences, and which calls for grave responsibility towards God the creator.”<sup>305</sup> Indeed Human beings have turned their back on God’s plan for creation and by so doing have provoked a “disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order. ‘Therefore the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish, and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and even the fish of the sea are taken away’ (Hosea 4:3).”<sup>306</sup>

Secondly, implicit in the concept of thanksgiving are three other important presuppositions. The first presupposition is humanity’s total dependence on God for all its needs. Life comes from God who has in turn given humanity the earth’s resources for its upkeep and well-being. The second presupposition is the objective existence and inherent goodness and integrity of the object of the thanksgiving (the earth’s resources). Many scholars from the different religious traditions hold that the guiding principle behind all environmental concern rests on the notion of the “integrity of creation;” the notion of the intrinsic value of the natural world, including human beings, as the creation of God. This implies that natural things have value far beyond the mere satisfaction of short-term human interests.<sup>307</sup> The thanksgiving of Jesus underscores humanity’s need for, and utter dependence on the resources of the earth. The Earth’s ecosystem therefore needs to be cared for if humanity must continue to derive these much needed services. Thanksgiving is an acknowledgment of the experience of providence. The third presupposition is that of celebration. *Eucharistia* always carries this note of joyful celebration which humanity accords God through whose goodness it has received fish, bread and wine, resources of the earth and products of human hands.

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<sup>305</sup>John Paul II, Address at the Liturgy of the Word, Zamosc, June 12, 1999, art. 3, <http://www.vatican.va>va>travels>documents>. Accessed January 13, 2017.

<sup>306</sup>John Paul II, Message for the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Tourism, June 24, 2002, art. 5 [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/tourism/documents/hf\\_jpii\\_mes\\_2002\\_0625](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/tourism/documents/hf_jpii_mes_2002_0625). Accessed November 18, 2016.

<sup>307</sup>Charles J. Kibert, Leslie Thiele, Anna Peterson and Martha Monroe, *The Ethics of Sustainability*, 2011, 63-65, <https://www.researchgate.net/file.PostFileLoader.html?idae=574ae7fad332dae991230c>. Accessed January 20, 2016.

Thirdly, the satisfaction of human needs lies at the heart of the use and management of natural resource. The realization of humanity's survival on earth and the consequent sustenance of humanity's larger needs require an interaction between the resources of nature and the ingenuity of the human person, and recognition in thanksgiving of divine providence as the source of both. For human ingenuity to be at its best there is need for collaboration among humans in every attempt at problem solving. this will turn scarcity into abundance through cooperate and effective management of that which is available in view of the many needs. The preoccupation of Philip and Andrew with the limitedness of the resources denotes a co-operation only between the resources of nature and the human person without the divine. The thanksgiving on the part of Jesus introduces the third aspect of the trio (the divine) and thus teaches that for a miracle of this kind to take place or for the needs of humanity to be effectively met; human beings must always rise above the level of that which is space-bound and enter into the realm of the divine. A connection must be made between materiality and the immaterial or spiritual. Jesus in this event underscores thanksgiving to God (as a cultivation of a sense of the holy) as the link between the material and the immaterial and in turn establishes himself as the source of that link. Eco-theology consists therefore in this context, in the interaction in Christ between nature, humanity and God; interaction between humanity, nature and the divine. Recognition of God's blessing in the gift of nature and in the surplus of nature.

The fourth principle is that all resource management efforts must be human-centred or people oriented. This neither denies the intrinsic value of the things of nature nor place undue emphasis on their conservation at the expense of human needs. As a matter of fact, leadership as a whole and environmental governance in particular must be people-oriented. The satisfaction of human needs is at the heart of the integrated natural resource management. Moved with pity by the need of the people Jesus took the initiative to provide food for them; political leaders are challenged to take a cue from this. Leadership in the context of the environment consists in evolving green or eco-friendly policies, ensuring that the resources of the earth are justly and equitably directed to the common good while at the same time considering the needs of future generations.

Fifth the biblical pericope insists on co-responsibility and involvement of the community and other stakeholders in the management of the resources. A top-down management approach has proven to be ineffective as far as resource management in Nigeria is concerned. Getting the



domicile-communities of a particular resource involved in its management has become prominent as an alternative natural resource management. It is the main focus of the Community-Based Natural resource management approach. It however forms part of the emphasis of the integrated approach.

Sixth the need for a judicious use of resources is also emphasized by the pericope; ‘so little was available yet so many people were fed.’ When judiciously used, the resources of nature would be enough for everybody to have a fair share with no body having more or less than he/she reasonably needs. Such judicious use involves the wide spectrum of natural resource management options so far pointed out.

Seventh, the passage also emphasizes equitable distribution, accountability and concern for justice both intra-generational and inter-generational, ‘they all ate as much as they wanted.’ It was not only the left over that were accounted for (twelve baskets), the least, no less than the greatest, men as well as women, the young as well as the elderly were equally accounted for and catered for. Everybody’s need, integrity and person was respected and catered for.

Eighth, order and discipline underscore the miracle of Jesus’ feeding of so many with so little. These are emphasized especially by the instruction given to the disciples to make the people sit down. In Lukan and Markan versions of the episode, the people sat down in groups of fifty each (Lk 9:15), and in groups of hundred and groups of fifty (Mk 6:40-41). Environmental laws, governance and ethics for the maintenance of order, the regulation of human use of the resources of nature and effective management of these resources are implied here. The avoidance of waste both from the point of view of reusing and recycling of the left over and the prevention of environmental pollution through indiscriminate and poor disposal of waste from used resources is also insisted upon by the pericope as the ninth principle. Conserving for future use readily comes to mind here too as the tenth principle. From the point of view of sustainable development this caution takes into account the needs of the future generation while providing for present needs.

## **Conclusion**

From the face value, it can be argued that the New Testament offers very little or nothing at all for the ongoing environmental debate. This may be because the environmental issues of today were not there at the time of Christ and were not definitely the primary concerns of the New

Testament writers. However, a closer look at some of these New Testament texts reveals truths that could be appropriated and applied to build convincing and practicable environmental values and principles. Some of these truths could be gleaned from the attitude, teachings and dispositions of Jesus about the things of nature. Anthony Asoanya draws attention to Jesus' reaffirmation of God's care for creatures, his distinctive role as agency of creation (through him all things were made; John 1:1-4), his incarnation, his gospel of "justice, sharing, caring, love, rendering service, solidarity, and living in harmony with all God's creation."<sup>308</sup> He identifies in each of these values, the ingredients which give ecological thrust to the Christ event in the New Testament. Against the background of this implicit ecological thrust the pericope of John 6:1-15 could be better appreciated. It is informative to note that these New Testament ecological values especially those drawn from the Johannine miracle of the feeding of the five thousand resonate with traditional African sensibilities towards the environment and its human and non-human content. Consequently, they could be re-emphasized and re-appropriated to address the contemporary environmental problems in Nigeria, other African nations and even globally.

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<sup>308</sup> Anthony Asoanya, *The Ecological Crisis in Africa as a Challenge to Lasting Cultural and Sustainable Development: A Theological Approach* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011),187-195.

*The Journey of Reconciliation: Groaning for a New Creation in Africa.* Emmanuel Katongole, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017. Pp xxvi + 189. Paper, \$30.00. ISBN 978-1-6269-8250-5.

African Christianity is confronted by ethnic strife, religious conflicts, divisive politics, socio-economic inequalities, cultural clashes, and ecological crisis. Reconciliation, therefore, remains a significant theological paradigm for African Christians. In his collection of inter-related essays, Emmanuel Katongole presents a Christian vision and mission of reconciliation for Africa. This book comprises eleven well-researched and insightful essays grouped into three thematic parts.

Part I has four chapters, with a focus on the Christian understanding of reconciliation as God's gift and invitation to humanity. The first chapter establishes the biblical foundation of reconciliation, grounded on God's vision of a "new creation" (p.5). The second chapter draws on "transitional justice mechanisms" to highlight constraints involved in the realization of reconciliation and political justice in Africa (p.16). This is further developed in the third chapter, as the author critically reflects on the 1994 Rwanda genocide, emphasizing the decline of moral consciousness, and the societal actions undertaken in bringing about reconciliation. The fourth chapter explores a contextual vision of reconciliation, from the perspective of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Africae Munus*. By focusing on this text issued by Pope Benedict XVI after the close of the Second African synod of Bishops, Katongole formulates six theological theses as necessary components of a vision of reconciliation for the African context.

Part II, developed in three chapters, explores the conception of the Church as a sacrament of God's reconciliation in the world. The first chapter focuses on the ecclesiological significance of reconciliation, using "parables" that can inspire the Church in Africa to become a credible and effectual agency of God's reconciling love (p.73). The second chapter explores the missiological aspect of reconciliation, in light of the African experience of violence and conflicts. The third chapter discusses Christian martyrdom as witness and seed of hope for reconciliation in Africa.

Part III identifies major pastoral approaches adopted by selected African Christians in their work of reconciliation. Katongole creatively weaves this part using practical experiences of both the laity and clergy. The first and second chapters chronicle the stories of Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu in Northern Uganda and Archbishop Emmanuel Kataliko in the Congo. This is followed by inspiring stories of two lay persons: Maggy Barankitse and Maison Shalom,

both of Burundi. These stories show the pastoral leadership and pastoral ministries initiated by many African ambassadors of reconciliation, whose work is often unrecognized.

Katongole concludes with a final chapter, which comes under the third part. It expounds on the interplay between the ecclesiological and missiological implications of reconciliation. Applying the metaphor of Pope Francis of the Church as “Field Hospital” to the African context, Katongole offers a renewed theological and pastoral vision of reconciliation, one that is capable of reconciling broken relationships, healing the wounds of divisions, enthroning justice, and fostering peace (p.167). This chapter is interwoven with profound experiences of ambassadors of reconciliations, and the spiritual exercises that sustain them in their ministries in Africa.

Emmanuel Katongole has succeeded in presenting with clarity the indispensable role of the Christian faith in the quest for reconciliation in the African continent. Building on the concept of reconciliation as divine gift and divine invitation, Katongole has constructed a path for African Christianity toward its mission of restoring broken human and social relations in Africa. By discussing the social, practical and ecclesiological dimensions, he offers insightful perspectives that liberate reconciliation from being mere abstraction, and make it a concrete human reality. Consequently, the underlying distinctness and strength of this book is the author’s integration of these dimensions with relevant voices and visions of African Christians as well as ambassadors of reconciliation. Katongole has demonstrated that the fruitfulness of the seed of reconciliation in a conflicted Africa demands commitment to bringing about the reign of God’s “new creation,” characterized by love, justice and peace.

Given the contemporary ecological crisis, including an essay dedicated explicitly to the relationship between ecology and reconciliation would have further enriched this book. Climate change continues to impact the global population, and Africa is one of the most adversely-affected continents. Since the earth is humanity’s common home, a Christian vision and mission of reconciliation cannot be divorced from ecological responsibility. African Christians have a moral duty to serve as credible voices of a voiceless groaning creation, and foster a mutually-enhancing relationship between humans and their home. Despite this drawback, the laity, clergy, theologians, and students of theology will find this book a valuable resource. Katongole has successfully developed a Christian theology of reconciliation that is effectual to the peculiarities of a conflicted African continent and responsive to the global quest for peaceful coexistence.

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