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Ejim Ofo Na Ogu. A Mystic Approach To The God
Question Of The Igbo Africans Of Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Igbo land is noted as one of the four areas in Africa, where Catholic evangelism made great impact and progress. According to Adrian Hasting¹ who is a knowledgeable expert in the history of Christian development in Africa, other areas of similar impact in Africa were Masaka in Uganda, Peramiho in Tanzania, and Dahomey which is the modern day Benin.² At the centre of this work is one of these four areas which is the Igbo land. The Igbo nation is located in the southern eastern part of Nigeria and the people inhabit a total area of about 16.000 square miles.³ This area can be located in the world map between 50 and 70 latitudes north of the Equator and between 60 and 80 longitudes east of Greenwich line.⁴ According to the World Factbook of the CIA of 2020, it is estimated that the Igbo people have a population of 45 million.⁵ The Igbo ethnic group and nation is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and in Africa.⁶ The Igbo Language is the native language of the Igbo people. Igbo Language falls into the Igboid languages of Volta – Niger language family which is part of a larger Niger –Congo language family.⁷ Majority of the Igbo people are Christians.⁸

¹Cf. A. HASTINGS, Church and Mission in Modern Africa, in: DOERR, L., (ed.), Peramiho 1898- 1998. In the service of the Missionary Church, Ndanda – Peramiho 1998, 1.

² Cf. Saviour Chidobere Nwaiwu, The Understanding and Relevance of the Book of Job in the Context of Igbo Tradition and Faith Crisis, (Diplomarbeit), Wien 2012, 8. (This work will subsequently be quoted only under the name Nwaiwu and serves as a foundation to this work).

³ Francis A. ARINZE, Sacrifice in Igbo Religion, in: EGWU, Raphael, Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being and the Triune God, Würzburg 1998, 13. (Subsequently as: EGWU, R., Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being).

⁴ Edmund ILOGU, Christianity and Igbo culture, in: EGWU, R., Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being, 13ff.

⁵ Cf. Africa : : Nigeria - cia.gov

⁶ Cf Lizzie WILLIAMS, Nigeria: The Bradt Travel Guide, England 2008, 32. (There is also an Igbo group in Equatorial Guinea who se forefathers are said to have migrated from Arochukwu.. Cf. The Native Igbo of Equatorial Guinea, www.igbodefender.com (Stand 15:07:2020) But the focus of this work is the Igbo people in Southeastern Nigeria)

⁷ Cf. Richard FARDON / Graham FURNIS, African Languages, Development and the State, Routledge 1994, 66.

⁸ Nwaiwu, 8.

The first Christian missionaries arrived the Igbo nation in the year 1857. They were the Anglican missionaries. The Catholic missionaries arrived in the year 1885.⁹ The evangelization and Christianization of Igbo people was part of a wider program for the entire Africa. Before then, there had been attempts in the 15th Century to evangelise the Benin and Warri Kingdoms in today's Nigeria. These attempts failed to materialize. The later effort to evangelise the Igbo people was to a greater extent successful. Today, Christianity boasts of being the major religion of the Igbo people.

The Igbo people have very rich culture and tradition. Some of their cultural features are similar to the Old Testament biblical culture of the Israelites. One of these cultural properties of the Igbo people is the prayer of *iju Ogu* which is a prayer for vindication and the intangible *Ofo* as a sign of inner innocence and righteousness.

The prayer of *iju Ogu* is accompanied by the intangible *Ofo* which represents the integrity, innocence, truthfulness, righteousness and honesty of the person undertaking the *iju Ogu* prayer form. Thus the prayer of *iju ugu* is preceded by the integrity of intangible *Ofo* and the *iju Ogu* prayer form presupposes and incorporates the intangible *Ofo*. The *iju Ogu* prayer form accompanied by the intangible *Ofo* – what is referred here as *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism - is similar to the prayer of Job in the Book of Job and to the God's mysticism of the New Political Theology. The appropriation of the concept and implications of Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism into the Igbo Christian theology will be an enrichment to the Igbo Christian life and will be an expression of Igbo – African political theology. The Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism like the mysticism of Job in the Book of Job and the God's mysticism of political theology is a mysticism of prayer which incorporates the feelings and expressions of suffering and is against the culture of pure affirmation which finds its expression in Nigeria today and also in Africa at large in the gospel of prosperity. The logic of the gospel of prosperity is based on doctrine of retribution and is an expression of today's faith crisis among the Igbo and Nigerian Christians and also crisis of faith in Africa at large. An appropriation of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism will provide a culture-rooted and theologically-founded approach to the Igbo Christian faith crisis. That is the main thesis of this work.

⁹ Francis A. ARINZE, in: EGWU, R., Igbo Idea of Supreme Being, 8. Comp. E. METU, God and Man in African Religion, 10.

Job's lamentation was as a result of the crisis and suffering he was undergoing although he was virtuous, coupled with his belief in a God of justice and goodness. After a period of fortitude and acceptance, Job cried out to God in pains. He questioned God and he made use of dramatic language of prayer which is against pure affirmation as used by his friends. Many Igbo Christians find themselves in similar situations of suffering and crisis like Job in the Bible. In the means of excruciating and most times unexplainable suffering they are perplexed and forlorn. This crisis is a crisis of faith and God-question.

The Igbo Christian faith crisis borders on the search for answers to the disturbing questions surrounding the historical, cultural and existential experience of the Igbo people in their encounter with the world at large, but also in their encounter with the Christian religion. In its historical dimension, the crisis deals with a Christianity that appears to have been implicated in the history of 'dissubjectification' of the African person. This crisis in its existential form embraces the present socio, politico, economic and religious situations of the Igbo African people; what is regarded as the "undeserved" suffering they are undergoing and their belief that God rewards uprightness and punishes evil; or better expressed, God should reward uprightness and should punish evil.¹⁰ In its cultural expression, it borders on a Christianity, which unlike the African traditional religion does not penetrate the way of life of the people; a Christianity that seems to remain aloof or superficial to their day to day life.

In this regard, this work approaches the Christian faith crisis of the Igbo Africans of Nigeria from three (already implied) aspects: the Historical, the Existential and the Cultural.

In the historical aspects of the faith crisis, this research work, keeping faith with the theology and mysticism of "opened eyes" – in Johan Baptist Metz's term, and remembrancing as a category of political theology, examines those historical stations and events whose memories and association with Christianity call to question in the African Christian consciousness the integrity of Christianity and her message of universal love and salvation and cast a cloud of doubt over the genuineness of the kind of God the Christian religion propagates - a God of justice and love. Some of these historical facts have led

¹⁰ Cf NWAIWU, 8.

some Igbos and Africans to regard Christianity and her message as a means of conquering and continuous domination of Africans and thus blocked their wholesome experience of God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a God of love and justice. It has also truncated their experience of the total liberation effected by His Son Jesus Christ in His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. These historical aspects include the dehumanization of the African person in the historical times through slavery, colonialism and racism and the ‘silence’ of God within these periods. Jean Marc Ela said it right when he wrote that

*The darkest periods of African history correspond generally to the times when access to God’s truth was blocked by everything that tramples and disfigures humanity. Whenever fatalism triumphs and all the mechanism of poverty and oppression shut the door on hope, God is on trial.*¹¹

Contrary to this ‘dissubjectification’ experienced by the African person – in this case the Igbo person, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob called all men to be subjects in his sight. The history of God’s encounter with man in the Old and New Testament is not that of “a slavish subjection and enervated devotion, it does not humiliate persons as subjects. Rather it compels them over and again to be subjects in the face of that which threatens that way of being.”¹² The fundamental and traditional Igbo encounter with Chukwu, the Igbo Great and Supreme God as deposited, depicted and expressed in the Igbo mythologies and folktales is that that allows one to be a subject in the presence of Chukwu. It respects the integrity and dignity of the human person and engages the human person in dialogue, inviting him to participate in the creation, formulation, development and governance of the world.

In the Existential aspect of the faith crisis, this work examines those existential factors that exact untold hardship and torture on the Igbo African Christians’ day to day living and so erupt a volcano of doubts on the notion of the Christian God as Almighty and Goodness Himself. As Ludger Schwienhorst –Schönberger acknowledged,

*God’s Goodness and Omnipotence seem to contradict our experience. We experience Evil and wickedness, be it those caused by humans, or those not caused by them (moral and non moral evil – malum morale et malum physicum): natural disaster, diseases and sickness, violence, war. These and similar experiences can lead to the denial of God, to atheism(mine translation)*¹³

¹¹ Jean Marc ELA, *My faith as an African*, Oregon 1988, 102.

¹² Johann Baptist METZ, *Faith in History and Society. Toward A Practical Fundamental Theology*, ASHLEY, J., Matthew, (trans.), New York 2007, 71 (Subsequently as: METZ, *Faith in History and Society*).

¹³ L. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, *Ein weg durch das Leid. Die Theodizeefrage Im Alten Testament*, in: BÖHNKE, M., et al(eds.), *Leid erfahren – Sinn suchen . Das Problem der Theodizee*, Freiburg.

Thus the existential aspect of the faith crisis borders on the examination of the present conditions of the Igbo African person which have critically sharpened the God-question - especially in the forms of poverty, conflicts and disease. These situations have led most times either to doubts, resignation or pursuits of wealth and success through other gods and means, or to pure affirmation with regard to the Christian faith and belief in the God of Jesus Christ.

Today, this situation is made more incisive and volatile by the submissions of the gospel of prosperity preachers who claim that the real believers and children of God should not be poor but rich. They should not suffer because according to them, the salvific event of Christ' death on the cross and his resurrection has not only paid for the sins of men, but it is also guarantor of the physical wellbeing and richness of all believers here on earth. The proponents of the gospel of prosperity claim that the real believers should neither be poor, nor suffer from misfortune. In other words, they claim that prosperity is the real inheritance of the real children of God. Though the submissions of the prosperity preachers correspond to the traditional beliefs of the African Igbo people, they however contradict the real experiences of most Igbo Christians and ferment and exasperate the faith crisis even more.

The cultural aspect of the faith crisis borders on a Christianity that does not penetrate the way of life of the people due to the rejection of dialogue with Igbo and indeed African culture. This has led to superficiality of faith and double - standard - lives of some Igbo and indeed African Christians.

From the early period of evangelization to the present time the faith crisis of the Igbo Christians has manifested itself in different forms, and different tendencies have been exhibited in handling this crisis. At the present time, the manifestation cum reaction to the faith crisis comes especially in the form of pure affirmation derived from retribution as expressed in the gospel of prosperity. This tendency has also found its expression in both Orthodox and Pentecostal denominations. This kind of gospel "misses nothing" and remains superficial to the real experience of the suffering Christian. The method employed

Basel. Wien 2007, 7. (vgl. Gottes Güte und Allmacht scheinen unserer Erfahrung zu widersprechen. Wir erfahren Unheil und Böses, sei es von Menschen verschuldet, sei es von ihnen unverschuldet(moralisches und nicht- moralisches Übel – malum morale et malum pysicum): Naturkatastrophen, Kankheiten, Verbrechen, Krieg. Solche und ähnliche Erfahrungen können zur Leugnung Gottes, zum Atheismus führen). Cf. Saviour NWAIWU, 10.

by the proponents of the gospel of prosperity is similar to that employed by the friends of Job whom Job characterized as “empty consolers”. It relativises the faith crisis and does not put into critical consideration the present state of the righteous Christian sufferer who is undergoing faith crisis. This work aims at identifying a cultural and at the same time biblical based language that is bereft of pure affirmation for the Igbo African Christians to handle their faith crisis. This is what is identified here as *Ofo na Ogu* Mysticism.

Thus this work seeks to initiate a mystical approach to the critical experiences and situations of the Igbo African Christians based on the Igbo African mystical traditional prayer and action form of *Ofo na Ogu*¹⁴ – a mystical dialogue of bringing questions unto God based on the depraved situations, and of human actions based on resistance in love against evil. In the biblical tradition, especially in the Psalms, Book of Job and Prophets critical questions concerning the conditions of the sufferer are brought unto God. The language therein is bereft of pure affirmation. The sufferer makes use of the dramatic and critical language of prayer.

In this light, the *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism represents an effort to dig into the Igbo African tradition and heritage and that of the biblical tradition, especially the book of Job, in order to recover and appropriate those foundational features of “being subject” that in the face of human sufferings and crisis refuse to give in either to resignation and “dissubjectification”, or to self immunization of a dry superficial affirmation. This is expressed in what is called the language of prayer. There is also the action part of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism which is based on integrity as represented by the intangible *Ofo* which offers the Igbo African authority to mount a fortress of resistance against any form of oppression or any threat or world-order, past or present that institutionalizes anthropological poverty or the indigence of being.

Thus, by way of summary, the traditional mysticism of *Ofo na Ogu* (*iju Ogu* accompanied by the authority of uprightness and innocence – intangible *Ofo*), involves integrity on the part of the petitioner, litigating questions and demands on the Great God Chukwu – akin to what is in the book of Job and expressed in God’s mysticism or Jesus

¹⁴ What is meant here is the Igbo *iju Ogu* prayer form which is accompanied by the authority of righteousness and innocence as represented in Igbo culture by the intangible *Ofo*. This is more explained in the fifth chapter of this work.

mysticism according to Johann Baptist Metz. *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism also demands actions of resistance against evil that begins from oneself. The language of prayer expressed in the *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism is most times dramatic and radical. In it, there is a call for a just world-order where all men are subjects in the presence of God and a beckon on God for deliverance in the limited time of history.

This work has seven chapters and the conclusion. As part of introduction of this work and before the first chapter, there is an explanation of the kind of mysticism implied in this work. It is the God and Jesus mysticism as expressed by Johann Baptist Metz. This mysticism is part of what he called the New Political Theology. Since this work locates itself within the wider spectrum of New Political Theology, chapter one of this work explores the history of the use of the term Political theology up to its present formation under Johann Baptist Metz as New Political Theology. The features of the new political theology are discussed. Chapter two deals with a concise history of the advent of Christianity in Africa at large, and in Nigeria cum Igbo land in particular. There will be an attempt to understand why the earlier attempts at evangelization failed and the different methods that were employed by the missionaries in the later attempts with their merits and demerits. That will give us a foundational picture of Christianity in Igbo land. Chapter three occupies itself with analyzing the Christian faith crisis of the Igbo Africans of Nigeria. As we already mentioned, this work identifies three aspects of the faith crisis: historical, existential and cultural. The fourth Chapter examines the different manifestations of the faith crisis of the Igbo African Christians with emphasis on its present form under the gospel of prosperity. Chapter five of this work concerns itself with Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism and its relationship with and implications in a wider Igbo African culture and tradition. Thus Igbo African culture and tradition, belief system and worldviews are also examined, mainly as they are connected to *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism. This work is an attempt at inculturation. Thus the sixth chapter of this work makes a case for inculturation and also attempts a concise history of biblical interpretation in Africa. This lays a bridge for the seventh chapter which occupies itself with the Book of Job and offers the biblical foundation of this work. It seeks to understand the different approaches to suffering and different understandings of God in the Book of Job with emphasis on Job's approach. In his suffering Job learnt to speak to God about his condition; he questioned God; he made use

of the language of prayer as against the language of theology with which his friends only theorized about God. Job's theology was that of a missing God. His language of prayer was dramatic and radical. He even threatened to take God to court. But God did not say that Job sinned for bringing questions unto him. It was Job's friends who were found wanting by God for being insensitive. The language here is similar to the language of Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism.

There is then the conclusion which attempts to answer the question on the proper language to speak about God for the Igbo Africans in the means of sufferings and crisis of faith. There is an inspiration from the mysticism of God in the question unto God theology and from the Book of Job in order to find the proper language in the Igbo African context of speaking of God. It is the language of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism. Here the synergy between the lamentation or language of prayer in the book of Job, question unto God theology – God's mysticism in Metz's formulation and *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism is established.

It is the conviction of this work that the appropriation of the idea in *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism will help the Igbo African Christians to deal with the dialectics of their Christian faith and to stand strong against the culture of pure affirmation as found especially in the gospel of prosperity that is prevalent in Africa today. Like in Political theology, *Ofo na Ogu* theology is two dimensional: mystic and action. In addition to prayer, this work promotes an African traditional based and gospel oriented Christian action of resistance against evil and oppression and a new biblically based approach to God, world and suffering. In appropriating this prayer language of *Ofo na Ogu*, there is an acknowledgement of the understanding of most African theologians that the "knowledge of (biblical) God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of Him"¹⁵

This work comes especially from an Igbo African background. However, in various places of this work there will be intermittently the use of the terms "Nigerian" or "African". When either of them is used, the Igbo theology or experience is also implied because Igbo nation is located in today's Nigeria and Nigeria is an African country. When either of the

¹⁵ DICKSON/ ELLINGWORTH, *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, 16, in: UZUKWU, Elochukwu, Eugene, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness. Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*, Oregon 2012, 55.

terms is used, it is to show and highlight wider experiences or phenomena in which the Igbo nation finds itself or participates in and to highlight the collectivity, connectivity and extension of these experiences and practices in a broader Nigerian or African scene.

This work is a development of my Master thesis (Diplomarbeit) which deals on the understanding of the Book of Job in the context of the Igbo faith crisis. Some of the ideas found in that work will be taken up in this work, especially in the area of the Igbo culture and different manifestations of the faith crisis.

This work will not pretend to provide a definite answer to the question of theodicy in Igbo African context. God should justify himself at God's own time. The aim here is to see the inner connectedness between the language of prayer in the book of Job, the Jesus Mysticism according to Johann Baptist Metz and the Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism as essentially the same mysticism and to appropriate this mysticism in Igbo Christian life and approach to faith crisis. It aims to sharpen the theodicy question in prayer and make it more alive, and to guard against a culture of pure affirmation, indifference, self immunization, anesthesia and amnesia to pains and sufferings in the society. It promotes a culture of openness and biblically based prayer to God in the means of suffering and crisis.

A MYSTICAL APPROACH

Giving to the underlying approach of this work as "mystical", it is necessary to elucidate what this approach entails in this work. Though the concept of mysticism is found in many world religions, our point of concentration is Christian mysticism. This is because this work borders on Christian theology. We shall begin by making a concise summary of the traditional understanding of mysticism in the Church and what this work understands as a mystical approach. It may be important to mention here at the beginning that this work draws its mystical approach from the framework of the mysticism of "opened eyes", a mystical-political dimension of Christianity as contained in the theology of Johann Baptist Metz. It is a mysticism of suffering unto God. This will be explained later.

Mysticism in the strictest sense is defined as “the direct, intuitional experience of God through unifying love.”¹⁶In this line of understanding, Jean Gerson defined mystical theology as “knowledge of God by experience arrived at through the embrace of unifying love”¹⁷ Here one has access to knowledge of God through the “unifying love”. In the Bible, St John and St Paul attested to their mystical experiences. Mystical experience so understood does not occur through one’s effort or striving but through a special grace of God that is higher than the normal grace of Christians.¹⁸Most times, it is difficult for the mystics to explain what took place other than to say that something occurred. One cannot describe it to a second person or even to oneself. This is because it may be very difficult and sometimes impossible to translate the experience in human language and expression, since the mystical experience transcends empirical categories. St Paul attests to this difficulty when he wrote thus:

... I will move on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – still in body? I do not know; or out of body? I do not know: God knows – was caught up right into the third heaven. And I know that this man – still in the body? or outside the body? I do not know, God knows – was caught up into paradise and heard words said that cannot and may not be spoken by any human being. (2 Cor. 12: 1b – 4)

St Augustine was also a witness to this indescribability of the mystical experience when he expressed:

*Thy invisible things, understood by those that are made, I saw indeed, but was not able to fix my gaze thereon; my weakness was beaten back, and I was reduced to my ordinary experience (Conf. 7.23).*¹⁹

F. L. Mascall described this situation in which the soul after mystical experience is unable to describe the event of the experience other than knowing that an event took place aptly in this way:

*When the soul tries to describe this object to itself, when it tries to elate this knowledge obtained by normal means, and above all when it tries to tell other people about it, it is faced with enormous problem of translation and interpretation.*²⁰

¹⁶Jean GARSON, in: GARDENER, H. C./ LARKIN, E.,E., Mysticism, in: MARTHALER, Bernard (ed.), New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2nd ed. Vol. 10, 117a.

¹⁷Ibid, 111.

¹⁸Ibid, 112

¹⁹ Ibid., 113

²⁰ Cf. Ibid.

This experience is intellectually bereft of imaginative content and incapable of normal conceptualization. Mystical experience is more of a fusion of personality than a deepening of understanding. This shows itself in the language the mystics use in the expression of their mystical experience. This language is derived from the arena of love. In love lovers express their longing for fusion of personalities. This longing is giving expression in joint joys, delight and interest. The ability of union of personalities is not giving to mortals. However, this union seems to be attained at a mystical union as expressed in the attestation of mystics. This attainment of this union of personality, something giving expression in the term “mystical marriage” seems to be the underling base of mystical experiences and their authentications. It is true that not all experiences characterized as mystical are in real essence authentic mystical experiences. But it will as well be wrong to characterize all claims of mystical experience as superfluous and false and to understand mystical experience in the terms of R. A. Vaughan who opined that “mysticism is that form of error which mistakes for a divine manifestation operations of a merely human faculty.”²¹ The mystical experience is made possible only through God’s special assistance through which the mystics have access to God’s truth to which the rest of humans are dimly groping. At the mystical level, the will and intellect are fused together and operating at the highest level possible for humans. “The difference between God’s self revelation in what may be called the ordinary ways – through the Prophets, the teaching Church – and what is given to the mystic in the special experiences may well be that, in the latter, there is a fusion of will and intellect in one act, analogous to but immeasurably fuller than the communion of souls that is experienced in human love.”²² This fusion of will and intellect is directed towards God who is the consummation of the mystic’s experience. As was mentioned earlier, the effects of the mystical experience is not primarily that of a deepening of understanding but rather “a deepening of the whole personality, an enriching of character, a development of virtue... in the authentic mystic, we have a man or woman who is invariably distinguished for integrity, candor, and sensitive conscience. At the state of ordinary awareness, he or she

²¹Ibid.,114a

²² Cf. Ibid, 114b.

shares our ideals, our beliefs, our principles of conduct”²³In this sense we have mystics like John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, Theresa of Avila. For mystics like Teilhard de Chardin, matter is raised to the level of spiritual. The propelling force of the fusion of mystical and prophetic give rise to social reform.

Be that as it may, many religious thinkers agree that every serious and sincere religion has its mystical dimension. These mystical dimensions are quite different from the reclusive mysticism or mysticism in the strict sense. The mystical dimensions are giving expression in different ways - for example “in the emphasis on social problems and deemphasis on institutional and clerical prerogatives, its diminished enthusiasm for laws, forms, and ritual...”²⁴ It is in this line of mystical dimension of religions that one can situate Johann Baptist Metz’s Christian mysticism of suffering unto God or God’s mysticism; a mysticism of open eyes, what he connotes as the mystical-political dimension of Christianity.

MYSTICISM OF SUFFERING UNTO GOD

As was earlier mentioned, the mysticism denoted in the mystical approach of this work is a mysticism connoted in what is termed “mysticism of suffering unto God” as described by Johann Baptist Metz. This mysticism is biblically oriented as found in many passages in the Psalms, in the Prophetic books and wisdom writings especially the book of Job. It is a mysticism of bringing our pains, sufferings and doubt to God in prayer. This mysticism accommodates these doubts and also feels deeply the absence of God because to know God is to miss him. It is a mysticism that is in high expectancy of the coming of the saving power of God. In this sense it is eschatological. It calls for discipleship in practical terms and stresses solidarity with the living and those who are not alive again. Metz called it the God mysticism or Jesus mysticism.

Permit me to make here a long quotation from Metz, which in my assessment is a summary of the understanding of the mysticism of suffering unto God; a mysticism of opened eyes. As he stated, this mysticism

²³Ibid., 115a.

²⁴Ibid., 116b.

... is found particularly in Israel's prayer traditions: in Psalms, in Job, in Lamentation, and last but not least in many passages in the prophetic books. This language of prayer is itself a language of suffering, a language of crisis, a language of affliction and of radical danger, a language of complaint and grievance, a language of crying out and literally, of grumbling of the children of Israel. The language of this God-mysticism is not first and foremost one of consoling answers for the suffering one is experiencing, but rather much more a language of passionate questions from the midst of suffering, question turned towards God, full of highly charged expectation. These mystics are no willing yes-men, neither assertive nor apathetic. They practice neither cowardly submission nor masochistic self-subjugation. They are not pious underlings. Their yes to God does not express shallow humility or infantile regression. And the prayer that expresses their yes is not a language of exaggerated affirmation, nor artificial song of jubilation that would be isolated from every language of suffering and crisis and which all too quickly falls suspect to being a desperate feigned naiveté. What occurs in this language is not the repression but rather the acceptance of fear, mourning and pain; it is deeply rooted in the figure of night, in the expression of the soul's demise. It is less a song of the soul, more a loud crying out from the depths – and not a vogue, undirected wailing, but a focused crying-out-to.²⁵

This is the mysticism of the Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form (*Iju Ogu*). In this cry of the soul, there is an expression of fear, of pain, a cry for rescue for justification, for vindication. This cry is not superficial because it comes from the soul that is in grief and pain. It is a cry full of expectations, waiting impatiently and incessantly for the advent of God. A cry of the righteous oppressed soul.

The *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism is a mysticism of opened eyes, a mysticism of prayer and action form – a political mysticism. This mysticism of opened eyes is biblically founded. It is a prayer and action based mysticism of seeing and confronting the problems and sufferings of the world and humans, it is based on discipleship, on bearing witness to Christ through practical faith; it is based on allowing sufferings of the world to discomfort and agitate us towards actions for the betterment of the society. It is Jesus mysticism.

Christian witnessing to God is guided through and through by political spirituality, a political mysticism. Not a mysticism of political power and political domination, but rather – to speak metaphorically – a mysticism of opened eyes. Not only the ears for hearing, but also the eyes are organ of grace ... In the end Jesus did not teach an ascending mysticism of closed eyes, but rather a God-mysticism with an increased readiness for perceiving, a mysticism that especially makes visible all invisible and inconvenient suffering, and – convenient or not – pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it, for a God who is a friend of human beings.²⁶

²⁵ Johann Baptist METZ, *A Passion for God. The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, ASHLEY, J. Mathew (trans.), New York. N.J 1998, 67. (Subsequently as : METZ, *A Passion for God*).

²⁶ Ibid., 163.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF A CONCEPT: POLITICAL THEOLOGY

This chapter is mainly concerned with the history of political theology and the characteristics of the New Political Theology under Johann Baptist Metz.

1.1 POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The term “Political theology” has a long history. Its usage stretches from the Hellenistic period, through the Enlightenment and Catholic restoration, to its present day understanding which arguably stems from the formulation in the 1960s championed by Johann Baptist Metz. The concept of New Political theology as formulated by Johann Baptist Metz maintains a critical difference from what was formerly understood under the connotation of “political theology”. Whereas the term “political theology” in the Hellenistic and Enlightenment epochs represented a legitimization tool for political theories and practices in the hands of theologians and theorists, the new understanding of political theology since the 1960s undertakes a critique of political policies and practices,²⁷ - a critical change in ideal and function. This work’s assessment of political theology and its history is derived mainly from the work by Bernd Wacker and Jürgen Manemann.²⁸ The understanding of The New political theology is anchored on the works of Johann Baptist Metz especially *Faith in History and Society*.

Attempt has been made to define political theology as “the reflection on those contexts in which theology and religion become political (if they are not already), that is, in which they have ideological consequences.”²⁹ This definition has been criticized by some political theologians as merely descriptive and lacking in normative and operative

²⁷ F. Schüssler FIORENZA, Political Theology, in: MARTHALER, Berard L., et al (eds.), New Catholic Encyclopedia, second edition, 460b.

²⁸ Bernd WACKER/ Jürgen MANEMANN, Political Theology: History of a Concept, in: DOWNEY, John K., / MANEMANN, Jürgen / OSTIVICH, Steven, T., (eds.), Missing God?, Berlin 2006, 170-179.

²⁹ MAUER, in: TAUBES, J. (ed) Der Fürst dieser Welt. Carl Schmitt und die Folgen, 117, in: WACKER, Bernd / MANEMANN, Jürgen, Political Theology: History of a Concept, in: DOWNEY, John K., / MANEMANN, Jürgen / OSTIVICH, Steven, T., (eds.), Missing God?, 170.

clarifications of what actually political theology is all about. Critics also maintain that it does not also cast any light on the all-important history of the terminology and its present day understanding.³⁰

Another attempt at a definition of political theology maintains that the term “political theology” refers to two different meanings. Firstly, it refers to “the implicit or explicit use of religious symbols to interpret, to justify, or to criticize political events, systems or units.” Secondly, political theology is defined as a “fundamental theology that analyses the interrelation between political and religious belief”³¹. The first part of this definition puts into consideration the different functions of political theology at different epochs either as a tool of legitimization of political theories or that of their critique. The second part of this definition tends towards what some have classified as political religion. In this understanding, political theology distinguishes and differentiates itself from “political religion” especially as propagated by Eric Vogelin. Political religion does not examine the misuse of gospel proclamation in the justification or legitimization of regimes or political situations as in the case of Erik Peterson but examines or rather uncovers the inner-worldly but admittedly religious phenomenon in (absolute) political systems like National Socialism. A characteristic of this phenomenon is belief in absolute reality to whom one pays allegiance to through praxis and action. In this capacity, this is known as false (Ersatz) religion. Political religion also maintains that religion exists only through an existent parallel (political) system of belief on the absolute.³² We shall briefly examine the historical development of the term “political theology”.

The term “political theology” appeared in the various schools of Hellenistic philosophy. This epoch witnessed a tripartite division of theology into mythic – *mythike (theologia fabularis)*, natural theology – *physike (naturalis)*, and political theology – *politike (civis)*.³³ This was evident especially in the middle stoicism. Whereas mythic theology represented poetic speeches and divine stories about the gods and heroes and these poetic speeches and divine stories most times found their destinations, presence and functions in the theatric

³⁰Cf. Bernd WACKER / Jürgen MANEMANN, Political Theology: History of a Concept, 170.

³¹ F. Schüssler FLORENZA, Political Theology, 459.

³² Cf. Bernd WACKER / Jürgen MANEMANN, Political theology: History of a Concept, 180.

³³ Cf. Ibid, 170.

performances, natural theology at this time was more concerned with the philosophical world view of different schools of philosophy, especially their claims on the essence of the divine. Political theology on its part was the concern of priests and statesmen. It dealt with the relationship between cult and state, maintaining that the nature and state of cult influenced the nature, pattern and health of the state and its policies.³⁴ For example it was assumed in Roman political theology that the fall of Rome was as result of the Christians' rejection of the gods of Rome.³⁵ The knowledge of political theology was necessary for the proper carrying out of the duty of public praise of the gods which in turn was believed to bring about the wellbeing of the citizenry.

Under Roman statesmen and thinkers like Pontifex Quintus Mucius Scaevola (d. 82 BCE) and Marcus Terentius Varro (116 – 27) the tripartite division of theology was established in Rome and through their works and writings there was frantic effort to rescue and salvage the Roman political theology. However, Varro also taught that political theology should be seen as part of mythical theology. Among works dealing on the tripartite division of theology was Varro's *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum*.

Tertullian criticized political theology as lacking in universality since every city had its own religion and political theology. Since it lacked in universality, it could not be a foundation of knowledge, morality and certitude. Augustine on his part criticized political theology as having no primary or fundamental stand of its own but having its foundation and basis on myths and natural theology. If the basis, on which it was built was proven to be false or a feeble, the entire political theology would crumble. Utilitarianism as the purpose and reason for political theology made political theology for Augustine questionable. Augustine also perceived a contempt of political theology on the part of Varro because of his preference for natural theology. Since this was not openly acknowledged by Varro, Augustine accused Varro (and political theology) of deceiving the people since he was not courageous enough to publicly denounce political theology (City of God IV, 27.32, et al).³⁶

³⁴ Cf. F. Schüssler FÖRENZA, Political theology, 459. (Also Bernd WACKER / Jürgen MANEMANN, 170.

³⁵ Cf. Bernd WACKER / Jürgen MANEMANN, Political Theology: History of Concept, 171.

³⁶ Cf. Ibid.

The term political theology was barely used in the middle ages. From the 16th- 17th Centuries onward, it was mentioned in relation to Augustine's citation of Varro's natural theology. In the context of the political - religious wars in the times of reformation and counter reformation which could not be settled on the basis of the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*,- where a ruler of a region or state could impose his religion on the subjects or inhabitants of his area, and the ruler's religion could determine the state religion, Augustine's reference to Varro's natural theology was humanistically construed as an alternative way between "obsessive confessional-dogmatic quarrels and authoritarian dictated public religion." The natural theology could serve as a connecting or base point of all confessions. The reference to Augustine's citation of Varro was here also indirectly implored as a critique of both theologians who supported the state determination of religion under the *cuius religio eius religio* (like J. Bossuet), and also secular theorists who proclaimed the supremacy of the state and saw religion only in terms of its functionality as an instrument of internal stability and external expansion. The political theology as criticized here was more or less a return to the utilitarianism and functionality of the pagan political theology.³⁷

A certain reference to political theology in the 18th century was in connection with the allegation brought forward by supporters of political theology against an unnamed atheist who alleged that theology in general was an invention of political authorities and is mythology. This allegation by the said atheist echoed Augustine's critique of Varro's political theology as having its basis in mythology. In the 19th century, the term "political theology" saw itself being used as a term of denunciation. This is evident for example in Karl Marx's use of the term in his critique of Hegel's justification of constitutional monarchy. It was used as a denouncing term against different theories that were trying to counter (or undermining) the prevailing ideological criticism of Christianity whose claim of salvation was considered non rational.³⁸

The term "political theology" was almost not in use in the works of the theorists of Catholic restoration. This is so though their activities and theological endeavours would be

³⁷ Cf Ibid, 171f.

³⁸Cf. Ibid, 172.

later interpreted as political theology. These theologians who believed that the political stability of the state was the function of religious confessionalism, set out to validate their conviction that the tumultuous social and political situations of the time in the form of revolutions were consequences of the rejection of Catholic dogma in the reformation and in the philosophies of Enlightenment. They held that the Catholic dogma was necessary for a secure and stable society.³⁹

Edmund Burke's use of the term was related to the French revolution. In his *Observations on the Revolution*, he saw the danger that the revolution posed for the English constitution and crown and labelled his contemporaries who biblically or theologically justified or defended the French revolution as either "political theologians" or "theological politicians".⁴⁰

In this era, the term "political theology" had predominantly a negative connotation, however not without exception. This exception is to be found in the French journalist Louis Veuillot's positive assessment of the theological analogies of the Spanish diplomat and lay traditionalist⁴¹ theologian Donso Cortes. Veuillot distinguished Cortes' "political or practical theology" as decisive and distinct against a Scholasticism that was theologically sound but has no clue of the political or practical import of dogma.⁴²

For Carl Schmitt whose work on sovereignty titled *Political theology* brought the term into a critical awareness, political theology relates to the necessity of the sustainability of the political decisionism of the strong state. This is anchored on the determination of enemy within and outside the state. Analyzing the present society as having lost capacity for God and as a society addicted to myth, he maintained the necessity and urgency to draw ideological inspiration and reinforcement from myth in order to sustain the strong state. The truth of these myths are determined based on their social acceptability and their capacity to engineer and sustain the decisionism of the strong state. These ideologies are

³⁹ Ibid, 173.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 172f.

⁴¹Traditionalism being a view that held on the fundamental incapacity of the intellect to reflect on God and religion due to the fundamental and intense debilitating and damaging effect of the original sin. In the radicalization of the negative effect of original sin, traditionalism forbade public use of natural reason and held that humans are due to this effect incapable of governing themselves.

⁴²Cf. Bernd WACKER / Jürgen MANEMANN, Political Theology. History of Concept, 173.

not based on the demands of the gospel and the meaning of political theology here is in line with that conceived by Varro.

Erik Peterson on his part criticized any misuse of the gospel message to justify or legitimize any political order. He saw a political theology that had functioned in this way not as a modern phenomenon but as already in existence in such works like those of Origen, Orosius and Eusebius von Caesarea. In what is understood as political theology under these names, monotheism was used as a tool for justification of monarchical systems and the Pax Romana under Augustus and Constantine understood in the context of the promised eschatological peace. For Peterson, the Trinitarian dogma broke every effort to misuse the Christian proclamation to legitimize any political system. Thus he stated unequivocally that

*the dogma of divine monarchy necessarily failed in the light of Trinitarian dogma, and the interpretation of Pax Romana in the light of Christian eschatology. Thereby... a fundamental break is made with any 'political theology' that misuses Christian proclamation to justify a political situation ... and the mystery of the triune God remains in God, not in the creature. So also the peace which the Christian seeks cannot be kept by any emperor but remains a gift that passes all understanding.*⁴³

Though Peterson has been criticized on the basis of inconsistency and that later examinations show that his claim “overburdens the evidentiary value of the historical material he offers and that his interpretation of this material itself cannot be maintained”⁴⁴, one cannot however deny the fact that the point he raised is critical and crucial and that Peterson gave a resounding blow to the understanding of political theology as legitimization tool. Metz on his part disassociated his theology from the “old political theology” criticized by Peterson and branded his theology the “New Political Theology”, indicating a break up with what was formerly understood under political theology.⁴⁵

1. 2 THE NEW POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Johann Baptist Metz could be rightly regarded as a foundational figure of a new era in the 1960s that marked a break up with the old connotation of political theology as a tool of legitimization of political theories. Under this new dispensation, the term political theology

⁴³ Erik PETERSON, Monotheism as a Political Problem, 1951, 104, in: WACKER, Bernd / MANEMANN, Jürgen, Political Theology: History of a Concept, 175.

⁴⁴ Bernd WACKER / Jürgen MANEMANN, Political Theology: History of a Concept, 175.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid, 177.

became a tool of critique of political theories and policies. This new era witnessed a positive connotation of the term “political theology”. Metz reformulated his theology as a “new political theology” to differentiate it from the traditional and classical theology criticized by Peterson.⁴⁶

In admittance of the fact that theological theories have political implications, New Political Theology assumes a two dimensional engagement with Christian religion and the society cum politics. Jettisoning the idea that Enlightenment has forced the God-talk to the backyard of human society and to the arena of privatization, New Political Theology seeks to bring the problem of the society as dealt with or concealed in politics into Christian religious discussions and also to bring the challenges of Christian religion as themes of discussion within politics. This aims to help politics rid itself of the prejudices against religion and enable it to have a firsthand contact and dialogue with Christian religion. It will also help politics to be balanced, authentic and honest in the formulation of its policies.⁴⁷

New Political Theology has its foundation in the church tradition which provides it with the stability and strength it needs so as not to weaken to a mere tool of religious legitimization of political ideologies and interest. However, New Political Theology still maintains a historical – political and concrete applied criticism of the church in what is termed a differentiated critical ecclesiology.⁴⁸ In this way it aims at helping the church not to relapse to a bourgeois religion of convenience and to forget her duty of discipleship to herself and the society at large. New Political theology understands itself as post-idealistic theology.

History in the understanding of New Political Theology is not basically the history of the victors and victorious. History is basically a history of suffering,⁴⁹ and Christianity imbibes a call for solidarity with those who suffer. New Political theology does not make any claim of bringing something “new” on the table, but “it is trying to speak about the God of Jesus

⁴⁶ Cf. Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ibid, 177.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid, 177f.

⁴⁹ Cf. METZ, Faith in History and Society,, 104.

by trying to make connection between Christian message and the contemporary world visible, and trying to articulate its tradition as an unrequited and dangerous memory in the world.”⁵⁰ It continually examines the practical implications of biblical message for our own time, for today’s society. In this sense, it is a theory of the truth of the Christian message with a practical intention for our own time.⁵¹ “It appeals to the history of human beings as subjects in God’s presence and tries to compel Christians to respond to the practical demands that this history makes.”⁵² There is here a call to discipleship because “only by following him (Christ) do Christians know the one they have gotten involved with and the one who saves them.”⁵³ This followership of Christ is essentially mystical and political; a political spirituality with preferential option for the poor.⁵⁴ It entails nothing short of “fighting against every form of hatred of human beings and every kind of oppression that refuses on a massive scale to let the population of entire regions of the globe become subject.”⁵⁵ Political theology thus formulates itself as a theology of the subject.⁵⁶ “...every theology that tries to reflect on Christian tradition in the framework of the world’s problems today, and wants to successfully negotiates a process of translation between the kingdom of God and society, is a “political theology””⁵⁷ In this sense, the *Ofo na Ogu* theology which aims to arm the praying subject with authority and dignity of the children of God; authority culturally founded in the Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* prayer and action form, and biblically grounded on the Book of Job is political theology.

Understanding itself as post-idealist theology, The New Political Theology carries out its theological undertakings under the primacy of praxis; giving room for innovation in the Christian undertakings for the salvation of humans in the world today. It allows itself to be

⁵⁰Ibid, 88.

⁵¹Cf. Ibid.

⁵²Ibid, 76.

⁵³Ibid, 62.

⁵⁴ METZ, A Passion for God, 44.

⁵⁵ METZ, Faith in History and Society, 78.

⁵⁶ METZ, A Passion for God, 12.

⁵⁷ METZ, Faith in History and society, 99.

inspired and influenced by the priority Kant assigned to practical reason.⁵⁸ From Marxism, it allows itself to be influenced by emphasis on the Subject and the notion that all men should be Subjects in solidarity with one another.⁵⁹

Thus New Political Theology puts great emphasis on “the Subject”, making it the basis of its theological thrust and praxis. However, its idea of subject is different from the subject in the intention and effort of socialism where we have a subject characterized by antagonistic class struggles. New Political Theology is not even bent towards the idealists’ or transcendental theology’s conception of subject based on the conception of a person a priori as a being of absolute transcendence. The subject in question here is not the so called liberated subject of the enlightenment but the subject as the individual that undergoes religious experience, as an individual of religious experience. It is the subject that finds its identity in the relationship with his or her God as attested in the historical anthropology informed by history of religion.⁶⁰

New Political Theology adopts three basic categories: memory, narrative and solidarity. These three categories and features beg for elucidation.

1.2.1 MEMORY

The memory here is defined as a “dangerous memory” or what is understood as “solidarity looking back”⁶¹. This memory is a remembering or solidarity-oriented memory with the dead or vanquished. This memory interrupts and breaks the understanding of history only in terms of progress and an understanding of history as a history of victors; an understanding that has been championed and propagated in the evolutionary or dialectical understandings of reality. The Darwinistic claws have entrapped the human race and held it hostage in virtually all facets of life – economical, political, and even cultural, leading to the forgetfulness of subject and a dissolution of self-identity as subject. This has led to such thoughts as the dead of subject and end of history. New Political Theology forms a bulwark against such threats.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bernd WACKER / Jürgen MANEMANN, *Political Theology: History of a Concept*, 178.

⁵⁹ METZ, *Faith in History and Society*, 82.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ibid*, 77.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 169.

In New Political Theology, history is understood as the history of suffering and freedom. New Political Theology maintains that memory is an indispensable tool in the thoughts and understanding of history in general. This memory, in the New Political Theology's use of it happens in the form of "dangerous stories in which it is the interest in freedom itself that is narratively introduced, identified, and presented."⁶² Thus it has an indispensable narrative structure.⁶³

To downplay the role of memory in history and society is detrimental and not non-consequential. On this note, Adorno observed that, "there simply are not any questions that could be asked in which knowing the past would not be preserved and would not continue to have impact."⁶⁴ For Walter Benjamin, the memory of the suffering that has accumulated in history is very vital in bringing the reasonable sanity that protects history from being unreflectively and banally interpreted solely in terms of the undialectic progress of reason.⁶⁵ Memory preserves and restores identity; showing how men and women are subjects in the course of history. The memory here is a memory of freedom. As has already been noted, this remembering or memory of freedom in history is basically a remembering of past suffering because history is basically a history of suffering. The freedom imbibed in this remembering refuses to identify itself with any concept of freedom that is connected with the domination of nature. The remembering of the past gives a dangerous insight; it troubles, puts-on-hold and scrutinizes the established claims and assumptions of the present and this interruption may lead to a collapse and disassociation with the established order and claims, which in fact is a nightmare for the society.

Memory and remembrance of the past suffering is a medium of learning for the present.

Respect for the suffering that has accumulated historically makes reason open to learn in a way that cannot explicitly happen in the abstract counterposing of knowledge and authority, which is mostly how the problem of reason's autonomy is discussed... In this openness to learn, history as a remembered history of suffering – wins the form of a dangerous tradition, which cannot be silenced or superseded (aufgehoben), either in purely submissive attitude towards the past (as

⁶² Ibid, 180.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Theodor ADORNO, Negative Dialectics, 55, in: METZ, Faith in History and Society, 178.

⁶⁵ Cf. Walter BENJAMIN, Thesis on the philosophy of History, in: METZ, Faith in History and Society, 177.

found in many approaches taken by hermeneutical theories of reason) or in ideology critique's stance towards the past (as found by many approaches taken by critical theories of reason)''⁶⁶

This memory is based on the biblical founded hope that no suffering shall be left un-restored, including those of the dead and vanquished (Rev 21). "Christian faith is to be understood as that stance in which a person remembers the promises of the past and the hope out of which people lived because of those promises, and binds herself or himself to these memories in a life-determining way."⁶⁷ Thus, New Political Theology appropriates apocalyptic features while indeed not losing sight of the historical conditions of the present; the need for resistance against evil. It does not give in to utopism but anchors itself on the God of the living and the dead.

*The hope that Christians have in the God of the living and the dead, in God's power to raise the dead, is the hope of revolution on behalf of everyone , those who suffer unjustly, those long ago forgotten, indeed, even the dead. This hope does not paralyze historical initiatives or the struggle for all to be subjects. Rather it guarantees the stability of those standards with which men and women faced with the accumulated suffering of the just, stand up again and again against the prevailing unjust conditions.*⁶⁸

In the understanding of New Political Theology, the church is the bearer of dangerous memory and church dogma are the formulas of this dangerous memory.⁶⁹ This dogma should not lose their dangerous character which should "shock people and still overcome them with its power"⁷⁰ This memory is narrative in structure and takes its foundation from a Christian faith which fundamentally understands itself as the *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*. "... (T)his memory is connected with those traditions in which the interest on freedom arose. Thus these traditions – in their essential, narrative features; that is, as narrated histories of freedom – are not the object, but rather the presupposition of any critical reconstruction of history by argumentative reason".⁷¹ Memory is a medium of reason to become practical as freedom.⁷²

⁶⁶ J. B. METZ, Faith in History and Society, 180.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 182.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 84.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid, 169.

⁷⁰ Dietrich BONHOEFFER, Letters and Papers from Prison, in: METZ, Faith in History and Society, 184.

⁷¹ METZ, Faith in History and Society, 179.

⁷² Ibid, 179.

1.2.2 NARRATIVES

As was hinted above, the memory in New Political Theology assumes the form of narratives in those dangerous stories whose practical intent is freedom. Narrative assumes precedence in relation to argumentation since narrative is at the beginning, and presents itself as the source and fortress through which argumentation derives its being. “The “beginning” and the “end” can only be discussed narratively, or by starting from narrative.”⁷³ The biblical faith is basically narrative because the faith experience was underived. Creation as an original and underived event could only be narratively communicated. The Old Testament prophets used narrative language to communicate God’s message to the people of Israel. In the New Testament, the event of the resurrection of Christ was original and underived. This world-turning event which overturned the existing world order and established a new era of salvation, was narratively communicated to the world by the apostles.

*The world arising from nothingness, the person formed from the mud; the new kingdom whose nearness Jesus proclaimed; resurrection as passage from death into life, the end as the new beginning; the life of future glory: all of these break the argumentative reasoning open and resist the complete dissolution or translation of their narrative structure.*⁷⁴

Narratives have practical intents. Storytellers try to communicate their messages in a practical ways, establishing a bond between the hearers and the tellers. As Walter Benjamin noted, good storytellers aim at communicating useful information through their stories; sometimes it may be an advice, at other times it may be morals, proverbs or maxim that are transmitted. These messages are born out of the personal experiences of the storytellers or the experiences of others as were communicated to the storytellers.⁷⁵ In order to pass on these useful experiences so as to counsel others, storytellers soak these counsel – bearing experiences in practical stories as one will soak yam in palm oil; allowing those who eat from these stories to be internally nourished by the practical wisdom they contain.

Metz noted that in the Sacraments of the Church themselves, it is not only performative language that is used, but also narrative language. This is seen for example, in the Canon

⁷³Ibid;188.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Cf. Walter BENJAMIN, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in: ARENDT, Hannah (ed.), *Illuminations*, in: METZ, Faith in History and Society 189.

where it is said “On the night on which he was betrayed”. Christian community is for him not a community of argument but a community that tells stories. Thus he says:

Christianity, as a community of those who believe in Jesus Christ, was from the beginning not first a community that interprets or presents argument; rather, it was a community that remembers and narrates, with practical intent: a memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus that makes it appeal narratively. The logos of the cross and of the resurrection has an indispensable narrative structure. Confronted with human history of suffering, faith in the redemption of history and of the “new human being” is passed on in dangerous-liberating stories, under the impact of which those hearers who are affected by them become “doers of the word”⁷⁶

Here there is no intention of opposing argument in theology but an intent to stress the fact that argumentative theology should not lose sight of its origin in narrative, and that the aim of argumentative theology is to defend the narrative remembrance of salvation in our scientific modern world.

In the modern theology where there exists an increase schism between dogmatic formulations on one hand and life or religious experience on the other hand, there is an urge, according to Metz for a dogmatic theology that arises from life experience. Such a theology is exemplified in Rahner’s theology where the day to day questions become theological questions. Rahner felt the fears and questions of his time. He felt in himself a sense of personal responsibility to approach those questions and fears of his contemporaries and bring them to the centre of theological discussions. His theology which was anchored on the patristic, as Rahner himself confirmed and also the scholastics, was able to take care of the daily worries and questions of Christians through the tool of narratives. It indicated a ground breaking effort to bring life and doctrine together. In Rahner’s theology as Metz acclaimed, the scholastics, which was hitherto objectified became subjectified; it became focused on the subject. In this venture, Rahner did not let himself be caged by the language of exactness. Here one finds a narrative dogmatic theology coming out of life stories.

1.2.3 SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is defined in Metz’s *New Political Theology* as “a category of assistance, of supporting and encouraging the subject in the face of that which threatens him or her most

⁷⁶ METZ, Faith in History and Society, 195.

acutely and in the face of his or her suffering.”⁷⁷ This is a solidarity with one another but most especially there is here emphasis on the support for the weak, the disadvantaged, the oppressed, those who are not yet able to, or may not be able to become subjects without solidarity. There is an incorporation of the solidarity with the dead or vanquished, those who can no longer speak for themselves. Thus solidarity is not only understood here as solidarity “looking forward” to the coming generation but also solidarity “looking backwards” to the vanquished and dead. This is because God is the God of both the living and the dead who called all men to be subject in his presence. This understanding of solidarity is not of a privatized, depoliticized, sympathy-seeking nature. It is not a solidarity modelled in accordance with the mentality of the bourgeois exchange society – “I support your interest and you support my interest.”

The solidarity of the world of exchange is summarized in the words “business” “profit” “allies etc. In this bourgeois- society - oriented - solidarity there is no place for love. The Christian solidarity of the New Political Theology is a commitment in love and a “commitment without counting the cost.”⁷⁸ It holds that Christianity does not exist neutrally and discipleship is not without a cost. It is a daring risk-taking solidarity in love, whose pillars and support are based on the faith in God’s promise of redemption; a God who has proved himself in history. “In contrast to those who put solidarity into action only as a sympathetic contact between allies or a kind of protectionistic altruism, the logic of the Christian idea of solidarity engenders a counter alliance that is realized in the partiality of discipleship”⁷⁹

The New Political Theology holds a dual concept of solidarity, both in its universal conception and understanding, as well as in its particular understanding .This helps in a self-checkmating of excesses. Its concept of universal solidarity serves to protect the concept of solidarity in its particular understanding from degenerating to hatred and classism. On the other hand, its concept of particular solidarity protects the universal concept of solidarity from apathy. In all cases, solidarity should aim at protecting the subject. Metz

⁷⁷ Ibid, 208.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 209.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 210.

maintains that “In mystical-political dual structure solidarity emerges as a category of the salvation of the subject at those points where it is being threatened: by being forgotten, by oppression, by death. It arises as a category of engagement so that men and women might become and continue to be subjects.”⁸⁰

As we shall later see, the New Political Theology’s Christian categories of memory, narratives and solidarity are integral parts of Igbo culture and tradition. They are not foreign to Igbo society. Thus the Igbo culture and Christianity have many meeting and merging points. However, it took a process and a span of time before the Christian message was planted and ingrained in the Igbo nation and Africa at large. Many factors accounted for that. At this point, we shall attempt a concise examination of the process of struggles and trials to communicate the Christian faith to Igbo nation and Africa at large took. This enables us to have a view of the origin of Christian faith in Igbo land and be able to conceptualise and contextualise the Christian faith in Igbo nation and Africa at large.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 211.

CHAPTER TWO

A SURVEY OF THE ADVENT OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AFRICA

In this chapter, a survey of the advent of Christianity in Africa in general and in Nigeria and Igbo land in particular will be attempted. In addition, those means and methods through which evangelization in Igbo land was carried out, with their merits and demerits will be identified.

2.1 THE CASE OF NORTH AFRICA AND ETHIOPIA

The Christianity-advent and Christian-event in Africa is a major occurrence that powerfully and fundamentally changed the face and indeed structure of Africa, arguably, forever. Though some could make case for the early contact of Africa with Christianity, citing the gigantic and unforgettable accomplishment of the North African Church, with such Names like Augustine of Hippo, Origen of Alexandria, Tertullian and Cyprian, the North African world at the inception of Christianity was geographically African, but culturally and politically Greek and Roman - it had become part of the Roman Empire and receptor of the rebirth through Hellenism. In order words, the world and civilization in which the North African church was founded was western Greek and Roman.

The evangelization of this northern part of Africa was effected through political expansions and held in being through the political power cum cultural build-up of those colossal empire builders and sovereignties whose words were laws and who could at will or whims call in the state of emergency and make the state of exception unexceptional. When this political power was given a religious legitimacy, it assumed the nature and character of a divine mandate. This was suggested when Leo I opined that by the bringing together of all people under the Roman empire, the Gospel of Christ would be effectively brought to all people. The bringing together of the people was to be the booty of the monster called conquest. When the empire disintegrated, so did also the church because the strength under

which the foundation of the church was built was political. And as the North African church ceased to be Latin, it almost ceased to exist in its entirety. Even the effort of St Francis of Assisi and his brothers to preach to the Sultan in Egypt in 1219 could not bring back the “lost church”.

The disintegration and eventual almost disappearance of the North African church has been accorded many explanations and reasons. Certainly, the North African Church was weakened by the many controversies and heresies she had to deal with. However, the refusal of the church to be inculturated, the insistence of those in charge of the North African church on a Latin and foreign church contributed in no small measures to its capitulation and surrender as siege was laid on Carthage captured by vandals in 439 AD⁸¹ and by Muslims in 689AD; as her Christian faith was put to test.

The resilience and survival till date of the Coptic and Ethiopian churches is given as an evidence of the fruit of an inculturated faith. The Copts were Egyptian converts from ancient religion of the Pharaohs, introverted and sustained through Coptic liturgy and additional advantage of the Bible in their local language. The Ethiopian church was initiated through the evangelization by Frumentius. Frumentius was consecrated bishop of Aksum by St Athanasius who was bishop of Alexandria - thus establishing the link between Egypt and Ethiopia. This link was to last for 1600years.⁸² Ethiopia was not under Roman rule. The Ethiopian church translated the Christian faith to the way of life of the people in music and liturgy. The Ethiopian Church was for a long time however controlled by the Egyptian Coptic Church. Though the church was not missionary-oriented, incapable of spreading to the rest of Sub Saharan Africa because of her lack of the political framework and the material facilities for such a tasking and demanding venture, the church was however able to survive many adversities to this day.⁸³ The evangelization of Sub-Saharan Africa would have to wait until the time the Europeans would have access to the Continent by way of the sea.

⁸¹ Vandal Kingdom ruled in North Africa and the Mediterranean 435-534.

⁸² Cf. Bengt SUNDKLER, / Christopher STEED, A History of Church in Africa, 12.

⁸³ Cf. Jude Chikodi IKE, The Church as Locus of Man's Encounter with God. A Study of the Theology of Otto Semmelroth and its Implication for the Church in Africa, Frankfurt am Main 2011, 274f.

2.2 EARLY ATTEMPTS AT EVANGELIZATION OF SUB –SAHARAN AFRICA

2.2.1 A GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The Europeans' contact with the Sub Saharan Africa was privileged by the conquest of the Ceuta and other strongholds of Morocco in 1415. Before this time, the Muslims' control of the Lands of Sudan and roots of the Mediterranean and the dangers of the land root of Berber mountain –areas, and also the adverse conditions of the Sahara desert would hold the eager energy and zeal of the European explorers at bay. "The reappearance of the Christian Missions on African soil would have to wait the time when Atlantic Ocean would emerge as the new center of European world expansion."⁸⁴

In 1456, Pope Callistus III gave all juridical, ecclesiastical and political rights of the discovered and subsequently conquered areas to the Portuguese reign. This was done in a series of agreements referred to as the *padroado* agreements. Side by side Explorers, Colonizers traders and missionaries arrived Africa. By 1460 they were in Cape Verde and subsequently in Senegal, Gold Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leon, Benin City and Warri in Nigeria, Angola and Zaire. It is reported that among the group that landed in Gold Coast (Ghana) were 500 soldiers and 100 artisans.⁸⁵ This very first attempt at evangelization of Africa, with its trade mark of force and impunity, was ear-marked for failure because of approach and attitude. This was in part because this first attempt at evangelization of Africa was not approached with much fervour and conviction. What were on fore front were the economical gains of the new arrivers in Africa. To be sure, some of the missionaries were men of great sacrifice who paid even the ultimate price in the course of African evangelization. However a great number of them at this period were explorers and traders. One of such is said to have given the reason for his adventure to Africa as "to serve God and his Majesty, to give light to those who were in darkness and to grow rich as all men desire to do."⁸⁶ Surely there were priests among the first group of missionaries but most

⁸⁴ Jean –Marc ÉLA, *African Cry*, BARR, Robert, R.(trans.), Oregon 2005, 10f.

⁸⁵ Cf. J. H. PARRY, *The age of Reconnaissance*, in: IKE, Jude, Chikodi , *The Church as Locus of Man's Encounter with God*, 308.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 279.

times, they were not independent; they were delegates of the Portuguese government and must take orders from their home government lest their stipends would be withdrawn. Thus the priests were more representatives of the King of Portugal than the Catholic Church. Many of the priests were also attached to the companies and most times under the control of these companies. As Lamin Sanneh articulated it,

*European traders were unwilling to allow religious factors to stand in the way of commerce and profit, and often expected priests to serve as purveyors of ritual to the trading companies. The city of God in the Church may be fairer by far, but men were happy to prosper in broad area of overlap with its worldly rival and leave the necessary separation to an indefinite future.*⁸⁷

The strong attachment of the missionary work to home government of the missionaries made the African kings and people suspicious of the intention of the missionaries. Given to this, most of them resisted conversion. The missionaries aimed to convert the African Kings so that the Kings would decree Christianity as a state religion for the people they governed. It would not be before 1631, when the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith which was formed in 1622 would take over missionary work in Africa. The move by the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith to send Spanish missionaries to Africa aroused suspicion on the part Portugal. Before then and even afterwards, Portugal rejected or banished missionaries from other countries. The Italian Capuchins – Frs. Angelo Maria and Bonaventure da Firenze were expelled from Warri Nigeria by the Portuguese against the opinion and will of the Olu (king) of Warri. The duo were later arrested in Sao Tome and imprisoned as economic spies.⁸⁸

This attitude was not peculiar to the Portuguese. The Dutch adopted also inimical measures against missionaries from other countries. The brutality of the Portuguese to the indigenes, their insatiable taste for African slaves was a danger and contradiction to the faith they said to have professed. Those heroic missionaries, who made bold to question the brutality of the Portuguese were penalized and punished in the most stringent of manners.

However this very attempt could be said to have recorded considerable success in Congo - the modern day Zaire. By 1519, there was already an African bishop of Congo descent,

⁸⁷Lamin. SANNEH, West African Christianity, .34.

⁸⁸ Cf. Ibid, 39-44. (Cf. also A. C. RYDER, Missionary activity in the Kingdom of Warri to the Early Nineteenth Century, in: Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, vol. 2,1, 1960, 1-24, in: IKE, Jude Chikodi , 277).

who, with a special dispensation from Pope Leo X, was consecrated bishop only a year after his priestly ordination in Portugal where he had undergone his priestly training and studies. Henry was the son of King Alfonso king of Congo. He was only 24 when he was ordained a priest and would only live to die at 37.⁸⁹ Africa would have to wait for another 400 years before sustainable ecclesiastical structures, stamina and confidence would be built that would be able to convince the ecclesiastical powers on the appointment of another African indigene as bishop in Africa.

2.2.2 BENIN AND WARRI KINGDOMS

BENIN KINGDOM

Efforts were made at this period to Christianize the people of the Benin and Warri Kingdoms of today's Nigeria. The Portuguese had already contact with Benin as far back as 1480 through trade, especially on slaves. There were also trade in valuable beads and the Benin pepper. During this period, the Portuguese observed encouraging signs of the possibility of the people of Benin accepting Christianity. The Oba of Benin took special interest in the visitors. However, the Oba and his people were not ready to leave the tradition of their fore fathers for Christianity. As trade between Portugal and Benin deteriorated so did also their relationship. However contact was maintained. The Oba later showed interest in the new religion. In 1516 he sent one of his sons with the sons of some of his chiefs to be baptized by the missionaries whom he also granted permission to construct a church. The Oba however died later the same year.

Another attempt was still made to evangelize the people of Benin Empire. In 1648 the Propaganda Fide assigned the task of the evangelization of this empire to the Spanish Capuchin of Valencia Aragon. This Benin mission was motivated by the positive assessment of Fr Colombin who had visited Benin and Warri in 1640. He described the people of these areas and environs as 'truly gentle, civilized, friendly to priest, exemplary in their behaviour, and receptive of good teaching.' He further stated that "In this kingdom the people may very easily be led to embrace the faith ... Their king is so greatly feared by his subjects ... Thus from this it may be imagined that if the king were converted to the

⁸⁹Cf. Jude Chikodi IKE, *The Church as Locus of Man's Encounter with God*, 277f.

faith, the rest of his subjects would easily follow”⁹⁰ However all effort to Christianize the people at this period proved abortive. The failure was largely due to the facts that the chiefs especially the prime chief known as *Uwangué* blocked the missionaries’ access to the Oba since they feared that their political and religious importance might be diminished and the tradition of the empire might be tampered with if the missionaries were to succeed in their mission to change the then religious statuesque.

WARRI KINGDOM

Attempts were also made to evangelize the people of Warri kingdom. Between 1571 and 1574 a group of Augustinian monks led by Fr Francisco a Mater Dei undertook a mission to Warri. The Olu (King) of Warri and his son accepted baptism through Fr Francesco. The son of the Olu took the name Sebastian and in 1597 succeeded his father as the Olu. However this mission failed due to lack of missionary personnel to sustain it. The state was poor and malaria was prevalent. The Olu constantly complained that for more than ten years after the introduction of the Faith to the people, there were no missionaries - or priest-presence. Ironically, priests were giving the offer of trading on slave as an inducement to the missionary work here and as a means of survival. Even at this, the difficulties surrounding the mission in Warri made this offer unattractive to the missionaries. In 1584, the Augustinian missionaries were withdrawn and in 1593 a group of Franciscans visited Warri from Sao Tomé to undertake a mission here. But most of these priests died within four years. In a bid to use natives to evangelize the people of Warri, the Bishop of Sao Tome Francisco de Villanova sent Domingo the son of Olu to Portugal to study for priesthood. It was a wrong understanding of the custom of the people since Domingo was the heir apparent to the throne. In fact before he left for studies, he had already a wife. He would still finish his studies in Portugal and return to Warri not to take up priestly duties but to attend to his traditional responsibilities. However, he was still well disposed towards Christianity. Despite this good disposition toward Christianity which was also maintained by his immediate successors notably his son Antonio Domingo and another successor Don Agostinho, Christianity could not be established in Warri. Historian Lamin Sanneh gives the reason for this failure as thus:

⁹⁰ Lamin SANNEH, *West African Christianity*, 44.

*The material circumstances of Warri militated against the successful establishment of the mission in the kingdom. Portugal's chief commercial rivals in West Africa, such as the Dutch and the English, neglected it because of its lack of opportunities for lucrative commerce. Christianity in this kingdom suffered because of this enclave position. ... The rest followed from the unwillingness of the priests to remain in Warri and the sorry plight of those who did; the reluctant patronage of Portugal...*⁹¹

In his overall assessment of the missionary activities in Africa at this early period, Sanneh further stated that,

*Christianity was too closely identified with existing European interest to be able to follow an independent course in African States. Traders and commercial agents working for European concerns might adopt the religion, but only so long as they remained tied to European bases... Many European traders ignored argument of religion in pursuit of profit and were not averse to restricting missionary ventures if commercial reasons demanded it. The fact that missionary ventures were promoted as the schemes of European kings also hampered their progress in Africa, because of the political price which would have to be paid by the African rulers who accepted Christianity.*⁹²

2.3 MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA FROM THE 19TH CENTURY ONWARDS

2.3.1 GENERAL ASSESSMENT AND OVERVIEW

While the missionary activities in Africa between the years 1450 – 1750 suffered an abysmal collapse, 19th Century ushered in a Christianity that despite different challenges, still survived till today. Describing the whole situation surrounding the earlier unsuccessful attempts and the later acceptance of Christianity, Sannah opined that African strength and resistance were weakened by the consistent attacks of the superior war machinery power of the Europeans. To this earlier period of the attempt to evangelize Africa Sanneh once again stated:

*In West Africa during this period, all the circumstances were unfavourable to the establishment of the Christian mission. Fresh hopes were constantly being aroused, only to be shattered on the unyielding rock of African resistance. Yet new forces were working to erode that resistance, and in the subsequent upheavals brought on by European trade, mainly in slaves and guns, African societies, increasingly overshadowed by an advancing column of gunboats, were conditioned and eventually compelled to accept new influences, and consequently Christianity gained foothold*⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid,43.

⁹² Ibi, 51f.

⁹³ Ibid, 52.

Thus, in this later effort at Christianization of Africa, the missionaries were to meet an Africa weakened by slave trade and whose cohesion and resistance had been battered through defeats in the battles and whose gods and deities could no longer protect them from the gunboats of the Whiteman.

This later undertaking was also spurred by the three factors that were captured in the caption “FOR GLORY, GOLD AND GOD”.- political glories of the European governments, trade and their economic growth cum wellbeing, and Christianization.⁹⁴ There were arguments for the replacement of the slave trade with legitimate trade – thanks to the industrial revolution. The French revolution, which was a radical political event that questioned and overturned the traditional structures and authorities in European France ironically and inadvertently advanced the course of the evangelization of Africa in the sense that it brought in the separation of the church and the state- a situation that gave missionaries a much needed freedom for a robust evangelization without recourse to their home government and the fear of not dancing to their tune especially as regards contents and methods.

Whereas the former attempts at evangelization of Africa were undertaken by the Catholic Church, the protestant churches were not only to take part in the later attempts to evangelize Africa, but they were to play a leading role. Most of them were paradoxically freed African slaves. Christianity had helped them to overcome the brutality of slavery, giving them a sense of human dignity and reason to look into the future. Stories like those of the Israelites’ captivity and enslavement in Egypt and their subsequent liberation by God as found in the Exodus were foundational sources of consolation and hope for them. The suffering of Christ - his unjust torture, crucifixion and death and his eventual resurrection from the dead was a living event that made them to hold on in hope in the means of torture and brutality; knowing that death did not have the final say. Now as freemen, some of them took a leading role in bringing Christianity back to Africa. One of them was Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

The Catholic Church also did not give up on her effort to establish herself in Africa and also win members for herself and for Christ. Evangelization was carried out by

⁹⁴ Cf. O.U. KALU (ed.), *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, 3.

congregations notably the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny founded by Anne-Marie Javouhey (1779-1851), the Society of African Mission (SMA fathers) founded by Bishop Marion Bresillac, Society of Mission for Africa founded by Cardinal Charles Martial Lavigerie; and the Holy Ghost fathers (Spiritans) founded by Venerable Francis Mary Libermann.⁹⁵

2.3.2 EVANGELIZATION OF IGBO NATION

In Nigeria and especially in Igbo land, the Holy Ghost fathers played a very important and decisive role in the evangelization of the people. They arrived Nigeria in 1885, 28 years after the arrival of their Anglican counterparts. They then established the Holy Trinity Church in Onitsha in a land given to them by the then bishop of Niger Delta Pastorate Samuel Ajayi Crowther.

The first method of evangelization they adopted was the establishment of Christian village for the people that were bought out of slavery. The Superior of the Holy Ghost Congregation in France in 1892 wrote to the Prefect of the College of Propaganda in Rome stating thus:

*... in all our missions our fathers bring up young children, both boys and girls, at great expense, and a good number of these, especially of the girls are children bought out of slavery ... we have to look after them for several years until we can establish them and make Christian household and then Christian villages.*⁹⁶

This shows a great effort by the missionaries at Christian charity and giving hope to the destitute. This method of evangelization was not peculiar to Eastern part of Nigeria. It was a general method used in evangelism in Africa at this time. In the French speaking countries of Africa these villages were known as *village de Liberté*. Or *Chréntites*. The concept of giving liberated slaves a home and a place to stay was a noble one. Through this restoration, the freed people started to have the sense of personhood. However, the liberated people also found themselves in restrictions and regulations thus having no sense of total freedom. A description of what it looked like to live in these villages had it that

life was regulated almost as severely by the mission bell as it was in England by factory hooter. It summoned the children to prayer at sunrise, to work at 6.30, to religious instruction and to

⁹⁵ Cf. Jude Chikodi IKE, *The Church as Locus of Man's Encounter with God*, 286.

⁹⁶ C.S Sp Archives, Paris (30 Rue Lhomond) Boite no. 649, Dossier A, in: CLARKE, P., B., *The Method and Ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1905*, in : KALU, O.U (ed.), *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, 36.

*rest at 11, to work again from 2.30pm till sundown. Having assembled once more at the foot of the altar to thank God for his mercies, they were left to themselves till 9.30 p.m., when at a signal from the father, conversation ceased and all sought rest in sleep.*⁹⁷

Whereas this method served to accommodate the degraded of the society by giving them the basic protections and providence they needed, some of these villages were seen as too regimental and also as sources of cheap labour for the missionaries and government. In his Journal Chauncy Maples, who was an Anglican missionary wrote that he “often felt like the governor of a goal than a missionary.”⁹⁸

Efforts were also made to evangelize the people through establishment of hospitals and health facilities. These helped to cure many illnesses and better the lives of the people. People who were previously segregated because of their illnesses like leprosy or those whose ailments were superstitiously interpreted as curses from the gods had a renewed and new life through the cure of their diseases. Orphanages were also opened to rescue twins who were at that time regarded as taboo. Many were influenced and moved by this to join the new faith. However in some cases baptism was required as a prerequisite for treatment.

Another method adopted by the missionaries for the evangelization of the Southern Easterners of Nigeria was the targets on the elites and chiefs of the society. This method was summarized in the words of Lejeune who was the superior of the Holy Ghost Congregation Onitsha Wharf Mission of Nigeria from 1901- 1905 when he stated “we must aim at the head; once the head has been won for us, the whole body will follow.”⁹⁹ He maintained that God sent them first to the elites and only when there was no success with the elites could they turn to the populace and the discarded in the society. Thus he erroneously interpreted the parable of the banquet where the chief hosts only turned to the commoners after those invited did not show up.

The method which was arguably the most successful in the evangelization of the Southern Easterners of Nigeria was the establishment of schools. In 1905 Shanahan who was the successor of Lajeune wrote “it is through the school that we will win over the

⁹⁷ R. OLIVER, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, London, 1952 (1970), 52, in: IKE, Jude, Chikodi, *The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God*, 287.

⁹⁸ C. MAPLES, *Letters and Journals*, London, 1897, 121, in: Oliver, R., *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, 54, in: IKE, Jude, Chikaodi, *The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God*, 287.

⁹⁹ Cf. P.B. CLARKE, in: KALU, O.U, *The History of Christianity in West Africa* 48.

whole country”¹⁰⁰ Again in 1909 Shanahan also wrote “If we go from town to town talking only about God we know from our experience that much of our effort brings no result. But no one is opposed to schools”¹⁰¹

This method of evangelization through the establishment of schools occurred under the background of rivalry between the Catholic missionaries and their protestant counterparts on who would get a larger chunk of followers. In a letter written in 1901, Lejeune who was Shanahan’s predecessor asserted that “it is perilous to hesitate, the Christian village must go and all our concentration must be on the schools otherwise our enemy the protestants will snatch the young.”¹⁰² Fr Paulus of the Holy Ghost Mission at Onitsha Wharf once wrote to Le Roy who was the Superior of the Holy Ghost congregation in Paris “we cannot allow the CMS to dominate Onitsha by means of their schools”.¹⁰³ Shanahan himself said that he will use the schools “to strike the last blow at the Presbyterians and others.” The Protestants themselves acknowledged this rivalry when the Archdeacon Dennis of the CMS stated:

*... this drive was so sporadic effort, like others which have been made from time to time, but it has on the contrary been vigorously sustained up to the present and with a large measure of success ... it is evident now that what we see is the working out of a well planned scheme to Romanize Southern Nigeria or at least the Igbo country ... we have more to fear from the Romanist menace than the Moslems so far ...*¹⁰⁴

This method of evangelization through the establishment of schools was disdained by Bishop Carlo Zappa who was Shanahan’s counterpart in the Western region. In a letter he wrote to his superiors in Rome on February, 12, 1911 he stated thus:

It is well known amongst all brethren of the mission at least until recently that I have not favoured or much encouraged the work of schools: I believe, as I still do, that encouraging them to be instructed, we are pushing our young people towards government employment, and I do not think we ought to be the first to push them in this direction. In such work, they are far from the guardianship of their families and missionaries, and are usually led into places of corruption where their morals and their faith are practically certain to be lost ... For that reason I have always thought the school method involves our misunderstanding of our mission which is simply

¹⁰⁰J.P. JORDAN, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria, 32f, in: CLARKE, P., B, in: KALU O.U. (ed), The History of Christianity in West Africa 51.

¹⁰¹Ibid, 54.

¹⁰² Cf. P. B. CLARKE, 51.

¹⁰³ Cf Ibid, 52.

¹⁰⁴CMS Archives, G3/A3/O, Dennis to Manley, 13 September 1913, in: Ibid, 54.

*an apostolic affair ; we should virtually be committing a crime against the souls of these children if we were to be the first means of leading them into dangerous situation without actually being forced to do so.*¹⁰⁵

This is myopic and simplistic approach to the situation. In my view, there is no authentic claim of sending one to heaven by simply blindfolding him or making him uneducated. Many missionaries were also learned people. Academic or secular learning is not juxtaposed or incompatible with moral or spiritual training. Both do not necessarily negate one another. The church was in the better position to accomplish both the academic and moral cum spiritual training. When a child is educated in both secular and spiritual trainings, he will imbibe them and grow up with them and be a tool of converting the so called “corrupt” government. When the Church backs out from education or recluses itself from schools, she inevitably leaves the so called “souls of these children” in the hands of the secular world which is described here as so corrupt and their future would be controlled by those who have little or nothing to do with Christianity. The best approach would have been, as adopted by the missionaries of the Eastern part of Nigeria, to train these children properly in order to be morally, spiritually and academically strong enough to face the society or even convert it. No wonder Lejuene remarked that “the Government prefers, holds in esteem, and grants opportunities to the Roman Catholic trained pupils ... indeed it gives them preference above all others”¹⁰⁶

The establishment of schools was a great and positive achievement of the missionaries. It led to the development and enlightenment of the people of the Southern part of Nigeria and Africa in general. Some of the great African nationalists were products of these missionary schools. Thus the establishment of schools by the missionaries contributed in no small measures to the emancipation of Africans. This also helped to change the prejudice of missionaries as regards Africans. Most of the missionaries came from Europe where debates were held about the humanity of the Africans and whether the Indians had souls. Thus Shanahan spoke of the nobility of the Igbo souls.

Converts to the new religion were recruited through the school system. As was mentioned earlier, there were also other methods of Christianization other than the school

¹⁰⁵ SMA archives Rome, 1911, in: IMOKHAI, The Evolution of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, 12, in: IKE, Jude Chikodi, 288f.

¹⁰⁶C S Sp archives, Böite 193, Dossier B, Vol. II, in: CLARK.E, P., B., 57.

method. Despite the success of the missionaries in evangelizing Igbo nation, the Igbos like their Nigerian and African Christians experience faith crisis. Examination of this faith crisis will be the task of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

FAITH CRISIS AND GOD QUESTION

Here we are concerned with different aspects of the Igbo African God Question and faith crisis. We shall attempt an examination of the different ways the Christian religion, her notion of God and her message of love and wholesome salvation were contradicted by the experience of the Igbo and indeed African Christians and therefore results in a crisis of faith and doubts about the nature of the Christian God. Some of these factors of faith crisis are not only peculiar to the Igbo people but are shared by the Igbo people as members of the African and black race.

Describing the crisis of the Igbo and Nigerian Christians Anthony Asiegbu stated thus:

In the context of these Nigerian Christians, the crisis impinges on the whole human person. It touches their health, social relationship, interest, feelings, life, security, prosperity, freedom beliefs, happiness and immortality. Indeed it refers to a religious experience that concerns the whole of human life and all that a person is. It refers to the type of religious experience which can be described in Tertullian words as 'totus quod sumus et in quo sumus' - that which touches all we are in what we are.¹⁰⁷

We identify three aspects of the faith crisis: Historical, Existential and Cultural. This corresponds to the view of many African theologians on what the program of God-talk and African theological discourse should basically concern itself with. This view is aptly expressed by Emmanuel Martley thus:

The struggle against anthropological pauperization of the African person is what gives Africa its theological agenda. It is indeed the pivot on which all relevant African theological interpretations and methodological interpretations must rotate. Contextually, any attempt at giving theological interpretation to this agenda must wrestle with the two interpenetrating dimensions of African reality, and any God-Talk in Sub-Saharan Africa must be done in the light of these unyielding dimensions of African theological realities.¹⁰⁸

These two realities on which African theological agenda must occupy itself according to Martey are politico-socioeconomic and anthropologic-religiocultural. These factors are foundational in the context of this work - the examination of the God question and faith

¹⁰⁷ Anthony ASIEGBU, A crisis of faith and a quest for spirituality, Enugu 2000, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Emmanuel MARTEY, African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation, Maryknoll, NY 1995, 38, in: OKAFOR, Ikenna, Towards an Africa Theology of Fraternal Solidarity. Ube Nwanna, Eugene, Oregon 2014, 110.

crisis of the Igbo Africans. The historical aspect of the God question holds a discourse on the anthropological pauperization of the African person through slavery colonialism and racism. In the existential aspect of the faith crisis, the politico- socioeconomic aspect of the theological agenda is approached. And the cultural aspect of the faith crisis borders on the religiocultural aspect of the African theological agenda and God talk.

3.1 THE HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE FAITH CRISIS

This historical aspect of faith crisis and God-question of the Igbo Africans is connected with, and expressed in what Engelbert Mveng called “anthropological poverty”. In his words,

When persons are deprived not only of goods and possessions of a material, spiritual, moral intellectual, cultural, or sociological order, but of everything that makes up the foundation of their being in the world and the specificity of their “ipseity” as individual, society, and history – when persons are bereft of their identity, their dignity, their freedom, their thought, their history their language, their faith universe, and their basic creativity, deprived of all their rights, their hopes, their ambitions (that is, when they are robbed of their own ways of living and existing) – they sink into a kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person. It is this poverty that we call anthropological poverty. That is an indigence of being, the legacy of centuries of slavery and colonization.¹⁰⁹

In this examination of the anthropological pauperization and historical factors of the faith crisis of the Igbo Africans, we are keeping faith with remembrance and memory as theological categories of political theology. As Metz pointed out, “Remembrance, which is always on the trail of the forgotten ... aims at a culture sensitive to absence – would really be the organ of theology which, as theodicy, tries to confront our most progressive consciousness with what has been forgotten in it: the grievances and complaints of the past”¹¹⁰ History is not only history of the victors but also history of the vanquished. Here, there is a call not only for solidarity “looking forward” with upcoming generations, but also a call for solidarity “looking back” with the dead, the forgotten, the vanquished, those who were unjustly murdered and conquered. In the theological category of remembrance, what

¹⁰⁹ MVENG, Impoverishment and Liberation, 156, in: UZUKWU Elochukwu, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness, Oregon 2012, 28f.

¹¹⁰ METZ, A Passion for God, 65.

is characterized as dangerous memories are exhumed. These dangerous memories are also known as memories of challenge which make demands on us.

These are memories in which earlier experiences flare up and unleash new dangerous insights for the present. For brief moment they illuminate, harshly and piercingly, the problematic character of things we made our peace with a long time ago and the banality of what we take to be realism. They break through the canon of ruling plausibility structure and take on a virtually subversive character. Memories of this sort are like dangerous and uncalculable visitations from the past. They are memories that one has to take into account, memories that have a future content, so to speak.”¹¹¹

Humans are products of their histories. Our origin plays into our future. Our histories are most times shaped by forces beyond our control. First and foremost we do not choose for ourselves the part of the planets where we wish to be born into, neither do we choose the race, the colour or even the families of our birth. These are forces that have their eternal origin in God who has created all men equal and has called for solidarity within men. Our fellow human beings become the face of God in our existence and a means of experiencing God when we open ourselves in love to each other. Love becomes the central message of Christianity.

However, history has shown that the Christian bearers of this eternal message of the Most High God sometimes made pacts with the princes of this world and as such compromised on the message of God. Sometimes, access to God was blurred through torture and inhumanity of man to man.

New political theology’ characterizing of history as a history of suffering is most true of the African experience. Metz talks about “respect for the dignity of suffering that has accumulated in history.”¹¹² According to him,

Humanity’s natural history is in some measure the history of its passion. ... it is not teleology but the “trail of suffering” that creates continuity of this history that is accessible to us. The dynamism of history is a memory of suffering as a negative awareness of the freedom that is to come, and as a stimuli to act within the horizon of this history in such a way as to overcome suffering.¹¹³

As Jürgen Manemann said, “Theological questioning must never gloss over the tragedy of concrete humans suffering ... who ever writes and thinks about catastrophes may not

¹¹¹ METZ, Faith in History and Society, 105.

¹¹² METZ, Faith in History and Society, 104.

¹¹³ Ibid.

present injustice abstractly because abstract concepts overwhelm any concrete response ... Bearing witness to the testimony of the fallen and saved means avoiding closure, keeping the question open an at issue rather than settled.”¹¹⁴ The God question of the African Christians remain tied to that of their African – American brothers and sisters – formulated in different question. The questions reverberate thus:

*... given more than five hundred years of chattel slavery, rape , torture, murder, lynching, and extended public abuse, of black human ‘other’, what might an African American (and in extension all Black and African) theology say about the cross of Jesus of Nazareth? How can such a theology affirm the Christian God as a God of love, compassion and justice, and mercy? How can this theology operate as if the goodness of God towards all mankind stood as unassailable theological axiom?*¹¹⁵

We shall look at the historic nature of the crisis of Christian faith of the Igbo Africans of Nigeria and in extension that of all Black Africans. What is contained herein is in agreement with what Metz refers to as dangerous memories which make demands on us.

3.1.1 THE QUESTION OF SLAVERY

The case of the transatlantic slave trade represents an ever present question on the human race. It reveals the monstrosity hidden in the depth of the human nature, which in historical time-intervals rears its ugly and atrocious head into human history in an annihilating venture. And when its passage is over, it leaves behind a world-stage and a collective humanity that is battered, devastated, desolated and forlorn. When the people of the world wake up to their God giving consciousness, they wake up to embarrassment, to incomprehensibility and to shame. Confronted with an embarrassment of a facilitation or an indifference that enabled the emergence and sustenance of the historic monster, not a few people would choose to remain in the chasm of darkness, drawing and harping from its depth a debasing sound of justification in order to offer themselves a less embarrassing emergence into the day. But as darkness cannot produce light, the sound of justification from the shadows of darkness and death only pollutes the daylight and leads to a double annihilation of the annihilated and a re-victimization of the victims.

¹¹⁴ Jürgen MANEMANN, Abandoned by God? Reflections on the Margins of Theology, in : DOWNEY, John, K. / MANEMANN, Jürgen, /OSTOVICH, Steven, T. (eds.), Missing God?, 25.

¹¹⁵ M. Shawn COPELAND, Knowing Christ Crucified: Dark Wisdom from the Slaves, in: DOWNEY, John, K. / MANEMANN, Jürgen, /OSTOVICH, Steven, T. (eds.), Missing God?, 60. (Subsequently as M. Shawn COPELAND, Knowing Christ Crucified: Dark Wisdom from the Slaves)

The question of transatlantic slavery refuses to be soluble to the evolutionistic explanation of history as progress. It rather represents a deep wound in the being of humanity. Humanity reveals itself as hallowed but also hazardous - the source of finest culture and civilization, but also the source of deepest inhumanity. Thus there is the call for mysticism of “opened eyes” to guide against inhumanity.

Humans build their progress most times basically through annihilation of others, through the devouring of others’ humanity. This same annihilation makes humans inhuman showing man as a being moving towards self annihilation, back to the chaos found at the beginning of creation. But the Incarnate Son of God came to heal the world of its selfishness and wickedness through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. The Spirit on Pentecost is the breath of God that renews the face of the world and the heart of men and makes it whole again and again. But when man blocks his heart against the Spirit of God, he becomes an annihilating machine. Only the Spirit of God is the guarantor that at the end, everything will be made whole and restored. The vanquished and those unjustly tormented, tortured and annihilated in history will be restored to wholeness. There is a call for solidarity both with the dead and the living. The task on humanity is through a united force propelled and sustained by the Spirit of God and good reasoning to protect the common humanity entrusted to humanity, making sure it does not turn to wicked inhumanity such as was witnessed in transatlantic slave trade. That is a common responsibility on humanity.

In acknowledgement of the role the city of Charleston played in slave trade and apologizing for this role, the Charleston council members stated on 19th of June 2018, a day - referred to as Juneteeth - yearly set apart to celebrate the abolition of slave trade thus

*The institution of slavery did not just involve physical confinement and mistreatment, it also sought to suppress, if not destroy the cultural, religious and social values of Africans by stripping Africans of their ancestral names and customs, humiliating and brutalizing them through sexual exploitation, and selling African relatives apart from one another without regard to the connection of family, a human condition universal among all peoples of the world.*¹¹⁶

There is no unanimous agreement as to the date of the beginning of transatlantic slavery, however some historians placed the date at 1620 with the arrival of “Dutch-man-of-war”

¹¹⁶ Cf. CNN News, 20th June, 2018, Charleston Apologizes for its Role in Slave Trade, by Jessica Campisis / Saeed Ahmed.

with some twenty Africans.¹¹⁷ In the subsequent years and centuries, men and women and children would be captured and forcefully sold to a life of perpetual subjugation and extreme agony of an immeasurable nature. In chains and aboard ships destining to the so called “new world” they were tortured, raped and subjected to all forms of mental torture. These tortures of the Africans were not exceptions but the rule, sanctioned and legalized by a humanity that asserted itself over others through the denial of the other’s humanity. As M. Shawn Copeland noted,

Chattel slavery was not a quaint revival of the medieval feudal system. It was structured, sanctioned, interpreted, and enforced by legislation. The slave “is one who is in the power of the master to whom he belongs. The master may sell him, dispose of his person, his industry and his labor” Slaves were deemed sold, taken, reputed and adjudged in law to be chattels personal, in the hands of their owners and possessors, and their executors, administrators, and assigns to all intent, constructions, and purpose whatsoever.” These laws aim to “erase every feature of social and human differentiation” and reify African humanity”¹¹⁸

Thus in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there is the extreme racialisation of the state of *homo sacer*. Here humanity witnessed the replacement of the Spirit of God with inhuman ideologies aimed at the suppression of human feelings and empathy for the “other” in order to make concrete brutal actions towards the other. It is estimated that 12 to 33 percent of the captured Africans perished in the course of their journey without reaching their destination.¹¹⁹ One of those cases was witnessed in what is called the Igbo landing, where in May 1803, a group of 75 captives of Igbo origin destined to be enslaved in the United States of America took control of their slave ship and decided to take their own lives rather than to submit to slavery. There is a historic site in Dunbar Creek on St. Simons Island, Glynn County, Georgia named Igbo landing in commemoration of this event. What is celebrated here is the act of resistance rather than the actual suicide called by many as the first freedom march in the history of the United States.¹²⁰ It was a resistance to be dissubjectified and in extension to the dissubjectification of the black African ‘other’ which had become normal in the world order but at this point especially in colonial America.

¹¹⁷Cf. M. Shawn COPELAND, *Knowing Christ Crucified: Dark Wisdom from Slaves*, 62.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 63.

¹¹⁹Cf. Ibid, 62.

¹²⁰ Cf. Igbo Landing Mass Suicide, www.blackpast.org (Stand 30.09.2020).

From around 1640, “in colonial America slavery was exclusively identified with black bodies.”¹²¹ Slavery aimed to destroy the identity and humanity of the Africans; to make them less human to justify the wicked passion of exercise of power over them. As Metz highlighted, “the destruction of memory turns out systematically to hinder identity, to prevent people from becoming subjects or continuing to be subjects in their social-historical contexts. Uprooting slaves and deporting them tends to destroy memories, and precisely in this way serves as a powerful reinforcement of their state of being slaves, their systematic disempowerment in the interest of effecting their complete subjugation.”¹²²

According to a summary of laws in the United States of America regulating the lives and ordinances for slaves published by George Stroud in 1827 as was summarized by Shawn Copeland,

*...slaves serve the term of their lives; slaves cannot testify against any white person, either in civil or criminal cases; slaves are forbidden all claim on the benefits of education as well as all means of moral religious instructions; slaves are required to submit, not only to the will of the master but to all white persons; slaves have no recourse to self defense, and thus are prohibited from defending themselves against the violence of the master or other whites; slaves are not exempt from the full weight of penal codes of slave-holding states; although slaves may be “considered member(s) of the civil society” for the purpose of prosecution and trial upon criminal accusation, but in manner “different from that which is observed in respect to free white persons, and the difference is injurious to the slave and inconsistent with the rights of humanity.” These laws granted near absolute power over black human beings to white masters and, by extension, to all whites.*¹²³

In transatlantic slave trade, history witnessed a brutal rape of the totality of the African humanity of no comparison, a rape that lasted for around four centuries.

In the words of Johann Baptist Metz,

*There is still pain, still mourning, still melancholy; above all there is still the often wordless suffering from the uncontrolled suffering of the past, the suffering of the dead. For not even greater freedom of coming generations makes up for the suffering of the past and set it free. No inner worldly improvement of the condition of suffering suffices to bring justice to the dead; it cannot touch in a transformative way the lack of justice and meaning in the suffering of the past.*¹²⁴

¹²¹M. Shawn COPELAND, *Knowing Christ Crucified: Dark Wisdom from Slaves*, 62.

¹²² METZ, *Faith in History and Society*, 75.

¹²³ M. Shawn, COPELAND, *Knowing Christ Crucified: Dark Wisdom From Slaves*, 63f.

¹²⁴ METZ, *Faith in History and Society*, 123.

Though there is the claim by Africans at home who sold their brothers and sisters to slavery as to the ignorance of the extreme brutality and inhumanity to which their brothers and sisters were subjugated to in this kind of slavery, it does not totally exonerate them from being co-operators in this dastard event. It is a betrayal of the brotherhood and solidarity that is said to characterize African societies. This is because Africans were those that captured slaves and some of them also served as middlemen in this shameful venture and those that were captured and sold included not only criminals and those captured in wars, but also innocent people.

The basic problem relating slavery with Christianity borders on the part that Christianity played or did not play in connection with the obnoxious institution of slavery especially as it concerns the Africans; it is about what was allowed to happen to others without a second thought;¹²⁵“about people’s historical experience with the church, ... a memory of being disillusioned by the church, the awareness of generations that knows about the church’s alliance with the powerful, and about the occasionally contradictory impression made by the church that is no longer about faith,”¹²⁶but rather contradicts faith.

It disheartens the African Christians to know that it was a Christian missionary by name Las Casas and his Jeronomite Fathers who suggested that Africans should be brought or transported to the Americans to work as slaves in replacement of the Indians.¹²⁷This led foundation for the enslavement of the Africans in the Americans. Thus the beginning of the transportation of Africans from their home land to the Americans as slaves is directly connected to Christianity. Part of the petition of the Jeronomite Fathers to the Spanish Crown reads as follow:

*Leave be given to them to bring over heathen Negroes, of the kind of which we have already experienced. Wherefore here it is agreed that your Highness should command us to grant license to send armed ships from this island to fetch them from the Cape Verde Islands, Guinea, or that it may be done by some other persons to bring them here. Your Highness may believe that if this is permitted it will be very advantageous for the future of the settlers of the Island, for royal revenue*¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Cf. Ibid., 93.

¹²⁶Ibid., 92.

¹²⁷ Though Las Casas later renounced slavery in its totality.

¹²⁸ E. DONNAN (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the History of Slave Trade to America, vol.1, New York 1965, 15f, in: IKE, Chikodi, Jude, The Church as Locus of Man’s encounter with God, 311.

For these Christian missionaries, the Negroes were sub humans to be captured and put into use for their revenue; they were objects to be instrumentalised at leisure at the hands of the whites for the benefits of the whites. The Africans for them were not subjects and have no claim over themselves, over their destinies and over their futures. They had no self consciousness and therefore can bear all pains. Africans' humanity was put under contestation. But these missionaries called themselves missionaries of a God of love and professed the universality of God's love for all His creatures and a Christ who died for the love of mankind. This constitutes an ontological contradiction and thus a fundamental faith crisis and God question of the Igbos and all Africans and Blacks.

The Christian faith was spread not through the convincing power of the Spirit that St Paul spoke of in 1 Cor.2:5, but through violence. The conquistadors and the slavers acting in the name of Christianity used Christianisation as a justification for enslavement and torture, with at times a tacit endorsement of the Church authorities. *Requerimiento* which was a document read to the indigenous people of America wherever they were encountered gave them the option to convert to Christianity or, as the document reads

*... wickedly and intentionally delay to do so, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall forcibly enter your country and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and we shall do all of the harm and damage we can as to vassals who do not obey and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him*¹²⁹

The missionaries of the school of Salamanca, especially Francisco de Victoria (1483 -1546) protested against the brutal treatment of the Indians by the Spanish Conquistadores in the pretence of Christianization. He protested that those brutal treatments could have also hindered the Native Americans from converting to the Christian faith.¹³⁰

The *Requerimiento* is not unconnected with the Papal Bull of Pope Alexander VI of 4 May 1493 where the Pope in the euphoria and acknowledgement of the discovery of the so

¹²⁹ T. TODOROV, *The Conquest of America*, 147, in: IKE, Jude, Chikodi, *The Church as Locus of Man's Encounter with God*, 311.

¹³⁰ While Melchoir Cano (1509 – 1660) of the University of Salamanca distinguished between explicit faith in Christ as a requirement for salvation and implicit faith in Christ as a requirement for justification, it was Domingo Soto who asserted that implicit faith in Christ was sufficient for the Native Americans who lived before the coming of the gospel of Christ to them. Thus he asserted the identity and subjectness of these Native Americans.

called new world by Christopher Columbus in 1492 enjoined King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain thus:

And in order that you may enter upon so an undertaking with greater readiness and heartiness endowed with the benefit of our apostolic favour, we, of our own accord, not out of your instance nor the request of anyone else in your regard, but out of our own sole largesse and certain knowledge and out of the fullness of our apostolic power, by authority of Almighty God conferred upon us in the blessed Peter and of the vicarship of Jesus Christ ..., should any of said islands have been founded by your envoys and captain, give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, ... forever together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdiction ... all island and mainland found and to be found Let no one therefore, infringe, or with rash boldness contravene, this recommendation, exhortation, requisition, gift, grant, assignment, constitution, deputation, decree, mandate, prohibition, and will. Should anyone presume to attempt this, be it known to him that he will incur the wrath of the Almighty God and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul.¹³¹

The Church leaders and the Christian world supported and effected the plundering and subjugation of peoples while at the same time preaching love of God and the God of love. So much violence was effected that it was estimated that the population of the Indians of Latin America came down from 75 million to 10 million.¹³² Christianity preached a message of liberation while still facilitating the slavery of African people to the extent of allowing some of her churches like the Chapel of St George in Elmira, Ghana to be converted to slave auctioning centre and some of her missionaries to be engaged as slavers. Thus Christianity and her houses of worship represented for many people an abode of perpetual bondage.

Copeland expressed that, “Slavery ... was deeply entangled with Christianity. Christian baptism underwent syllogistic mutation: It was unthinkable to baptize slaves; blacks, Africans, were natural slaves; therefore blacks could not be baptized.... It was intended that slavery should stand in perpetuity, and Christianity would be one means to that end.”¹³³ When baptism was considered later in the 18th Century, it was considered only as a means of making slaves to accept their so called fate of perpetual slavery as ordained by God. Copeland further lamented that,

¹³¹ Cf. H. S. COMMGER, (ed.), Documents of American History to 1898, vol. 1, 3, in: IKE, Chikodi, Jude, The Church as Locus of Man Encounter with God, 294.

¹³² Cf. Jude Chikodi IKE, The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God, 310.

¹³³ M. Shawn COPELAND, Knowing Christ Crucified: Dark Wisdom From Slaves, 64.

*... ministers claimed that the enslaved Africans were not humans; that God had foreordained black people to a life of subjugation and servitude to white people; and that because the Bible did not expressly prohibit it, slavery did not transgress divine law. Ministers advocated a Christianity that sought to unmake the God-image in Africans, to render them servile und docile; acquiescence to a divine ordination of their subjugation to whites.*¹³⁴

In their messages many Christian leaders and ministers did not preach the message of liberation to the slaves but that of subjugation and perpetual slavery. There were records of slave editions of the Bible where some books of the Bible that talks of equality of all men or liberation and freedom of all peoples were excluded. In this so called Slave Bible, about 90 percent of the Old Testament and 50 percent of New Testament were removed. A normal King James Bible has 1189 chapters in it. The slave Bible had only two 232 chapters in it. The Book of Exodus was redacted. No story of Moses demanding from Pharaoh: "Let my people go!" There was no Book of Galatians and the verse "There is neither bond nor free – for ye all are one in Christ Jesus." No Jeremiah "Woe unto him that useth his neighbour's service without wages." What were left were verses like Ephesians 6:5 "Slaves be obedient to your masters." Thus there was the use of religion to justify the horrors of slavery.¹³⁵ Sample of such Bible edition is found inside the Washington museum of the Bible.

As one enslaved man remarked,

*I often heard selected portion of the Scriptures read.... On Sunday we always had one sermon prepared expressly for coloured people So great was the similarity of texts that they are always fresh in memory: Servants, be obedient to your masters – not with eye service, as men pleasers." "He that knoweth his master's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes"; and (verses) of this (type) One very kind-hearted clergy ... was very popular with the coloured people. But after he had preached a sermon from the Bible that it was the will of Heaven from eternity that we should be slaves and our masters are our owners, many of us left ...considering, like the doubting disciple of old, "This is hard saying, who can bear it"*¹³⁶

An epistle by a bishop of London in 1727 to the English colonies read thus:

Christianity and the embracing of the Gospel, does not make the least alteration in civil Property...; but in all these aspects, it continues to keep persons just in the same state as it found them. The Freedom which Christianity gives, is a Freedom from bondage of sin and Satan..., but as to their outward condition, whatever that was before, whether bond or free, their being baptized, and becoming Christians make no manner of change ... (indeed baptizing) lays (the

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ This was reported also by NBC News.

¹³⁶ CREEL, Community Regulation and Cultural Specialization in Gullah Folk Religion, 51, in: COPELAND, M., Shawn, Knowing Christ Crucified: Dark Wisdom From Slaves, 65f.

*slaves) under stronger obligation so to perform those duties with greatest diligence and fidelity.*¹³⁷

Here, Christianity was confirming the slavery of the slaves. There was prevalently no bold practice aimed at condemning the slavery and its horrifying effects. In a book on Moral theology that was used in the seminaries for the formation of future priests prepared by Francis Kenrick (1796 – 1863) who was then archbishop of Baltimore, the church leader regretted that many slave laws had been passed that “forbid the teaching of reading and which impede greatly the exercise of religion”, but he maintained that

*... nothing against the law must be attempted, neither anything by which the slave might be set free, nor anything be done or said that will make them bear the yoke with difficulty. But prudence and charity of the sacred ministers must be shown in this, so that the slaves, informed by Christian morals might show service to their masters, venerating always God, Supreme Master of us all; so that in turn the masters might show themselves gentle and even-handed and might lighten the condition of the slaves with humanity and with zeal for their salvation.*¹³⁸

What is advocated here is a Christianity that risks nothing for the sake of the little ones and for the sake of Christ. It is a bourgeois Christianity and a Christianity of convenience. In line with Metz, “These kinds of professions of faith and dogmatic formulas are “dead” meaninglessly “empty” ... when what is remembered in them no longer shows anything of (the) dangerous character – dangerous both for the society and for the church, when this dangerousness is smothered by its institutional mediation...”¹³⁹ For the characteristics of genuine Christian message is “the critically liberative but also redemptively dangerous way that it introduces the remembered message into the present so that”¹⁴⁰ ‘it will shock people and yet overcome them by its power.’¹⁴¹ Be it said then that “nothing makes a religion more guilty than the attempt to buy its political innocence by refusing to take part in the historical struggles for a state of affair in which all human beings can be subjects.”¹⁴²

¹³⁷ W. D. JORDAN, White over Black: American Attitude Toward the Negro, in: IKE, Chikaodi, Jude, The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God; 293.

¹³⁸ F. P. KENRICK, Theologia Moralis, in: IKE, Jude, Chikodi, The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God, 294.

¹³⁹ METZ, Faith in History and Society, 184

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Dietrich BONHOEFFER, Letter and Papers from Prison, in: METZ, Faith in History and Society, 184.

¹⁴² METZ, Faith in History and Society, 79.

There remain disturbing questions in the mind of most African Christians and non-Christians and also an open question on God. Why God Why? Why the hatred, the subjugation, the dehumanization, the torture in your Name? Why your silence? Why did those who preached in your Name also chose to dehumanize and enslave people of African origin in your Name? Why did you allow this in history and to the Africans? These are questions that must be brought in *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form. These questions must not be suppressed or extinguished, little to mention justified.

Despite the humiliation, many of the enslaved person insisted on their humanity, on their dignity as human persons, on being subjects. They refused the falsely wicked interpretation of the bible that denied them their subjectness. Drawing inspiration from the liberative and redemptive narratives in the bible, they formulated their contextual liberative and redemptive narratives that sustained them with hope in their journey through immeasurable agony and torments. It is these liberative narratives that is highlighted in *Ofo na Ogu* theology as a political theology.

3.1.2 COLONIALISM

*If colonialism meant anything at all politically, it was the lost of sovereignty and independence by the colonized peoples. This loss of sovereignty, in turn, implied the lost of the right of a state to control its destiny; to plan its own development; to decide which outside nations to borrow from or associate with or emulate; to conduct its own diplomacy and international relations; and above all, to manage or even mismanage its own affair ... (C)olonialism completely isolated and insulated Africa It is in this loss of sovereignty and the consequent isolation from the outside world that one finds one of the most pernicious impacts of colonialism on Africa and one of the fundamental causes of its present underdevelopment and technological backwardness.*¹⁴³

Colonialism shattered the normal and natural flow of the personal and societal African life. Colonialism is spurred by a feeling of human superiority, by a thinking that the other has no capacity or capability of handling affairs. Colonialism also comes with cultural superiority, that the imperialist's own culture is the ideal culture and must be imposed on others. Its energy is drowned from deep vested personal interest. Colonialism in itself is a lie. It is a lie about its mission – purporting to help where it came to conquer, to subjugate and to exploit. It is a lie about the situation of the people it conquered -purporting that the people existed in a state of nature before the imperialists' arrival, whereas history and reality show

¹⁴³ A. Adu BOAHEN, African Perspective on Colonialism, in: PARIS, Peter, J. (ed.), Religion and Poverty, Pan-African Perspectives, 3.

a contrary fact; purporting that people had no morals whereas the tradition of the peoples were built on core morality which colonialism shattered; purporting that people were only fetish and had no idea of God whereas the people's life and morality were built on the idea of a Supreme Being.

Colonialism conquered people so that they would be alien in their own land, it subjugated people to obey without questioning or option; it impoverished people so that they may beg in continuity – a legacy of anthropological poverty. It expunged culture so that people would lose identity and cohesiveness. It battered the dignity and honour of men as free beings in order to highlight the superiority of the imperialists. It imposed a help that is aimed to enslave and enslaved minds who in freedom would help. Colonialism is a superimposition of self over others to determine their fate and fortune.

In 1885, at the so called Berlin Conference, Africa as the cake of the world was shared amongst the league of nations of the West. There was no African that was present at this conference although there were kings and kingdoms in Africa before this conference. These were to be erased.

The colonizers of Africa were Christian nations. The attitudes of these Christian-colonizers were a share contradiction to the faith they said to have professed. A legacy of impunity was handed over to Africa. The stories of the brutality of Belgium in Congo, how the people were maimed, tortured and killed by the Belgian imperialists send shock waves to the core of humanity in man – it is nothing short of monstrosity. Underdevelopment, under- education were the operational legacy and the legacy left behind. The best way to control the Africans and blacks was to leave them uneducated. The first secondary school in Congo was only established in 1948. At the time of their independent from Belgium Congo, a country of 13 million people had only 13 graduates. At independence, Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of Congo made a speech for which he was later to pay with his life:

[...] For this independence of the Congo, although being proclaimed today by agreement with Belgium, an amicable country, with which we are on equal terms, no Congolese worthy of the name will ever be able to forget that it was by fighting that it has been won, a day-to-day fight, an ardent and idealistic fight, a fight in which we were spared neither privation nor suffering, and for which we gave our strength and our blood. We are proud of this struggle of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depth of our being for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to

put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force.”(Patrice Lumumba’s impromptu Independence Day Speech as first Prime Minister of Democratic Republic of Congo, June 30, 1960).

Under colonialism, there was almost no dialogue between those with powers and those under the imposition of power. Dissidents were crushed with all brutality. This is still the case today in most African nations – the poor struggle for their dignity and those at the corridors of power think they are the donors of life. It is a legacy received from colonialism and sustained by neo-colonialism.

Expressing the common destiny of the colonizers and missionaries Éla stated

Consistently, the missionary movement of modern times has coincided with the formation of colonial empires of the various people of Europe, these empires serving as prop and warranty for the evangelization of black Africa. At the time of the great voyages of discovery, as later during the time of exploration, the missionary belong to a society and an economy on the wax, and a society and economy that threw themselves into the colonial adventure. Side by side with the soldier and the merchant, we have the missionary.¹⁴⁴

Thus the missionaries are seen by many as collaborators of the colonizers and the missionary enterprise in Africa is seen by some as part of the larger enterprise of colonization, of conquering Africa. As Jude Ike puts it,

The interconnectedness of culture and religion was so strong that changes in one effected the other. The domain of African life was the subject of attack by both the missionary and the colonialist. Both the colonialist and the missionary were convinced that their commercial and religious missions would not succeed unless the African “savages” were enlightened by the grace of the western culture and civilization. In the pursuance of this “civilization mission” most missionaries paved the way and in some cases were conscious agents of the western imperial rules.¹⁴⁵

Some Africans think that the missionaries were either officially or unofficially part of the pact of the subjugation of Africa by the western imperialists. “In a way missionary activity tried to humanize western imperialism.”¹⁴⁶ Some have also argued that there was no initial pact between the colonizers and missionaries to subjugate Africa. They argue that in general, the main aim of the missionary activities in Africa was to evangelize and save souls. Through the dedication and sacrifices of many missionaries, this aim was also achieved; many Africans were evangelized. However, human agents and circumstantial factors created sometimes alternative experiences that were not in accordance with

¹⁴⁴ Jean – Marc ÉLA, *African Cry*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Jude Chikodi IKE, *The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God*, 295.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 196.

Christian message. Some people are however of the view that in some instances, there were really initial plan and conspiracy between the colonizers and the missionaries to subjugate Africans. The proof advanced for this view comes again from a Belgian document in *Avenir Colonial Belge* of 30 October 1921. This document contains instructions of a certain Jules Renquin the Minister of colonies to the catholic missionaries on the nature and type of missionary work they were to do in Congo. After addressing the missionaries as “fellow countrymen” and welcoming them to their “second fatherland”, he emphasized that the missionaries were to use their interpretation of the Bible to undermine the people of Congo and keep them in subjection to Europeans. He told the missionaries that their mission was first and foremost to work for Belgium:

The job you are invited to do here, is very delicate and requires a lot of tact. Priests, admittedly you have come to evangelize; but your evangelization must draw inspiration from our great principle “everything first and foremost for Belgium’s interest.” Therefore the main goal of your mission is not to teach Blacks to know God. They know God already. They talk about and submit themselves to a certain NZAMBE or certain MVINDI – MUKULU, and so on. They know that killing, stealing, slandering, insulting, etc ... is bad. Let’s have the courage to confess that you have not come to teach Africans what they already know. Your role essentially consists in facilitating the job for administrators and manufacturers. This therefore is to say that you will interpret the gospel in the way that best serves our interest in this part of the world.¹⁴⁷

Going further the minister instructed the missionaries that:

Among other things, you will see to it to make our “salvage” lose interest in the material wealth their soil are brimming with, in order to avoid that being interested in, they bloody not compete with us, and dream of evicting us some day. Your knowledge of the Scriptures easily will help you find passages which recommend and get people to love poverty. For instance, passages like “Blessed are the poor, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them”; and “it is easier for camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” You will therefore do everything so that Blacks may be afraid of becoming rich in order to deserve Heaven.¹⁴⁸

As if this was not enough, the minister further instructed the missionaries to teach the Africans to accept the violence that would be used against them without complaint. “Contain them so that they may not rebel. From time to time, administrators and manufacturers will find themselves obliged to use violence (insults, beatings etc ...) to make themselves feared. Blacks would not retort to harbor feelings of revenge. For this,

¹⁴⁷ Les Devoirs des missionnaires dans notre colonie, *Avenir colonial belge*, Brussels, 30 October 1921, in: AYEDZE, Kossi, A., *Poverty Among African People and the Ambiguous Role of Christian Thought*, in: PARIS, Peter, J., *Religion and Poverty. Pan African Perspective*, 199.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 200.

you will teach them to support everything. You will comment and invite them to follow the example of the saints who turned the other cheek, forgave their debtors, and received spits and insults without wincing”¹⁴⁹

Thus there may not be any claim on the part of the missionaries of ab initio being ignorant of the brutality of the imperialists and their agents against Africans. Indeed, in their knowledge, or silence or maybe cooperation with this violence, the missionaries became accomplices to this brutality. One must however emphasize that this is not applicable to all missionaries and missionary activities in Africa.

The minister further emphasized that in the missionary schools, Africans should not be taught the way of critical thinking but the way of blind obedience and submission. “Insist particularly on blind obedience and submission. This virtue is better practiced when there is no room for criticizing. You should therefore avoid developing critical thoughts in your schools. Teach them to believe and not to think”¹⁵⁰

Thus, many critics opine that the schools in colonial times were citadels of cultural imperialism and for indoctrinating Africans on the inferiority of their culture and the need to vacate it and embrace western civilization and culture. Some of those produced under this indoctrination were neither authentically Africans nor Europeans.¹⁵¹ This situation is captured by the African Poet Lenrie Peters in the poem *The Fence*.

*There where the dim past and the future mingle
their nebulous hopes and aspirations
there I lie*

*There where truth and untruth struggle
in endless and bloody combat,
there I lie.*

*There where time moves forwards and backwards
with no one moment pause for sighing
there I lie*

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Cf Ikenna OKAFOR, *Towards an African Theology of Fraternal Solidarity*, 166f.

*There where the body ages relentlessly
and only the feeble mind can wonder backwards
there I lie in open-souled amazement.*

*There where all the opposites arrive
to plague the inner senses, but do not fuse,
I hold my head; and then contrive
to stop the constant motion.
my head goes round and round,
but I have not been drinking;
I feel the buoyant wave; I stagger*

*It seems the world has changed her garment.
but it is I who have not crossed the fence,
So there I lie
There where the need for good
and “ the doing good” conflict,
there I lie.¹⁵²*

¹⁵² Here the poet tries to show through the paring of opposite words and opposing and contrasting worlds the confusion in which an average African found himself in the imperialist era. He talks about being in the middle of where the dim past and future mingle with their hopes and aspirations. The word “dim” here refers to an African tradition that was continuously being eroded but still has not given way, has not been extinguished even though it is “dim”. One can also interpret the word “dim” here as tenacity. The dim past of African tradition and her society, and the uncertain future of the so called civilization; the confusion of truth and untruth created by this situation because of ideologies and propaganda - many untruth were being masqueraded as truth. The intensity and aggressiveness of this struggle between truth and untruth is portrayed by expression “bloody battle”, bearing the semblance of the independence speech by Patrice Lumumba. With the allusion here of time moving forward and backward there is the portrayal by the poet of the uncertainties and the indecisiveness of this mingling point of the past of the African traditional society and the forward of European westernization. These opposites trouble the mind of the poet and refuse to reconcile with each other. Though the poet did not drink, he seems to be in a state of stupor because of the condition on the scene – portraying the situation of confusion of the African scene and African person. The expression “It seems” in the verse “It seems the world has changed her garment” shows a world under alteration, a world that is changing but has not yet changed totally. The expression “it seems” portrays a situation of uncertainty, of one

This is the world which many people especially the intellectuals think Christianity helped in creating in Africa.

In the instruction by the so called minister of colonies, even the sacrament of confession should be used as a means of denouncing and subjugating the African. Thus the minister enjoined the missionaries as regards Africans to “institute for them a system of confession which will make of you good detectives for denouncing all Blacks nurturing any self-awareness and claiming a National Independence.”¹⁵³ The missionaries were promised rewards if they were to follow this part. The missionaries needed the security provided by the colonizers so there was the need for cooperation and collegiality. Though one cannot out rightly say that this attitude defined all the missionary activities in Africa, there is however indications of their effects in the evangelization of Africa. This constitutes a faith crisis and God question for some Africans – where Christianity is used as a tool of subjugation.

Critics observe that both the missionaries and the colonizers most times adopted the same approach and method. Like the imperialists, the missionaries were not to dialogue with the African culture but to abolish it. As Edward P. Antonio expressed,

*The establishment of Christianity in Africa was often shaped, conditioned and mediated through colonial rationality and in turn colonial rationality was currently shaped, deployed and propagated through Christian mission. This historically contingent relationship ... has been perceived in Africa as largely negative for it instituted and actualized regime of cultural, political, and historical power which produced the social structures within which missionaries, colonialists and natives encountered each other and whose effects were alienated relations which constituted the substance of that encounter.*¹⁵⁴

Be that as it may, the entire missionary activities in Africa and Igbo land are not to be seen under these binoculars of conspiracy. To be sure, there were missionaries who criticized the

trying to understand what is going on or to confirm certain hypotheses. This shows that the world was struggling with the change between the old and the new, trying to change itself but has not yet succeeded because it is struggling with contradictions which refuse to reconcile with one another. There is in the last stanza the contradiction between the good that is preached and the action of doing good. The good that is preached is different from the action on the ground.

¹⁵³ Les Devoirs des missionnaires dans notre colonie, Avenir colonial belge, Brussels, 30 October 1921, in: AYEDZE, Kossi, A., Poverty Among African People and the Ambiguous Role of Christian Thought, in: PARIS, Peter, J., Religion and Poverty. Pan African Perspective, 201.

¹⁵⁴ Edward ANTONIO, Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse, 10. In: ILO, Stan, The face of Africa, in: OKAFOR, Ikenna, Towards an African Theology of Fraternal Solidarity, 115f.

impunity of the colonizers. There were those on the side of the down trodden, the forsaken and the outcasts. Many missionaries risked their life for “the little ones” as Jesus puts it in the Bible. As the founder of Holy Ghost Fathers Père Liebermann sought to enshrine into the consciousness of the missionary endeavour of his congregation in Africa the utmost necessity to be human and to stand on the side of the oppressed Africans he wrote: “The black race has suffered exceedingly from us the Europeans. What a joy it would be for me to do everything in my power to repair the injustices of whites in their regard.” He further enjoined his members, “These people must not consider you as agents of the French government.”¹⁵⁵ However, this was not always the case with the missionaries.

While I agree with the opinion that

*while no one disputes the role the imperialism, transnational cooperation, unequal exchange, and foreign domination and exploitation have played and continue to play in the generation, consolidation, and reproduction of the African predicament, these facts should not be exploited to justify and rationalize the deficiencies and shortcomings of the ruling elites, and not to obscure the “indigenous class accumulation of national wealth, and indigenous use of coercive state power to ensure that wealth stays in the hands of those who control the government”*¹⁵⁶

However, this work approaches the subject of Colonialism and similar relating subjects with the aim of exposing their connection with the God question and faith crisis of the Igbo and African people and the part that Christianity played in them which exasperates the faith crisis. Many people see the history of modern Africa as characterized by the incessant quest of other people to lord it over them and impose their religion and God over them. If the Christian God is infinite Goodness, all powerful and all merciful, why this history of suffering and subjugations of the African people? The kind of God that Christianity produces in this façade is a God under trial. In this association with colonialism and imperialism, Éla expressed that

*The God of the missionary preaching was one whose power signifies not liberation but economic oppression, cultural and political alienation and a racist contempt for the native. The indictment of Western imperialism rests on a reinterpretation of the message of the Bible from within the colonial situation and calls for a search for a God-for-the-emancipation-of-the-black who has spokespersons among the Africans themselves. The black prophets seek not to return to the God of the ancestors, but to make the message of the gospel heard in the African contest.*¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Père LIBERMANN, in: ÉLA, Jean Marc, African Cry, 16f.

¹⁵⁶ Simeon O. ILESANMI, Africa’s Poverty, Human Rights , and a Just Society, in: PARIS, Peter, J., Religion and Poverty. Pan-African Perspectives, Durham / London 2009, 305

¹⁵⁷ Jean-Marc ÉLA, African Cry, 48.

This task informs the Ofo na Ogu theology.

3.1.3 RACISM

The issue of race is a fact of life, perhaps the problem of life. For many people around the world, race is not simply an issue to be discussed in a remote, abstract manner, but a burning, turbulent question that impinges upon and controls their daily lives. For these people, the issue of race dwarfs all others, since it not only controls the present but also determines the future.¹⁵⁸

Racism is a fact of life especially for the Africans. It impinges on their lives and puts enormous challenges on them on all facets of life. Through racism and racial ideologies agents of racism seek to control, hamper, degrade, deny, demote, doubt and annihilate the African-being and humanity; they seek to scuttle African life and its infinite capacities and capabilities. Through racial ideologies racism is inculcated in the consciousness of members of a group or race to look down on others and superimpose themselves on others as natural and fundamental superior agents. In their attempt to hold “the beings of others” in place, to station it in order to make it object of calculative thinking, agents of racism eliminate all variables knowing that “being” eludes all calculations. Agents of racism interpret the racial ‘other’ through fixed negative racial binoculars and through constant degradation and show of strength, they try to suppress the mental, psychological, and physical development of the racial ‘other’ in order to maintain the claim of superiority and justify their racial ideologies. There is always the attempt to deny the achievement of the others since it threatens their claim of superiority. In this state, the racial impostor feels satisfied since his joy stems from this condition. There is always resistance from him to any challenge of the superimposed structure.

It is undeniable that Black Africans are victims of racism all over the world, even in their own continent Africa – as in the case with the apathy regime of South Africa. Africans have been pushed to the background of economic, social and political structures. Even the change of political structures has not effected the desired social and economic progress of Africans because racism in Africa is interconnected with the racism all over the world and the racial structures which were established for centuries cannot give way all of a

¹⁵⁸ J. HOLDER, The Issue of Race: A Search for a Biblical / Theological Perspective, The Journal of Religious Thought, Vol. 49, No.2, 4, in: IKE, Chikodi, Jude, The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God, 298.

sudden even when political powers change hands.¹⁵⁹ It is not intended to be claimed that all economical and developmental problems in Africa stem from racism. What is said here is that racism plays a vital role in the impoverishment of people and nations since nations tend to gather according to their kinds and invariably exclude others. How economic issues are handled by the world powers depends on which nation is involved and the nearness of the nation involved to the world powers not only in policies but also in race. Thus serious issues in Africa are handled with kid gloves especially when it concerns freedom and when those oppressive powers in Africa are allies to the western powers. People who are massacred and maimed in the course of emancipation and struggle for freedom are not reported by the western press nor does it draw proper attention from the international powers. In the western world consciousness that is the nature of Africa. Africans are accustomed to pains.

Our own part here is not to examine racism in general but to examine how racism effected and perhaps still effects the dissemination of the Christian message to Africans and therefore truncates their wholesome assimilation and experience of the gospel of Christ as a “good news”, as a message of liberation; how racism affects African way of “being subject” and their experience of the Father of Jesus Christ and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a God of love and a God who has called them to be subjects in his sight. A poet articulated the justification of violence especially against the other in the world thus:

*My mother told me:
If you stone the white fledglings,
God will punish you;
if you hit your friend,
the boy with the donkey face,
God will punish you*

*It was God's sign
of the two sticks,¹⁶⁰*

¹⁵⁹ We do not intend to say that all problems in Africa borders on racism. Of course, Africa has also ethnical problems. But the problem of racism is more annihilating. Ethnicity does not question the humanity of others but racism does..

¹⁶⁰ A reference to the Cross as Gustavo Gutiérrez noted

*and the commandments of God
fitted into my hands
like ten more fingers*

*Today they tell me:
If you do not love war,
if you do not kill a dove a day,
God will punish you;
if you do not strike the black,
if you do not hate the Amerindian,
God will punish you;
if you give the poor ideas
instead of a kiss,
if you talk to them of Justice
instead of charity,
God will punish you,
God will punish you.
Mama, is that really
our God?¹⁶¹*

Conditions of racism, be they in form of physical and psychological violence and oppression or otherwise should be subjects of theology as theodicy and resisting them also paramount in the program of new political theology. As Metz pointed out, “conditions that are absolutely contrary to the Gospel – the degradation of peoples, oppression, racism—become provocation to the very heart of its message. They call for the formulation of Christian discourse about God under categories of resistance and transformation.”¹⁶²

In order to properly understand how racism coloured and still colours the African encounter with Christianity, it will be important to examine the European background from where the early missionaries came to Africa. This background will be examined with its relationship to Africa and the Christian mission therein.

¹⁶¹ Juan Gonzalo ROSE, *La Pregunta*, in: GUTIÉRREZ, Gustavo, *On Job, God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, VIII

¹⁶² METZ, *A Passion of God*, 27.

IDEOLOGICALLY NEGATIVE PORTRAYED AFRICA

While on one hand Enlightenment is regarded by some thinkers as a period of significant progress and breakthrough in world history through reason or emancipation of reason, other thinkers have mounted criticism on Enlightenment as a letting loose of uncontrollable and unbridled power resulting in utmost will to power - a power to conquer and dominate. Thus, in contrast to Marx who distinguished between “reason” on one hand and “power” on the other hand, for Nietzsche power is embedded and enshrined in the being of reason itself and both are indistinguishable from one another. Thus the discourse on modernity and its credit takes two different approaches. On one hand there is the celebration of the freedom of reason and of the subject, on the other hand there is the criticism of Enlightenment as a bearer of reason that is power oriented – a power towards domination. Such critique is seen in thinkers like Heidegger, Horkheimer, Adorno and Facault, According to Heidegger, in the culture of Modernity, especially in the area of science and of technology there is the fulfilment and perfection of the power syndrome of the Western metaphysics and civilization. The guiding principle here is the freedom of the subject. In the Western modernity, there is the will to power. The Cartesian “cogito ego sum” is interpreted in the sense of the will to absolute and insatiable power to control and to possess. Thus *cogitare* is to be understood in the sense of *pecipere* – from the root *per-capio* which means to possess something. Here, man maintains that his thinking not only establishes his own existence but the existence of every other being. Thus the modern man puts himself as the determinant of what being is and in his desire for control and lordship of the universe, there is the erasing and wiping out of multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. There is the insatiable power to extend, to discover, to invent, to control and possess. This has contributed to the suffering of other people like the Africans. It has also led to Eurocentrism and the negation of others; to the conquering and domination of others and the formulation of negative ideologies against the “other”. This did not start with the Enlightenment, but had its root in the European historical consciousness from the ancient times.

As it concerns the Africans, Emeka George Ekwuru remarked that,

From the Greco – Roman period to the present day, the ascription of the negative and odious characteristics of blackness to Africa has been on the increase in its intensity, in terms of its structures of relationship and patterns of action. As a racialised other, Africa is pushed to a

*defensive side of humanity. She must always struggle to assert the nature and quality of her humanity in their varied labyrinthine features.*¹⁶³

This assertion is undeniably true of the European history of civilization and expansion. There exist throughout European historical consciousness astonishing and extremely destructive negative ideological rants against Africa and Africans. African post-colonial studies have found themselves embarrassed by these discoveries of a presumed civilized society with all its humanism and Christianity, which nonetheless exhibited what may be called “ideological barbarism” against Africa. Having ideologically arrived at an answer, there were later desperate efforts through pseudo science to justify unjustifiable claims. Thus many African scholars agree that Europe has been egoistically unfair to Africans and African histories and that Europe sought to build her civilization on the carcass of Africa and African humanity.

It does not fall within the scope of this work to attempt an exhaustive exposition of this negative thrust of European historical consciousness against Africa. We shall only attempt a concise X-ray of the negativity through which Africa and Africans were defined and approached by Europe and what influence it had on the missionary activities in Africa and the African experience of Christianity and the Christian God.

While Africans will find it true to identify themselves and their world with the poetic description of Africa by the African poet Abdul Kader Kéré

*I was born in a land
Of such beautiful sunrises
Of such flaming sunsets
Everywhere, everywhere you may be,
Nature offering within
Rich her beauty*¹⁶⁴

This understanding of Africa was not only passionately and wilfully expunged from the prevalent European ideological consciousness, but there were also energetic and exuberant efforts to push African rationality and humanity to the zone of contestation. Africa is disgustingly ascribed to negativity – right from the early Greek thoughts. This negativity

¹⁶³ Emeka George EKWURU, *The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis and the Dialectics of Afrizealotism*, Owerri 2011, viii.

¹⁶⁴ Abdul Kader KÉRE, *Native Land*, in: EKWURU, George Emeka, *The dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis*, 85.

which started in the ancient times will increase in intensity in the modern times, where later efforts will be made through fictitious attempts to seek justification for an answer that had already been arrived at through ‘unholy’ desires.

In an ancient text *From the Air, the Waters and Lands (Von den Luften Wassern und Orten)* whose authorship was wrongly ascribed to Hippocrates, the character and nature of human beings were interpreted and determined from the kind of weather and climate that existed the place where they existed. Places of warm weather like Africa were characterized with indulgence and moral debasement; whereas places of extreme and rough weather as Europe stood for human freewill. This interpretation laid the foundation to the political-geographical interpretation and determination of peoples through Aristotle to the modern times.¹⁶⁵

In line with Hippocrates, Herodotus had taught that the geography of the place one existed influenced the self development of the person. A land cannot at the same time produce tasty fruits and great warriors. According to him the Persians should have learnt through their shameful defeat that it was better to live in a poor land and be lords of others, than to live in productive land and become servants of people.¹⁶⁶ Thus Herodotus was invariably propagating a doctrine of geographical human developmental inhibition and superiority through strength and might. Herodotus promotion of verifiability of assumptions and propositions find its exceptions in his approach of Africa. Thus he wrote without verifications about beings without heads or with dog heads that live in Libya zone of the earth, which represented Africa.¹⁶⁷ Thus in this way, through false and exotic pictures, he was putting African humanity into contestation. This negativity, though not verifiable, went on in Europe uncontested. As Allimadi commented,

Few of Herodotus’ contemporaries must have challenged his assessment of Africa. So the western mind was conditioned to accept a fantastic and grotesque image of Africa from the early stage. Blackness of skin was explained as an aberration that could be resolved through scientific enquiry. It was strongly associated with moral perversity and intellectual and spiritual inferiority to whites. Using white skin as their reference point of meaning “normality;”

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Hans SCHELKSHORN, *Entgrenzungen. Ein europäischer Beitrag zum philosophischen Diskurs über die Moderne*, Weilerswist 2016, 212f.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Ibid., 213.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Ibid., 214.

*physicians, scholars, religious leaders and politicians attempted to define black skin as unnatural.*¹⁶⁸

In line with Herodotus, Aristotle claimed that the “barbarians” of the northern and southern part of the earth were from nature inhibited to a rational self development and formation.¹⁶⁹ Aristotle also divided humanity into two: Masters and slaves. He supported the enslavement of other peoples by those he considered to be superiors – even through wars. Those he considered to be superiors were not surprisingly his kins of the Greek folks and their likes. Thus he wrote that “Tamed animals are better off when ruled by men, and so are those who naturally inferior when ruled by their superiors.”¹⁷⁰ All these self glorifications cum upliftments and negativities against Africa prepared the way for the eventual invasion, enslavement and colonization of the African people by the Europeans. Thus Cheikh Anta Diop in an African metaphoric expression asserted that

*... imperialism, like the prehistoric hunter, first killed the being spiritually and culturally before trying to eliminate it physically. The negation of the history and intellectual accomplishment of Black Africans was a cultural and mental murder which preceded and paved the way for their genocide here and there in the world.*¹⁷¹

He was expressing the assertion that in an effort to stereotyped blacks in the category of the inferior race there were incessant efforts to deny and expunge black history and achievements from European consciousness and from the world history at large. For example there were desperate efforts to deny the Black root in Egypt and therefore black root of Western civilization. Thus Diop maintained that

*The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the ‘western’ civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four element of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmology and science.*¹⁷²

The work of the French Egyptologists Charles Francois Dupuis und Count Constantin de Volney which among others established the Black root of the Egyptian civilization which

¹⁶⁸ Milton ALLIMADI, The Heart of Darkness: How White Writers created the Racist Images of Africa, Newyork 2002, 13, in: EKWURU, The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis, 103.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 188.

¹⁷⁰ ARISTOTLE, Politics 1256b20-5, in: EKWURU, Emeka, George, The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis, 55.

¹⁷¹ Cheikh Anta DIOP, The African Origin of Civilisation: Myth or Reality, in: EKWURU, The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis, 18.

¹⁷² Ibid, 36.

some racist Egyptologists sought to deny shows the height of desperateness of the negative propagandists in efforts to maintain the negative and inhuman stereotype on Africa and Africans. As an archeological report reads,

*An analysis of some 800 skulls from pre-Dynastic Egypt – from the lower Valley of the Nile, that is, before 300 B.C. – shows that at least a third of them were Negroes or ancestors of the Negroes whom we know; and this may well support the view, to which a study of language also brings some confirmation, that remote ancestors of the Africans today were important and perhaps dominant element among populations which fathered civilisation of ancient Egypt.*¹⁷³

In asserting the Black root of the Egyptian race of the time of Egyptian civilization the Egyptologist Volney stated that

*... all have a bloated face, puffed eyes, flat nose, thick lips; in a word, the true face of the mulatto. I was tempted to attribute it to the climate, but when I visited the Sphinx, its appearance gave me the key to the riddle. On seeing that head, typically Negro in all its features, I remembered the remarkable passage where Herodotus said : “As for me, I judge the Clochians to be a colony of the Egyptians because, like them they are black with wooly hair...” In other words, the ancient Egyptians were true Negroes of the same type as all native born Africans. That being so, we can see how their blood, mixed for several centuries with that of the Romans and Greeks, most have lost the intensity of its original colour, while retaining nonetheless the imprint of its original mould. We can even state as a general principle that the face is a kind of monument able, in many cases, attest to shade light on the historical evidence on the origin of peoples.*¹⁷⁴

In utmost despair and embarrassment at the erroneous stand taken by some previous Egyptologists he stated his facts more emphatically:

*But returning to Egypt, the lesson she teaches contains many reflection for philosophy. What a subject for meditation, to see the present barbarism and ignorance of the Copts, descendants of the alliance between the profound genius of the Egyptians and the brilliant mind of the Greeks! Just think that this race black men, today our slave and the object of our scorn, is the very race to which we owe our arts sciences, and even the use of speech! Just imagine finally, that it is in the midst of liberty and humanity that one has approved the most slavery and questioned whether black men have the same kind of intelligence as whites.*¹⁷⁵

Thus, he was aware of the European history of imposition of itself as a superior race through juxtaposing of the black African race at the zone of contestation of humanity; coupled with the conquering of peoples in the European wars of expansion. In the understanding of the racist ideologists, humanity was understood only in terms of Europeanism. There was no room for variety, no room for difference, no room to follow

¹⁷³ Basil DAVIDSON, *Old Africa Rediscovered*, in: EKWURU, *The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis*, 32.

¹⁷⁴ Constantin de VOLNEY, *Voyages en Syrie et en Egypte*, in: DIOP, *The African Origin of civilisation*, in: EKWURU, *The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis*, 32f.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 34.

one's own type of civilization. The technological success of Europe, such as the invention of compass and mastering of sea led to the humiliation of other peoples. For the ideologists, it was not a question of a more developed society which according to history is rotatory, but that of superiority and inferiority of human nature. This attitude would be seen in the works of eminent European thinkers throughout European historical consciousness. It is seen in Sepulveda who propagated the conquering and evangelization of the so called barbarians through violence. This position will be criticized by Las Casas who maintained that the conquering of people by Europeans had materialistic aims and undertone. Las Casas would argue against evangelization through violence since violence breeds violence. Las Casa renounced and condemned slavery. This however happened after being the first to suggest that the Black Africans should be brought over to the West Indies to work as slaves. This he did in order to relive the Indians.

This negativity towards African is seen in John Locke (1632-1704) who despite rejecting slavery in his First treatise published in 1689 went forward to justify it in his Second Treatise on the condition of war captives or when someone was facing death. In this way, he justified the enslavements of blacks of African descents, whom he considered to be captives of war. According to Bindman, this represented “the ‘political’ Locke who had drawn up the constitution of South Carolina, vesting absolute authority on slave owners. Locke was, after all a realist who was fully aware of the importance of slavery to English economy, and had himself invested in the Royal African Company.”¹⁷⁶

Locke maintained that rational ideas were not innate but acquired through education. He maintained though that the mind had innate reasoning capacity that could vary from person to person. He maintained that in the beginning “the world was America”, meaning that the West evolved from societies similar to that of the American Indians. In this line he said that “America was the childhood of mankind and that Indians should be classed with “children, idiots and illiterates because of their inability to reason in abstract, speculative terms”¹⁷⁷ Locke also through his nominally essential property” established his racial ideology. Explaining this Goldberg asserted that,

¹⁷⁶ BINDMAN, in: EKWURU, *The Dynamics of Afri- Raciogenesis*, 152.

¹⁷⁷ P. MARSHALL / G. WLLIAMS, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*, London – Dent 1982, 192, in: EKWURU, *The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis*, 155.

*Locke's empiricist anti-essentialism led him to reject the notion of properties essential to the constitution of any object. Locke substitutes the notion of a 'nominally essential property,' that is, any contingent property of an object conventionally designed by speakers of a language to be essential for essence. Any property in this sense can be so nominated; and choices are a function of the speaker's interest. For seventeenth century English speakers, and for speakers of European languages in general, colour was considered property of the human beings, and it was considered such in Locke's view because it was taken on grounds of empirical observation to be correlated with rational capacity. Thus, Locke could conclude that in formulating a concept of man for himself, an English boy would rationally fail to include Negroes. It follows not only that Negroes could be held as chattel property; in their enslavement they could justifiably be treated as brutes and animals.*¹⁷⁸

Thus in this venture, Locke contributed in no small measures towards the degeneration of African personhood and humanity; making it an object of arbitrary determination or rather justifying its arbitrary annihilation by his European folks.

This racial ideology against Africans is also found in David Hume (1711-76) who maintained that races differ by causes that are purely natural and stated thus:

*I am apt to suspect that Negroes and in general all other species of men ... to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation – no ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no science*¹⁷⁹

Success or arts were only understood in western style. One wonders the limited knowledge about the Africans at the hands of Hume. How many African countries did he visit and how many people of African origin did he have contact with? How many African history and art did he come in contact with? What is his own understanding of civilisation? Knowing that his claim enjoyed acceptability within the then European consciousness and there would be little or no objection he felt at ease to make flippant claims of no substance.

According to Ekwuru, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) “appears to be one of the great champions of Western brand of raciology of the 17th and 18th Centuries.”¹⁸⁰

Without any contact or any relational accessibility with Africans, but plunging himself deeper into the prevalent European imaginary raciology against Africa and Africans, Kant, one of the greatest European thinkers of modernity asserted that , “The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a

¹⁷⁸ Theo David GOLDBERG, *Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of meaning*, Massachussetts-Blackwell 1993, 27f, in: EKWURU, *Thy Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis*, 155f.

¹⁷⁹ Cf EKWURU, *The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis*, 158.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 160.

single example in which the Negro has shown talent.”¹⁸¹ Positing the difference between the black race and the white race; Kant stated categorically that

*So fundamental is the difference between these two families (or races) of man (i.e black and white (Schwarz und Weiße), and it appears to as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour. The religion of fetishes so widespread amongst them is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks deep into the trifling as appears to be possible to the human nature.*¹⁸²

In assessment of Kant raciology against Black Africans Ekwuru stated that

*Just as Locke, with his empirical anti-essentialism, by mere observation, zoomed the Negro out of the rational circuit of humanity, and Hume, correlating race with nature and culture, opposes the white with nature and culture; Kant in his own turn, in form of Critique of Negroisation, reworks Hume’s thesis of the correlation of nature and race into a strict essentialism of psycho-physical causality.*¹⁸³

Thus

*By dialectically negating Africa, Europe was able to posit and represent itself and its contingent historically as the ideal culture, the ideal humanity, and ideal history. While “reason” and “humanity” and light remained in Europe, “irrationality” and “savagery” and “darkness” (even in instances when these were of European origin) were conveniently - and perhaps unconsciously – projected on Africa, the Big, Bad, Primeval Evil, the Dark Continent*¹⁸⁴

These were the reality of the European background from which the missionaries came. However, there were also unbiased anthropological and scientific investigations which have countered the scornful racial opinions against the Africans and Blacks. In the words of the renowned anthropologist Frans Boas,

*There is, however, no evidence whatever that would stigmatize the Negro as of weaker build, or subject to inclinations and powers that are opposed to our social organization. An unbiased estimate of the anthropological evidence so far brought forward does not permit us to countenance the belief in racial inferiority which would unfit an individual of Negro race to take his part in modern civilization We do not know of any demand made on the human body or mind in modern life that anatomical or ethnological evidence would prove to be beyond his powers*¹⁸⁵

This negative hysteria against Africa did not end with the European pagan or secular world. It did not leave Christendom, the Christian missionaries and their Christian message

¹⁸¹ Immanuel KANT, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of view, in: Eze, Emmanuel, Race and Enlightenment. A Reader, Cambridge 1997, 115, in: Ekwuru, The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis, 164

¹⁸² Ibid, 165.

¹⁸³ EKWURU, 161.

¹⁸⁴ Chukwudi Emmanuel EZE, Introduction: Philosophy and (Post) colonial, in: Ders (ed.), Post Colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader, Cambridge 1997,13, in: EKWURUR, The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis,80.

¹⁸⁵ Frans BOAS, The Primitive Mind, New York 1963, 78, in: EKWURU, The Dynamics of Afri-Raciology, 138.

uninfected. When theologians were summoned by Emperor Charles V to determine the humanity of the Indians, these “men of God” did not appeal to the authority of the Scripture but took recourse in Aristotelian Politics to deny the humanity of the Indians. Commenting on this Jude Chikodi Ike stated that

*One’s experience of race as a disadvantage or an advantage will influence one’s attitude to life and religion. While Africans and Blacks everywhere find themselves on the disadvantage position, they are in this suffering. Did Emperor Charles V on July 7, 1550 at Valladolid, capital of Castile, not summon a special meeting of theologians and councillors to decide on the human status of the Indians discovered by Columbus and subdued by the Conquistadores? These learned Christians borrowed their arguments against the humanity of the Indians from Aristotle’s Politics instead of looking into the Bible. The Aristotelian Sepulveda: Just as Children were inferior to adults, women to men, and monkeys to human beings, so the Indians were naturally inferior to the Spaniards.*¹⁸⁶

Only the Papal Bull of Paul III *Sublimis Deus* (1553) could remedy the situation, coupled with the effort by Cortes who sought to legitimize the children born to him by Indian women that “all without exception, are capable of receiving the doctrine of faith”.¹⁸⁷

These church men and theologians took to this argument although there were other theological and humanistic arguments on the contrary. Humanists like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) had taught that God gave man no definite or static nature. This was done so that man could participate in all things. Man is an ensemble of all natures. This indeterminate nature of man gives him the possibility to develop and blossom his being and himself.¹⁸⁸ Though human nature is indeterminate, there is according to Pico the equality of human nature.¹⁸⁹ Man stays at the centre of creation as its unification. He unifies all natures of created beings and brings them to God. That means that God created man as the unification of all things.¹⁹⁰ Though Pico also taught that man can degenerate to the animal level, but this was possible only through one’s actions and life style.¹⁹¹ Here, there is only a moral undertone. Pico also defended the humanity of all men by maintaining that one can find wisdom in those regarded as barbarians. In this way he argued against the climate and

¹⁸⁶ Jude Chikodi IKE, *The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God*, 298.

¹⁸⁷ Cf Jude Chikodi IKE, 298.

¹⁸⁸ Hans SCHELKSHORN, *Entgrenzungen. Ein europäischer Beitrag zum philosophischen Diskurs über die Moderne*, 174f.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 178f.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

instinct theories.¹⁹² Man is a being of reason and freedom. That makes the self development of man possible.

Humanists like Thomas Moore (1478-1535) also criticized the conquering of people through war and violence. He argued that the discovery of compass was double sided – a two age sword. It led to the development of people but has also contributed in no small measures in the subjugation and sufferings of peoples.

Francisco de Victoria (1483-1546) of the school of Salamanca also criticized the idea of a universal kingdom under one king as developed by Dante as one of the arguments for the conquering and subjugation of peoples especially by Spain. In connection to Aristotle, Dante propagated that only under the condition of one king one kingdom in the whole world could there be enduring peace. According to de Victoria, neither the King or Emperor, nor even the Pope could claim to be the king of humankind. He also criticized the doctrine of the natural slave since all human beings are from nature rational beings and the doctrine of natural slave would not and does not correspond to the nature of God the Creator of man. As a great humanist, he advocated for the brotherhood of peoples of the earth in the sense that any suffering of any people on any part of the world should concern all. He was for the right of uninhibited movement for all men, and for the right for any man to live or settle in any part of the world he wanted. He was also against colonialism.

Although there were such humanistic ideas in Europe, some Christian missionaries in Africa allowed themselves to be influenced by the overwhelming racial undertone in Europe of their time and thus the Christian message was sometimes smeared by racism, racial ideologists and discriminations as against the spirit of the Gospel. As some African scholars noted “... the main constants of the vocabularies of discrimination and difference were not buried in the pagan tomb of classical antiquity, but were carried over and translated into the growing vocabularies of the subsequent generations that were manifestly Christian in outlook.”¹⁹³ The ancient terrific and inhuman descriptions of Africa like those found in Herodotus and Pliny were baptized by the Christian missionaries, into such words like “salvage” which they applied in the description of Africans.

¹⁹² Ibid., 189

¹⁹³ EKWURU, *The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis*, 105.

The generic image of the salvage represented violence, sexual license, a lack of civility and civilization, an absence of morality of any sense of it. Thus, with the psychological interiorizing of the moral space in the late medieval thinking, the salvage man came to represent the Wildman within – sick or lack of reason, the absence of discipline, culture, civilization, in a world, morality – that confronts each human being. The other that requires repression, denial, and disciplinary constraint was taken first and foremost to be irrational other in us, and only by extension did it come to refer to those not ruled over (or lacking the capacity to be ruled) by the voice of Reason, the purveyor of the Natural Law.¹⁹⁴

Some pseudo biblical racial ideologies were propagated, that Africans and Blacks were descendants of Cain or Ham and therefore were cursed. As such they were condemned to serve the Whites forever. As such, the Bible became an ideological tool of operation in the hands of those missionaries. Most missionaries in Africa consciously refused to preach the equality of white and black people. Even the schools became vehicles of indoctrination of the superiority of the Whites.

As Ike stated, “Racism is not peculiar to Africans but we are interested in the problem in so far as it colours their encounter with Christianity.” Giving a practical example he stated “How can one comment on the following text which was part of the sermon preached at St. Catherine’s College in Cambridge by Richard Sibbes, the father of the protestant missionary thinking in the 17th century?”

I want to say that generally God prepares people by civilizing them before they are Christianized: this is so because the Spirit of God cannot dwell in such souls of uncultured, wild and barbaric peoples, who are strictly speaking no human beings at all. Therefore they have to be brought to cultured manners and not only that, they have to be taught the rule of law before they can be Christianized. They are therefore on the right track all those who are helping the natives to come out from their innate savagery and intemperateness. Grace cannot be forced on someone who cannot accept it, that is, who is not civilized. That is why God has willed that the savage souls be first brought into contact with civilization so that they will realize their natural proneness to damnation, be discouraged in following it then made to become Christian.¹⁹⁵

This so called sermon, is in all its ramifications racism and in support of slavery. The Africans are “strictly speaking not humans”; “innate savagery and intemperateness” are their nature and the grace of God cannot dwell in them because they are “uncultured and wild and barbaric peoples” who have “natural proneness to damnation”. This was regrettably the mind setting of most missionary work in Africa.

¹⁹⁴ Theo David GOLDBERG, Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning, 23, in: EKWURU, The Dynamics of Afri-Raciogenesis, 112.

¹⁹⁵ J. POBEE, Grundlinie einer Afrikanische Theologie, Göttingen 1989, 54, in: IKE, Jude, Chikodi, The Church as Locus of Man’s Encounter with God, 299.

As Ike summarily opined,

*The general attitude of the missionary towards Africa was ambiguous: an admixture of compassion and disdain, racial segregation and devotedness. It is according to Meinrad Hebga SJ, a condescending paternalism accompanied by ideological rhetoric about the civilizing mission of the Church and of Europe.*¹⁹⁶

Elaborating further on the opinion of Hebga SJ about the Cameroonians and in extension of other African Christians Ike stated that

*It is certain, however that the Cameroon people did not know what to think of priests who courageously undertook exhausting labour and sever deprivation to create converts, but also rigorously separated them from their own flock and shared their meals supplied by the faithful natives, only with other Europeans. Moreover, these brave and zealous men of God refused to respond to the greetings of African polygamous people, even as they willingly dined at the houses of Europeans surrounded by their African concubines... Embolden by European super fire power which soon silenced the African bows, matchets and dane-guns, and puffed up with racial and ideological theories, of a superior race, missionaries looked down on African converts whom they often referred to as bushman, barbarian, savage. It is lamentable that the church thereby sold her birthright of freedom and equality of the children of God for a mess of racial portage.*¹⁹⁷

There were also missionaries who did not buy into racism.

In the Bible, Jesus gave the apostles power over demons and unclean spirit. As Kurt Appel analysed it, this is in connection with the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth; it marks the beginning of a new order. The old world order, which was characterized as “demonic” represented an old symbolic order which in itself was linguistically, physically, socially, mentally and psychologically destructive to the human person – to the subject. This means that a new symbolic order is to be established which is neither physically, intellectually, nor socially destructive (Mk 6: 7-13). At the centre of this Kingdom of God is the mercy of God as shown by Jesus. As Appel further analysed, Jesus allowed himself to be deeply moved by the need, anxiety and poverty of the people. They were like sheep without a shepherd and Jesus was touched in his innermost being; he was totally moved by the destitution of the people – he was moved with compassion. In this sense, Jesus reveal the essential element and predicate of God as contained in the name of Yahweh which is his unfathomable and unending mercy and care for his children. Jesus’ body becomes a resonance place of God’s unfathomable love and mercy and therefore to

¹⁹⁶ Jude Chikodi IKE, 299.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 299f.

God's new heavenly palace. In this sense Jesus himself in his body becomes the abode of God and a centre of a new symbolic order characterized by God himself transferring his dwelling place from the old heavenly abode (cloud, sky) and temple as represented in the oriental world (Ezekiel 1-11) to a new heavenly abode which is Christ's body where it raises the feeling of compassion and mercy for the indigence of the people. God's palace in the holy symbolic order is situated in the collective feeling of compassion and mercy as expressed in the lives and teaching of Jesus and his followers.¹⁹⁸ Thus there is a call to collective solidarity, compassion and mercy. Where such exist, there is God's abode among men.

In this sense one can say that the racial ideologies against the African and black persons locates itself within this old symbolic order which is linguistically, physically, intellectually, psychologically, socially injurious and destructive to the human person and does not correspond to the new symbolic order which ushers in the kingdom of God. As De Victoria of the school of Salamanca intimated, this injurious symbolic order does not correspond to the nature of God the creator and in extension, his deep love, care and mercy for his creatures. The Old symbolic order is a place of desolation and can be interpreted in the sense of a desert which in biblical term is a place of powers that are destructive and inimical to the human person. The person of Christ disempowers and disintegrates the old symbolic order.

Prayer, as Kurt Appel reiterates has its place where the old symbolic order or any symbolic order that is injurious to the human person is questioned. Prayer calls for new openings where sensibility, new joys and creativity in the individual and social bodies come to appearance and regenerates these bodies.¹⁹⁹ This openness in my own opinion prepares one for the emergence of God.

The path of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism is to go through this path of prayer and raise question to the old symbolic order that is in itself very destructive to the human person. The *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offerer is not to turn away from the sufferings of Africans and the entire

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Kurt APPEL, Vom Preis des Gebets, in: DERS, Preis der Sterblichkeit, 215f; Cf Kurt APPEL, Nach Europa zwischen Philosophie und Gebet, 53f.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 219

humanity; to the faith crisis and God question of not only the Igbo Christians but also the African and black Christians and non Christians in entirety. Asserting one's subject does not mean to counter negativities with negativities since this is against the Christian spirit. The *Ofo na Ogu* theology is to call to mind the "subjectness" that characterizes the *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offerer. This "subjectness" enables him to go into dialogue with his creator to protest against oppressions and evil in the world. The traditional Igbo person is of the conviction that Chukwu endowed him with all dignity of the highest order. That was why Chukwu always adopted the approach of dialogue with man even in creation.

This being subject or what I refer here as the "Subjectness" and dignity in God's approach to man is what is highlighted in *Ofo na Ogu* prayer mysticism as against ideological destructions. In other words, there has to be no self immunization against suffering, but through ontological conviction of the integrity and in infinite capacity of the human person, one must continue to reject any attempt by the ideologists and pseudo scientists to negatively define the being of Africans through which these ideologists ideologically impose self-sovereignty over the beings of Africans in a bid to cage and hamper them. *Ofo na Ogu* theology stresses the uniqueness of every individual as creature of God which is not to be objectified or instrumentalised and that God's plan for history is beyond human instrumentalisation and calculation.

3.2 THE EXISTENTIAL ASPECTS OF FAITH CRISIS

The existential aspect of the Nigerian Christian faith crisis is connected with the economic, social and political situations that the Igbo and the Nigerian Christians find themselves.

As noted in my aforementioned work "at the time of conversion the Igbo Africans were presented with an Omnipotent and All benevolent God who never overlooked the needs of his children (Mt.6: 25-34). They learnt that the covenant of God with the Israel set two ways before the people – life through obedience and death through disobedience (Lv.26; Dt.27- 30). Put simply you reap what you sow (Gal 6: 7, Ps.34: 11-22). This idea of reaping what you sow is not alien to the Igbo tradition."²⁰⁰ With this concomitance in mind, many Igbos embraced the Christian religion. But sooner or later they came to realize that one

²⁰⁰Saviour Nwaiwu, 10.

does not necessarily reap what one sows. In fact in most cases, it is the other way round. The evil doers, the corrupt politicians, the wicked people are really the ones who are having good lives and they intimidate and oppress the lowly. On the other hand the righteous, the virtuous, the innocent are humbled and crush to the ground every time. They are the ones who are poor and are denied their rights. They suffer from ailments and violence.

Thus the present day Igbo and indeed African Christians are faced with many harsh realities ranging from poverty to disease, violence etc. These realities persist despite their personal efforts and their faith in the Christian God. In all cases, the adverse conditions bring the faith of the Igbo and African Christians to question. Ludger Schwienhorst - Schönberger - as was intimated in the introduction - acknowledged that such situations of adversity and contradictions can lead to faith crisis and to atheism when he stated that

*God's Goodness and Omnipotence seem to contradict our experience. We experience Evil and wickedness, be it those caused by humans, or those not caused by them (moral and non moral evil – malum morale et malum physicum): natural disaster, diseases and sickness, violence, war. These and similar experiences can lead to the denial of God, to atheism(mine translation)*²⁰¹

In the context of Igbo people and Africans Igwegbe rightly stated that, “it is to religion that the African turned to in the face of the existential questions about human life: who is man, where does he come from, where is he going, how must he live? ;the source and meaning of pain and joy, suffering and disease, health and after life.”²⁰² This observation is not only true of the traditional Africans of yesteryears, but also of the today modern Christian Africans. Thus J. S. Pobee stated that: “African mysticism, whether in traditional or Christian religion, is an experience of the divine, while one remains on earth. African spirituality searches for the deliverance capable of transforming one's terrestrial condition.”²⁰³

²⁰¹ L. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Ein weg durch das Leid. Die Theodizeefrage Im Alten Testament, in: BÖHNKE, M., et al(eds.), Leid erfahren – Sinn suchen . Das Problem der Theodizee, Freiburg. Basel. Wien 2007, 7. (vgl. Gottes Güte und Allmacht scheinen unserer Erfahrung zu widersprechen. Wir erfahren Unheil und Böses, sei es von Menschen verschuldet, sei es von ihnen unverschuldet(moralisches und nicht- moralisches Übel – malum morale et malum pysicum): Naturkatastrophen, Kankheiten, Verbrechen, Krieg. Solche und ähnliche Erfahrungen können zur Leugnung Gottes, zum Atheismus führen). Cf. Saviour NWAIWU, 10.

²⁰² Isidore IGWEGBE, Sacramental Theological Thinking in the African Symbolic Universe, Frankfurt 1995, 41.

²⁰³ J. S. POBEE; “African Spirituality“, in : WAKEFIELD(ed.), A dictionary of Christian Spirituality, in: L. A. UGBOR, L., A., Prayer in Igbo traditional Religion, 56.

As I also stressed in my aforementioned work, the traditional African spirituality does not fall into the category of what Karl Marx described as “opium of the people”. Thus I stated that

Worthy of note is that the traditional Africans (Igbos) do not turn to religion as Opium of the people - as a means of consolation as Karl Marx would say of religion in general. Rather they see religion as a fundamental source that gives meaning and answer to their world. They seek to understand the world around them in order to take appropriate actions to keep the world in harmony. They believe that nature and God has placed at their disposal means of understanding and being in harmony with the world around them. It was not a matter of sitting down when things are not normal and waiting for nature to play out its course, but of ascertaining what necessary actions that should be taken by means of sacrifices, moral actions, reconciliation and restitution in order to assure harmony in nature. Here there was no move to dominate nature but to dialogue with nature and its forces. Man must steadily keep the equilibrium of the cosmos in being through proper and necessary actions. Redundancy has no place in their mind set, less the cosmos would disintegrate into chaos. The belief that proper actions that have the hallmarks of justice and morality must be undertaken in different life situations was part of their religion. This traditional view, still influences the African Christians of today²⁰⁴

When African traditional spirituality is described as “this world spirituality”, it means that traditional Africans, in this case Igbo Africans, do not adopt escapism of this world for a future joy. They believe in the joy in this world and take appropriate actions to make the happiness in this world existent. There is no conception of a transfer of happiness in a next world as a result of suffering in this world as is most times portrayed in Christianity. Thus the different adversities and evils the Igbo African Christians experience in this world while maintaining moral actions and faith in God constitute factors of faith crisis for them.

We shall briefly examine the nature of some of the existential conditions that put the Igbo African Christian faith on trial. The areas we shall handle include: poverty, violence and conflict, ill health and disease.

3.2.1 POVERTY

The absence of economic developments constitutes a perennial and immediate source of despair for the majority of Igbos and Africans. By way of general understanding, “poverty has to do with all those things and conditions that rob persons of certain quality of life, of dignity, and of well-being.”²⁰⁵ Poverty constitutes a breeding ground for other forms of

²⁰⁴ Nwaiwu, 31.

²⁰⁵ Lewin L. Williams, A Theological Perspective on the Effects of Globalization on Poverty in Pan – African Context, in: Paris, Peters, J., Religion and Poverty. Pan – African Perspectives, 91.

crisis in Africa. Though it may not be correct to say that poverty is the only cause of suffering in Nigeria and Africa, it remains true however that poverty contributes a great quota to suffering of the Nigerians and Africans and exasperates other forms of crisis like violence. Poverty also breeds and facilitates diseases and death since a poor person can scarcely take care of his or her health issues in Nigeria and Africa. Unemployment thrives in Nigeria Majority of the people live below one Dollar a day. The enigma is that these situations prevail amidst rich human endowment and natural resources. Ogbunwezeh observed that

*The painful paradox of it is that this is a continent that is endowed with all the resources that make for greatness, human, ecological and mineral. A continent that harbours over 40 percent of the world's potential hydroelectric power supply; the bulk of the world's diamond and chromium; 30 percent of uranium in the non-communist world; 50 percent of the world's gold; 90 percent of its cobalt; 50 percent of its phosphates; 40 percent of its platinum; 7.5 percent of its coal; 8 percent of its known petroleum reserves; 12 percent of its natural gas; 3 percent of its iron ore; 64 percent of the world's manganese; 13 percent of its copper, vast bauxite, nickel and lead resources.*²⁰⁶

As I noted in the aforementioned work, “the problem in Africa is that of institutionalized corruption. The rich continue to grow richer at the expense of the poor. The middle class has almost disappeared from the African society. .Poor quality of leadership sickens Africa. The selfishness of her leaders cripples her.”²⁰⁷ They steal the money that belongs to the people and most times deposit it in the banks in the western world. This is accepted in the western world though it is known to be stolen money. Worst still, these western leaders make pacts with the corrupt African leaders to prevent the poor people of Africa from crossing over to the western world in search of a greener pasture. The best way to stop the hazardous journey through deserts and rivers to Europe and America which make people to fall prey to human traffickers and all kinds of violence is to initiate sanctions against those political leaders who corruptly enrich themselves and also enrich the western nations. The next step will be to bring back all stolen money from African leaders deposited in the western banks. This will go a long way towards fighting corruptions in Nigeria and Africa and reduce the hazardous immigration. Maier indicates that the attitude of the West towards

²⁰⁶ Emmanuel Fanklyne Onyemaechi OGBUNWEZE, *The Scandal Of African Poverty: Exploring The Factors Sustaining The African Predicament*, in: OKERE, T., I., / NJOKU, Chukwudi, Anthony (eds.), *The Scramble For Africa: The Scramble Continues*. International Symposium Owerri 2004,158.

²⁰⁷ NWAIWU, 32

fighting corruption in Africa is hypocritical. While condemning corruption in Africa, they still aid corruption by allowing corrupt money to be deposited in their banks. He asks: “A man who receives stolen goods is called a fence, but what do you call a country that is in the business of receiving stolen goods? They lend Nigeria money, somebody here steals the same amount of money and gives it back to them, and then they leave these poor Nigerians repaying what they never owned. The role of Western powers had been totally disgraceful.”²⁰⁸

Thus, in as much as corruption and greed by African leaders and their agents greatly cause poverty in Africa – in fact in my opinion, it is the main cause of poverty in Nigeria and Africa, - one should not lose sight of the global contribution to poverty of individuals and nations. As Lewin L. Williams indicated, “in the same sense that a particular context, system at work make some people rich while keeping others poor, there are countries which in their drive to stay rich and powerful make others poor and keep them so.”²⁰⁹ This could be seen as one of the reasons why Western powers allow money stolen from Africa by African leaders into their countries. In the words of Kossi A. Ayedze, “The truth is that colonialism, post colonialism, and the international financial institutions, as well as African leaders and intellectuals, share various degrees of responsibility for this gloomy situation of Africa. All of them are held responsible because of the ‘partisan, inhuman, incoherent, and generally unpopular remedy situations’ the pretend to propose for the eradication of poverty in Africa...”²¹⁰

Describing the conditions of most poor Christians in Africa, Ayedze stated that “They have difficulties affording meals, good clothing, and descent houses. They cannot afford to educate their children and may powerlessly watch their baby die of a disease that could easily be cured.”²¹¹ Women, he noted experience the suffering most. They constitute the

²⁰⁸ Karl MAIER, *This House Has Fallen*, London 2000, in OGBUNWEZE, Emmanuel Fanklyne, Onyemaechi, *The Scandal Of African Poverty: Exploring The Factors Sustaining The African Predicament*, in: OKERE, T., I., / NJOKU, Chukwudi, Anthony (eds.), *The Scramble For Africa: The Scramble Continues*. International Symposium Owerri 2004, 158f

²⁰⁹ Lewin L. WILLIAMS, *A Theological Perspective on the Effects of Globalization on Poverty in Pan – African Context*, in: PARIS, Peters, J., *Religion and Poverty. Pan – African Perspectives*, 91.

²¹⁰ Kossi A. AYEDZE, *Poverty among African People and the Ambiguous Role of Christian thought*, in: PARIS, Peter, J. (ed.), *Religion and Poverty. Pan – African Perspectives*, 195.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 196.

majority of Christians and contribute more to the upkeep of their churches and their leaders. Most of the women do not have access to prenatal care. This exposes them and their unborn children to high mortality risk. Even when the children are born, they are disadvantaged from birth due to their low birth weight, physical or mental impairment as a result of lack of prenatal care. These situations of poverty constitute great challenges to the faith of these people.

It is observed that Christianity had in the past romanticised poverty for Africans and prescribed it as model for African Christians. This was especially at the early stage of evangelization of Africa. As Ayedze also indicated, “During the missionary period, Africans have been introduced to a type of Christianity ‘which glorifies poverty to the point that African converts loathe profit.’ This ‘poverty gospel’ is still prevalent in Africa, especially among main line churches.”²¹² “African converts have been taught that if they are poor on earth, compensation will come in heaven when they die ... Africans were expected to be passive and obedient observers of Christian faith that tranquilizes their aspirations.”²¹³ “Moneymaking was regarded as morally and religiously dangerous. The notion that the rich person could only with difficulty please God thus found its way into conscience and continues to impact the lives of many Christians in Africa.”²¹⁴ However, as Ayedze also noted “... another brand of Christianity ‘which glorifies economic prosperity’ is being witnessed in every part of the continent.”²¹⁵ Thus it seems that the prosperity gospel is an extreme reaction to the poverty gospel introduced to Africa at the early stage of Christian evangelization.²¹⁶ Pastors and advocates of the prosperity gospel only succeed in deceiving people all the more. As Williams noted,

When some of the “spiritualists” get involved in the economist environment in the world, it is merely to promote a gospel of individual success. In the theology that supports these theories of personal success, there is no engagement with national building. Televangelists fly around in private jets to preach “the Word”, and while they get richer, the world gets more violent. They argue that every person was made to be as wealthy as they are, but since it is the faith of

²¹² Ibid.197.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 208.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 197.

²¹⁶ “Reaction” not in the sense of its origin, but in the sense of its acceptance and the rate at which it spreads in Africa. Gospel of prosperity is discussed in chapter four of this work.

*individual believer that brings the reward from God, the reward is meant to be treated as personal achievement... Those who are unable to name things and claim them in the spirit of Christ have a faith problem that they alone can remedy.*²¹⁷

Thus to the question of most African Christians whether the Christian God can rescue them from the curse of poverty, proponents of the prosperity gospel say yes – the mission of Christianity is to free one from the curse of poverty but it depends on one's faith. That means, if you are poor, you do not have faith. This gospel puts most Igbo and African Christians in dilemma.

Most of the church leaders in Africa do not have a firsthand experience of poverty because most of them can afford their daily meals and medical bill and most of them live in descent houses and quarters provided for them by their congregations. This can lead to apathy and lethargy to ills in the society especially the evil of corruption and the plight of the poor who are denied of descent living. It becomes worst when the church leaders become friends or allies to these corrupt political leaders and allow themselves to be bought over through expensive gifts and money. They would fail to live up to their prophetic callings and would be very slow in criticizing ills in the society especially as perpetrated by their political friends. This is regrettably sometimes the case in Nigeria and lives the poor Christians disillusioned.

The Igbos are overwhelmingly Christians. They are known to be highly industrious and hardworking people. Thus they are spread all over the world, eking out living. But the Igbos have their own experience of poverty and destitution. After the so called Nigeria-Biafra civil war which lasted from 1967 -1970, the Igbos had to start all over again, with almost nothing. The saying goes that every Igbo person literally started with 20 Pounds after the civil war. This is because after the secession of Biafra as state which was majorly made up of the Igbo people, Biafra had her own currency. But after Biafra lost the war, every Biafran that had money in the Bank was only giving 20 Pounds to start life again - irrespective of how much money one had in the Bank or at home. Most Igbo people rejected this offer and decided to start life all over again from the scratch. The properties of the Igbos all over Nigeria were claimed by others. Only in a few parts of the country did

²¹⁷Lewin L. WILLIAMS, A Theological Perspective on the Effects of Globalization on Poverty in Pan – African Context, in: PARIS, Peters, J., Religion and Poverty. Pan – African Perspectives, 93.

they give the Igbos back their properties. These put the Igbos at a very disadvantage position financially. Federal presence is barely felt in the Igbo region after the war because most of those who ruled after the war were non Igbos. The Igbos were still being treated as a conquered people. But the Igbos are resilient people. They never give up but move on with tenacity, resolute to survive. Today they count among the successful people in Nigeria and Africa. But many of them still linger in poverty due to the situation of the Nigerian state and the corrupt nature of her leaders. There are poor road network, erratic power supply, poor security, unemployment etc.

In a traditional setting of the Igbo people where poverty is abhorred and regarded as a curse, everybody struggles to liberate himself from poverty. But despite this, poverty still persists and even spread aggressively at an alarming rate. In the old traditional Igbo African society and religion, curses were laid on any person that stole public property or embezzled the public fund. Everybody feared such curses since they were believed to be effective. But Christianity seems to have no solution to corruption except to preach for repentance which the greed of those in power would not permit. The submission of the prosperity gospel confuses Christian all the more. Those who made their wealth through nefarious and evil ways continue to brandish their wealth in extravagant ways. The Christians begin to lose faith in God as a God of love and justice. They experience a faith crisis.

In this situation, the Christians are in dilemma. The spirit of *Ofo na Ogu* in Igbo traditional religion advocates for justice, fair play and solidarity on the part of humans. The Church leaders must vigorously preach against the causes of poverty and people whose evil actions harm the well being of the people especially the poor. The New Political theology advocates for “open eyes” to these ill of the society.

3.2.2 VIOLENCE AND CONFLICTS

Violence in Africa takes different shapes: There is the arbitrary physical violence. But there is regrettably a more subtle but most dangerous and devastating kind of violence in Africa: “the calculated violence of neglect; that is, the deliberate failure of government and state

officials to carry out their state duties in order to benefit from the ensuing disorder and distress.”²¹⁸ As was stated in my aforementioned work,

*the upward movement of a culture of political violence in Nigeria and Africa is worrisome. The overall consequence of this state of arbitrary violence in Africa is a process of dehumanization which ... takes at least three forms: the degradation of human body, the collapse of shared values, and the breakdown of social order.*²¹⁹ *The impact of violence in African societies is devastating and long lasting. It degrades individuals, dissolves social norm and deflects human energies from more productive activities.*”²²⁰

As I further observed, “the nature of conflict in Africa does not succumb to simplistic explanations. It cuts across religious, political, cultural, socio- economic and strategic elements. This is the situation where the Igbo African Christians most times find themselves and their faith is put on trial. They ask for what practical answer Christianity has for these unjust situations.”²²¹

There are different explanations by theories as regards the causes of conflicts and violence in Africa. These explanations may be classified into three major groupings: Cultural, Structural and Economic.

Theorist on the cultural groupings of violence in Africa maintain that Africa as a continent is made up of different peoples, groups and ethnicities. These involve different cultural identities. There may arise conflicts in a bid to defend those identities. Though one cannot rule out this reason as contributing to violence in Africa, however many conflicts in Africa do not succumb to the cultural explanations. Africa is not a land of ‘ancient tribal hatred’ as the western press may portray it.²²² “It is political manipulation of ‘difference’ in a context of socio- economic hardship that triggers ethnic conflict.”²²³

Advocates of the structural causes of conflicts in Africa maintain that most of the basic political and social structures in Africa are originally not African but brought through colonization. They maintain that these structures are also still weak and therefore unable to

²¹⁸ P. CHABAL Africa. The Politics of Suffering and Smiling, London- New York 2009 , 153.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 154.

²²⁰ NWAIWU, 32f

²²¹ Ibid, 34.

²²² Cf. Ibid, 30

²²³ P. CHABAL, 160.

take care of the African situations. Whiles some of the advocates of the structural causes of violence in Africa think that with the passage of time, these political and social structures will come to maturity and will strengthen the African political and social system and then conflicts will minimize, others think that since these structures are not originally African but imported from the West, they may be inappropriate for the African system and situations. They maintain that even in societies where these structures are rooted and stable, there also arise conflicts even if not as prevalent as in Africa. Every conflict has its dynamism and context, so do the ones in Africa.²²⁴

The opinion that economic and financial situations of Africans are the cause of violence in Africa is perhaps the most popular mostly advocated. The advocates of the economic and financial situations of most Africans as the reason for conflicts maintain that since there is scarcity of goods to satisfy the large population of Africa, this may naturally result to conflicts. This explanation admittedly accounts for many conflicts in Africa. However, I still agree with Patrick Chabal that how these economic factors translate to conflict in Africa is “a result of historical, social, and cultural factors that can only be properly assessed in their local context”.²²⁵

The worst kind of violence especially in Nigeria is the use of the armed forces and police to exploit, extort and suppress the people so that they may not rise up against the political elites. The shameful situation is that the police and armed forces, under the pretence of provision of security, mount what is referred to in the Nigerian description as “road blocks , what is supposed to be traffic checks but is however a disguise for extorting money from public transport drivers who will in turn collect it from their passengers. This is done with all forms of intimidations and audacity. The few drivers and poor people who have protested against this unjust wicked situation have suffered untold hardship in the hands of these trigger happy gunmen who were supposed to keep order, peace and justice in the society. Many times they did not survive to tell their stories. The poor people become the last receivers of this process of extortion. They rich people, including catholic priests

²²⁴Cf. Nwaiwu, 30

²²⁵ P. Chabal, 163.

and many wealthy pastors do not experience this condition because they go on their private cars. In this way, there is most times no body to speak for the poor on this regard.

Another form of violence in Nigeria and Africa is what is referred to as political thuggery. Corrupt politicians engage the service of thugs in order to stay in power. They use thugs to intimidate their opponents and to rig elections. In addition to that, thugs are implored to attack those who criticized unjust structures and corruptions of politicians. This has resulted in what is called in Nigerian term “political assassinations”. Those who have lost their lives for their criticisms of corrupt politicians and governments include catholic priests and men of God of other denominations and many social activists. It is known that the Islamic terror group Boko haram has its origin in political thuggery.

The issue of religious violence effects Nigeria drastically. There is the problem of Boko Haram Islamic terror group in the Northern part of the country and the Fulani Herdsmen who are marauding about causing disastrous economic damages to farmers and who have caused untold evil and death to Christians in Nigeria. Nigeria is divided into majorly Muslim North and majorly Christian South. Most of the Igbos are Christians and live all over Nigeria. Whenever there is religious upheaval in the North where Christians are killed, it is mostly Igbos that are killed because the Igbos are regarded and rightly so as Christians. The corrupt system in the country does not allow for adequate fight against terrorism. Sometimes, influential people are sponsoring or sustaining these terror groups for personal gain. In this situation, the faith of Igbo and indeed Nigerian Christians are constantly put on trials.

But what brought about the most violent effect on the entire Igbo people was the Nigeria – Biafra civil war that lasted from 1967 – 1970. These three years left indelible scares on the minds of Igbo people. What they experienced in this three-year war was a violence of an immeasurable nature that sought to exterminate an entire ethnic group or nation. It shows the barbaric nature of the human nature and the degenerated level to which one can sink when one allows oneself to be taken hold by the demonic passion of hatred.

On July 29, 1966, the northern military officers led by Major Murtala Mohammed, Major Martins Adamu and Captain T Y Danjuma led a coup d’état that carried out the massacre of around 300 Igbo military officers and officers of the eastern region. It was a

revenge from the Northern Nigerian side for a coup d'état of 15 January 1966 led by Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna , Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzogwu, Major Adewale Ademoyega and others, where 22 prominent people of many regions in Nigeria including Sir Tafawa Balewa the then Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Ahmadu Belew the Premier of Northern Region and his wife, Chief S L Akintola the Premier of Western Region among others were killed. Since most of the coup plotters were of Igbo extraction, it was termed an Igbo coup and a death sentence for the entire Igbo people. What followed was a killing and massacre of people of Eastern region that lived especially in the northern part of Nigeria – what is described as a pogrom. Within three months, northern mob with the tacit support of the northern military slaughtered over 100,000 Igbo civilians in three separate pogroms. This massacre led to the secession of people of Eastern Region of today South East and South-South under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Odimegwu Emeka Ojukwu. The war broke out despite the effort to avoid it by some African leaders in what is known as the Aburi Conference and Agreement. This was because the Nigerian party led by General Gowon refused to implement the Aburi Agreement. During the war over 3 million Igbos including one million children were massacred or starved to death. There was what was called the Asaba massacre where soldiers of Nigerian extraction made up of today's North, South West and Middle belt in 20 minutes murdered over 1000 people that were either Igbos or were referred to as Biafra sympathizers. This they did by luring them to a square in the pretence of a discussion.

The question that has been asked severally is: Why would Nigeria not let people who felt they were not accommodated in the Nigerian project to go their own way? The right to self-determination is accommodated in the international law. Many people are of the view that it was because of the oil that was and is still located in this part of the country that called themselves Biafra. In the words of Father Tony Byrne – one of those who struggled to bring relief materials to Biafrans, “Thinking of the root cause of this bitter war – the rich oil resources of Biafra – made me fume with anger. This war might never have happened if those resources were not there. No one need have died.”²²⁶ Also, as Monsignor Carlo

²²⁶ Tony BYRNE, *Airlift to Biafra*, in: OKAFOR, Ikenna, *Towards an African Theology of Fraternal Solidarity*. Ube Nwanne, Eugene – Oregon 2014, 125.

Bayer, the then Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis said while responding to the questions of students in a public lecture in Vienna:

*The war would never have happened if there were no rich oil wells in Port Harcourt area. More than a million people died. I am convinced those people were sacrificed on the altar of oil ... That's the easy part of the answer... The more difficult part to explain ..., was the role of the colonial and former colonial powers. Everyone knows that colonialism is finished in Africa, but there are many countries who still want to buy their raw materials at the old colonial price, or less, from their former colonies. These powers are also keen to defend their past behavior by trying to show that Africans are not matured enough to manage their own affairs.*²²⁷

Most of the world powers like Britain under Harold Wilson Labour government and the Soviet Union supported and supplied the Nigerian State with war ammunitions weapons to use against the then Biafran State. Majority of the world stood and watched how a people were being exterminated. The then Biafran State was blocked in all directions to hinder any supply of food to their civilian population – what was against the international law and Geneva Convention. In fact it was a consciously implored weapon of war as found in the public statements and writings of the Nigerian public and military officials. As Major Benjamin Adekunle (the black scorpion) of the Nigerian army said to the World Press in 1968 , “I do not want to see any Red Cross, and Caritas, any World Council of Churches, any Poe, any Mission, or any United Nations Delegation. I want to prevent even one Ibo having one piece to eat before their capitulation.”²²⁸ The disease of malnutrition known as kwashiorkor mercilessly emasculated the tender and innocent children of this time, sparing in them only a chequered little and weak skeletal design crowned with incommensurately big, eyes-sunken skull. This was its mercy to those it left alive. Except for the efforts of a few men of conscience both internationally and locally- some of whom gave their lives in exchange - this production of the *musselman* and the consequent fabrication of corpse in Biafran land could have been a totality.

The Biafran war shows a cry of a people to be subjects in the presence of God; to be authors of their own destiny. As Ikenna Okafor expressed in the tune of Ikenga Metuh,

From the Biafran side though, it was not a war that was fought for its own sake. No, it was the struggle of a God-fearing people, to break the yoke of anthropological pauperization, which the

²²⁷ Carlo BAYER, in: BYRNE, Tony, Airlift to Africa, in: OKAFOR, Ikenna, Towards an African Theology of Fraternal Solidarity, 125.

²²⁸ Cf. E. C., EJIOGU, Benjamin Adekunle: The Portrait Of A Genocidist, saharareporters.com, (Stand 11.07.2020).

*neo-colonial structure was designed to entrench. Trusting their God, the Supreme Being, Ama Ama Amasi Amasi” – Unknowable and Unfathomable ONE; “Chi na Eke”- the God who creates; “Chi Ukwu” – the Great God, who created them as free people before the advent of major religions of today, the people took to arm to defend themselves. As a people that call themselves “Umu Chukwu” – the Children of the Great God; a people who in great numbers willingly embraced Christianity with awesome joy and dedication, not because of, but rather in spite of the Whiteman’s arrogance, their struggle is no less different from that of the biblical Israelites.*²²⁹

Thus, the Biafran experience shows that the history of the world is a history of suffering as Metz maintains. It also shows what could happen when the world closes its eyes to impunity; when the suffering of the ‘other’ is not regarded as my suffering, and the ‘other’ is regarded as a ‘distant other’. Africa and Africans have always been this ‘distant other’ in the eyes of the world, for things are handled differently when different people are involved. It shows the need of “an opened eyes mysticism” in the worlds of Metz, eyes to see the suffering and injustices in the world and the courage to fight against them. Thus the Biafrans believed that *Ofo* – justice - was on their side, thus they embarked on *Ogu* – on the cry and struggle to be subjects in the face of God. Thus Ikenna Okafor would also say that “it is important to reassert to historical memory that the Biafran revolution was a loud and desperate cry for freedom. That cry was deliberately ignored, in fact exacerbated, by the titans of capitalism and communism in a world whose conscience and perception of truth and justice has been badly warped by selfish materialistic interest.”²³⁰

The questions the Igbo people continue to ask in this regard is “why God why? Why this history of suffering? Why the injustice? Why the ominous silence?”

3.2.3 SICKNESS AND DISEASE

Sickness and disease constitute a major aspect of Igbo African existential faith crisis. The problem of sickness in Igbo nation and Africa at large is due to the economic and financial situation of the majority of Africans. Most times, sicknesses and diseases which could have been handled and healed on time regrettably degenerate to a more protracted stage due to lack of fund and money on the part of the poor Africans to tackle such sicknesses. Again the state of most of the government owned hospitals is deplorable. The neglect of the health sector in Nigeria is abysmal. Basic health facilities are not provided by the corrupt

²²⁹ Ikenna OKAFOR, *Towards an African Theology of Fraternal Solidarity*, 127

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 128.

governments in Nigeria and Africa at large. Good health provision may sometimes be obtained in private hospitals or private health sectors. When this is the case it is costly and is above the reach of most poor Nigerian. As I categorically stated in my aforementioned work,

The prevalent situation of ill- health can be properly situated in the poor economic situations of most Africans. When the state health system collapses, as it is the case in most African countries, the poor Africans may not be able to afford private health treatments. They find themselves in desperate situations. The corrupt politicians steal their money and are inappropriately rich. These can afford to take care of themselves and their families in times of need and sickness. They can afford to fly their wards abroad for treatment when the required treatments are not available at home. But these are the ones who steal and are corrupt, and are wicked. Why should their situation appear better than an average African Christian whose hands are clean and who prays to God by morning and by night? This is the enigma of an average African Christian. Africans are not poor because they are ill; they are ill because they are poor.²³¹

Sickness affects people's productivity. It also affects the abilities of parents or guardians to take adequate responsibilities of their children or wards. In Igbo land, sickness has its social, religious, economic, psychological dimensions. The sick person may not be able to participate in the social functions and activities and thus there is a feeling of alienation. In the traditional Igbo societies, some sicknesses were regarded as curses or punishments from the gods and there were the tendencies to avoid people afflicted with such sicknesses like leprosy. The sick person may not be able to farm (if he is a farmer) or participate in trading at market places on market days (if he is a trader). Thus the sick person is economically and financially disadvantaged. There is in Nigeria most times no provision for health insurance by the government and no support for the people who are sick. Sickness may also cause people gainfully employed by the government or in the private sectors to lose their jobs. In such cases there are most times no remunerations or legal protections. Most times, the burden of the sick person falls on the immediate family and sometimes on the extended kinsmen. They participate in finding solution to the sickness. Enumerating the psychological dimension of sickness in Igbo land, I stated in the aforementioned work: *The Understanding and Relevance of the Book of Job in the Context of Igbo Tradition and Faith Crisis* thus

Sickness in Igbo land and Africa has its psychological aspect. This is based on (Igbo) African holistic view on reality. Reality is a harmonious entity. Sickness is an interruption of this harmonious entity. This interruption is most times conceived to be caused by something or

²³¹ NWAIWU, 34

*somebody external. This something or somebody must be identified and exposed before the sickness could be properly treated and cured. When an African is sick, there is tension between trying to identify the cause of the sickness traditionally, and only accepting the results of modern medical procedures. The sick person may believe that somebody is trying to harm him or her. So there is always a search for the “who” that is responsible for the sickness. In order to find the “who”, he may have to consult diviners. Some Christians in Africa today may prefer to go to prayer houses or to some self-proclaimed prophets to ascertain the persons or causes of their sicknesses and the adequate healing process or medication to follow. This of course is when the sickness is protracted. There is still deep in them, sometimes unknowingly, a silent, resilient, traditional African belief that sickness and suffering do not belong to the normal order of things.*²³²

Sickness means for most Igbo African Christians and non Christians the ability to be impacted from outside. This shows weakness and according to the interpretations of the gospel of prosperity proponents, it also shows lack of faith. This constitutes crisis of faith for the faithful Christians who are afflicted by different ailments. Sometimes, these people wonder from one prayer house to another in search of healing. Sicknesses most times lead to faith crisis and subsequently to the loss of faith on the part of Igbo African Christians. The Christians ask why God would not want to heal them despite their faith in him or why they are outrageous or unexplainable sickness despite their virtuous and upright Christian living. These most times lead them to seek healings through other means and other gods.

The African Christian faith crisis arises partly as a result of friction between African traditional beliefs, which still survive in the mind of the African Christians, and the sometimes ‘arid’ Christianity in its unapplied form. Thus, the cultural aspects of the faith crisis.

3.3 CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE FAITH CRISIS

The Cultural aspect of the faith crisis is a result of the friction between the Igbo traditional religion and culture on one hand, and Christianity on the other hand. This may be mainly due to the lack of dialogue of the Christian faith with the African traditional religion and culture.

Culture is a way of life of a people. People are born into their culture and when they grow up in a culture, the culture become part and parcel of their lives – an integral part of their existence. Christianity inculturated in any culture illumine that culture and sanctifies

²³² Nwaiwu, 35

it. In this way, the people of that particular culture become sanctified through their culture sanctified by Christ. When this is not the case, there is a dislocation between a people who professed Christianity and their culture and this leads to crisis faith even when these Christians still attend church services. This was the situation when Ehusani, describing the situation of Christians in Nigeria at the time he was writing, stated:

*The embarrassing picture is that of a poor quality of Christian discipleship and wide spread crisis of commitment among people... Though our cathedrals and chapels are filled to capacity every Sunday, many will admit that the majority of African Christians live ambivalent spiritual lives with an exterior allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ, but with an interior and perhaps a more profound allegiance to the god of their forebearers who refused to give way to the new God.*²³³

This situation is further expressed by Bolaji Idowu when he opined that

*The church has on hands communities of believers who by and large, live ambivalent Christian lives. Christianity for them is a fashionable religion which has the habit of beginning and ending within the wall of a church building; it does not reach those vital areas of Africans. Thus it is possible for an African to sing lustily in the church 'other refuge have I none' while still carrying amulet on his person, or being able to go out of the church straight to his diviner without feeling that he is betraying any principle.*²³⁴

This stage of faith crisis as expressed here represents a second stage and also an early phase of the African Christian faith crisis. This stage has given way to other forms which at present expresses itself most especially in the gospel of prosperity. However there is no total obliteration of the former tendency. There still exist some Igbo and African Christians who engage in syncretism. The constancy between all the stages is a dislocation between faith and life, a search for meaning and inner fulfilment.

At the time of conversion there was the need for dialogue between Christianity and the culture of the new converts. This was to make assurance for an integral conversion; for conversion from the root. This was because the new converts came from a cultural milieu that had existed for centuries, and this culture had regulated their lives and those of their forbearers for centuries. They were products of this culture and they were still to live within the environment of this culture. Traditional religion was a meeting and melting point of

²³³ George EHUSANI, Truly Christian: The Challenge of inculturation, Symposium paper on Inculturation and the Nigerian Church at St Joseph Major Seminary Ikot Ekpene, 7th May 1999, 1. (Ehusani was at this time the Secretary general of the Catholic secretariat Lagos.)

²³⁴ Bolaji IDOWU, The predicament of church in Africa, in: BAETA, C.G (ed.), Christianity in Tropical Africa, London, 1968,433.

other components of the Igbo African culture. It regulated and influenced the entire life of the Igbo African people. Thus there was the need for dialogue with African traditional religion. However, this dialogue did not take place. As Mbefo remarked “it is clear that there was no dialogue between Christianity ... with African’s traditional religion. Traditional religions were works of the devil destined to be annulled through ... evangelism.”²³⁵

Alward Shorter regretted this situation when he stated that

*The tragedy is that early missionary endeavour in Africa never produced a confrontation or a meeting of the meaning between African religious thought –system and the thinking of nineteenth century European Christianity. They represented two outlooks which, if they were not entirely exclusive, nevertheless remained mutually close to one another.*²³⁶

Everything about the African culture was regarded as evil that must be uprooted and replaced with Christianity in European cultural garb. As such integral conversion did not take place; there was no conversion from the root. Christianity did not permeate the inner way of life of most of the Christian people as a result of this omission. This resulted to a double standard in the lives and practices of most of the new converts.

Christianity gave most Africans and Igbos status in the colonial and even post colonial era but had little to do with their real way of life. Most of the children and adolescent that attended schools at that time did so to run away from the exertion of the government. So also was the case with many adult converts. This was because associating with the missionaries afforded them protection since the mission, according to the superior at Onitsha Wharf “enjoys the privilege of ‘inviolability’ or ‘sanctuary.’”²³⁷ Thus in some cases it was more of a survival mechanism than of a real conversion.

The missionaries also adopted stringent punitive measures in their evangelical work. Measures that were applicable in the medieval European Church and that had long been abrogated by the church in Europe at that time they were applied to the new converts in Africa especially to Catholicism. These included public penance like kneeling in front of the people during holy masses as a mark of repentance, wearing sackcloth, public manual

²³⁵Luke MBEFO, *Christian Theology and African Heritage*, 10.

²³⁶A. SHORTER, *African Christian theology – Adaptation or incarnation*, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, *Christian theology and African Heritage*, Onitsha, 10.

²³⁷ Cf. Luke MBEFO, *Christian Theology and African Heritage*, 56.

labour etc. “Excommunications were flung about in the style of medieval popes”²³⁸ To justify this method on the claim of “non-existent value” is utterly uncharitable and misleading since a survey of Igbo culture shows deep rooted moral values and reverence. Inculturation has been tasking itself with appropriating these values in evangelization. At the early stage of evangelization, the missionaries were also discouraged from preaching the equality of blacks and whites.

This assessment is not to discredit the entire work of evangelization by the missionaries. In fact, among the missionaries were many great men and women of heroic actions whose odysseys are being song till today. They did not shy away from the then terrifying challenges of evangelization of Africa. Most of them also lost their lives in the process. One must acknowledge the great difficulties these great men and women had to face and their impacts in the lives of the Igbo Africans. But we have also to acknowledge their humanity, imperfections and limitations. In the course of the years after evangelization, Christians in Nigeria and indeed in Africa are still trying to come to terms with the principles of Christianity while at the same time not losing their orientation as Africans; to be truly Christians, and truly African. They seek to remain subjects in the face of a world order that threatens their way of being subjects and they are flabbergasted when agents of Christianity seem to be connivers in the unholy act of dissubjectification. They seek to understand what answers Christianity has for their life situations. Our task here is to see how the omission of dialogue between Christianity and African traditional religion which resulted to cultural faith crisis could be remedied for authentic African faith. First, let us examine the different reactions of Africans to the Christian faith that manifested their faith crisis and God question.

²³⁸P. B. CLARKE, *The Methods and ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1805-1905*, in: KALU, O. U., *The history of Christianity in West Africa*, 56.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPROACHES, REACTION AND MANIFESTATIONS OF IGBO NIGERIAN- AFRICAN CHRISTIAN GOD QUESTION AND FAITH CRISIS

The Igbo cum Nigerian and African Christian faith crisis has manifested itself in different modes at different times and epochs of the history of African Christianity; beginning from the early periods of evangelization to date. These crisis- manifestations represent different ways in which majority of Igbo Christians in different periods of the African Christian evangelization have reacted to the aloofness of the Christian faith to the practical African problems and what they regard as double standard attitude of Christianity. I identify here four different modes of manifestations.

4.1 RETURN TO TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGION

This was the first and early reaction to the faith crisis of the Igbo and African people in general. Some of the early converts who were brought over to Christianity due to its “fancifulness” of relating to modernity but whose conversion was not integral and deep rooted most times found themselves reverting to the African traditional religion. Éla gives the reason for that as found in the shallowness of the conversion.

*The missionary apostolate cultivated in Africans only the surface which invited cultivation, leaving fallow, a no man's land bristling with clumps of questions, doubts, hopes and dissatisfaction of every sort. The evangelization of the missionaries was peripheral. They could not go to the depths of Africans and their culture. They removed African traditional religion and yet left holes unfilled, questions unanswered, no in-depth spiritual replacement.*²³⁹

Thus, “in this spiritual emptiness, holes unfilled and questions unanswered, the African believer was confused and unsure of his identity. He felt alienated from his cultural and social environment. He yearned for and most times returned to his old religion which was for him practical and part of his life.”²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Jean-Marc ÉLA, *My Faith as an African*, 104.

²⁴⁰ Nwaiwu, 24.

At the early stage of the evangelization, there was also most times pressure from the society which was predominantly members of African traditional religion. Since there was no dialogue between African traditional religion and Christianity during the Christian evangelization, converting to Christianity meant an abandonment of the entire life of the people and invariably sundering oneself from one's own people. It was a herculean task and sometimes resulted in psychological or even physical combat and sometimes (though not all the times) resulted in a revert to one's own culture and people. An example of this is found in the ancient kingdom of Congo.

The King of the Kingdom of Congo was converted to Christianity with his household and baptized by Portuguese missionaries. The King took the name John, while his wife took the name Eleanore, after their Portuguese counterparts. However pressure from the traditional setting forced the king to reconvert to African traditional religion. His wife and son refused to reconvert to African traditional religion causing great disunity in the royal family and in the kingdom at large to the extent of a civil war.²⁴¹ Thus what we said earlier that at the onset of Christianity, some who could not cope with the alienation from their culture as result to their converting to Christian faith returned back to African traditional religion. This situation caused problems in African households. When the head of the family – in most cases men and husbands - were reconverted to African traditional religion, there was most times pressure on the rest of the family members to reconvert to African traditional religion. This also occurred the other way round: Christian members of a family often treated those who reconverted to African traditional religion as fallen Christians and most times sundered themselves from them. This brought disunity in the family.

The problem of lack of dialogue between African tradition and Christianity was also a problem among the Igbo people. Traditional ceremonies like *Iri ji* (New yam festival) *Ibo Uzo* festivity, *Iwa akwa* (wearing cloth ceremony) and many other festivals which defined the lives of the people and were sources of joy, celebrations, solidarity, collectivity etc were regarded as heathen ceremonies by the missionaries and their immediate local successors. Even after the departure of the missionaries, their immediate Igbo successors continued to discourage the people to participate in these ceremonies. Thus there were always great

²⁴¹ Cf. Jude Chikodi IKE, *The Church as Locus of Man's Encounter with God*, 277f.

frictions and misunderstandings within members of Christian communities and denominations and even within members of the same families on this regard. In recent times, there have been efforts to bring dialogue between these cultural festivals and Christianity. Sometimes, these ceremonies begin with church services or Holy masses. These have helped to bring down the tension though some Christians continue to maintain a total breakup from the culture.

In the event of conversion to Christianity, some Africans perceived in the Christian God a passive rather than an active God. Their African traditional gods were more active in the direct impact to the life of the people. “Their gods were feared and were held in high esteem. They were regarded as guarantors of justice. And they were believed to adequately punish anyone who went contrary to the ordinance of the community based on justice.”²⁴² This dissatisfaction by some Africans with this situation they think was brought about by the introduction of new religions is portrayed by Folu Olukayode in a prayer of a dissatisfied African:

*Almighty return this country to pre Christian days for your people in Nigeria are stealing in the name of God. Almighty, bring back Sango (a Yoruba divinity, the god of thunder that punishes) and other deities for the God they gave us from Arabian land and Red Sea cannot prevent N2.8 billion leaving our shore and improving the life beyond the sea... Chineke (God in Igboland) uproot all churches from Nigeria and close down all mosques. Grant us the peace we used to enjoy even when they opined we were backwards and uncivilized.*²⁴³

Most Igbo and other African traditionalists who reconverted to African traditional religion after being converted to Christianity did so because they complained that the deities and spirits they served continued to appear to them and issuing warning to them to return to the service of the gods and tradition. Such was the case in an article of April 20, 1986 of the *Sunday Times* titled *Give Us Back Our God* referred to by Luke Mbefo where the people of Agulu community in Anambara State were asking the Nigerian government to give them back the statue of their god *Haba* who had been appearing to them and causing spiritual problems among them in a demand from them to get back his statue (*Haba*) which was displayed at the National museum at Oninka Lagos.²⁴⁴ Most of these people where

²⁴² NWAIWU, 24.

²⁴³F. OLUKAYO, The Church's Prophetic Witness in Political Cultural Context of Nigeria, in: African Journal of Theology, vol. II, no.1, 1982, 13.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Luke Nnamdi MBEFO, Christian Theology and African Heritage 113f.

Christians whose Christian faith were not yet integral. The Christian faith had not yet touched the vital areas of their lives. There is a danger of either syncretism or return to African traditional religion.²⁴⁵ The traditional Christian denominations like Catholicism, Methodist and Anglican Churches did not take the issue of Spiritism in African traditional religion seriously.

As regards this form of faith crisis, the *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism has to emphasis on the dialogue between Christian religion and African traditional religion. *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism in itself represents this dialogue. As also contained in new political theology, it emphasises that people have to bring their anxieties, doubts, questions to God in prayer. These anxieties and doubts are part of the faith process as is contained in the bible. Thus, *Ofo na Ogu* theology makes case against self-immunization from doubts and pure affirmation as contained in prosperity Gospel.

4.2 SYNCRETISTIC PRACTICES

Another manifestation of the faith crisis is the syncretistic practices on the part of Igbo and African Christians. Plutarch is credited to be the one who coined the word syncretism from the Greek word *sukretismos*. The word had first its origin in the secular milieu before finding its path in the religious vocabulary, being used since 19th mainly in comparative religion to designate “a fusion of different godheads.”²⁴⁶“Syncretism refers to a process of combining different religious practices; a combination of different faiths. This combination results in synthesis, strengthening, weakening or dissolution of the old allegiance.”²⁴⁷In the words of J. Moffat,

*In syncretism, there is a blending of religious ideas and practices, by means of which either one set adopts more or less thoroughly the principles of another; or both are amalgamated in more cosmopolitan and less polytheistic shape.... The outcome is a unification of deities in a fresh synthesis.*²⁴⁸

As was stated in my aforementioned work,

²⁴⁵ Cf. NWAIWU, 24.

²⁴⁶J. S. MARALDO, Syncretism, in: RAHNER, Karl (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Theology. A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Kent 1986,1657.

²⁴⁷ NWAIWU, 26.

²⁴⁸J. MOFFAT, in ASIEGBU, Anthony, *A Crisis of Faith and a Quest for Spirituality*,13.

*Syncretistic practices admit some kind of process of give and take, acceptance and rejection, joy, sorrow, confusion and utmost disappointment. Syncretism is an indication or a manifestation of crisis of faith and cry for help in the face of threatening situations. It points to a desire for self fulfillment and a state of confusion, in which the believer embarks on the experimentation of or sampling of cultic practices of different religions and beliefs, and engages on complementing different practices from these religions, which normally should be incompatible. It shows a state of insecurity of the believer.*²⁴⁹

In order to avert the crisis and discord in the family and society at large caused by going back to African traditional religion, and in order not to be looked upon by Christians as backwards, and as heathens, some Igbo and African Christians started combining features or elements of both African traditional religion and Christianity. This was also because of the insecurity they felt and the inner hollow they tried to fill.

Thus it was observed that many Christians in Nigeria still held tenaciously to some of the traditional beliefs and practices which they consider central and fundamental to their lives²⁵⁰

It was the observation of Leith Ross very long time ago that an average Igbo Christian

*Can attend communion and believe in medicine, keep ... a church wife and several native marriage wives, tie precious in the same corner of a handkerchief his rosary and the shaped bit of 'iron for juju' made for him by a Awka blacksmith; plant side by side in the garden round his new cement and pan -roofed house, the hibiscus of civilization and the ogirishi tree of pagan family rites*²⁵¹

As we already observed, syncretism as a form of Igbo faith crisis represents the second phase of the Igbo Christian faith crisis. It was major expression of the faith crisis around 1939 when Leit Ross published his observation. It also remains true that syncretism has not completely disappeared in the core of the Igbo African Christian life. As Afigbo observed, a substantial amount of traditional belief system continues to survive in the core of modern African life.²⁵² Mbefo saw in syncretism the danger of what he called neo-paganism.²⁵³ As he further expressed,

In the first place we can say that we have a number of Christians who are so nominal but who have remained unconverted, unreborn,....In the second place, it can be said that we have a

²⁴⁹ NWAIWU

²⁵⁰Anthony ASIEGBU, A Crisis of Faith and a Quest for Spirituality, 19.

²⁵¹Leith ROSS, African Women, London 1939,292.

²⁵² A. E. AFIGBO, Social Development in Nigeria. A Survey of Policy and Research, Ibadan 1982, 27.

²⁵³Luke MBEFO, Christian Theology and African Heritage 114.

*church in transition where a generation of newly baptized Christians have doubts about the new religion which used to be there home.*²⁵⁴

This doubt Mbefo mentioned indicates a crisis of faith. What the *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism emphasizes here is not a fusion of god heads but a dialogue between Christianity and the African traditional religion and culture. This is because both of them are not contradictory to each other and as Ratzinger intimated, the search for truth inherent in man makes every culture capable of engaging in dialogue.

4.3 PROLIFERATION OF CHURCHES

A present and most evident manifestation of the Igbo African faith crisis is the search for inner fulfillments, external and internal security within Christianity itself. This search leads to the splitting of different church groups, the formation of independent churches and worship houses by individuals to suit the aspirations and yearning of certain groups of people or to attend to certain needs of a group of worshipping community hitherto neglected. This is what is referred here as the proliferation of churches.²⁵⁵ It has taken different shapes and emphasis in the history of Nigerian and African Christianity blossoming today in what is called the gospel of prosperity. We shall start the examination of this phenomenon by first examining its early manifestation in the Nigerian Christianity in the form of formation of African independent churches.

4.3.1 AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

The upshoot of independent churches in Africa is as old as the missionary activities in Africa.²⁵⁶ However, these churches have taken different forms in the course of the history of the African Christianity.

Africans themselves took the leads of the formation of independent churches in Africa to meet the needs of the African persons who felt dislodged from his cultural root. The early evangelization in Africa had neglected the African culture. Most Africans found themselves

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 116.

²⁵⁵ There are of course some churches that are established purely for selfish gains or as business centres.

²⁵⁶ R. A., VAN DIJK, Christian Fundamentalism in Sub – Saharan Africa: The Case of Pentecostalism, Leiden 2000, 5.

in a situation of being uprooted from their cultures into a religion – in this case Christianity - married to another culture. Thus, most of the African converts to Christianity felt a dislocation and alienation from their foundations, an inner emptiness and a search for existential meanings and self identity. The first group of the independent churches in Nigeria and Africa were formed to meet the cultural need and attachment of the African persons who wanted to remain Christian perhaps because of its association with modernity, but who also had an inner connection with, and a yearning for their cultures and thus wanted not to be alienated from them. These Africans wanted to be in touch with their cultural rituals and ceremonies which had given meaning to their existence. They had their beliefs in spirits – both good and bad, on spirit possession, on Ogbanje, on fortune telling and prophecies which were not attended to by the early missionaries. The African culture had provided rituals and ceremonies to attend to these needs. These were abolished by the early missionaries without providing any substitute for these needs. This lacuna was believed to have threatened the very existence of the African person.

As Rijk A. van Dijk noted, different factors

... did in fact pave the way for a type of independent Christianity that could cater for the needs that the established missionary churches chose to ignore. A whole area of dispute had emerged after the introduction of missionary Christianity, concerned with elements of the African cosmological system that the missionaries chose to ignore as mere superstitions'. The influence of spirits, the manifestation of spirit in possession rituals, the influence of witches and other evil powers and the ritual protection and purification that were considered so essential in the life of an African individual were for the white missionaries area of strife and dispute, elements of heathen worship. Missionary Christianity could not accommodate Ancestors, witches and similar powers in its own religious ideology, and practice; nor did it offer any substantial worship, protection and purification that could deal with their effects.²⁵⁷

Examples of such churches in Nigeria were the Aladura Churches. The origin of this movement is traced to Joseph Shadare, an Anglican lay leader who in 1918 together with a fellow teacher Sophia Odunlami formed a prayer group in Ijebu Ode, Nigeria. The word *Aladura* means in Yoruba Language “praying people”. “The Aladura Churches reflect the indigenization of Christianity through its use of African symbols, traditional healing modalities, and worship styles. Where earlier churches emphasized salvation in the

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 7.

hereafter, the Aladura churches offer solutions to this-world problems”²⁵⁸ Some other churches in this category include: The Precious Stone Society, The Christ Apostolic Church, The Cherubim and Seraphim Society.

Thus these independent African Christian Churches were “a child of necessity” to fill in the spiritual gap of some of the worshipping African Christians by tapping into the African religious powerhouse and bringing in spiritual currents to fill in what was lacking in the culturally uprooted confused Christians. This processes most times involved a combination of Christian practices and those of the African traditional religion – what can rightfully be characterised as institutionalized syncretism; it is part and parcel of their liturgy. As I further mentioned in my previous work,

*It is observed that in their healing ministries and exorcisms, they adopt practices similar to those of African traditional religions while also they read the bible and sing Christian songs. The crisis of the African believer at this time was that he found himself sitting on the fence. He was afflicted by demons and evil spirits, and the missionaries and their churches neither appeared to understand nor to have answers to their problems. Most of these believers left the orthodox missionary churches for these African indigenous churches and healing homes which understood and appeared to have solutions to their problems.*²⁵⁹

Even those Africans who took over from the missionaries in the main stream churches did not also take into pastoral consideration these basic spiritual needs of the African person for fear of being accused of syncretism.

4.3.2 PENTECOSTALISM

At the end of the Nineteenth century, another wave of evangelism and Christianity known as Pentecostalism came into existence. Most accounts of the origin of Pentecostalism situate it to an outbreak of glossolalia in a Bible college in Topeka, Kansas which poured over to what is known as the ‘Azusa Street’ revival in Los Angeles in 1906 initiated by the black Evangelist William J. Seymour.²⁶⁰ In Van Dijk’s account, some of the Pentecostal churches are traceable to some Black American Churches that had sprung up in the wake of the first Pentecostal wave in Illinois at the end of the nineteenth century. These churches

²⁵⁸ <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu>, Aladura Churches in Nigeria / Religious Literacy Project, Harvard Divinity School (Stand: 18.04.2020).

²⁵⁹ NWAIWU, 28.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Simon COLEMAN, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity. Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 21.

later found root in Africa both through missionaries and also African ministers who had contact to this Pentecostalism through living in the USA and studying in one of the Pentecostal related bible colleges. White missionaries from England also brought Pentecostal churches to Africa. However, as early as the late 1940s and 1950, Africans themselves gradually started taking over leadership of these churches.²⁶¹

These streams of churches and their movement are called Pentecostalism because of their emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The churches under this group maintained a sharp difference from the indigenous African churches. Their attitudinal and doctrinal outlooks highly favoured a strict breakup with African tradition. They remained critical of the independent African Christian churches because of their syncretistic practices and their link to African tradition. True Christianity for them meant a total break up with African tradition. They saw the African tradition and culture as the old life and Christianity as the new life. At the same time these Pentecostal churches maintained also their differences from the main stream churches like Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches.²⁶²

The Pentecostal Churches and the Orthodox Churches established by the white missionaries maintained their differences in that the Pentecostal Churches took seriously the concerns of the African worshippers like spirit possession, and occult forces which the established Orthodox Churches had neglected. Pentecostal Churches disassociate themselves from the African Indigenous Churches for their syncretic practices and affiliation to African traditional religion

By taking such forces and powers seriously the Pentecostal churches have moved close to the experience of many Africans, closer than the white missionary churches ever could with their utter denial of the existence of such powers²⁶³

4.4 THE GOSPEL OF PROSPERITY AND PURE AFFIRMATION

4.4.1 MEANING OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL

From the 1980s or even some years before then, a new wave started sweeping through the Pentecostal movement. Preachers known as televangelists and others started availing themselves the benefits of modern technology. There began to be a shift in orientation in the gospel preaching of many Pentecostal preachers to what is called gospel of prosperity.

²⁶¹R. A., VAN DIJK, 11.

²⁶²NWAIWU, 28.

²⁶³R. A. VAN DIJK, 28.

It is a gospel that provides solution to earthly problems; a gospel that does not postpone the reward of the believer to the next work but promises him physical and especially financial being in this world. It is a gospel that says that a man of faith can suffer no ill and cannot be poor. “Put in simple terms, God is with those who make progress in life, and Christianity is about prosperity and not about poverty”²⁶⁴ In a nutshell, “prosperity gospel is the teaching that the solution to people’s problems of sin, sickness, poverty, and demon oppression are in Jesus Christ.”²⁶⁵It emphasizes “an earthly life of health, wealth as the divine, inalienable right of all who have faith in God and live in obedience to His commands.”²⁶⁶Prosperity Gospel is variously characterized as the Faith, Faith Formula, Prosperity, Health and Wealth or Word Movement.²⁶⁷It is said to be based on the three principles of healing, prosperity and positive confession. It maintains that the blessings from the Abrahamic covenant are extended to all believers through the salvific work of Christ. In the positive confession, it is claimed that what you say or claim, is what you get.²⁶⁸

The prosperity gospel scrambles with the question of theodicy, with the vital issue of how the all-loving (Ephesians 1:6, 7; 2: 7-9; Titus 2: 11; Luke 1: 54, 72, 78; Romans 15: 9; 9: 16, 18), all-holy (Exodus 15: 11; Isaiah 57:15, cf. Job 34:10; Isaiah 6: 5; Habakkuk 1: 13), all – just and all-powerful God (Job 42: 2; Matthew 19: 26; Luke 1: 57) can co-exist as it does with evil.²⁶⁹ The prosperity gospel maintains that God did not create evil; evil came into the world as result of sin. But God did make provision for the abolishment of sin and its consequential evil in the world through the death of his Son Jesus Christ.²⁷⁰

Prosperity gospel adherents interpret poverty, disease and death are consequences of sins. Jesus has destroyed the foundation of sin and thus liberated all people from its consequences such as poverty, sickness and other forms of tragedy. The ones who still suffer from these so called consequences of sins according to the gospel of prosperity proponents do so as a result of personal sins and lack of faith. The real believers are

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 14.

²⁶⁵ G. O. FOLARIN, Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria: A re- examination of the concept, impact, and evaluation, in: African journal of biblical studies, Vol. XXIII, No. II; October 2006, 83.

²⁶⁶ Stanley M. BURGESS (ed.), Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, New York-London 2006, 393.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Simon COLEMAN, The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity. Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 27.

²⁶⁸ Cf. COLEMAN, 28.

²⁶⁹ G. O. FOLARIN, Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria, 90.

²⁷⁰ NWAIWU, 29.

immune to them. According to the proponents of gospel of prosperity, “God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ and every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ and he/she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith.”²⁷¹ Thus, proponents of the gospel of prosperity maintain that real children of God cannot be poor or sick or die prematurely and that the Christian God is a God of riches and prosperity and not of poverty. They propagate a pure affirmation derived from the doctrine of retribution. They overlook the reality on ground and the call to costly discipleship. They fail to comprehend that “though Christ has already inaugurated his kingdom on earth, it has not reached its culmination.”²⁷² Emanuel Umeh called such a religion of self deceit. Thus he stated

*The teachings of religion of self-deceit are based on one topic: those who worship the living God will not suffer; Christians are not meant to suffer, suffering is not the portion of a true Christians, etc. The logical consequences is that suffering has nothing to do with Christianity and those that suffer are not actually Christians. Poverty is equalled to suffering and true Christians are destined to be wealthy. The aspiration of such religion of self deceit is to create paradise on earth.*²⁷³

4.4.2 ORIGIN OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL

It seems to be generally agreed that prosperity gospel originated from United States of America.²⁷⁴ Though early Pentecostalism did not emphasis on material prosperity, the prosperity gospel evolved from Pentecostal churches through her (former) ministers. Some people have traced the origin of the prosperity gospel to Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003) of Tulsa Oklahoma, a former Baptist minister who later became a minister under the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church. He said he got a revelation in 1974 about the text of Matthew 23:11f²⁷⁵. For Hagin, “prayer for health and wealth was infallibly

²⁷¹ Paul GIFFORD, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, London 1998, 62.

²⁷² Nwaiwu, 29.

²⁷³ Chukwuemeka Emanuel UMEH, *African Theology of Solidarity and Religion of Self-Deceit. The Nigerian Experience*, Aba 2012, 92.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Simon COLEMAN, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity. Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 40.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Aylward SHORTER / Joseph N. NJIRU, *New Religious Movements in Africa*, Nairobi 2001, Pauline Publications Africa, 32.

answered.”²⁷⁶Hagin vigorously preached Christian faith and life that is full of wealth and luxury. In 1974 he founded his Bible Training Centre which he used as a vehicle of spreading his prosperity gospel.

However, long before this, the soil had been prepared and watered for the germination and up springing of prosperity gospel. As Coleman pointed out, “In the US of the nineteenth century, economic success, Divine Providence, and millennial hopes for the coming of the Kingdom of God were frequently conflated ..., and the connections between living a correct life and gaining bountiful wealth and prosperity were pointed out by clergy as well as lay people.”²⁷⁷ One of those who watered the ground and helped in preparing the stage for the emergence of prosperity gospel was the American Baptist minister, lawyer and writer Russell Herman Conwell (15.02.1843 – 06.12.1925). He was the founder and first president of Temple University in Philadelphia and was known to be an orator and a philanthropist. He is remembered among other things for his lecture *Acres of Diamond* which brought him fame and wealth. This was known as his formula for success. Conwell inextricably preached for prosperity and connected morality and honesty with wealth. Thus he stated:

I say that you ought to be rich, and it is your duty to get rich. How many of my pious brethren say to me, “Do you, a Christian minister, spend your time going up and down the country, advising young people to get rich, to get money?” Yes of course I do. They say, “Isn’t that awful! Why don’t you preach the gospel instead of preaching about man’s making money?” “Because to make money honestly is to preach the gospel.” That is the reason. The men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community. “Oh” but said some young men here tonight, “I have been told all my life that if a person has money, he is very dishonest and dishonorable and mean and contemptible.” My friend, that is the reason why you have none, because you have that idea of people. The foundation of your faith is altogether false...²⁷⁸

Furthermore, he stated

... the men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community ... ninety-eight out of one hundred of the rich men of America are honest. That is why they are rich. That is why they are trusted with money. That is why they carry on great enterprises and find plenty of people to work for them. It is because they are honest.²⁷⁹

Intrinsically and inextricably connecting sin with poverty Conwell further stated

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 41.

²⁷⁸ Russell H. CONWELL / Robert SHACKLETON, *Acres of Diamond*, 1925, Harper and Brothers, 18f.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 19.

*It is an awful mistake of these pious people to think you must be awfully poor in order to be pious ... I sympathize with the poor, but the number of poor who are to be sympathized with is very small. To sympathize with a man whom God has punished for his sins ... is wrong. ... let us remember there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings...*²⁸⁰

Through such words and preaching which are fundamentally and realistically false, people like Conwell prepared the stage for the emergence of gospel of prosperity.

After the Second World War, leading figures in the North American healing revival movement including William Branham, Oral Roberts, Jack Coe, A.A. Allen, Gordon Lindsay, started ingraining the idea of the healing wish of God for the faithful in their messages. 3 John 2 was interpreted by Oral Roberts as a mandate to prosper. In 1950, Roberts also created the “Blessing Pacts”. People were promised a refund of their money if they were to donate \$100 to help fund his then financially in need television network and if they did not receive the money back from an unknown source within a year.²⁸¹

Though prosperity gospel originated in the USA, it has spread throughout many parts of the globe. While the wealth and health gospel in many parts of the globe basically maintains the basic principles of healing, prosperity and positive confession and also seems to thrive in situations of economic recessions, there are different adaptations and modifications of the gospel of prosperity by indigenous ministers to make it more fitting and more persuasive to their indigenous local communities and churches. As Hackett pointed out,

*We (should not) forget the predominantly American origins of the Pentecostal and charismatic revival in Africa. Yet in its present phase, the forces of appropriation and negotiation seem to be more active, with more evidence of agency by African evangelists. It is hard to resist gospel ships and cargo, but indigenous inspirational literature is now beginning to proliferate and some African evangelists are becoming well known on the global circuit. At one level they appear to be content to reproduce the theological tenets of the movement (a skill much admired in certain cultural context), but it is in the process of selection that we find an African emphasis and creativity – in the importance attributed to deliverance, healing and experience, for example.*²⁸²

²⁸⁰Ibid, 21.

²⁸¹ Cf. Simon COLEMAN, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity. Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 40.

²⁸²R. HACKETT, *The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa*, in: ROBERTS, R. (ed.), *Religion and Transformations of Capitalism*, London 1995, 211, in: COLEMAN, 36.

We shall examine the gospel of prosperity with its modifications and appropriations in Nigeria.

4.4.3 PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN NIGERIA

Prominent in the prosperity gospel in Nigeria was the person of ‘Archbishop Professor’ Benson Idahosa, who was called “The Apostle of Africa” in the wider neo Pentecostal circle.²⁸³ He was the founder of Church of God Mission International in Benin City, Nigeria. He studied with prominent American ministers like Gordon Lindsay at the Church for Nations Institute in Texas in 1971. Idahosa had established for himself a religious empire including world of faith group of schools, the All Nations for Christ Bible Institute that harboured students from over forty countries and a Faith medical Centre.²⁸⁴ He engaged himself in series of crusades and was purported to have carried out miracles and healings. However the authenticity of these miracles was not without contestation, contention and controversies. In any case, he flourished in cash and fame.

Today there are numerous prosperity gospel churches and preachers in Nigeria. Another notable prosperity gospel figure in Nigeria is David Oyedepo, founder of Living Faith World Outreach aka Winners Chapel. He claims that Hagin’s baton has been passed to him and that he received Copeland’s anointing by sleeping on the bed Copeland once slept on.²⁸⁵ Oyedepo is one of the flamboyant prosperity preachers in Africa and arguably one of the richest boasting of private jet and houses in many countries of the world. There are other ones like Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo the founder of the Commonwealth of Zion Assembly (COZA) who believe extremely on what is called seed sowing. There is also the female preacher Rev Funke Adejumo. In a recorded video she maintained that, “offering time is not blessing time but judgement time. That is when your financial level is determined. So if you always hide because you are an usher or in the choir, you don’t give offering, you can never be financially prosperous.” Another known prosperity gospel preacher in Nigeria is Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo the founder of Kingsway International

²⁸³COLEMAN, 35.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Paul GIFFORD, Trajectories of African Christianity, in: International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church, Vol.8 , No.4, November 2008, 287.

Christian Centre (KICC) who among other things once told his members to pay \$1000 or N1000 for every year they have lived on earth.²⁸⁶ Other preachers of prosperity gospel are Pastor Chris Oyakhilome founder of the Christ Embassy. In 2011, Forbes Magazine estimated his wealth to be between 30 and 50 million USD. For him, someone who wants to be financial prosperous or who seeks healing from an ailment must as a matter of necessity and importance sow seed which is money.²⁸⁷ Pastor Enoch Adeboye founder Redeemed Christian Church of God once said to a gathering of pastors of his church “Anyone who is not paying his tithe is not going to heaven, full stop.” He continued “Go back, immediately after this convention to retribute your ways with your congregation.” “Paying your tithe is not a minor thing” he had previously warned. “Go back to Malachi, chapter three, verse 8-11”,²⁸⁸ he urged. There are numerous other prosperity gospel preachers including those with small congregations.

Lamenting about the nature of prosperity gospel in Nigeria which he described as religion of self deceit, Emanuel Umeh further stated

*The faithful are ideologically forced to believe that success can be attainable through the amount of money one pays for prayers. Prayers are being prescribed to the faithful as medical doctors prescribe drugs to patients. The faithful are meant to believe that prayers work like magic and the amount of money one invests in religion equals the quality of blessings one receives from God. The unqualified emphasis on testimony with corresponding quantifiable offer in material things make the action suspicious. Actually, when the people’s trust, hope and faith in religion are manipulated and used for maximization of profit, then we have a case of religion of self deceit. This manipulation is easily attainable because of the social disposition in worshipping wealth and material success.*²⁸⁹

Suffice it to say that not all the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are fundamentally and foundationally geared towards prosperity gospel. An example of such Pentecostal Churches that do not preach prosperity gospel is Deeper life Bible Church which rather is bent toward asceticism.

²⁸⁶ Cf. <https://www.pulse.ng>, 3 popular Nigerian pastors who believe in seed sowing (stand 31.03.2020).

²⁸⁷ Cf. <https://www.dw.com>, Preacher of prosperity: faith and business (Stand: 31.03.2020)

²⁸⁸ Cf. <https://www.the-star.co.ke>, Who really benefits from Nigeria’s ‘prosperity gospel’? – The Star (Stand: 31.03.2020).

²⁸⁹ Chukwuemeka Emanuel UMEH, African Theology of Solidarity and Religion of Self-Deceit. The Nigerian Experience, Aba 2012, 91.

The prosperity gospel ministers in Nigeria operate under some known clichés or phrase in order to convince and most times confuse their congregations. Some of these clichés are as follows:

POVERTY IS A CURSE, POVERTY IS A DISEASE

In accordance with the spirit and teachings of prosperity gospel, proponents in Nigeria tend to portray poverty as a course or a disease that needs to be cured. In portraying poverty as a course, ministers of prosperity tend to appeal to ancestral course. They tell poor people that the reason why they are poor is because of inherited ancestral curses. These (pseudo) ministers maintain that the ancestors of the poor believers incurred these curses due to abominable evil they did in the ancient times. These curses are transferred from generation to generation, what they call generational curses. They maintain that poverty is one of the results of these curses. In order to deceive the innocent Christians all the more, some of these ministers of prosperity operating under this curse motif tell the Christians that they may not be conscious or aware of the said evils that their ancestors committed in the past but that God through his Spirit has revealed the evil deed in question to the prosperity ministers. These ministers of prosperity go on to say that through exorcism, the believers will sunder the chain of these ancestral curses and free themselves from their effects, one of which is poverty. They tell gullible believers that these curses are the reason why they do not progress in their businesses; they are the reason why they are unemployed or do not get promotions; the curses are the reason why they do not pass exams or in general are not successful in their life endeavours despite their enormous efforts . They then tell the congregants in question that they need to be freed from these curses. The susceptible Christians will be charged different fees for the so called exorcism. They would be told to bring money for the purchase of material for the exorcism. Sometimes, they would be told that a group of “prayer warriors” are praying for the persons and their families and thus the need to sustain these “prayer warriors”. Afterwards they would be told to donate generously or “sow seed” in order to appreciate the ‘healing’ and bring it to fruition.

The prosperity gospel ministers in Nigeria also operate under the cliché “poverty is a disease”. In order to drive this home, one hears them say such things like “My God is a Rich God”; “God is not the God of Poverty”. Through these, they allege that poverty is a

disease caused by sin. Thus those who are poor are poor because of their personal sins. In this way, they lay the blame of the poverty on the poor Christians themselves, not really because the person is not hardworking or because of structural and social injustice but because the poor person is a sinner. In this way they try to condemn and shame every poor person as a sinner. They opine that the poor persons in question have to become members of their churches in order to liberate themselves from sin and to be rich. In becoming members of their churches, you have also to be an active one through financial contributions and paying of tithes.

IT IS NOT MY PORTION

Members of gospel of prosperity churches in Nigeria always operate under the phrase “It is not my portion”. In this way they mean to say that poverty is not their portion, illness, accidents, deaths, and other evils and disasters are not their portions. This could be traceable to the general tenant of positive confession of all prosperity gospel ministries. Those who suffer from these misfortunes are therefore regarded as unbelievers or people of ‘little faith’. Most of the people who may be poor or are suffering from one problem or the other may tend to lead fictitious lives in order not to be taken as “people of little faith” or be shamed by members of their congregations. Sometimes people make false testimonies either as arranged by the pastors of these congregations in order to make people to see what result “a good faith” could bring about and by so doing, induce members of the congregation to make more contributions to the pastors and pay tithes, or people make false testimonies of miracles and breakthrough in order to show that they are among the favoured of God as a result of their uprightness.

MOVING TO THE NEXT LEVEL THROUGH SOWING OF SEEDS

Prosperity gospel ministers in Nigeria also operate under the cliché “moving to the next level”. By this, they mean moving to the next level of success and prosperity. This success can be in form of promotion, business successes and more cash and wealth. A vital way to move to the next level is by donating generously “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:8). By this method, they tend to target those who are already wealthy or employed. Since the love of having increases by having, the ministers of prosperity tell the rich people to sow more seeds so that these seeds may bring abundance for when one sows

sparsely , one will invariably reap sparsely and when one sows bountifully, one will also real bountifully. (2 Corinthian 9: 6-11).

Some of the Bible quotations used by prosperity gospel preachers include Deuteronomy 8:18f which is interpreted as God giving people the power to be rich; Malachi 3:10f which they used in emphasizing the paying of tithe; in John 10:10, the life in abundance that Jesus promised is interpreted to include material prosperity, wealth and good health.

The prosperity preachers most times circumvent and twist these passages in order to fit to their prosperity messages. These preachers not only target the rich, the also exploit the poor. They maintain that for the poor people to become rich they must make painful sacrifices and offerings to the pastor or the church. They poor must blindly donate the little he or she has in order to become rich.

4.4.4 PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND CATHOLIC MINISTERS AND LAITY

Pentecostalism and to some extent prosperity gospel are indeed making their inroad in Nigerian Catholicism and also mounting influences on the pastoral work of catholic clergy and the laity. These influences most times make themselves evident through reactions from both catholic priests and laity to this blow of wind sweeping over the Nigerian Christianity. These reactions range from total rejection and hard criticism of Pentecostalism and gospel of prosperity to imitation and copying from them.

Those who are on the side of criticism think that most, if not all Pentecostal churches are just out there to make money; they think that their motto is the gospel of prosperity. They criticize these preachers of gospel of prosperity for manipulating the psyche of the poor, sick and needy to their own selfish gain while not changing anything as regards the condition of the Christian who came to them for help. One of those in this side of criticism is Boniface Obiefuna, who with regard to prosperity gospel maintained that

Through their aggressive evangelism one sees they are but selfish, greedy, boastful, conceited insulting, disobedient, irreligious, unkind, ungrateful, merciless and immoral. They employ all sorts of methods to work on people's psyche in their difficult moments and so make them (the non-functional mind as St. Paul puts it) become failures in the faith²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Boniface OBIEFUNA, Endure to the End: Charismatics and the Hard Times, Enugu 1997, 30f , in: ACHUNIKE, Hilary, C., The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests, Onitsha 2004, Africana First Publishers Limited, 46.

Catholics on the side of criticism also criticize the literalist interpretation of the bible among the Pentecostal churches and consequently the preachers of prosperity gospel. In this regard Josephat Oguejiofor stated thus

In virtually all the evangelical groups or sects, it is literary interpretation of the Gospel that is prevalent ... This is the interpretation that filters through readings, and preaching, as well as moral admonitions. In this perspective the stories of Jesus miracles in different gospels are assumed as they are, not just as what happened in illo tempore, and what one can draw lessons from. They are viewed as indications of what benefits that are accruable to the believer in Christ by their cheer (sic) repetition, here and now.²⁹¹

It is important to note that the Pentecostal Churches also criticize catholic practices as being unbiblical and based on human traditions. Thus they fail to recognize the biblical root of Catholic practices and that the Bible itself is part of the holy tradition of the Church. The Protestants also say that Catholics do not read the scriptures and that they worship the Saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary instead of worshipping only God. Thus they fail to recognize the difference in veneration which is honour to the saints and asking them for their intercession (*Dulia*) and the special honor to Virgin Mary as the Mother of God (*Hyper dulia*) and asking her for her intercession, and worship and adoration which is due to only God alone (*Latria*) as the Creator of all things visible and invisible. He alone governs and sustains all beings and He is the Beginning and End of all things. The Protestants also think that Catholic Church is ineffective and inactive in the lives of Christians because she has left the path of early Christians and also the path of the Spirit of God and has made herself immobile with human structures such as the hierarchy. Damboriena's idea of what the Pentecostals think about the Catholic Church is also true in the Nigerian scene. As he stated,

Modern Pentecostals assert that the decline of charismatic gifts was a sign that the church has abandoned its original fervour and had succumbed to the pagan influences in theology and liturgy. As contributing causes they adduce the church's increase hierarchisation, the fight against heretical factions and a kind of obsession for logical definition of truth. The result was an overly institutionalized Christianity, a theology based exclusively on theoretical and non-experimental principles, a rationalist understanding of Christian life, the elimination of the freedom of the spirit and of the spontaneous understanding and practice of Christ's message.²⁹²

²⁹¹ J. Obi OGUJIOFOR, African Worldview, New Religious Movements and the Demands of Sciento-Technological Advancement, in: Bigard Theological Studies, Vol. 24, No.1, Jan – June 2004, 8, in: ACHUNIKE, Hilary, C., The Influences of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests, 47f.

²⁹² P. DAMBORIENA, Tongues As Of Fire: Pentecostalism in Contemporary Christianity, Washington 1969, 2, in: ACHUNIKE, Hilary, C., The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria, 53.

That being said, we get back to the influences of Pentecostalism and gospel of prosperity on the Catholic priests and laity.

There are Catholic clergy and laity in Nigeria who react to the influences of Pentecostalism not necessarily by criticizing Pentecostalism in its totality, but by denouncing the abuse and deceit that could be found in most of them like the mechanisms of gospel of prosperity preachers. These priests and sometimes lay faithful then establish similar healing ministries and adoration centres in order to curb the influx of Catholics to Pentecostal Churches and maybe save them from falling prey to the antics of gospel of prosperity preachers. Rev. Fr. Godwin Ikeobi is said to be one of those early priests who pioneered healing ministries in Nigeria in order to curb the influx of Catholics to churches and ministries where they could be exploited. Celestine Obi, a close associate of him narrated how it all started:

*One afternoon in May 1972, he read to me an article in a Nigeria weekly paper attacking the fraudulent practices of one Prayer Group leader in Igboland. Both of us agreed that the abuse of a thing, a good practice, should not stop or forbid its use. He then decided on starting a prayer group at home after studies in Paris. His idea was to found a group that prayed, a healing ministry after the mind of Christ. Fr Goddy continued Christ's Healing Ministry in all the parishes he was pastor. He showed the people how to bring life's vicissitudes in this holy exercise. He taught them the nuts and bolts of prayer. Christianity is not a way out but a way through life. Prayer is not a miracle drug to make life easy and without suffering. Christianity does not give escape from life's burden but strength for meeting them as they come. Ikeobi shared the joys and sorrows of his clients while at the same time pointing out how we are often our worst enemies: consciously and willfully living a bad life and expecting good to result from it.*²⁹³

Thus although Ikeobi established healing ministry, he never promised Christians freedom from problems and sufferings as in the case of prosperity gospel preachers but taught them that prayers can give one strength to go through one's ordeals. In this line Innocent Odingba who is also a member of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal - a religious group in the Catholic Church which like the Pentecostals emphasis on the Holy Spirit – warns against what he called “a crossless Christianity”. He writes:

If there is anything like crossless Christianity, it may mean a type of following Christ that does not want to suffer or carry cross and follow Him. Maybe, a type of Christianity by registration

²⁹³ Celestine Adizue OBI, Oration and Tribute to the Late Rev. Fr. Godwin Ikeobi, on the Day of His Burial at the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Onitsha, Anambara State Nigeria, April 9, 2003, in: Brochure for the funeral Rites of Rev. Fr. G.C. Ikeobi, 179, in: ACHUNIKE, Hilary, C., The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria, 77f.

*or nomenclature, the type that promises crown of glory without first crown of thorn, the type of Christianity that follows miracles instead of miracles following them, the type that begets super-stars without super-scars.*²⁹⁴

That being said, the third group in the influence of Pentecostalism and gospel of prosperity on Catholics in Nigeria is the group of Catholic priests and laity in Nigeria who succumb to the influences of Pentecostalism and Gospel of prosper that they begin to adopt their methods especially in the liturgy. They ask their congregations to bring their tithe, they engage themselves in series of healing ministries and seek to influence or be admired by their congregations by ingraining in their liturgies different unorthodox or un-catholic practices that are associated with prosperity gospel healers or even African traditional religion healers. Like Prosperity gospel preachers, they sometimes try to trace the causes of people's poverty to ancestral curses and perform rituals to liberate them from the so called curses. They read the books and listen to the audio or video recordings of the prosperity gospel preachers and imbibe their teachings in their preaching and homilies. Commenting on this Uzukwu stated

*More often than not, "priest-healers" become tin gods! Combining in their own person the power of seers, healers, and priest representing God, they receive the thank-offering of grateful votaries. When challenged about either orthodoxy or orthopraxy, they claim either that "it works" or that "it is what our people want/need". And because they have been enriched through thank-offerings, they become untouchables, outlaws! ... The fear that this use of sacred power may empower the "healers" to create their own sects in is becoming a reality in Nigeria. A change in theory and practice of ministry is called for in Nigeria and African Church.*²⁹⁵

It is not the healing ministries that are here criticized. Healing is a gift of the Holy Spirit and the Church needs and acknowledges this gift among the children of God. The Nigerian Catholic Church also needs this ministry. Healing ministry in the Nigerian Catholic Church has contributed immensely to the edification and restoration of both Catholics and non-Catholics in Nigeria. This gift should be used to serve God and His people. What is criticized here is the exploitation of the people of God through the tendencies found in gospel of prosperity – the tendency to associate illness or poverty with personal sins or curses and the prioritizing of financial gains.

²⁹⁴ Innocent ODIMGBE, *Crossless Christianity*, Onitsha 2001, 5, in: ACHUNIKE, Hilary, C., *The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria*, 44.

²⁹⁵ Elochukwu E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. New York 1996, 123, in: ACHUNIKE, Hilary, C., *The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria*, 84.

Many Pentecostal churches are also doing great work among the children of God. Catholics and the Catholic Church in Nigeria have had also positive influences from Pentecostal churches like the use of public address system, gospel music, singing of choruses and clapping of hands in the churches and many other things. So it is not Pentecostalism in its entirety that is here criticised but the attitude of abracadabra, exploitation and deceit that are found in most prosperity gospel preachers in some Pentecostal churches.

The prosperity gospel tendencies as a whole represent one of the current manifestations of the Igbo - Nigerian – African Christian faith crisis. Despite the glaring shortcomings in their theologies, prosperity preachers have continued to attract floods of Igbo and African followers to their churches; finding acceptance and applause among them. The reason for this is said to be the fact that the concerns expressed in the prosperity gospel match with the African worldview. Africans, from time immemorial have been longing for freedom from sickness, demon oppression, and poverty.²⁹⁶ Igbo African tradition and culture abhorred poverty as failure and believed the righteous and innocent should not experience calamities; it is believed that good things follow good people and bad things follow bad people. One reaps what one has sown. Thus the message of the prosperity preachers matches the world of retribution as contained in Igbo African traditional religion. Members of their congregations believe that suffering is always the work of the evil one and the evil one has no power over the sons and daughters of God. For the real Christians who still experience suffering, this is a dilemma. They are absolved in faith crises and God question.

Like the friends of Job in the Old Testament book of Job, the prosperity gospel preachers try to make people feel guilty by maintaining that their personal sins or ancestral curses are the causes of their sufferings and situations. They themselves claim to be real children of God favoured by God by leading flamboyant life styles. They employ many deceitful ways and wrong interpretations of the Bible to extort money from the people in order to sponsor and maintain their expensive life styles.

²⁹⁶G. O. FOLARIN, Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria: A re- examination of the concept, impact, and evaluation, in: African journal of biblical studies, Vol. XXIII, No. II; October 2006, 85.

4.4.5 ASSESSMENT GOSPEL OF PROSPERITY

The place of Prosperity Gospel in Pentecostalism and wider Christendom is highly contentious and ambiguous. As Coleman pointed out, “If the Movement’s supporters regard it as a revival of old faiths and a reclamation of the Christian’s right to have dominion over the earth, opponents see the Faith Gospel as dangerous in its irresponsible claims to solve all problems – spiritual, physical and financial.”²⁹⁷ Some authors see the prosperity gospel as heretical especially in their crude emphasis on prosperity. They maintain that its conferment of total power on believers has cultic rather than Christian origin.²⁹⁸

Studies show that prosperity gospel thrives in a situation of despondency, economic depression, social breakdown and political upheavals and instabilities. Thus the success of prosperity gospel in the USA is said to be associated with the wide spread disenchantment with mid-twentieth-century liberalism.²⁹⁹ This is the case both in Africa and also in Latin America. A study conducted in relation to Faith or Prosperity Gospel in Brazil holds that “In the context of declining real wages and high levels of underemployment and unemployment, the health and wealth gospel of post-modern Pentecostal churches ... reverberates through the slums of Brazil.”³⁰⁰ Though this is true, however prosperity gospel ministers also establish their churches and ministries in the cities in order to attract the rich, middle class and working class people. For example in Nigeria, cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt etc. reverberate with prosperity preachers. Many poor people flood to prosperity preacher in order to be helped to achieve their believed destiny to be rich or to be healed.

Be that as it may, not all the principles of prosperity gospel are vicious. There is in a very few prosperity gospel messages talks on the importance of training and skills. But this is very minute and most times is drown in the very loud emphasis on wealth through promise and not through skills. In fact most of the prosperity gospel churches in Nigeria do not talk on skills but on unmerited miracles that the believers would receive. They employ abracadabra and confer false hopes on the susceptible and gullible believers in order to

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 27.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid, 46.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 27.

³⁰⁰ R. CHESNUT, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*, in: COLEMAN, Simon, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, 37.

induce or even coerce them towards bringing out financial contributions or donations. Prosperity gospel has also helped in supporting unjust structures and authoritarian regimes in Africa. According to Coleman, findings made from studies by Gifford show that the gospel of prosperity oriented Rhema Bible church in Randburg Johannesburg founded in 1979 by Ray McCauley who was ordained by the American minister Kenneth Hagin

*has helped to support state authority and therefore draw attention away from the need for social change. For prosperous white South Africans, Faith ideas are said to present comforting messages that emphasise the need for order in society and justify the possession of wealth as sign of divine grace. For poorer blacks in Africa on the other hand, the preachers of wealth and health do not appear to have practical schemes for societal development but present alluring images of efficiencies linked to foreign missionaries as well as a form of prosperity that do not rely on the initial possession of resources.*³⁰¹

It is clear to an average Nigerian that the rhetoric of prosperity preachers which are most times based on retribution and pure affirmation are bereft of touch with realities in Nigeria. There are many hardworking and God- fearing people who are poor and who are beseeched with one kind of suffering or the other. Poverty, sickness and other forms of sufferings in Nigeria have different causes that are not necessarily based on or determine the moral or spiritual state of the individual. I interpret the Gospel of prosperity in the words of Reikerstorfer as containing “an almost pagan propensity to affirmation, which does not allow for any suffering unto God, does not know about any suffering unto God and so suppresses any kind of eschatological unrest.”³⁰² It propagates “a kind of theology which no longer misses anything, which cultivates the ‘happiness of immediacy’ ... and abandons the transcending power of ... sorrowful interruption.”³⁰³ It does not make room for suffering in the life of a Christian and suppresses doubts and uncertainty that are characteristics of faith experience in the bible. What Terrien said of the friends of Job can be rightfully applied to them:

*In their view, religion is a matter of trade, humility an insurance policy, and morality a coin that buys peace of soul and prosperity. On the surface, their creed is a magnificent one and their theism unblemished. Looked at more closely, their belief is not faith ... They are defending not God but their own need for security ... Their theism has become a subtle form of idolatry.*³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Ibid, 32.

³⁰² Johann REIKERSTORFER, What Price God-Talk , in: Downey, John, K. / Manemann, Jürgen / Ostivich, Steven, T. (eds.), Missing God? Culrural Amnesia and Political Theology, Berlin 2006, 165.

³⁰³ Ibid, 164.

³⁰⁴S. TERRIEN, Job, in: GUTIERRÉZ, 114.

Another form of Christian faith crisis is gradually creeping into the Igbo Christians both at home and in diaspora. This is expressed in a kind of rejection of religion in totality. Thus, the last form of faith crisis of the Igbo Christians.

4.5 TOTAL REJECTION OF CHRISTIANITY AND RELIGION

Some Igbo and African people whose parents were Christians and who were raised as Christians or attended Christian schools are turning their back on Christianity for different reasons especially the historical aspects of faith crisis. Some of these people, when they were unable to revert to the African traditional religion because of their lack of contact with the African religion *ab initio* - since they were born in Christian homes when the evangelization of Africa had already taken place and Christianity had become the way of life of the people -turn out to reject all religions *in toto*. Though this approach may not be so rampant at present, it is however gradually creeping into the Igbo and African Christian reality among people both at home and in Diaspora. This is exasperated through the involvement of social media and information technology. Videos and documentaries which tend to and to some extent has succeeded in discouraging people of black race from identifying with religions especially Christianity because of their dehumanization of the African person in history are being circulated. For the Igbos who would not want to revert to African traditional religion, it is highly unlikely that they will adopt Islam since they have no favourable contact with the religion. There is always religious disturbances and violence in the northern part of Nigeria where the Muslims constitute the majority. In such religious violence, Igbos in the North are always victims since they are regarded as Christians. The constant tension between the North and South -East part of Nigeria has made most people in the south eastern and south southern parts of Nigeria to see Islam to be inimical to them. This is also the same with the Muslims in the North who regard every Igbo person as a Christian, and therefore an infidel. It must be said that the Muslims from the northern part of Nigeria who reside in the south east of Nigeria practice their faith without any hindrance from the Christians who constitute the majority there. As a result of the aforementioned situations in Nigeria, when an Igbo person rejects Christianity, it is either he rejects all religions or he reverts to African traditional religion.

In this reaction to the faith crisis, they regard Christianity as a form of ideological enslavement of Africans. They regard Christianity as a religion which inhibits Africans from taking their fates in their hands and effecting total revolutionary change in Africa. Christians are taught or deceived, they maintain, to wait for the world beyond where they will enjoy perfect bliss and satisfaction thus making them numb to revolution and subservient to exploitation and suffering. They also observed that Christianity offers the western nation means of controlling Africans since the established African churches like Roman Catholic or Anglican and many other churches must always take orders from Rome or London or America. In addition, the heads of these churches advise Africans to bear their sufferings, while they themselves will be wallowing in luxury. This is expressed by the popular African artist Fela Alikpola Kuti in most of his songs on religion. These Africans hold that Christianity has uprooted and displaced Africans from their religious and cultural base and has made them to sit on the fence – neither being authentically Africans, nor authentically Christians since Christianity is enrobed in Europeanism. Thus the crisis of identity of the Africans. This reaction occurs especially on the basis of historical faith crisis, but also existential and cultural.

This kind of reaction or approach to the faith crisis by a total rejection of Christianity and most times of religion occurs most especially amongst the educated Africans and amongst the youths. The connection of Christianity with slavery, colonialism and racial ideologies facilitates this kind of reaction to faith crisis. This reaction occurs also amongst Igbo Africans who are living in the Western world. The harsh realities of racism and subjugations led them to question the faith brought to them by the “oppressors”. Some of them come to the awareness of the share contradiction in the lives of those whose forbearers brought them the message of love, and the actual practice of racism. They could not have meant well for them. Actions speak louder than words. Most of them think Christianity was a means used by the Europeans to conquer Africa since most of the Europeans no longer attend church services or profess the Christian faith. Hence a popular idiomatic story to illustrate their doubts and discontents has it that at the time of the coming of the missionaries to Africa, the Africans had the land, and the missionaries had the bible. Then the missionaries told Africans to close their eyes for prayers. The Africans, having total trust in the missionaries and believing it was the custom and norms of the new faith

obeyed and closed their eyes only to open their eyes at the end of the prayers to discover to their utmost amazement, bewilderment and perplexity that the “missionaries” now have their land, and they – the Africans have only the bibles of the missionaries – a millennium trick. It was a way of saying that missionaries were ideologists in disguise who used Christianity to dislodge and dispossess the Africans of all aspects of life.

Here, the *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism, while maintaining a call for bringing questions, doubts, pains and disappointments to God in prayers and a call for the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth, emphasizes also concrete actions of resistance against oppression and racism that are in consonance with the Bible. It has to emphasis the difference between the Christian message as is contained in the Bible, and the real lives of individual Christians which may contradict the message of the Bible. In connection to the political theological feature of narratives, *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism emphasizes the telling of liberative stories of how the contextual interpretation of the bible and discovery of liberative motives helped the enslaved Africans to reject their enslavement and “disssubjecification” and move to freedom as subjects. So there is emphasis on liberative narratives and contextual interpretation of the bible.

The Igbo traditional prayer form of *Ofo na Ogu* brings the anxiety of the praying subject and his society into the prayer. Thus there will be in the next chapter a look at this *Igbo Ofo na Ogu* prayer form that is akin to the payer tradition of psalms and the Book of Job. *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form imbibed into the Christian consciousness is antidote to this false form of Christianity as found in the gospel of prosperity which is immune to suffering and crisis. It will irrigate the true biblical form of Christianity that incorporates suffering and crisis into the prayer life of Christians.

CHAPTER FIVE

OFO NA OGU MYSTICISM AND IGBO CULTURE

5.1 IGBO OFO NA OGU MYSTICISM

Religion is the epicentre of the dealings of the traditional Igbo African person. As expressed in my aforementioned work,

*A typical traditional Igbo man is “notoriously religious”. Religion permeates every aspect of his life: social, economic, political, cultural and otherwise. He sees reality not as a sundering between physical and spiritual, visible and invisible, sacred and profane. He rather sees reality as one whole entity with its different forces intersecting, interacting intermingling, co- existing and complementing one another. Ill-health, epidemic and natural disasters are seen as anthropological or cosmic disorder. In such situations, the traditional Igbo man seeks for the causes of the disorder. He does this through the consultation of diviners or fortune tellers. When he finds out the cause of the disharmony in his environment, and the diviners has ascertained that he or any member of his community consciously or unconsciously has gone against any of the ordinances of nature and of the gods, he moves forward to appease the gods through sacrifices and rituals. Through these sacrifices he seeks to bring back harmony in his life and environment. It is the belief of a traditional Igbo man that when he has fulfilled all his obligations and duties, the gods owe it to him as a duty to protect him.*³⁰⁵

These religious and moral obligations of righteousness, innocence, truthfulness, justice in Igbo consciousness known as (intangible) *Ofo*, serve as an authority to demand wellbeing, harmony, peace and progress in one’s own personal and communitarian existence. “May the spirits not cheat human beings, and let the men not cheat the spirits” is a popular proverb in Igbo land.”³⁰⁶This authority from uprightness is in Igbo term the *Ofo* of one’s life. But when despite the authority from righteousness, calamities still befall an innocent person or evil things occur in the person’s life in succession, the traditional Igbo man will raise up a prayer of protest known as *iju Ogu* to protest against the evil occurrences in his life. The concepts of *Ofo* and *Ogu* are two components that come together in the prayer of protest of an innocent and righteous Igbo person. We shall go forward to elucidate on the two- in- one concept and how it is connected to the rest of Igbo tradition and culture.

³⁰⁵ NWAIWU, 9f.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 10

5.1.1OFO

Ofo is defined as a “spiritualized socio-political symbol of leadership, authority, truth and justice”³⁰⁷

Ilogu and Metuh defined *Ofo* in the same manner thus:

Ofo bu akara nke eziokwu, ikpenkwumoto, ikike ochichi, inwere onwe, ekpere ruru Chineke nti, n'ike di n'aka umunwoke, na umunna bu ude; ...

Ofo bu akara nke Eziokwu, ikpenkwumoto, ikwuwa aka oto, ike ochichi na ikike igo ma obu ikpere Chineke na ndi mmuo ekpere”

This means “*Ofo* is the symbol of truth, justice, power of leadership, freedom, prayer that reaches God’s ear, reserved power for the men and strength in kinsmen ...

Ofo is a symbol of truth, justice, righteousness, power of leadership, worship and prayer to God and the spirits”³⁰⁸

The concept of *Ofo* is divided into two: Tangible and Intangible.

TANGIBLE OFO

Tangible *Ofo* is a sacred stick or staff, made out of a particular tree known as *Detarium Senegalense*:³⁰⁹ The Igbos believe that Chukwu gave them this tree to use in the administration of justice. As Ilogu noted

“... *Ofo* made out of these branches (*Detarium senegalense*) is the abode of the dead ancestors, hence its authority and sacredness as well as the special place given to it as the emblem of unity, truth and indestructibility for the individual or group possessing it.”³¹⁰ Thus this staff, once consecrated assumes a sacred role within the community, group, person or persons that possess it and becomes a vehicle through which prayers could be sent to the spiritual world. In this sense, the *Ofo* stick is tapped on the ground after prayers

³⁰⁷Jecinta Uchenna IKEGWU, *Ofo as a Cultural Resource and its Significance in Igbo Cultural Area*, in: IKENGA, International Journal of Institute of African Studies, vol.14 No 1, Nsukka 2012 , 327.

³⁰⁸ Cf. Jecinta Uchenna IKEGWU, *Ofo as a Cultural Resource and its Significance in Igbo Cultural Area*, in: IKENGA, International Journal of Institute of African Studies, vol.14 No 1, Nsukka 2012, 328.

³⁰⁹ Some scholars opine that the tree is *Detarium Elestica* or *Detarium Microcarpum*. Different parts of Igbo land use the type that is located in that area. In some part of Igbo land, *Ofo* is made from bronze or iron. What is important is that it is a sacred sign of authority and justice.

³¹⁰ ILOGU, in: IKEGWU, 327.

are said to seal it and to transmit the words spoken to the world of the spirits. *Ofo* is also used in the administration of justice. It is the sacred sign of justice uprightness and truthfulness among the Igbo people. Thus *Ofo* comes into play in arbitration and one is bound to say only the truth before the *Ofo*. The *Ofo* holders or elders in the community are expected to administer only justice. It is believed that *Ofo* will harm the person who tells lies before it.

In this regard, Ikegwu stated that "... the origin of *Ofo* is uncertain among the Igbo traditional society and is as old as Chukwu who gave *Ofo* to the Igbo people to administer justice."³¹¹ There are different kinds of tangible *Ofo*. As the tangible *Ofo* is not the main interest of this research work, we are not going to enumerate on them. The main interest of this work is the intangible *Ofo*.

INTANGIBLE OFO

The Intangible *Ofo* is the internal authority derived from uprightness and innocence. It is the act of inner righteousness that justifies a man as blameless. This authority empowers the Igbo man to expect goodness and wellbeing in his life because he believes that good things follow good and upright living. So the Igbo people say "*Ome mma na mma na aga, ome njo na njo na aga*" (goodness follows good and righteous people while evil follows evil men). This authority enables him also to demand justice and fairness from spirits and humans when he is experiencing anything contrary to this expectation.

When the Igbos say "*Ejim Ofo, ejim Ogu na okwua*," They mean "I am on the part of justice, righteousness, honesty and truth in this matter" When they say "*Ejim Ofo aga*" It means the power and authority that come from innocence and righteousness is my strength and life principle." Enumerating on this *Ofo* Ekwuru elaborately stated:

The traditional Igbo believed that truth and justice go hand in hand ... This moral theme ... is variously manifested in ... proverbs: Ejim gi Ofo, "my hands are innocent on this matter;" Ofo is associated with the just and upright ... Hence with this proverb the speaker affirms his uprightness. One who feels he is just may further say: Ejim Ogu ejim Ofo, I am totally on the side of justice." And when one tries to claim falsely what does not belong to him, in order to remind the person of the need of truth and justice, the traditional Igbo asks metaphorically "Iji kwa Ofo(?), "have you truth and justice on your side? When one stands by truth and justice, he is always considered to be safe from the adverse or negative effect of Ofo use; ... One with Ofo

³¹¹ Jacinta Uchenna IKEGWU, 328.

which implies truthfulness and justice, will always go free, for the gods kill evil doers. In this sense the Igbo sums it up, that Oji Ofo ga – ana “the man on the side of Ofo will always reach home (the just man shall always be vindicated).”³¹²

Ofo as an act of inner righteousness, justification and innocence permeates the entire life and understanding of the Igbo traditional people that it is enshrined in their personal names such as *Ejimofo* – I have justice in my favour; *Ofobuike* – Justice is strength; *Ofoka* – justice is superior; *Ofokansi* – justice is greater than poison, *Ofoegbu* – may justice not kill, *Ogujiofo* – A right that is fought with a right cause.

The Igbo people say further proverbially, *Ome ihe jide Ofo* – Everyone should be just in his or her dealings or let everyone act justly or keep one’s hands clean from evil; *Ejim Ofo ka ogwu* – My own charm or posser is truthfulness. *Ofo ka idide ji awa ala* – With uprightness, one can bring about wonders; *Okwu eji Ofo kwue, na eru ebe Chukwu* – Words spoken with Ofo reach God’s abode. Thus Enyeribe Onuoha summarized what Ofo meant for the Igbo people thus:

Ofo bu eziokwu, Ofo bu Ikpekwooto, Ofo bu ndu;

*Ofo di nso, Ofo dire, Ofo ka nsi, Ofo ka aja, Ofo na eche uwa nche*³¹³

This means *Ofo* is truth, *Ofo* is justice, *Ofo* is life, *Ofo* is sacred, *Ofo* is effective, *Ofo* is stronger than poison, *Ofo* is more effective than sacrifice, *Ofo* governs the world.

What the intangible *Ofo* embodies are qualities and actions of universal significance - “actions such as punctuality, truthfulness, good character formation (moral uprightness), obedience, regularity.”³¹⁴

³¹² Emeka George EKWURU, *Igbo Cosmology. The Ontogeny and Hermeneutics of Igbo Sculpture*, Owerri 2009, 160.

³¹³ E. ONUOHA, *Coloquium: Igbo Traditional Religion – The Mechanics for Renewal*, Ministry of Information, Owerri 1982, in: NWAORGU, Andrew, E., *Cultural Symbols: The Christian Perspective*, Owerri 2001, 21. We described in the previous chapter, a brand of Pentecostalism that advocates a total break up of Christianity with African culture. That means the it does not favour dialogue or inculturation. It fails to recognize what is good in African culture because advocates maintain, as they were told by early missionaries that everything African in African culture is evil. Nwaorgu could be said to be one of those Pentecostalists that do not favour the dialogue of African culture with Christianity. This attitude comes more out of distortion, lack of deep understanding of Christian message and the African culture. It is against the spirit of Second Vatican council (NA2).

³¹⁴ Jacinta Uchenna IKEGWU, 328.

When the upright man – a man of *Ofo* - experiences evil, he protests against this evil situation through *iju ugu*.

5.1.2 IJU OGU

At a time of unexplainable affliction and distress, the traditional Igbo man protests his innocence through *iju ugu (itu ugu)*.

Iju ugu is a prayer of protest to Chukwu or the gods and deities for underserved suffering one is experiencing. There is a high notion of justice amongst the ancient Igbo people. It is believed that the moral actions of human beings helped in preserving the world order and regulate occurrence of events. Human beings were therefore not only observers, but also co-operators in the maintenance of the world order. This is because there was the belief that people and in fact everything is connected to one another morally and spiritually and the universe is not a product of chance. Everything that happens in the universe has a reason and there is an Eternal Spirit – Chukwu – governing the universe and who is also the guarantor of its order. The gods and spirits are placed over specific areas of control and governance but human beings are not left out in the maintenance of equilibrium in the universe. Through his moral, spiritual and social actions, man helps either in sustaining the order and equilibrium in the universe or in bringing everything in disarray. The bringing of the order and equilibrium in disarray through the actions or inactions of man results in famine, draught, defeat in wars, death, barrenness, sickness and other ills and sufferings. As Éla pointed out, “in cases of misfortune, - sickness, a poor harvest... drought, sterility of couple, death of a wife or a child, any kind of failure, or successive deaths in the family, the diviner often attributes these sad events to misdeed.”³¹⁵ But the moral and spiritual actions of man bring about great harvest, fruitfulness, fertility, rainy season and dry season in their proper order, good health, riches etc. This law of nature does not only govern the society and community but also the individual. Through his actions, a human being determines his fate and future and that of his household. If he is a man of moral action, a man of truthfulness, a man who has the intangible *Ofo* in him, sickness, deaths and other forms of calamities would not come his way. But if he is a man of evil ways, he would always receive the repercussion of his actions in forms of calamities. Thus

³¹⁵ Jean Marc ÉLA, *My faith as an African*, 21.

*The Igbo traditional man believes in retributive justice. He believes in divine retribution in its traditional setting. He believes that evil would only come upon the man who has sinned. No just man would or should suffer. He believes that only when one has gone against the ordinances of the gods or nature, when one has committed grave offences that grave tribulations will come upon him.*³¹⁶

But when in spite of one's innocence one is still experiencing calamities, there is then *iju ugu* prayer of protest. - *Iju ugu* is preceded and accompanied by *Ofo* which shows the inner nature of the one that is offering the *iju ugu* prayer as righteous. Thus when one says *Ejim ofo na Ogu* one is literally saying "I am innocent and I call for my vindication" In this case, *Ofo* is the internal truthfulness of a righteous man who is offering the *iju ugu* prayer.

There is among the Igbo people the belief in the communitarian effect of grave sins. That is why certain sacrifices and rituals are undertaken to ward off impending dangers when it is observed that someone has committed a taboo. Hence the Igbos say: *otu aka ruta mmanu, ozuo ndi ozo onu*, meaning that when one finger touches oil, other fingers would invariably be smeared by it – when someone commits a taboo, it affects all the members of the community. At sometimes, the person that committed the taboo may be ostracized or expelled from the community in order that he may not bring calamities upon the whole community. However, in the cases of adverse communitarian effect of grave sins, the adverse effect is experienced by all the members of the community. It comes in forms of pestilence, draught or famine. In this case, the community would offer sacrifices through its traditional priests to cleanse the people of any unknown sins.

But when a particular person or household who feels that he, she or it has not committed any taboo or abomination, a person who feels he or she is upright and righteous, who feels he or she has observed all the ordinances of the gods, nature and tradition, when in spite of the uprightness he or she is visited by untold hardship or calamities like untimely death, unexplainable disease, or destruction of one's crops or investments, or when someone feels he or she is being victimized by the strong and powerful in the land because he or she is not influential, or he/ she feels there is a miscarriage of justice against him/ her or that people are trying to forcefully take away what belongs to him or her, he or she normally embarks on the prayer of *Iju Ugu*. It is a protest prayer against injustice and oppression that

³¹⁶ NWAIWU, 52

one may be experiencing, and a protest prayer against perceived undeserved sufferings and unexplainable calamities. In the Iju Ogu prayer,

*He declared that he has neither bore nor executed any evil intention against any human being and as such, if the misfortune is coming from a human being, he implores on the gods to intervene and vindicate him; let the gods reward each person according to his deeds while vindicating the innocent. He declares that he had not committed any abomination and therefore, if he is being tormented by evil spirits, he prays that the ancestors, his personal chi, the deities and above all Chukwu should intervene and redeem him. This protest prayer is known as iju ugu.*³¹⁷

As Ndiokere, citing Metu described it,

*... itu ugu could be described as the prayer of persecuted soul. It is offered by person who is plagued by undeserved misfortunes inflicted by a spirit or a fellow human being. In the former case the offerer would beg the spirit to leave him alone because he has done nothing wrong. In the later case the protester prays the spirit to punish his persecutors because he had done them no wrong.*³¹⁸

In the Igbo prayer of iju Ogu, there is a call for vindication, a call for justice, a call for justification and a call for liberation. It is a beckon on God to restore man to wholeness amidst humiliation and dissubjecification, in the midst of rejection and dejection. It is a call on Chukwu and the good spirits whom one believes to be the guarantors of justice and liberation.

Iju Ogu is only undertaken by a person who believes he is innocent and unjustly manhandled or mistreated either by the spirits or by humans. The belief in one's innocence also means a searching of heart, an examination of conscience. It is also a call on Chukwu and the good spirits to come to judgment and to come and examine one's deed and the deeds of men. The *Iju Ogu* prayer offerer tells Chukwu and the gods to punish him or her if he or she is found to be guilty. There is the belief that Chukwu and the gods who see everything and know the deeds of men cannot be deceived.

The prayer of iju Ogu is mostly spoken loud to the hearing of everyone who cares. It is not a silent prayers but most times dramatic. This is because one is neither afraid of the judgments of the spirits nor those of humans. The language used therein is most times radical and dramatic - characterised as the language of prayer. The *iju Ogu* prayer is most times offered in the open before the eyes of those who may be present. Most time, it is said

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Nathaniel I. NDIOKWERE, *The African Church Today and Tomorrow*, vol. 11, Enugu 1995, 70.

in front of one's house within one's compound. There is no calling on people to gather because one is offering *iju ugu* prayer but the voice and cries of the *iju Ogu* prayer offerer may draw attention of those within the compound or vicinity. It is most times undertaken alone and may be spontaneous. The words come from the heart and not from the head. The *Iju Ogu* prayer offerer may raise his hands and eyes to heaven to indicate the sincerity of his dealings and may say similar words like.

Elu lekwa aka m, Elu na Ala lekwa Aka m , Emegiderem onye? Aka m dikwa ocha. (Heaven look at my hands, Heaven and Earth look at my hands (examine me), whom did I wrong?(I did not wrong anyone) My hands are clean – Heaven and earth examine me and see that I am innocent- vindicate me.)

This is a traditional way of calling on the universe, visible and invisible alike to come and examine one thoroughly and to declare one as innocent. The prayer may be undertaken standing or one may decide to take another posture as one may be moved. Sometimes the *iju Ogu* prayer offerer touches the ground and throws up sand as a form of oath of innocence. The Earth goddess is the mother of all deities and guarantor of law and order. Earth goddess (Ala) is a powerful deity whose wrath can threaten the very existence of man. The *iju Ogu* prayer Offerer is a kind of putting his very existence at stake in order to prove his innocence and to call for vindication as in the case of Job. He or she asks the gods to punish him or her if he or she were to be found guilty but otherwise, to vindicate him or her. It is Chukwu that is most especially appealed to but one calls also on deities and ancestors to come to one's help.³¹⁹

Iju Ogu would be the traditional Igbo people understanding of the prayers of Job in the Book of Job as we shall later see and Job will be understood as a man who has *Ofo* (justice) on his side.

We shall now examine the African belief system and world view in their connectivity with *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form.

³¹⁹ Cf. Nwaiwu, 52f

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE IGBO AFRICAN BELIEF SYSTEM AND TRADITION

If culture is the totality of the way of life of a people, then a people cannot be understood without an understanding of their culture. An exposition of the culture and world view of the Igbo people will help for an understanding of the people who are at the centre of this research work. Again since *Ofo na Ogu* is an Igbo prayer form that comes from the Igbo culture, it would be proper to give a larger picture of the culture from where *Ofo na Ogu* emerges and how this prayer form connects and relates to other cultural components of the Igbo tradition. This will provide a foundational understanding of the Igbo *Ofo an Ogu* prayer form. Thus, here some of the key features of the Igbo- African tradition and culture would be examined.³²⁰

5.2.1 PREAMBLE

There is an understanding that the Igbo people have a holistic view of reality. This means that the Igbo reality is composed of different components and aspects that are interrelated to one another. These components of reality are not necessarily seen as being in opposition to one another but they are seen as aspects of a dynamic harmonious whole in a proper and constant relationality. These aspects are interwoven and complement one another for a proper equilibrium in the universe. All aspects of life are permeated by religion so that one may not observe a clear cut distinction between the secular and the religious. Man's activities on earth are not only related to one another but they are also connected to the world of spirits. In this regard Echema stated that

It is a difficult task to deal with religion, culture and moral of a people like the Igbo as a separate entity since there is no dichotomy among these realities. Igbo world view is one of an extraordinary harmony and coherence, where it is difficult to distinguish the sacred from the secular, the natural from the supernatural or the animate from the inanimate (...) This harmonious view of the world of the Igbo means a system of thought in which religion, politics, social theory, history medicine, psychology, birth and burial rites were all neatly interwoven in such a way that to isolate one item from the whole means to destabilize the entire structure . For

³²⁰ This exposition was also done in my Master thesis, *The Understanding and Relevance of the Book of Job in the Context of the Igbo Tradition and Faith Crisis*, 37-66. Naturally, some of the features found in that work is also found in the present work.

*the Igbo, there is no word for religion as such, because it is not something that is objectified in their thought system, but rather is an aspect of life.*³²¹

While explaining this view, Njoku calls for caution and proper understanding of what the holistic Igbo worldview means in order not to fall into the hands of racist ideologists. The Igbo African holistic view should not be interpreted in terms of monism – a system where there is no recognition of distinction between aspects or phases of existence. The conceptional and existential distinction between these aspects of existence is clear and clearly shows itself in Igbo conceptions, thoughts and actions. However, these aspects are not necessarily seen as juxtapose to one another, as acting in opposition to one another but are seen in terms of relationality and complementarity. Thus he stated that

*... caution however should be exercised so that the close relationship that is meant to exist between the two realms of reality will not be interpreted as some kind of monism, or playing into the hands of Hegel who charged that the African had not reached the level of consciousness where he could make a distinction between himself and a personal being. Certainly the African recognized a distinction between the sacred and the profane, otherwise what does the designation of some places, altars and persons as sacred mean? All it amounts to is that reality is better understood in complementary terms, not in terms of opposition. Diverse entities do not have to act in opposing fashions; they are better seen as complements for they reinforce one another. The sacred and profane are two sides of the order of existence. These two orders at once transcend and indwell in each other... Mutual accommodation then exists between the created existences and the divine.*³²²

We shall examine these different aspects of the traditional and cultural lives and realities of the Igbo people. These aspects still play a vital part in their understanding and life of Christianity. There will be the examination of the religious, cosmological cum metaphysical, their moral worldviews, anthropological worldview and social classification. Most of the aspects and components of their culture and tradition are anchored in eternal truth and universal principles and therefore compatible or even manifestation of Christian principles. Some others however are not compatible with Christianity. Later in this chapter we shall also discuss the features of political theology as they relate to Igbo culture.

³²¹ Augustine ECHEMA, Corporate personality in Traditional Igbo society and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in: OGBUNANWATA, Benignus, Chukwunedum, New Religious Movements or Sects. A Theological and Pastoral Challenge to the Catholic Church, Bern 2001, 32.

³²² Francis O. C. NJOKU, Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology, Owerri 2002, 166.

5.3 RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEM AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE

Scholars of religion have put forward basic or cardinal points on which African religion hinges. For G. Parrinder, the West African religions have five basic cardinal belief elements: Belief in Supreme God or creator, belief in the chief divinities, belief in general non human spirits often associated with natural forces, the cult of ancestors of the clan and belief in charms and amulets.³²³ For E.B. Idowu, the four cardinal elements on which West African religion anchors are the belief in Supreme God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits and belief in the use and practice of magic and medicine.³²⁴ We shall approach our examination of the Igbo culture from these points including the cult of ancestors.

The Igbo people of West Africa are known for their deep religiosity. Thus Arthur G. Leonard said of the Igbo people that they

*Are in the strict and natural sense of the word a truly and deeply religious people, of whom it can be said as it has been said of the Hindus, that they eat religiously, drink religiously, bath religiously, dress religiously and sin religiously. In a few words, the religion of these natives (...) is their existence, and their existence is their religion.*³²⁵

The religious belief of the Igbo people touches those cardinal points as enumerated by E. B. Idowu and G. Parrinder. We shall attempt an enumeration of these religious cardinal points of the Igbo people.

5.3.1 THE BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING – CHUKWU

The ancient Igbo people's belief in a Supreme Being and Creator of heaven and earth is succinctly described by F. A. Arinze thus:

*God is the Supreme Spirit, the creator of everything. No one equals Him in power. He knows everything. He is altogether a good and merciful God and does harm to no one. He sends rain and especially children, and it is from Him that each individual derives his personal 'Chi'. But this Supreme Spirit has made many inferior spirits who are nearer to man and through whom man normally offers his worship to Him.*³²⁶

³²³E. G. PARRINDER, West African Religion , in: UGBOR, L., E., Prayer in Igbo Traditional Religion: Its meaning and Message for the Church in Igboland today, Exerpta ex dissertation ad Doctoratum in Facultate Theologie apud Institutum Spiritualitatis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Rome 1985, 6. (Subsequently as L. E. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo Religion).

³²⁴E.B. IDOWU, African Traditional Religion, in : L. E. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo Religion, 6.

³²⁵ Arthur G. LEONARD, The Lower Niger and its Tribes, in: OGBUNANWATA, New Religious Movement or Sects, 32.

³²⁶F. A. ARINZE, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, in: UGBOR, L., E., Payer in Igbo Religion, 14.

In the same line of thought, Ikenga Metu summarized the Igbo belief on Supreme One God in this way:

*God precedes everything in existence. He depends on nothing for His existence. He is therefore Ens a se, He exists of Himself. He is creator of everything, Lord of everything. He continues to preserve everything in existence, which therefore depends on Him for its continue existence. He is the Great Providence, Chukwu. God is powerful; He knows everything; He is all-good; He is in no way evil and cannot will evil... He is kind and merciful. Above all He is a person, and listens, understands and often grants our request.*³²⁷

Thus in line with Idowu and Parrinder classification of belief in a Supreme Being as one of the cardinal elements of the African belief systems, the ancient Igbo in the opinion of many Igbo scholars believed in a Supreme Being, the Creator of heaven and earth. They called this Supreme Being – Chukwu – Great God or Chineke – God the Creator. Chukwu created all things and other deities and put them in charge of different spheres of life and existence. These deities were directly worshipped but Chukwu was not directly worshipped. Thus it was taken that Chukwu is immanent in these deities and worships to the deities were taken as indirect worship to God.³²⁸

Chukwu also assigned to each created person a personal *Chi*. The personal *chi* were like guardian angels to protect one from evil forces and to lead one to one's destiny. Thus there is a strong belief in destiny (*akaraka*) which has been mapped out by Chukwu for every person. Since Chukwu is taken to be a great and good God, it is the supposition of every Igbo person that Chukwu has willed a good destiny for every person in as much as the person keeps the culture and tradition of the Igbo people and lead a just life both privately and publicly. When the situation shows otherwise despite one's uprightness (*Ofo*), the Igbo person protested through *iju Ogu* prayer form.

One recognizes another opinion which holds that the idea of Igbo belief in a Supreme God came with Christianity. Igbo tradition scholars of this opinion hold that the name "Chukwu" originally referred to a deity or an Oracle in an Igbo locality or town known as

³²⁷E. I. METU, *God and man in African Religion*, 41.

³²⁸ Cf. NWAIWU, 39.

Arochukwu. They opine that the missionaries only Christianized the name to refer to the Christian God.³²⁹

In defence of the Igbo belief in a Supreme God before the advent of Christianity Ikenga Metu made reference to a document of early explorers of Igbo land where distinctions were made between the belief in the deity at Arochukwu and the belief in the Supreme God among the Igbo people. Thus the document reads:

*The Igbos all believe in an Almighty –being, omnipresent and omniscient, whom they call Tshuku, whom they constantly worship, and whom they believe to communicate directly with them through his sacred shrine at Aro. But they speak also of another and distinct Deity, who at Abo is known as Orissa, but throughout other parts of Igbo, as Tshuku – Okike 'God the creator, or Supreme God.'*³³⁰

Olaudah Equano, an Igbo man who as a child was captured and sold as slave to the West Indies described in 1789 (prior to 1885 which marks the advent of Christianity in Igbo Nation) in his writings that his Igbo people had belief in a Supreme Being - God. Thus he stated:

*As to religion, the native believe that there is one creator of all things and that he leaves in the sun and is girded around with a belt that he may never eat or drink; but according to some, he smokes a pipe which is our favorite luxury. They believe he governs events, especially our deaths or captivity.*³³¹

Thus there are indications that the Igbo people professed belief in a Supreme Being prior to the advent of the missionaries. There are also several stories and myths among the Igbo people narrating the creation of things by Chukwu or Chineke – the God the Creator. Relating this to Igbo Christian belief today and the faith crisis the Igbo Christians experience, I stated in my aforementioned work thus:

With this traditional understanding of God, which still influences the Igbo Christians of today and is not in contradiction with the Christian conception of God, an average Igbo Christian is frustrated when the reverse seems to be the case. He is desperate when assess to God seems to be blurred by pains and sufferings. He continues to be perplexed by the presence of death, evil and suffering in the world created by God. In order to give explanations to the perplexities of evil and death in the world, the ancient Igbos adopted some myths to explain how evil came into

³²⁹Cf. E. I METU, God and Man in African Religion. A case study of the Igbo of Nigeria, Enugu 1999, 7ff. (subsequently as E. I. METU, God and man in African Religion).

³³⁰ W. B. BAKIE, Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the River Kwora and Binue commonly known as Niger and Tsadda, in: METU, E., I., God and man in African religion, A Case Study of Igbo of Nigeria, Enugu 1999, 13.

³³¹ Oludah EQUIANO, Oludah Equinao travels or the interesting Narratives of the life of Oludah Iquiano or Gustavus Vassa, in : METU, E. I, God and man in African religion, 11.

*the world. These myths showed that evil and death did not originate from God. In order to protect man from evil God gave the deities charge over man. They were to protect man from calamities when man kept the natural laws and ordinances of the gods. The gods were to be blamed when there was disharmony in reality.*³³²

When these calamities occurred to the Igbo traditional persons, he protested through *iju ogu* prayer form if he believed he was innocent. He always appealed especially to Chukwu to come and rescue him knowing that Chukwu is all good and does no harm to anyone.

5.3.2 THE BELIEF IN DEITIES AND DIFFERENT GODS

There was among the Igbo people the belief in deities and gods.

*These deities were worshipped by different communities. In traditional Igbo world view, deities occupied the next position after Chukwu in the ontological hierarchy of beings. These deities served as a kind of agents of Chukwu the Great God. Chukwu assigned to them different functions and areas in His administration of man and his world. These deities were created by Chukwu, the Great God.*³³³

Thus in Igbo land one found multiplicity of deities. Each community had its own deity or sometimes more than one deity. Shrines and altars were erected for and dedicated to these deities. Most times, shrines to these deities were located in places that were isolated from the residential areas of the community. These deities and gods had also priests attending to them who were also their mouth piece. Sacrifices were offered to these gods at designated times or when occasions demanded. These gods were seen as protectors and guardians of their communities. The gods were consulted through their priests before the communities embarked on serious issues and missions like wars. They were also consulted when their designated communities experienced adverse events and occurrences like draught, pestilence, or famine. The gods intermittently issued warnings to communities or people when they were seriously going against the basic norms of tradition or culture. They issued warnings against negligence, oppression, greed, injustice etc. They were also taken as guarantors of justice. As such, individuals were most times obliged to take oaths before them to prove their innocence. Oaths before them brought contestations to an end in favour of the one who took the oath.

³³²NWAIWU, 41

³³³Ibid.

In addition to community deities, there were also throughout Igbo land (or at least a greater part of it) also general deities designated for specific events in existence. As was elaborated in my aforementioned work,

Chukwu had given each of these deities their special duty on earth and area of specialization. For agriculture, Ahianjoku was to see for the growth of yam in the farm; Amadioha was the deity of thunder and justice. So Amadioha could only strike down somebody who had committed great offence against the natural order of things; Anyanwu was the sky deity in charge of good fortune and progress; Ala was the custodian of law and morality and mother deity of fruitfulness and fertility; Agwu was the deity of medicine, spirit possession, prophecy and divination.³³⁴ Igwe was the sky deity in charge of rain. He was regarded as the husband of Ala – the earth deity. Thus he sent rain to the earth to fertilize Ala - earth.³³⁵ ... Each of these deities was independent of the other. Oracular power was attributed to some of these deities. They knew deep secret things of life and hidden deeds of men. They performed judicial functions and were consulted for the revelation of truth and establishment of justice in matters which were difficult and complicated and were beyond human understanding.³³⁶

These deities were to see for the well being of man as assigned to them by Chukwu. But Chukwu the Great God remained above them. In other words, they were His subordinate and His representative. These deities also exercised punitive measures when there were serious transgressions against the traditional or cultural norms. When there were disorder in any sphere of existence or aspect of life, diviners consulted the deity that was responsible for that sphere or aspect of life. For example, pestilence might indicate that law and order had been thrown asunder. Ala, the earth deity would be consulted and there would be sacrifices as would be directed by the diviners. In most communities, any person killed by the thunder deity Amadioha would not be touched by any person because it signified revenge and justice. The person would be thrown into the evil forest. Such death was interpreted in terms of retributive justice. Above calling on Chukwu as guarantor of one's innocence, the *iju Ogu* prayer offerer also calls on these deities to come and vindicate one.

There was also the belief on *Chi* – guardian angel in Christian understanding - given personally to each person by Chukwu for the person's protection and guidance as was earlier on hinted. Each household or family had also their own family idols which protected members of that household. Altars were erected for the household gods at the family *Obi*

³³⁴ E. I METU, God and Man in African Religion. 83.

³³⁵ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, The continuity of Traditional Values in the African Society. The Igbo of Nigeria, Owerri 1991, 170.

³³⁶ NWAIWU, 41f.

which was an erected house-of-gathering for members of a household. The family morning prayers and breaking of Kola nut were always done before the altar of the family god. When calamity befell a household, the Iju Ogu prayer offerer attested his innocence and protested against what was being experienced before the family gods. He asked the gods questions why members of the family experienced calamities despite keeping to the ordinances of the land and keeping to their responsibilities in relationship to the gods. The protests were most times dramatic and intense and had led sometimes to discarding and replacement of the gods when the calamities continued to occur.³³⁷

At the advent of Christianity, the Igbo people were told to jettison these deities. They were instructed these were heathen worship and manmade elements devoid of power, liberation and salvation. The Almighty is to be accessed directly, they were instructed - the All powerful One and guarantor of justice and liberation. He is a God that takes care of His own and does not allow them to go to Sheol, to silence as the Psalmist would say. However, it is the experience of the Igbo Christians that despite his righteousness, the righteous do suffer on earth. Most times it seemed as if God is silence over injustice, oppression, natural disaster and moral evils caused by man to man. In the Igbo traditional setting, the different gods would be blamed for negligence. “But now that these gods have been jettisoned and access to God is made direct by the Christian religion, why this history of suffering? Why these existential sufferings despite one’s uprightness?”, the Igbo Christians ask. That was the same crisis encountered by Job in the Book of Job – God’s seeming silence in the face of suffering of the innocent. Job made use of the language of prayer to address this crisis of faith.

The *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form provides an avenue for the suffering subject to bring his historical and existential sufferings to God in prayer through the language of prayer, thereby making one full of expectations of the rescue of God.

³³⁷ Cf. L. N. MBEFO, *Christian Theology and African Heritage*, 126.

5.3.3 THE BELIEF IN ANCESTORS AS LIVING DEAD MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Another cardinal traditional belief of the Igbo people is the belief in the ancestors. As was intimated in my earlier work,

The ancestors were deceased members of the family, who lived virtuous and dignified lives and had gone to live with Chukwu, their creator.³³⁸ Though no longer in flesh present on earth, the ancestors were still regarded as part of the families they left behind. In this sense they were termed “living dead” members of the families. ... not every dead Igbo person was qualified to be named an ancestor. Only those who had lived a well dignified life, with shining moral values like integrity, honesty, hospitality, hard-work, fidelity and affability³³⁹ were qualified to be accepted as ancestors. During important family meetings or feasts, the ancestors were always invited to be part of the gathering.³⁴⁰ ... Prayers and sacrifices were offered to the ancestors. Food and drinks were given to the ancestors sometimes in form of libation. Shrines were established where offerings and sacrifices could be made to the ancestors. The ancestors were expected to be the “eyes” and solicitors of their families in the spirit world.³⁴¹

What this implies is that without the integrity and inner truthfulness as implied by the intangible *Ofo*, one would not be qualified to be named an ancestor. Thus, in Igbo traditional society, solidarity was maintained not only with the living but also with the dead. There was a spiritual bond that united both the world of the living and that of the living dead. Thus, for the Igbo African, life does not end in this world; there is always life after life and both “lives” are united with and connected to one another.

In the morning prayer of the Igbo traditional person, he remembered the ancestors. The ancestors were called upon to protect the families they left behind and to guide the going out and coming in of members of their families. At the morning breaking of Kola nut, the ancestors were not forgotten; they were giving their shares of the Kola-nut before the still-on-earth-living members of the family or community would take their own. They were paid homage to and their participation in the communion of brotherhood as exhibited in the sharing and drinking of wine were assured and brought to consciousness through libation. Altars were also erected for the ancestors. Sacrifices were also offered to them. However, their own kinds of sacrifices were inferior in status to the ones offered to the gods and

³³⁸ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, *The Continuity of Traditional values in the African Society*, 172.

³³⁹ Pantaleon IROEGBU, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*, Owerri 1994, 140.

³⁴⁰ Emefie Ikenga, METU, *God and Man in African religion*, 123.

³⁴¹ NWAIWU, 43f.

deities. The ancestors on their part also showed their connectedness to “this world” existence and their solidarity with and relatedness to the “still on earth living relatives” through reincarnation through which they came back to “this world existence” through children born into their families or extended families. When, an ancestor re-incarnated in a family, it was taken as a mark of good will and love on the part of the ancestor.

As the “living dead” members of the families, they were also rebuked when they seemed to lag behind or to neglect their intercessory or protectional duties as regards their families. The *iju Ogu* prayer offerer also would rebuke the ancestors for failing in their duties and would call on them to live up to their responsibilities, protect their families, ward off dangers from them, plead their cause before Chukwu and the deities and also bring them good fortune. Relating this to Igbo African Christians today, it was stated in my previous work that

This notion is still deep rooted in the Igbo African Christians of today especially the Catholics. There is the strong belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints should be their intercessors before God. That is one of the reasons why devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints are still strong among many African Christians. For the Igbos, poverty means failure and failure is evil.³⁴² The saints should help to keep off evil from them and help them to succeed in life endeavours. They are frustrated when it appears that their request through the saints like recovering from sickness, getting good jobs, success in exams etc. are not granted.³⁴³

We shall now examine sacrifice which is an important feature of the Igbo traditional religion.

5.3.4 PRACTICE OF SACRIFICES AND RITUALS

Offering of sacrifices was a vital and indispensable part of Igbo religious and cultural existence. Offering sacrifice provided the Igbo people a means of restoring harmony and equilibrium in a world that was put in disarray by the immoral and amoral actions or inactions of man. Sacrifices offered man means of reconciliation with the deities and gods, of cleansing himself and his community of transgressions, of warding off impending evil or danger, of thanksgiving, a means of supplication but also of protest against unwarranted suffering. Thus, sacrifices were part and parcel of the Igbo religious and cultural life. Many communities in Igbo land offered sacrifices of thanksgiving to their deities after success in

³⁴² R. EGWU, *Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being and the Triune God*, 36.

³⁴³ NWAIWU, 45.

wars, or after a good harvest. Such known festivals in Igbo land like New Yam Festival (*iri ji*), *ibo uzo*, were preceded by sacrifices of thanksgiving. Sacrifices were offered to restore equilibrium in the cosmos and to avert impending dangers as a result of sins of man. They were offered to atone for known and unknown sins. As Aligwekwe stated,

*Each time an individual's or a community's life was in danger, or when the success of an enterprise was disturbed, they were interpreted as signs of the gods or the ancestors demanding the offer of a sacrifice, of the performance of rituals in their honour, to chase away an imminent misfortune. A failure in a commercial or any form of economic venture, for example was understood as a sign that the god of riches Mbataku of the trader concerned was complaining of having been forgotten. A drought or a famine meant that the society had thrown nature out of balance, by such and such a fault; that through sacrifice and prayers, equilibrium could once be re-established.*³⁴⁴

Thus different types of sacrifices were offered depending on the purpose or aim of offering the sacrifice or the deity or ancestor to whom the sacrifice was directed to. We shall enumerate some of the different kinds of sacrifices in the Igbo traditional religion.

AJA CHI (the sacrifice to personal *Chi*) As the name indicates the *Aja Chi* were sacrifices offered to the household gods (*Chi*) or to the personal spirit protector and guardian spirit (*chi*) in thanksgiving for their protections and to ask them to continue to protect them. As was earlier on hinted at, every household in the Igbo traditional setting had their household god and there was also a belief in personal spirit protector giving to every individual by Chukwu. In most communities in Igbo land, these kinds of sacrifices were undertaken at least yearly before the community festivals. "It was the duty of the personal *chi* to protect an individual and bring to him good fortune. Sacrifices were offered to these personal *chi* to thank them for the protection and assistance one had received and to ask them to continue to provide and protect an individual or a household. This sacrifice was known as *aja Chi*."³⁴⁵

IGBU AJA This was a yearly sacrifice of a community to cleanse members of their transgressions that were especially inadvertently or unknowingly committed. This was offered for the continuous maintenance of equilibrium and harmonious dynamism in the cosmos. However, in times of great dangers, calamities and adverse effect, this sacrifice could also be carried out at any time. This is because it was believed that human

³⁴⁴ALIGWEKWE, 198.

³⁴⁵NWAIWU, 45.

transgression were responsible when the cosmic order is put asunder and there were strange occurrences such as pestilence, draught, premature death, famine etc.³⁴⁶ This transgression might have been collectively or individually committed. I enumerated in my aforementioned work the proceeding of the igbu aja rite:

*In the rite of Igbo aja, two goats were needed. One of them was slaughtered and used to perform the rituals of Igbo aja. The other is made to bear the sins of the community. Every member of the community transferred his or her transgression to this goat by laying his or her hand on this goat while observing the directives of the diviner who carried out the cleansing. The goat was then chased out of the village into an evil forest where it wandered for the rest of its life. Nobody dared kill or eat this scapegoat since the goat was regarded as unclean and evil because it bore the sins of the community.*³⁴⁷

This goat is called in Igbo language *ewu agbara*, that means the goat that belongs to the gods,³⁴⁸

ICHU AJA The Igbo people believed in communitarian effect of great sins. Thus the Igbos say *Otu aka ruta mmadu ya ezuo ndi ozo onu* which is a proverbial way of saying that a personal sin can bring punishment and spell out doom for the rest of the community members or group. When such threatening taboos or abominable acts in the Igbo consciousness or in the consciousness of a particular community like murder, desecration of shrines of the deity, killing of animals a particular community regarded as sacred etc. were committed, the sacrifice of ichu aja was embarked on to appease the gods in order to avert or chase away an evil wave that could envelope the whole community or an individual.³⁴⁹

IGO MMUO P. E. Aligekwe defined *igo mmuo* as

a sacrifice offered to remind the spirits or the gods, of the innocence of a person or a community or to protest against an evil being suffered. Only persons convinced of their innocence of the transgressions of the law of the land and of the gods could offer the sacrifice of igo mmuo. No

³⁴⁶ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, *The continuity of traditional values in the African society*, 183.

³⁴⁷ NWAIWU, 46.

³⁴⁸ Comparison has been drawn between this Igbo traditional sacrifice of Igbo Aja and the Old Testament practice of Yom Kippur – day of atonement (Lev. 16:21f) which has the similar ritual and prescriptions. The actual people that practiced this sacrifice were the real traditional Igbo people that had no contacts with Christianity or the Bible. Most of them were not lettered and sundered themselves from modernity and Christianity. Thus the tradition was handed over to them from their forefathers. There are many other similarities between Old Testament tradition and the Igbo culture and tradition that have made some people to raise the speculations that the two nations may have had the same origin or remote contact.

³⁴⁹ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, 184.

*culpable person had the right to participate in the sacrifice less the gods would strike him dead; it was the sacrifice of the innocent.*³⁵⁰

Thus, this sacrifice was carried out in times of unexplainable calamities and sufferings and only by someone who believed he was innocent and righteous and had not gone against the ordinances, norms and laws of the land. This was based on the concept of retribution among the ancient Igbo people. Calamities, they believed could only come as a result of human transgression and (except in communitarian effects on the whole community) only to one who had committed the offence.³⁵¹

Thus if it were to be in Igbo culture, Job would have offered the sacrifice of *igu mmuo*. As we have already discussed above, another form of protest and declaration of one's innocence at a time of great affliction took the form of a prayer known as *iju ugu*.

IKPU ARU In Igbo culture and tradition, certain grave sins or transgressions attracted excommunications from the rest of the community members. Incest and murder were some of those grave transgressions. The offender was ostracized and he was forbidden from participating in the social, political and religious lives of the people. In the event of such cases, the person was regarded as unclean and it was believed that contact with such a person would contaminate other members of the community and it could bring about the wrath of the gods and evil upon them. Some of those grave offences attracted banishment from the community. One could also become unclean through contact with certain forbidden objects or through eating certain crops or animals that the community regarded as sacred (*nso*). In these and other similar cases, the person needed to be cleansed of his or her uncleanness before he was allowed to have contacts with other members of the community. This was done through the sacrifice of *ikpu aru* where after rituals of cleansing had been performed by the diviner or the traditional priest, the person was regarded as clean again and worthy to be re-admitted into the community. It was the responsibility of the person to be cleansed to bring items that were used in the ritual and sacrifice of *ikpu aru*. In most cases, the pertinent was required to confess the sins committed before an idol³⁵². "In some parts of Igbo land, this cleansing and re - admittance sacrifice was known as *ikwa*

³⁵⁰Ibid,185.

³⁵¹ Cf. Nwaiwu, 46f.

³⁵² Cf. Ibid, 47.

ala- atoning the earth goddess. This is because the earth was the mother deity. It was on the earth that man existed and cultivated and lived, they thought. One had to atone the earth goddess because her grievance would threaten the very existence of man.”³⁵³

The traditional Igbo man also offered sacrifice as an act of supplication, of thanksgiving, of complaint and of justification.³⁵⁴ As I stated in my aforementioned work,

*One observes that one of the basic reasons for offering sacrifices in the traditional Igbo setting was the belief that evil brought disaster while faithfulness to the gods and tradition brought well being, blessings and prosperity. This notion is still found among the Igbo and African Christians of today. Evil should not visit the righteous and upright man. In the holy services, they pray for God's protection from evil and success in their work. When despite their faithfulness to the Christian God and their devotions, sufferings persist in their lives, they experience faith crisis and are tempted to look for alternatives.*³⁵⁵

Another vital aspect of Igbo traditional religion is prayer. Prayer is in itself broader than sacrifices in the sense that all sacrifices are accompanied by prayers but not all prayers are accompanied by sacrifices. We shall next examine prayer in Igbo African traditional religion.

5.3.5 PRAYER AS FUNDAMENTAL IN IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Prayer was a vital aspect of the Igbo African life. Through prayers, the Igbo African person maintained his communication with his ancestors, with his personal and household Chi, with the spirits and deities and with Chukwu, the Great God. He communicated to them the needs of his family and those of the society at large. His prayers were most times communitarian. Thus J. S. Pobee noted that “African spirituality, starting from traditional African epistemology which may be summarized as *Cognatus sum, ergo sum*, i.e. I am because I am related by blood, stresses a sense of belonging”³⁵⁶ Central to his prayers was the demand for life. What he asked for was not just mere bare life, but a robust life full of energy and events. He started his day with prayer and ended it with prayer. Thus Okeke noted that

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Cf. ALIGWEKWE, 187; NWAIWU, 47.

³⁵⁵ NWAIWU, 48

³⁵⁶ J. S. POBEE, African Spirituality, in : L. A. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo traditional religion, 59.

The early morning prayers of the elders of different families which are started by offering Kolanut piece to the ancestors are dominated by the demand for life ... This life for the Igbo man/ woman does not just mean to exist, it is rather understood as the full dynamic existence in which other things – all the good things of life will come. Life is not just only for the individual persons; communities like the lineage, the village and the family, have their own 'Ndu' (life)³⁵⁷

As we earlier on noted, most families in the Igbo tradition began their day with prayers. It was the duty of the elder in the family to lead in the family prayer. Normally, this prayer was done communally. Each morning, member of the family gathered in the *Obi* for prayers. This was done before the day's activities. Kolanut was broken and prayers were said must especially before the family or household shrine of the household *Chi*. The family *Chi* was thanked for the protections granted so far and continued protection was prayed for. The ancestors were given their own share of the kolanut. They were also beckoned upon to protect members of the family the left behind in all their endeavours. The day's activities were handed over to them. Sometimes, the elders made the prayers alone when they must leave their household earlier. The content of their prayers were however for all the members of the family. At night, prayers of thanksgiving were also communally said before members went to sleep.

One identifies different types or kinds of prayers in Igbo traditional religion. Most of them were interrelated and intermingled or interwoven. We shall attempt to examine some of them:

Ekpere Otito (Praise prayer): This was a praise prayer to the gods and a form of encomium on the ancestors. This existed sometimes in forms of songs or praise names. These songs and praise names were recited most especially during community festivals or feasts. Praise prayers were also found in private and household prayers. The god or ancestor to whom the praise was directed was praised for his deeds and their assistance at different successful events or mission like in wars. The gods were praised for the wonders they did in the past which was contained in traditional narratives or legends. Ancestors who were warriors, rain makers, great wrestlers or great hunters were praised for their great achievements during

³⁵⁷Anthony OKEKE, An investigation into the nature of interpersonal relationship in polygamous families, in: OGBUNANWATA, New Religious Movements or Sects, 39.

their days on earth. In most cases, *ekpere otito* existed as introduction to other forms of prayers.³⁵⁸

Ekpere Ekene (Prayer of thanksgiving). The prayer of thanksgiving was central to the traditional Igbo person's religious life. He was thankful especially for being alive.

Most of the festivals like new yam festival were those of thanksgiving – in gratitude for a successful farming year. During these festivals, prayers of thanksgiving were offered to the gods and ancestors.

The daily prayer of the Igbo African person also started with thanksgiving. The kola nut that was broken in the morning was that of thanksgiving for life. The prayer over the kola nut began with thanksgiving. The Morning Prayer began with thanksgiving for the protection through the night and the night prayer began with thanksgiving for the protection through the day's activities and events and asking for protection through the night. The Igbos offered thanksgiving prayers for good harvest, success in adventures and missions and other forms of success³⁵⁹ As I explained in my previous work,

*The thanksgiving prayer of the (Igbo) African centered on life. He thanked the gods for letting him and his household live. He then made petitions for long life, good health, peace and love in the community, and material wellbeing. There was passion for life even for those who were not buoyant. Life for him did not mean just living, but living honourably and wholly, in good health and material wellbeing. However, he yearned first and foremost for pure, raw life before any other things. Let there be life, he would constantly utter. He lived in constant optimism even in hard times like times of famine and pestilence. He believed that tomorrow would be better if there is life. That is the meaning of such Igbo names like: Ndu diri, (a short form of saying that once there is life there is hope), Ndubuisi (Life first) Nduka aku (life is greater than wealth) etc. That was the reason why it was a great abomination in Igbo culture for someone to take his own life, no matter in what situation one might find himself. To take another person's life was also abominable. They understood life as a gift to be nurtured and protected. Life belonged to Chukwu, so he said -Chinwendu.*³⁶⁰

Ekpere ekene serves most times as introduction to the main prayer.

AYIYO (Prayer of petition). This consisted an integral part of the prayer of ancient Igbo person. In his communication with the world of the spirits in prayers, the traditional Igbo person expressed and communicated to Chukwu, the deities and the ancestors his desires

³⁵⁸ Cf. Nwaiwu, 50.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, 51.

and needs and asked them for assistance. Sometimes, the need expressed and asked for in his or her prayers were communal. At other times they were those that concerned him and his family or household. He prayed for rainfall because of the crops in the field, he prayed for sunshine during festivities, and he prayed for peace, love and unity in the community, for brotherhood amongst kinsmen. The Igbo person always included in his prayers to the gods and ancestors request for longevity, good health, children, wealth and protection from evil spirits.³⁶¹

There was constant need of communication with the spirit world. He believed that the world was not controlled by the physical and material – there were invisible forces that permeated and to some extent controlled the destiny of man and the events of the world. There was the need to communicate with those forces and to make present the needs and desires of the people in the world. Before his petition, he would make sure that he had also fulfilled his own obligations to the spirits and had brought forward a blameless life. In his petition, he also asked for the forgiveness of sins – known and unknown and those of the members of his or her household. He sometimes made promises that he would fulfil if his prayers were granted. The most important thing he asked in his petition was life. As Westerman rightly remarked, if the African is asked what he considers the greatest good, his answer will be 'life'.³⁶² This is most true of the Igbo Africans.

The Igbo Christians' prayer today is still filled with petitions for prosperity, good health, success and liberation from poverty and oppression. This is because of the sufferings experienced by the Igbo and indeed most Africans in the world today. This suffering is a cause for faith crisis and God question among the Igbo and African Christians.

Iju ugu (itu ugu) (Declaration of innocence or prayer of protest): This form of prayer has already been discussed above.

We shall next discuss another cardinal aspect of Igbo African traditional religious belief system – belief in charms and amulets.

³⁶¹L. A. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo Religion, 56.

³⁶² WESTERMANN, The African Today and Tomorrow, in: L. A. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo religion, 57.

5.3.6 CHARMS AND AMULETS AS PART OF IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Belief in charms and amulets is one of the above named characteristics of African traditional religion. This was also applicable to the traditional religion of the Igbo people of the South East of Nigeria.

In the ancient times - before the coming of the missionaries, it was not unusual for the traditional Igbo African man or woman to carry charms and amulets on his person. These charms and amulets were prepared by “powerful” medicine men for different purposes and they were believed to have magical or supernatural powers. There were charms and amulets prepared for traders so that they might prosper; there were those meant to give extraordinary strength; those worn by warriors so that they would appear invincible in wars and battles; those worn by hunters, those worn by ordinary people for protection etc. Prominent among the purposes of charms and amulets was that for protection - to protect one from external invisible negative forces. These negative invisible forces, it was believed, could hamper the health and progress of an individual or even totally destroy or kill one. It was also believed that there were human enemies who could manipulate the invincible and inimical forces to harm another person. So there was urgent reason to be on one’s guards. When a person suffered from protracted or terminal illness, it was believed that it could have been the work of enemies manipulating negative forces in order to cause harm to a person. It could also be the handiwork of demonic or inimical forces. When the person felt that he was tormented unjustly since he was innocent (he has intangible *Ofo*— truthfulness and justice on his side), he cried out for liberation and vindication from these negative forces through the prayer of *iju Ogu*. This was so since it was believed that only those who had done evil should experience evil.

In many ancient Igbo households, charms and amulets were hung at the entrances of compounds. These were also aimed for protections. These charms and amulets were meant to protect the inmates of a house from the evil spirits (*ndi agbara na ndi mmuo ojoo*) that were wondering aimlessly seeking where to enter or who to destroy. Sometimes, it was believed, that these dangerous spirits had no particular abode but when they were expelled from people or households, always wandered and sought for abode to live in. They might enter an “unprotected” house. When they entered a household, they would start to cause

havoc and destructions. These inimical spirits could also trail or follow people from a distant place in order to settle in their households and thereby causing great problems. They could also follow a member of a household from the market where people of different origins came to trade and where it was believed that not every person that came to trade in the market was a human being. It was also believed that when a visitor came into the compound with destructive and negative forces to harm members of the families, the charms and amulets would neutralize or even destroy these inimical forces. It was also believed that these charms and amulets protected the household members while they slept and protected the house while members were away.

However, not all charms and amulets were used for good purposes. There were also those used to harm others or to gain undue advantages over others.

With the coming of the missionaries and during evangelization, African Igbos were asked to abandon their charms and amulets since they belonged to heathen worship. There was a move to replace those charms and amulets with crosses, rosary, holy medals and other sacramentals. But this replacement was not convincing. As Asiegbu noted:

... at conversion Christians were asked and encouraged to dispose of all their cultural, religious practices and objects. Amulets or charms were replaced with crosses and medals. Yet deep within the converts, these religious objects were linked to their spiritual needs, and many a time they felt great need of them even after conversion. The exchange was not always convincing and so a spiritual gap was usually created. This made certain Christian converts turn the prohibited culture and religion into secret cult in the form of syncretistic practices so as to satisfy their spiritual needs. This in effect shows the strength of culture and religion³⁶³

This was especially during the early stage of the evangelization. Though one cannot say that there are no more charms and amulets in Igbo society today, one can however rightfully say that majority of the Igbo African Christians have at least outwardly replaced these artefacts with crosses, holy medals, rosaries, holy water and other sacramentals. They see the sacramental as their Christian amulets and expect the sacramentals to have magical power and to protect them from evil forces. When it is not so or when they experience great adversities despite their holy sacramental, they question the Christian faith. It was most times believed that evil forces were the reasons for sicknesses and poverty despite their efforts. Sickness for them meant weakness – ability to be influenced from the outside.

³⁶³Anthony ASIEGBU, A Crisis of Faith and Quest for Spirituality, 30.

Some Christians also hang crosses in front of their houses to protect them from evil forces. Some drink holy water when they are sick because of their belief that their sickness may not be unconnected with evil forces. Some would take their medication with holy water believing that the holy water would take care of the spiritual source of the sickness while the prescribed medications from medical practitioners would take care of the physiological. Some go to prayer houses for solutions to their problems or even to diviners. Those who are more faithful to the Catholic faith go to adoration centres. When solutions to their problems are not forth coming, there is frustration and crisis of faith. This is made worse by the submission of the gospel of prosperity proponents who maintain that the righteous should not suffer.

We shall now examine the Igbo metaphysical and cosmological worldview as signified and implied in the Igbo word *Uwa*.

5.4. THE WORLD – UWA- IN IGBO COSMOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL CONCEPTIONS

In the traditional Igbo world view, there is the belief in two worlds: the spiritual world and the material world. Both the spiritual and the material worlds are encompassed in the Igbo word *Uwa* – which means world. The traditional Igbo person acknowledged the interaction of both worlds without contradictions.

*The entirety of existence, from God the highest Being to inanimate beings of our cosmos can be summarized in the englobing concept of the Igbo term Uwa. Uwa is all inclusive. It mirrors being, existence, entity, all reality. It englobes all that is: animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal and global. It has transcendent and immanent scope as well as explicative and prospective elasticity. Further it has moral, psychological and eschatological dimensions*³⁶⁴

Thus the Igbo world *Uwa* is an all-consuming, all-encompassing, all-including word. It encompasses the spiritual realm and the material realm, the physical and the metaphysical. The Igbo people say *Uwa anyi no n'ime ya* (the world we live in) when referring to the material world and *Uwa ozo* (the next world) or *Uwa di n'ihu* (the world after this present) to refer to the spiritual world. Some would also say *Uwa mmuo* (the spirit-world) in this regard. Though both worlds are distinct in themselves in Igbo consciousness, they however

³⁶⁴ Pantaleon IROEGBU, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*, 144.

intermingle with one another. The next world though invisible, is present with us in the material world. It is here present but also transcends the “here experience” and transcends the physical world. There is the belief that the “here world” is influenced by the next world. That was the reason for sacrifices and prayers. There were communications between beings in the spiritual world and those in the material world. It was believed that spirits could appear in the world of humans for special mission. It could be the spirit of a dead person or an apparition from a deity. The deities could also assume the body of certain animals to make themselves present in the world of humans. That was the reason why it was prohibited to kill certain animals in certain places. Humans also have access to the world of the spirits through diviners. Through diviners, the mind of the spirits in the spirits world is communicated to humans. Human beings could also pose questions to the spirits and get answers from them. Thus, diviners had access to the spirit world and served as intermediaries between the humans and the spirits.

In the Igbo African traditional consciousness, the world of the spirits and the world of humans intermingle in the world of dreams. Thus in dreams, the spirits visit humans and communicate to them messages or secrets that ordinarily would not have been accessible to humans. Sometimes, the communications of the spirits were in coded languages that required interpretations. At other times, they communicated in clear languages.

The Igbo conception of beings is in the form of pyramids in a state of equilibrium.³⁶⁵ At the apex of the Pyramid is Chukwu – the great God. There are then successively the deities or gods, the spirits, the ancestors, humans, animals and inanimate beings in the descending order.

According to Panteleon Iroegbu, the world of the spirits in the Igbo consciousness has five categories: the divine world which is the abode of the Great God – Chukwu who is also called Chineke – God the creator. There is the godian world which is the world of deities or powerful spirits. Then there is the good spirit world which is the world of good spirits who were formerly ancestors but have moved to generalized spirits due to passage of time and the consequent remote memories of them on the part of the living. Their relationship with the living is no more personalized. There is also the bad spirit world (*uwa umu agbara*)

³⁶⁵ P. ALIGWEKWE, 199.

which is the world of those spirits inimical and hostile to man. There is then the world of the ancestors.³⁶⁶

The material world or the earth is the centre of activities and a place of actualization of potentials. Man is at the apex of the order beings in the material world. He is the epitome of and at the centre of the material world. He has the ability of communicating with the gods, to dialogue with them and to protest against oppressions both from the physical and spiritual world. He also communicates with the Great Spirit Chukwu. In creating the world, Chukwu solicited his assistance and incorporated man in the art. He is a creature of God who has the potentiality of interacting with his creator. He is endowed with spirit/ soul (*mmuo/ mkpuru obi*), mind (*uche*), and body (*ahu*). It is the duty of humans to maintain equilibrium in the material world by observing the culture and tradition of Igbo people and keeping to the laws of nature. Man could through his moral actions maintain order in the universe or through his immoral actions bring about chaos and suffering. Thus, the maintenance of order in the universe lay in the hands of humans. The Igbo traditional person acknowledged the interaction of both the spiritual and material world and sought to maintain harmony between both worlds. Epidemics were as a result of disharmony in the cosmic other anthropological order.³⁶⁷

The material world is in itself transient. Thus the Igbo say; *Uwa na agafe agafe* which means that the world passes away Or *Uwa na agbanwo agbanwo* which means that the world changes. This is also the meaning of the Igbo saying: *Uwa n'eme ntughari*. This expresses first and foremost Igbo philosophical optimism.³⁶⁸ It all means that though one is suffering or poor today, tomorrow may be better through hard-work and destiny. It also cautions man to be careful of his actions since man's actions against nature and tradition may cause the world to change (*tugharia*). It also cautions the powerful or wicked men in

³⁶⁶ IROEGBU, 141f.

³⁶⁷ George, EHUSANI, *An Afro Christian Vision "Ozovehe"*, towards a more human world, New York 1999, 219 – 220. In the paper presented by Prof. Dr. Leonard Swindler at the 2011 Facultatis of the faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna, on the 17th of October titled “Die Menschheit im Wandel der Zeit: Vom Monolog zum Dialog, the presenter emphasized that the cosmos is in constant dialogue. There is a constant dialogue between the different components of the cosmos. I think it is in this sense that the traditional Igbo man understood the cosmos and believed that the different components of the universe were in constant dialogue with one another.

³⁶⁸ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, 199.

the society who oppress the poor to be careful because the order of things may change (tugharia) and justice would prevail. They would then reap the fruit of their wickedness. It also advises people not to laugh at the lot of the innocent who might be experiencing difficulties or who is oppressed because the future would vindicate him. Hence they say *Oji Ofo ga ala* – One who is innocent would be vindicated. The Iju Ogu prayer offerer prays for this vindication because the offerer has *Ofo* which is inner righteousness and innocence which brings justice.³⁶⁹

5.4.1 SUFFERING IN IGBO TRADITION

The conception of suffering among the Igbo people is expressed by Ezeanya when he stated that

*In the traditional religion of our people (Igbo people), suffering is seen as an evil that must be got rid of by all means. There is therefore no question of resignation to the will of God, no matter the nature of suffering and no matter the duration...according to the religious tradition of our people (Igbo people), suffering could never come from the hand of God.*³⁷⁰

Thus suffering is seen in Igbo tradition as something negative, an aberration, a distortion. It does not belong to the normal order of things. Sickness, natural disaster, draught, famine, pestilence, death, poverty – all do not belong to the normal course of events. They were expressions of cosmic disorders brought about by the sins and misdeeds of man. They were seen as logical consequences of grave sins; as forms of punishment to man for his misdeeds. In these situations, the traditional African person would seek to restore the lost order and harmony in the cosmos by first ascertaining the transgressions that brought about the disorder. Then measures to restore these disorders through punishments, sacrifices and prayers are effected.

The ancient Igbo persons believed in the dignity of labour. That is why they proverbially say: *Aka ajaja kpataara onu mmanu mmanu*- which is another way of saying that through the works of your hands you shall live or that success comes through hard-work. Thus the traditional Igbo people frowned at laziness or idleness. Begging was seen as something

³⁶⁹Cf. NWAIWU, 58.

³⁷⁰Stephen, EZEANYA, The Christian and suffering, Lenten Pastoral 1989 in: Chris A. OBI, "Biblical Perspectives on Suffering in African context", in : African Journal of Biblical studies, Vol. XXII No. 1, April 2006, 113.

shameful when someone was neither physically nor mentally challenged. Thus, an average Igbo person strived to escape poverty because of its social and religious implications.

The Ancient Igbo people also believed in the part played by destiny in a person's life. They believed that people had different destinies according to people's different *chi*. When one follows one's destiny, one would always be successful. However, there were those destined to be super rich. Thus the Igbo people say *Uba si a chi* which means that wealth comes from God. Others might not be so rich no matter how hard they strived but they would be able to live in wholeness and wellness. There was a total rejection of poverty or sickness as someone's destiny. These were as a result of the deeds of man. In some way, the Igbos also acknowledged that one may be unsuccessful in a particular endeavour. The Igbo people would then acknowledge that the said endeavour, be it handwork or trade, may not be the person's destiny (*akaraka*) and they would exonerate the person's failure. Thus they proverbially said "*Omewere ma chi ekweghi, onye uta atala ya*" which means that there should be no blame for a hardworking person who was unsuccessful. What it all means is that the person should search for his destiny in another endeavour. When one discovers where one's destiny lies, one will be successful. There is rejection of failure in totality of a person. In all, when someone, despite his or her moral uprightness and hard-work and trials in different endeavours of life still persisted in poverty or sickness, he protested through the prayer of *iju Ogu*. Sometimes it led to the replacement of the one's personal *Chi* and the replacement of the *Chi*'s shrine by a medicine man in order to change one's destiny.

Sometimes, sufferings could come as corrective measures or a form of warning from the deities or gods to an evildoer; warning him or her to change his way or greater calamities would befall him or her. In this sense, the deities play the role of the father who corrects to save.³⁷¹ Suffering could also be a sign to somebody to take up a responsibility destined for him in the society maybe as priest or servant of a god.

Suffering could originate from humans or from the spirits. The physical world could not on its own cause evil to man but the gods and spirits could use them to cause calamities to

³⁷¹ Chris A., OBI, 115.

man as a consequence of his actions or omissions since man lives on the physical world. So earthquakes, thunderstorm or tempestuousness were regarded as acts of the gods.

There were also internal form of suffering and torture in the form of spirit possession. Some people with psychological or mental problems were regarded as being possessed by evil spirits. The good spirits would never harm an innocent person. But the bad spirits in the bad spirit world (*uwa umu agbara*) were treacherous spirits distorting the normal order of things and events and causing havocs here on earth even for the innocent person. Humans could also manipulate evil spirits to harm an innocent person. In the understanding of the Igbo traditional person, the evil manipulations of the bad spirits were prevented by the deities and good spirits, by the personal *Chi* who is like a guardian spirit, and by the ancestors who protect the families they had left behind from evil influences both from the spirit world and the physical world. The charms and amulets were also means of protection. The *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offerer radically protests a situation where these seem not to be the case, where he suffers despite his uprightness. He brings his case before the panel forces in heaven and earth whose Supreme Being is Chukwu and asks for justice. He calls forth for any being or force – spirits or humans – who has any case against him to bring it forth in the panel headed by Chukwu. If not, justice should be served to him by restoring his wholeness and punishment served on the aggressor.

Suffering can also be caused by man to man. That means, suffering could result from oppression. In this case the social structure of the society should guard against this and protect the vulnerable like orphans and widows. It was believed that the cries of the orphans and widows were so powerful that they could spell out great doom for both the oppressors and the silent community. When the community was found wanting in protection of the oppressed, the oppressed most times cried out to Chukwu and the gods for justice. The protest against this kind of oppression is done most times through *iju ogu* especially when the oppressor is a man of influence and power and little could be done against him. There was also protest through the sacrifice of *igo mmuo*, as we earlier on indicated.

The Igbo word for suffering “*ahuhu*” and the act of suffering “*ita ahuhu*” call in a picture of a negative force on man, a force exacting tormenting pressure on him and which

brings in excruciating anguish, gnashing of teeth, wailing and sweating. This negative force could be impacting on man either internally or externally but it comes from a force outside of man because man is created to be good; though he could change in the course of time. In other words, the negative forces do not originate from the nature of man. Negative forces always come from outside – from evil spirits. Man's act to resist this negative and unwanted visitor could cause him gnashing of teeth, sweating, wailing or the protest form of *iju ugu*.

The Christian notion of taking one's cross and following Christ conjures in the Igbo Christian mind a situation of a heavy burden that one is bearing without resistance. The picture created by the word "cross" as interpreted by the Igbo word "*obe*" is that of an all-inclusive acceptance of the burden of suffering without complaining. It brings in the picture of a physical and mental torture that most times does not have any purpose except for the next world to come and which one should bear patiently with fortitude. This notion is foreign to the Igbo culture and consciousness. For the Igbo African traditional man, the good life begins here on earth. The prayer is that of the abundance of good life here on earth. He struggles and works to avoid suffering. The gospel of prosperity preachers in Nigeria exploit this notion to promote their erroneous teaching. Thus there is the need for the reinterpretation of the Igbo word for the Cross of Christ for a more meaningful understanding of the theology of the cross for the Igbo Christians. This will be done in the conclusion.

The reason for the negative dispositions of the Igbos towards suffering will be more expounded in the traditional notion of life after death.

5.4.2 IGBO TRADITIONAL NOTION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

The traditional Igbo people believed in life after death. They believed that there was existence that transcended the present material existence - that was the world of the ancestors and the spirits. Thus when one dies, he goes to join his ancestors – he continues his life in the spirit world. From the spirit world, a dead - living ancestor has the capacity to reincarnate again in the material world. Reincarnation was seen as gratuitousness on the part of the ancestor to the family he reincarnated in. It was seen as his expression of love willingness to associate with the family.

However, this life of the next world was not viewed in terms of reward for a life well lived here on earth or in a kind of Christian conception of heaven and hell. To be an ancestor was a kind of a privileged place of belonging to the spirit world and being honoured and venerated by those on earth and of being in a position of being an intercessor and protector for the living. The ancestors could also be rebuked or even starved when they did not perform their supposed duty for their family on earth. As Mbiti remarked,

*Whether one is deified or not depends on the living, and there is nothing to hope for or look forward to in the afterlife... Even where there is a belief in reincarnation, this too is not a hope or reward for the afterlife, and he who is reincarnated is neither better nor worse off than he who is not. The hereafter is for the African people devoid of hope or promise. One is simply gathered to one's forefathers, and this is about all.*³⁷²

So the Igbo did not have the belief in suffering here on earth to be rewarded in the next world to come. The reward and punishment for the Igbo traditional persons took place here on earth. Thus, the offerer of *iju ugu* prayer asks for vindication here on earth and punishment for his oppressors also here on earth. The earth was for the Igbo person the centre of actualization of potentials and also the place of reaping the fruit of one's labour. Thus he always prayed for long life here on earth in order to be able to enjoy the fruit of his labour. He prayed for blessings in this world. Thus his spirituality is not "eschatological but historical, anthropocentric—or better perhaps, sociocentric, revolving around the community of the living and dead."³⁷³

Thus "Igbo's traditional Spirituality is fundamentally earthly spirituality that is grossly concerned with the abundance of life for an individual and the community in this world."³⁷⁴ As a result, the traditional Igbo African

*tried to make best use of his life on earth. He sought to live life to its fullest on this earth. He observed moral and religious principles and hoped for a reward here on earth. He was not a hedonist because there were religious and moral regulations for his actions. His longing for life was understood to be communitarian, life not only for himself but for his family and community. Life for him meant wellbeing.*³⁷⁵

³⁷² J.S. MBITI, in: L. A. UGBOR, 72.

³⁷³ L. A. UGBOR, 74.

³⁷⁴ NWAIWU, 59.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 60.

5.5 SOME MORAL PRINCIPLES IN IGBO TRADITION

We shall here examine some of the moral principles in Igbo traditional society. These were features when observed, gave the Igbo traditional person authority to protest against sufferings from invisible forces or intimidations, oppressions or injustice from man. They were part of the features that gave him the inner authority – *Ofo*.

5.5.1 LIFE AS SACRED

The Igbo traditional people extremely valued human life because they regarded it as sacred. Life belongs to Chukwu – *Chinwendu* – they say. There were no such things in Igbo society as assisted death or euthanasia or happy death as was the case in the ancient Greeks. Such was taken as murder. Murder was taken as a taboo (*aru*) which could spell out doom for the entire community. Such required cleansing and atonement and most times banishment of the murderer if he was not to pay with his own life. Taking of one's own life was also forbidden since life was taken as belonging to Chukwu. Under no circumstance of frustration was suicide accepted. One has to live in constant optimism, believing that tomorrow would be better. Somebody who killed himself was buried unceremoniously without allowing any contact with his body. For someone who hanged himself, a grave was dug directly under the suspended body and the rope holding the body was severed so that the person fell inside the grave without any contact with people.³⁷⁶

5.5.2 TRUTHFULNESS

Truthfulness was taken as the hallmark of any Igbo great person highly respected in Igbo society. An *Ichie* - an elder should be a person of truthfulness. Their words had great weight in decision making. In fact, it was not only old age that qualified one to be an *Ichie* (elder) in the Igbo society but most of all integrity of life. When someone had spent his life in deceit or was known to be dishonest, he was not admitted into the council of elders even if he was old. It was believed that a person of truthfulness would always live a long life and those who were not truthful most times died suddenly. This inner truthfulness is the intangible *Ofo* that protected people from all forms of evil and gave the *iju Ogu* prayer offerer the authority to offer such prayer. The tangible *Ofo* was used in the administration

³⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid, 60f.

of justice and one should not lie before it because it was believed that it would harm the person if he lied. Thus,

*Truth was a very high moral principle among the Igbos. The Igbos said that Eziokwu bu Ndu (Truth is life). Sometimes, one was asked to take an oath before the god or goddess of the land that he would speak the truth on a particular issue. At other times the elders poured libations on the ground calling on the gods to punish anyone that bore false witness. It was believed that one who spoke falsehood always came to an untimely death, while those who spoke the truth had long life.*³⁷⁷

5.5.3 JUSTICE

The Igbo people had a notion of commutative and retributive justice. They believed in natural retributive justice. Justice for them was to be experienced in this material world and not in the next world to come. One reaps the fruit of one's labour here on earth. The elders in the communities were to see especially that justice was administered in all matters. There was the belief that there were invincible forces that maintain order and justice in the cosmos. So famine and draught were seen as consequences of the deeds of man. Sickness, diseases and poverty were most often seen as resulting from the personal sins of individuals. Thus the *iju Ogu* prayer offerer protested against this kind of suffering when he was innocent. Injustice to disadvantaged people in the society like widows and orphans, it was believed, could bring down the wrath of these invisible forces. Arinze summarized the notion of justice among the Igbo people thus:

*Justice is one of the main pillars of ibo morality...Justice it is that rules the relations between man and man... Justice and piety dictate the cult of the ancestors and the performance of final funeral rites... It is the Ibo man's idea of justice which drives him to justify revenge and say: Eme mbolu aburo njo (Revenge is not sin)*³⁷⁸

5.5.4 INNOCENCE

Innocence in Igbo culture and tradition was a condition for the prayer of *iju Ogu*. It was believed that an innocent man would not be harmed by any invisible force since *Ofo* is on his side. It was also believed that the forces of justice and order would always fight his course against oppressive forces. Thus, he calls for this liberation and vindication through *iju Ogu* prayer when he was oppressed. Here the innocent man will say "*Ejim Ofo*". That

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 61.

³⁷⁸ F. A. ARINZE, Sacrifice in Igbo Religion, in: UGBOR, L., A., 60.

means, I am on the side of the truth and righteousness; I am innocent. This inner innocence leads him to offer the prayer of protest which is the prayer of *iju Ogu*.

5.5.5 MORALITY

The traditional ancient Igbo society had high and maybe rigid concept of morality especially as it concerned sexual relationship. People from the same village in many Igbo communities were not traditionally allowed to marry one another no matter how big and expanded the village might have been or the distance in consanguinity that might have existed among them. This was because, people from the same village were regarded as siblings from the same source no matter how distant or remote this origin or source might have been or how many centuries it had spanned. Any known sexual relationship between them was taken as incest and resulted in sacrifice of atonement and purification (*ikwa ala*). This is still the case in many Igbo societies today. However, some communities in Igbo land had more flexible regulations in this regard than others. Same sex marriage was not tolerated in the Igbo traditional society.

Stealing was also one of the things detested in the Igbo society. A thief was a disgrace to himself and his family. The Igbos punished the thief by shaming (*igba mbembe*). This was done by making the thief carry what he had stolen on his head or shoulder and parading him around the village. Some people would be following behind singing shaming songs. Intermittently, he also received strokes of cane.

5.5.6 SOLIDARITY

Solidarity was one of the hallmarks of Igbo traditional society. This solidarity was not only exhibited economically but also socially and culturally. Children were introduced into the path towards solidarity by a kind of friendship-exchange-labour or family-inter-labour in which children from different families who were friends worked together for their different families at different days. It was known in Igbo language as *Igba onwe oru*. The respective parents of these children cooked for them when they were to work for their particular families. Through this way, children learnt to help one another.

In Igbo society, many things were done communally among kinsmen in different communities and among community members. Such things like burials and traditional

marriages were done communally. There were traditionally laid down rules on what one was to contribute in such occasions and how people were to help one another. There were solidarity among different groups and there were also different solidarity groups. Such groups like the age grade, village women organizations, and occupational unions like the hunters' union, farmers' union, market women organizations, traders union – all were geared towards solidarity with one another and protections of their different interests.

Marriages were means of solidifying friendships between families. In-laws supported one another during cultural, religious, or social ceremonies. Brothers were expected to help and assist one another and their different families. A man was expected to help in raising-up the children of his late brother and taking care of his widow. When the widow had no issue especially male child before the demise of her husband, the brother of the husband was to give child to the brother through his widow. The children conceived belonged to the late brother in so far as the widow had not remarried or the bride price had not been returned.³⁷⁹ Solidarity as a part of the Igbo traditional society in connection with the features of New Political Theology will later be visited in this work. The iju Ogu prayer offerer attests to having exhibited no negligence with regard to solidarity in the community but of being part of it. He then prays for solidarity both from the spirits and from humans.

5.5.7 HOSPITALITY

Hospitality was one of the main characteristics of Igbo African traditional society. The Igbo traditional folklore and narratives abound with stories to drive home the essentiality of hospitality. It was said that through hospitality to strangers, aged or handicapped persons, blessings were received from the gods because the gods and spirits came to earth most times in the figures of needy persons. By not being hospitable, one would be driving away blessings and fortunes from the gods destined for one. Children were supposed to fetch water and fire wood for the aged in the community.

It was also believed that people were related to one another and belonged to one human family. The person you called a stranger might be in some way or the other related to you.

³⁷⁹ This was similar to the Old Testament practice according to Deuteronomy 25:5-10. However there was no restriction that the widow could not marry outside her husband's family if she so desired. In this case, her bride price must be repaid to her late husband's family then she would be free to remarry. If the bride price was not returned, the children born in the subsequent union traditionally belonged to her late husband.

Thus the need to be kind and generous. Again, every person, it was taken, would be in one time or the other in need of another person's help. So it was believed that the person you helped today might turn out to be your saviour tomorrow. Thus it was normal to offer help to strangers, aged or the physically and mentally challenged. Barren women could conceive and bear their own children by being hospitable to children especially orphans. This is one of the characteristics that constitute the intangible Ofo which gives the *iju ugu* prayer offerer the authority to protest if evil experiences were overwhelming him or her.

5.5.8 RECONCILIATION

The Igbos also believed in and highly treasured the principle of reconciliation. This could be between brothers, families, clans, Kindred or communities. It could be reconciliation of immediate or generational (remote) enmity. Some enmity and animosity that existed between families or communities might have lasted for many generations and were passed from one generation to another. Some could have been as a result of grievous injury or harm inflicted by a family or community on another family or community which was not forgiven because maybe forgiveness was not asked for or was not accepted when offered. Such offences may include the killing of member of a group, betrayal, land dispute etc. This kind of reconciliation was always done communitarian. Reconciliation always began through acceptance of misdeed and request for forgiveness and the granting of forgiveness. Most times, people sealed the reconciliation through a covenant (*igba ndu*) where both parties agree to have forgiven one another and not to do harm to one another. The *iju Ogu* prayer offerer always attest to keeping to all these principles and therefore pray for vindication.

We shall now examine the anthropological world view of the Igbo person.

5.6 IGBO ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORLD VIEW

The Igbo word for person is *Mmadu*. The person (*Mmadu*) is made up of the body (*ahu*), the mind (*uche*) and the spirit/ soul (*mmuo*). The existence of a person does not end in the material word. The spirit lives further and joins the ancestors in the spirit world.

In the Igbo conception, the person is a creature of God – Chukwu. He is the crown of God’s creation. He has the capacity to dialogue with Chukwu - the Great God or Chineke – the Creator Spirit and with other spirits, to negotiate with them his destiny and to protest against unjust order. He was to approach the spirits with great respect and reverence and also expected reciprocal good will from the spirits. Thus the Igbo people say – “let humans not cheat the spirits and let the spirits not cheat humans.” Humans were to offer sacrifices, libation and prayers to the spirits and expected protections from them.

With regard to man in himself, in his essence, to have been superior to all natural elements of creation, and by his ability to hold dialogue with the supernatural forces and maintain the equilibrium between him and them, he has already fixed his status among them and has proved his superiority over the rest of creation in the natural world. His duty was to work incessantly to the upkeep of that superiority they thought.³⁸⁰

Though the Igbo person was conscious of himself as the crown of creation, he still approached the natural world with respect and awe. He regarded himself as part of nature and took the duty of maintaining equilibrium in the cosmos as his responsibility. This he did especially through keeping the laws of nature, leading moral life, sacrifices and prayer. Some of the features of nature like forests with ancient and mighty trees, mountains and hills, rivers and seas were regarded as manifestation or abode of the spirits. By holding dialogue with these features of nature, the ancient Igbo person believed he was holding dialogue with the incarnate spirits or with the spirits that manifested themselves in them. Thus, most times, the Igbo man offered sacrifices on the foot of hills, at the sides of rivers etc. There were forests that were regarded as sacred where man ought not to approach with indignation. Thus the ancient Igbo person’s relationship with nature was not understood in terms of domination, subjugation or exploitation but in terms of respectful relationality and reciprocity. Not only could man communicate to nature, nature also communicated to man. However, not all persons could understand the communications of nature. Herbalists who used herbs in effecting cures for different ailments in Igbo land spoke of the communications of herbs, leaves, roots and trees to them for the healing of mankind’s ailments. Features of nature communicated themselves to these herbalists as panacea for one form ailment or the other. Thus, these herbalists and elders in Igbo land strongly

³⁸⁰P.E. ALIGWEKWE, 198.

advocated for the treating of nature with utmost respect so that nature can continue to preserve man.

The Igbo person saw himself or herself as an authentic independent being but in relationality with other beings in the community. “I am because we are. And because we are, therefore I am.”³⁸¹ His independence was not in isolation to other beings in the society or community. He saw himself as part of that community. His independence was more or less as an authentic individual person ordained with reason and capable of making individual choices and taking responsible decisions. He never believed that his destiny had been sealed in totality by powers superior to him. He believed that through his own thoughts and actions he could determine his own destiny. Even when it seemed that there were forces beyond him that seemed to be controlling or hindering his movement towards his desired destiny, he believed that he had the authority to hold dialogue with those forces and to determine the direction he intended to move his life and destiny or protest against undesired destiny. Thus he saw himself as a subject. When it seemed that he had ill destiny (*chi ojoo*) or that he was ill fated, he believed he could change his fate by changing his personal *chi* to the one who would lead him to his preferred destiny. In line with this Iroegbu stated that for the Igbo African, “the human person is the communally and self-embodied being that is in search of full transcendence.”³⁸² The society of this Igbo human person was essentially egalitarian in nature though there were social classifications. These classifications will be examined next.

³⁸¹ J.S. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 108.

³⁸² P. IROEGBU, *Kpim of Personality. Treatise on the Human Person*, Owerri 2000, 107. Cf. Nwaiwu, 63 “While A. S. Boethius defined human person thus: *Persona est rationalis naturae individuae substantiae*. (Person is an individual substance of a rational nature) and Aquinas said that: Person is a distinct subsistent in rational nature, ancient Igbos and Africans would rather see a person from its communitarian point of view, although each still distinct in itself. They saw a human person as an authentic being among other beings, involved in a wholesome and life involving relationship with other beings and environment, and he finds his realization in this relationship.” Cf P. IROEGBU, *Spirituality and Metaphysics: Their Relationship in African Worldview*.

5.7IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

As was stated above, the Igbo society was fundamentally egalitarian in nature. Everyone was fundamentally taken as equal. Vital decisions were taken in the council of *Umunna* (kinsmen) which included every Igbo male persons that had reached the age of maturity. The Igbo society had also rulers known as *ndi Eze* who ruled different communities. Every *onye Eze* (singular) had his Eze's cabinet made up of representatives of different communities within an autonomous community. The Eze took his decisions in consultation with members of the Eze's cabinet. When things seemed to be taking false directions and improper or corrupt decisions were made as a result of an Eze that had become corrupt and an Eze's cabinet that is being manipulated, the council of elders was to speak up. And as a last resort, the chief priest, the mouth piece of the deity of the community would speak up, most times issuing warnings from the god or goddess of the land.

However, there were some social classifications in Igbo society. Aligwekwe identified five of them. *Ogaranya* or *Nnukwummadu*, *Dimkpa*, *Ogbenye*, *Ohu*, and *Osu*. However, I identify another group between the *Dinpka* group and the *Ogbenye* group – *Onyenkiti*. Thus in my own assessment, there were six of them We shall examine these social classifications among the traditional Igbo people.

OGARANYA OR NNUKWU MMADU

Ogaranya is an Igbo word for a rich person. *Nnukwu Mmadu* in Igbo language literally means a great person or an influential person. Thus members of this social group were the influential people in the Igbo society. They were not only materially rich, they were also titled people in the Igbo society. They had laid foundation for their wealth and were generous. One of the characteristics of a rich person in the traditional Igbo society was that he had more than one wife. However to be rich or be a titled person were not only what qualified a person to be an *Ogaranya* or *Nnukwummadu* but most especially how one had used one's wealth to better the lot of the society. The *Nnukwu Mmadu* must have used his influence and wealth in the socio, political and economical betterment of his community and society. Through this, his society acknowledged him as *Nnukwu Mmadu* or *Ogaranya*.

*The human person is realized only in taking up and transforming the socio – economic and spiritual elements provided by his community. The accomplished person is not only rooted in the community and its givens, it is also that community that which determines his constitution and development as well as his destiny.*³⁸³

In Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, Nwakibie will be described as *Nnukwu Mmadu* or *Ogaranya*. Not only that he was a wealthy farmer, he also used his wealth to better the lives of people around him and helped young people to develop themselves. It was to him that Okonkwo went to borrow yam seedlings to start his own farming. Okonkwo requested for four hundred yam seeds but he gave Okonkwo twice the number of yam seeds he requested because he saw Okonkwo as a hard-working young man, trustworthy and who was eager to succeed. As was stated in the book,

*There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge barns, nine wives, and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan. It was for this man that Okonkwo worked to earn his first seed yams.*³⁸⁴

DIMKPA

Dimkpa in Igbo society literally means a grown up. To be grown up did not mean only bodily or physiological extensions, but maturity in character and thinking. A *dimpka* in Igbo society was a man of brevity and courage. Those regarded as *dimkpa* were strong men of character; they were warriors who were not afraid of confrontations and defence of their integrities, families and communities. Those who were *dimkpa* were most times feared or at least respected and served as a kind of bulwark for their families and communities. They were not villains. A *dimkpa* was not afraid to tell the truth and to stand by the truth. The *dimkpa* was not as rich as *Nnukwu Mmadu*, but he was not a poor person. His brevity and strength had helped him to attain certain level of success and prominence in the society. *Dimkpa* were most times titled persons since their communities had acknowledged their contribution in the society. In Chinua Achebe's book *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo the protagonist of the book would be described as *dimpka*. Okonkwo was a leader in Umofia village. He was a great wrestler and a warrior, very audacious and quick to temper. He was in an unending battle for status. He was afraid of showing weakness and failure. He never

³⁸³ E. M. METOGO, *Théologie Africaine*, in : KABASELE –LUMBALA, *Christianity & Africa*, in: IROEGBU, Pantaleon, *Spirituality and Metaphysics*, 19.

³⁸⁴ Chinua ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, Chapter one.

wanted to look like a coward. That exactly was his undoing for he died as a tragic hero. As Achebe described him:

*Okonkwo was well known through the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen, he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umofia to Mbaino. He was called the cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights.*³⁸⁵

These were the characteristics of *dimkpa* in Igbo society. Describing Okonkwo further, Achebe wrote “He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a severe look. ... When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on spring, as if he was going to pounce somebody”³⁸⁶

In Igbo society, those who have wrestled through the ordeal of life and came out successfully were regarded as *dimkpa*. A *dimkpa* was ambitious till death. He was not to give up in life struggles. He could still attain the status of *Ogaranya* or *Nnukwummadu* if he continued in his struggles positively. Even if he dies in the process of his audacity, in the process of telling the truth, in the process of defense of his community and family, one would say that he died as a *dimkpa*. It was a great honour for an Igbo person and his family to say that he died like a *dimkpa*.

ONYENKITI

Onyenkiti means a commoner. He was a normal person in Igbo society. He may be an artisan or had another occupation. But he was neither rich nor influential in the society and had received no traditional title. Though he was not rich, he could however provide for his needs and those of his family. The *Onyenkiti* has attained a fairly level of stability since he has occupation or trade through which he earned a living and sustained himself and his family. The *Onyenkiti* lacks the audacity to be *dimkpa* and tended to be in the crowd. He is modest in his approach to things. He tended to be flexible, adjusting himself to changes and decisions without resistance. He was not among the decision-makers in the society.

³⁸⁵ Chinua ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, Chapter One.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

Onyenkiti has to be on his guards so that he does not degenerate to the level of *Ogbenye* – a poor person. “The *onyenkiti* could simply be referred to as a commoner who had not degenerated to the level of *ogbenye* and who had not the audacity to be *dimpka*.”³⁸⁷

OGBENYE

This is the Igbo word for poverty or a poor person. As the name implies, this group is made up of the poor people in the society. Some of these people were formerly on the level of *Onyenkiti* but due to misfortunes like sickness, draught, one form of catastrophe or the other, they lost their sources of income and degenerated to the level of *Ogbenye*. This situation was captured in Chapter three of the book *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. I would like to bring in that passage here:

The year that Okonkwo took eight hundred seed yams from Nwakibie was the worst year in living memory. Nothing happened at its proper time; it was either too early or too late. It seems as if the world had gone mad. The first rains were late and when they came, lasted only a brief moment ...

The draught continued for eight market weeks and the yams were killed ... The year had gone mad. When the rain finally returned, they fell as it had never fallen before. Trees were uprooted and deep gorges appeared everywhere.

*That year, the harvest was sad, like a funeral and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotten yams. One man tied his cloth to a tree branch and hanged himself...*³⁸⁸

Thus, this portrays a situation that could easily bring one from the level of *onyenkiti* to *ogbenye*. But one of the characteristics of *dimpka* is that in this situation, he would not give up; he has to wrestle with the ordeals and challenges of life. It is only when he is able to conquer this challenges or at least master them that he would be called *dimpka*. If not so, he would degenerate to *ogbenye*. In this case, Okonkwo was able to wrestle with the ordeals and survived it. It was not the case for every other person.

Sometimes old age could also bring someone to this level of *Ogbenye* especially if the person did not have any child. In Igbo society, children were a kind of insurance for parents at their old age. The children were obliged to take care of their parents. But when someone had no child, his or her wellbeing in old age was not secured. Widows, orphans and the

³⁸⁷NWAIWU, 65.

³⁸⁸ Chinua ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, chapter 3.

disabled were among the endangered people to fall into the group of *Ogbenye*. The good thing about the *Ogbenye* was that he was a free person and lived in the hope that through hard-work he could become a rich person one day.

The prayer of the traditional Igbo person may not be to be so wealthy like the *Nnukwu Mmnadu*, but to have a good health and a good life where he could be able to afford for his daily needs and pay his bills and those of his household. Begging or being a beggar is shameful in Igbo society. Only those who were handicap or had disabilities were visited with mercies and compassion. It was also the duty of the relatives and society to provide for them and help them. But for a person without disability to beg was a disgrace to him and his family. The Igbos also believed that health is wealth. So they not only prayed for long life but also for good health (*Ogologo ndu na ahu isi ike*). The *Ogbenye* lived with the hope that through his hard work and blessings from the gods, he would come out of his poverty. But when despite one's hard work one still remained in poverty, the ancient Igbo person protested through Iju Ogu.

There were also those who were *Ogbenye* (poor) due to their own weaknesses and laziness. In this sense, Okonkwo's father Unoka could be characterized as such. Describing him Achebe wrote "He was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. .. Unoka was of course a debtor, and he owed every neighbor some money..."³⁸⁹

Describing him further he stated "Unoka was ... a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer, and they swore never to lend him money because he never paid back."³⁹⁰As was said, the *Ogbenye* had his freedom, but this was not the case with the *Ohu*, the social classification we describe next.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

OHU

Ohu is an Igbo word for slave and members of this group had not their freedom in the society. People were bought as slaves and also some war captives were also made slaves or sold as slaves. People could also become slaves due to unpaid debts until the person was able to pay the debts. There were those that were giving out as slaves in order to pay for the human lost they or their families or societies inflicted on another groups. They slaves worked for their masters and had no freedom of their own. However, for the slave, there remained a latent hope of regaining his freedom one day and living a prosperous life.³⁹¹ Though he was not free, the *Ohu* was better in the ancient traditional Igbo society than the *Osu*.

OSU

This was the last group in the ancient traditional social ladder of the Igbo society. Those in this group were those consecrated to the gods to attend to the altars and service of the gods. This is known in Igbo land as the *Osu* caste system. This was explained by Chinua Achebe in the eighteenth chapter of *Things Fall Apart*:

*He was a person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart – a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine.*³⁹²

One could become an *Osu* through communal actions of the society, thus not expressly out of their own free will. People also became *Osu* willingly by dedicating themselves to the gods in a bid to seek protection from them. People whose life were endangered or who wanted to escape the wrath of the community due to maybe crimes committed ran into the shrine of a deity and consecrated themselves to the god. There were those who sought the protections of the gods not because of crimes committed but because of intimidations from persons of influence or slave traders. From then onwards, they became *Osu*. They were segregated from the rest of the community and inter marriages between them and those that

³⁹¹This kind of slavery was totally different from the Trans-Atlantic slavery. Here there is at least the acknowledgment of the other's humanity. There were no segregation between the markets for the slaves and those for their masters etc. The brutality of the Trans-Atlantic slavery has no comparison.

³⁹²Chinua ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, Heinmann, African Writers' Series, , Chapter 18, 113f.

were not *Osu* (regarded as free born) were forbidden. When somebody who was not an *Osu* married an *Osu*, he became an *Osu*. Descendants of *Osu* remained *Osu*. This was known as *Osu* caste system in Igbo land and one of the elements in Igbo culture that was heathen and against Christian life.

The tenacity and at the same time problematic nature of the *osu* caste system for the Igbo Christians was also portrayed by Chinua Achebe in his book *No Longer At Ease*. Obi was the grandson of Okonkwo (the principal character in *Things Fall Apart*) and the son of Nwoye. Nwoye became a convert to Christianity and took the name Isaac. Embracing Christianity and the western education, Isaac retired as a catechist. His son Obi had returned from the white man's land after his studies. He met a girl called Clara at a party and both fell in love. Obi was ready to marry Clara until she disclosed to her that she was a descendant of *Osu* and therefore an *Osu*. Due to the love Obi had for Clara, he intended to go ahead with his plan to marry Clara – going against the custom of the Igbo people. He first disclosed his plan to his friend Joseph who came from the same village of Umuofia with him. Joseph was abashed and against the intention of Obi. And he said to Obi:

“You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an *Osu* is? But how can you know.”³⁹³ By this, Joseph was sarcastically saying that Obi's sojourn in the white man's land and his education had made him to forget the culture of his people. At Obi's insistence to go on with the marriage, Joseph went on to caution Obi:

*Look at me Obi, what you are going to do concerns not only yourself and future generations. If one finger brings oil, it soils the other. In future, when we are all civilized, anybody may marry anybody. But that time has not come.*³⁹⁴

Even Obi's father who was a retired catechist and his mother Hannah who was also a devout Christian were strongly against Obi's idea of, and his insistence on marrying Clara. Obi was taken aback by his father's stand. He brought in his father's Christian faith to play as a strong point to support his decision to marry Clara. Thus Obi argued: “I don't think it matters. We are all Christians.”

But his father insisted: “We are all Christians but that is no reason to marry an *Osu*.”

³⁹³ Chinua ACHEBE, *No longer At Ease*, Heinemann African Writers' Series, chapter 7, 64.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 67.

But Obi argued further “The Bible says that in Christ there are no bond or free.”

But Isaac, his father went on “My son. I understand what you say. But this thing is deeper than you think”

“What is this thing” Obi questioned. “Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man an *Osu*, a thing given to idol and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children’s children forever. But have we seen the light of the gospel?” However, despite being a retired catechist, Isaac’s Christian faith had not yet overcome or conquered the strong cultural negative and unchristian meaning and influence of the *Osu* caste system. Thus he maintained:

*Naaman, captain of the host of Syria, was a great man and honourable, he was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper. Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you my son, not to bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into our family. If you do, your children and your children’s children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory.*³⁹⁵

Alas, Obi could not marry Clara. Achebe wanted to portray the tenacity of some cultural element in the modern Igbo Christian life. *Osu* caste system was one of those. Today, there are no new people being dedicated to idols but the Igbo Christians have not yet eradicated the belief of regarding the descendants of *Osu* as *Osu*. Till today efforts are still being made to abrogate this obnoxious belief. But success has also being made.

This is an assessment of the Igbo culture prior to the advent of the Christian missionaries. Though not all its features were compatible with Christianity, the Igbo culture was however fundamentally open to Christianity and the Christian message. It is a culture capable of dialogue. A dialogue with Igbo culture would have produced authentic Igbo African Christian spirituality capable of penetrating the inner lives of the Igbo Christian and providing answers to their doubts and insecurity. Regrettably, lack of dialogue with the culture produced a crisis of faith that borders especially on the place of the Igbo culture in Christianity. There seemed to be alienation of the Christian message to the inner life of the African Igbo people. There is also crisis emanating from historical and existential aspects of the faith crisis as was described above. The Christian message talks of a loving God who protects his people from the evil of the Satan. However, God seems to be indifferent to the situations of oppression, poverty, disease, wars and violence in the historical and existential

³⁹⁵Ibid, chapter 14, 120f.

experiences of the African Christians, in this case, Igbo Christians. In the traditional Igbo society riches and wealth came from Chukwu through the deities that had been assigned to this like Ikenga. Njoku was the deity in charge of Agriculture. Pestilence and diseases were results of taboos committed which must be atoned for. The deities were to protect the people from pestilence and wars thus the constant sacrifices in the Igbo traditional society in order to maintain the equilibrium. When things went wrong despite the integrity and innocence of humans, the traditional Igbo person prayed to Chukwu who is above the deities and protested through *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form.

5.8 IGBO TRADITION AND THE FEATURES OF NEW POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Like the New Political Theology the “*Ofo na Ogu*” tradition as part of Igbo tradition imbibe the features of memory, narratives and solidarity.

5.8.1 MEMORY

The Igbo memory and tradition were in the ancient times transmitted orally from generation to generation. (Igbo civilization dates back to centuries ago). This transmission took place first and foremost in the family circle- from father to son. It was a strong belief in Igbo culture that a father would not deceive his son- he would always tell him the truth. What one heard from the father or grandfather or an elder in the family was regarded as sacred and a form of authority. That was why in matters of great importance, when somebody was to attest before the elders or before the people about the authenticity and truth of an issue, most Igbo people gave authority to their case and submission by beginning with the saying *Nnam gwaram si* (my father told me,) or *dika nnam si gwam* (according to my father or as my father told me). This is like taking an oath in the name of one’s father and this not only put the father’s name at stake, but also the integrity of the entire family and lineage. In a culture where people believed in the integrity of name (*Ezi aha ka ego, aham efuna; Ahanna*), something great was at stake. Any family that was tainted with falsity and lies was followed by generational disgrace and disreputation. People would not for example want their relatives to marry from or to be married into families whose members had in the

past indulged in the act of stealing, lies, or murder. They were abominations (*aru*) in Igbo land and would need cleansing and rebranding that could stretch through many generations.

This introductory words “*Nnam gwaram*” (my father told me) were used only when the father was no more there to repeat his words; when he was no more alive or at least available. If he was alive or available, he would be required to speak for himself. It was believed that the ancestors and the late father would be vindictive if somebody was to lie or toll with their names. In this way tradition and history was transmitted in the family circle from one generation to the other. The *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offerer always invoked this saying when necessary, tapping into the family memory storehouse that was transmitted narratively from generation to generation. He implored this to attest to his integrity.

Tradition was also transmitted in a bigger community circle. There were always gatherings where elders narrated the history and events of a community’s existence. Through these narratives, there occurred a gradual transmission of memory and tradition from generation to generation. Elders were always taken as archives and deposits of history and traditions because they were nearer to the origin. Whenever an issue or property was under contention, or when there were different narratives on issues bordering on tradition or history as handed over by ancestors, the elders were always consulted and their insights and submissions carried great weight and authority in resolution of issues and decision making. If the issue could not be resolved by the elders’ insights, then there will be the *igu Ofo* or *inu iyi* also called *idu isi*(oath taking) through which the issue was handed over to the world of spirits because the ancestors and the spirits had access to the unadulterated truth and were always on the side of truth. These all show the importance the Igbos attached to tradition and memory both on the family and community level.

There is also a general deposit of memory and tradition in what is called *Omenala Igbo* or Igbo culture and tradition. This is the ensemble of the unwritten laws, norms and culture known, acceptable and practiced in the entire Igbo region of the eastern part of Nigeria, handed over from generation to generation.. The *Ofo na Ogu* tradition is one of these.

The *Omenala Igbo* guides every actions and deeds of individual persons and communities in Igbo land. To go against the *Omenala* may require sacrifice of atonement. Of course, there were practices in *Omenala Igbo* which due to their obnoxious nature have

been abrogated (like the killing of twins) or reformed, or those that the Igbo nation is still struggling to eliminate (like the osu cast system). However, most of the Igbo *Omenala* (tradition) is based on justice, fair play, honesty, uprightness, sincerity; it is based on *Ofo na Ogu*. Some of those traditions are ingrained in Igbo proverbs and maxims such as : *Ejim Ofo na Ogu*(My innocence and uprightness will vindicate me); *Oji Ofo ga ala* (justice will always prevail), *Onuru ube nwanne agbala oso* (be your brother's keeper); *Egbe bere ugo bere* (justice, fairness and peace); *Ome mma na ma gala, ome njo na njo ga ala*. (There is always repercussion for evil and reward for good deeds) ;*Mmadu agaghi egbu onye oga eli* (do no harm to your loved ones); *Mmadu bu agbata obi ibe ya* (We are all one human family).

One of these basic Igbo traditions was portrayed in the book *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe. This was in connection with a child called Ikemefuna. The child was a “peace ransom” giving to Umuofia community by another community in order to avert an impending war. It was a kind of replacement or atonement of a human lost effected by another village on Umuofia village - a kind of “an eye for eye” justice. Ikemefuna was put under the guidance of Okonkwo, a respected warrior of the land, pending the decision of the oracle as regards the fate of the boy. When the oracle finally decided that the boy should be sacrificed, the elders of Umofia warned Okonkwo not to participate in the killing of the boy since the tradition had it that “you shall not lay your hands on the child that calls you father”. However Okonkwo neglected this advice. This was because as a warrior, he did not want himself to appear as a as a man of emotion since for him, emotion was an attribute of weakness and cowardice. He went on and participated in the killing of the boy Ikemefunna. But his action was not without repercussion since Okonkwo ended up killing himself.

The Igbos would dig into their collective memory by saying such things like: *dika omenala anyi (ndi Igbo) siri di* (according to our (Igbo) tradition), *Igbo kwuru si*(in the sayings of the Igbo people). Such introductory words call everyone to consciousness, to attentiveness, and to memory. They call a person to go beyond himself in his subjective world and move to the collectivity, to the archives of collective memory and consciousness, to tradition which is beyond self, a source of order in existence, something which binds the

living and the dead; humans, ancestors spirits, gods and Chukwu together; an existence that envelopes all and connects them together establishing harmony peace and justice.

The Ofo na Ogu prayer offerer first digs into the collective memory of Igbo tradition, to the world order which holds the Igbos in being and attest not to have disrupted this order and harmony. Based on this he calls for vindications, what is termed *iju ugu*. His conviction that “*oji ofo ga ala* (truth and justice will always prevail) empowers him towards resistance of oppression which makes it a form of New Political Theology. The call on vindication is a call on dignity, a call against oppression, a call to be subject.

5.8.2 NARRATIVE

Narrative is an integral part of Igbo tradition and culture. Igbo tradition and world order were communicated narratively. These came in form of mythologies, folklores and stories that explained origins of things, counsel, educate and motivate one to moral acts and acts of bravery and subjectness.

The Igbo Origin is explained in forms of narratives. One of those narratives is the Nri narrative which holds that Ezenri and Ezeadama who were the forbearers of Igbo people came into existence from heaven and in dialogue and relationality cooperated with Chukwu in bringing beings into existence. This was captured in Northcote Thomas report of 1913.

The traditional account of the origin of kingship is that Ezenri and Ezeadama came from heaven and rested on an ant heap; all was water. Cuku asked who was sitting there and they answered, “We are the kings of Nri and Adama,” therefore Cuku and the kings talked. After some conversation Cuku gave them each a piece of yam; yams were that time unknown to man, for human beings walked in the bush like animals”³⁹⁶

This mythology of the Origin of the Igbo shows the idea of being subject ingrained in the Igbo idea and mentality. This idea of being a subject is enshrined even in their relationship with Chukwu – the Supreme God. This being a subject is a reality that existed from the creation of beings. Chukwu did not just come and create things without a dialogue with those archetypal persons. Neither did Chukwu coerce them in cooperating with Him. He however engaged them in a dialogue and enlisted their cooperation. This is highlighted by Chinua Achebe when he stated

³⁹⁶ Thomas, Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, vol 1, 50, in: UZUKWU, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 16.

And what is more, Chukwu Himself in all His power and majesty, did not make the Igbo world by fiat. He held conversations with mankind. He talked with those archetypal men of Nri and Adama, and even enlisted their cooperation and good offices.³⁹⁷

This myth never gave a suggestion that those archetypal persons saw Chukwu in a lesser light than He was. They knew Chukwu was the Great God, greater than the deities and spirits and far greater than humans. But they knew that the Supreme Being did not take them as “Nobody” but as “Somebody”; He never related to them as objects but as subjects. Uzukwu captured this when he stated that,

... the divine-human dialogue in the Igbo narrative reveals that God, experienced relationally, is for good of humans: religion is anthropocentric. God for human values the dignity of humans to the point of engaging them in conversation or dialogue right from creation: they participated in the invention of agriculture; they enjoyed freedom in plotting out their needs and they actively cooperated in searching for ways of realizing their needs in this world.³⁹⁸

It is from this notion of being a subject as anchored in the Igbo reality and as are contained in narratives that were formally orally transmitted that the *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form emanates. As Achebe putted it, “a man may talk and even bargain with his chi at the moment of creation or when he needs to redress an oppressive destiny”³⁹⁹ This redressing of oppressive destiny is the foundation of *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form. The praying subject asks question, like Job he protests against injustices and oppression. He asks Chukwu to intervene redirect the course of oppressive structures

The narratives are transmitted first and foremost in the family circle. The Igbos’ (and indeed Africans’) understanding of family is more than what is portrayed in the model of a nuclear family but more portrayed in the model of an extended family. That is not to say that there are no nuclear families in Igbo land. In the traditional Igbo setting children gathered together after their supper under the moon light or at the family’s *obi* to hear stories from their parents, grandparents, uncles or aunts or other grownups in the family. During these gatherings, songs, folklore and mythologies were shared. The older people in the family also told stories of their real life experiences so that the younger ones could learn from them. Here the problems of the family were also discussed. Experiences during the

³⁹⁷ Chinua ACHEBE, in: UZUKWU, Elochukwu, Eugene, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness, 17.

³⁹⁸ UZUKWU, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness , 17.

³⁹⁹ Chinua ACHEBE, in: UZUKWU, Elochukwu, Eugene, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness, 17.

day were shared with members of the family. This scenery is captured by Achebe in the nineteenth chapter of *Things Fall Apart*

When we gather together in moonlit village, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We gather together because it is good for kinsmen to do so.

The narratives were also transmitted in a larger community circle. These were done orally through narratives or songs. In the traditional Igbo African communities, there were always gathering where the events and problems of the communities were discussed. During these gatherings, elders of the communities narrated past events or history of the community in order to transmit the knowledge to the coming generation to avail and equip them with necessary knowledge and truth for the peace and progress of the community. The Igbo would say that “*Onye na anoghi ebe eliri ozu, na esi na ukwu abo ya*” (He who does not know the origin and truth of a thing or a problem, always make drastic mistakes in trying to solve or resolve it). In other words, it is necessary to know the origin and history of a thing because “*akoruo, egeruo*”- when you know the history and origin of a thing, you understand a thing properly.

Different communities have different ceremonies to commemorate different events in the history and life of the communities. During these festivals, these events may be narrated through songs by gifted traditional singers or sometimes by the *oja* (traditional flute) player or *ikolo* (wooden gong) player who told the stories with the melodies and sounds of their drums and flutes. They may be stories of victory in wars, praising the heroic deeds of great warriors of the community, or praising the deliverances by the gods or stories of origin of things and events.

5.8.3 SOLIDARITY

The Igbo society is structured and built on solidarity. In other words, solidarity is the bedrock on which Igbo culture is built and the fabric through which it is woven. N.S.S. Iwe intimated this when he stated that

This sense of solidarity is experienced at the major levels of social intercourse – domestic, village, clan and age-grade etc. Each level of solidarity is a veritable instrument of social security and protection for the individual through the duty of co-operation and mobilization of

*resources and loyalty it enjoins on the members... social solidarity in its various forms and expression is a constant factor of Igbo culture.*⁴⁰⁰

This solidarity begins and is experience from the family level through the extended manner in which the Igbos understand the family. A family is not comprised of only father, mother and their children but uncles, aunts and cousins. These take themselves as brothers and sisters and almost instinctively feel the demands to help one another. They may be living in different houses but share the same compound and the same *obi* which is a kind of house of gathering or assembly at the entrance of each compound. Here the family assembles to discuss issues concerning the family at large. Normally the eldest in the family is regarded as the head of the family. In some families, members eat together or children can eat at any of the houses in the compound and the older ones are expected to help in the training of the younger ones either by paying their school fees or helping them to learn trade or acquire skills. The women also assist one another when need be and may take food items and condiments like oil, salt, garri etc from one another. Of course this is not to say that members of the families living together exist in an idealistic world without frictions and quarrels. Like any human society they may also experience tension and friction. It is the function of the elder in the family to call together the quarrelling parties and make peace within them. When a household loses the breadwinner - in most cases a man, the brother of the deceased is expected to assist in the upkeep and sustenance of his deceased brother's family. Some may argue that modernity has adversely changed this enviable family way of life, but this structure arguably is the anchor and bedrock of Igbo culture and civilization and still exists in the Igbo society especially in the villages.

Solidarity transcends from the family level to clan level. Joy and grief are shared together. When any family in the clan is bereaved, members of the clan are expected to commensurate with the deceased family and assist the family in different ways. Most times contributions are made and giving to the family to assist them in the event of burial. Committees are constituted for the organization of the burial and people in the clan or kindred are assigned different functions for the success of the event. On the burial day, in most communities like mine (Umualumaku, Ehime Mbano, Imo state), men are expected to

⁴⁰⁰ N.S.S. Iwe, in: Amaechi Ngozi / Ugwulebo Kelvin / Onyenze Chinyere, Igbo Superstition and Development: A Critical Analysis, in: Okere T. I. (Ed.), The Church and Igbo Society. Proceedings of the International Symposium Organized by Whelan Research Academy, Owerri; Nigeria, Vol.2 No10, 198.

bring a keg of palm wine and women are expected to bring cooked fufu and good soup in order to assist the bereaved families in hosting their guests and visitors. Joys are also shared. For example when a daughter from the clan or kindred is getting married, the suitor is traditionally required to bring together with the bride price other items like tubers of yam, bags of rice, soaps etc. These things are not kept entirely by the family from where the girl comes from but are shared among members of the kindred. Only a certain prescribed portion is kept by the family. The Igbos say that a child is not own by a person or a family but by a community. Also in ceremonies like marriages, child dedications, Iwa akwa, etc, people share in the joy. People do not normally wait for invitation cards. It is taken for granted that everybody is invited. This sense of solidarity amongst kinsmen is expressed for example in the nineteenth chapter of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the prayer of one of the characters and the elder of the family Uchendu:

*We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him.*⁴⁰¹

This solidarity transcends the kindred level to the community level and above it. Members of a community do things together and have different celebrations and festivals which remind them of their common origin and oneness and the need for people to assist one another. There are also different groups and associations within different communities which are designed for the assistance of the members and the progress of the community at large.

Solidarity is not limited only to members of the same community or even tribe. The culture demands that one should have solidarity with strangers and visitors or the disadvantaged among the people. If a person is on a journey and is thirsty and comes to someone's house to demand for water, one is obliged to give him. If one has food, one has to offer one's visitor because human beings are related with one another and are members of the same human family. A person who is not charitable and who does not assist people in need is regarded by people as a wicked man and he is avoided by the people. Neither

⁴⁰¹ Chinua, ACHEBE, Chapter 19.

men nor the good spirits assist him in times of urgent need and most times, he dies miserably.

The *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offerer sees himself as part of this human family. At the time of *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offering, he attest to the fact that he has been faithful to this solidarity that binds the human family together; he has not broken the chain of connectivity, neither has he oppressed the poor, the stranger, the widow or the orphan. He has not taken what does not belong to him. He therefore cries and demands the intervention of the good spirits to fight his course and for Chukwu to restore his wholeness and punish his aggressors. That is why most times the *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offerer raises his palm to heaven and says “*Elu na ala lekwa akam. Emegiderem onye? Aka m dikwa ocha*. Heaven and earth look at my hands. Whom did I offend? My hands are clean.

CHAPTER SIX

INCULTURATION AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN AFRICA

Ofo na Ogu theology as an African political theology based on Igbo African prayer form is an attempt at inculturation. Most of the elements of the Igbo culture are not opposed to Christianity. There is then the need for a dialogue between Christianity and Igbo tradition and culture; the need for inculturation. We shall examine the concept of inculturation and the process of biblical interpretation in Africa.

6.1 A CASE FOR INCULTURATION

Though the word “inculturation” had already made inroad into theological sphere since 1959, it established itself in the official Church document in the apostolate of John Paul II who used the word in his exhortation to a Papal Bible Commission on 26th March 1979 and later that year in his encyclical *Catechesi tradendae* as a successful expression of the mystery of incarnation.⁴⁰² By way of definition, inculturation of the church may be defined as

*... the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of the people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, but as an enrichment of the church universal.*⁴⁰³

J. Ratzinger noted the difficulties and impossibilities that surround an evangelization without dialogue between the different religions cum cultures involved and Christianity. In evangelization, dialogue between cultures is very important for the survival of both Christian culture and the culture of the people that are to be evangelized. This presupposes

⁴⁰² Cf. ROEST-CROLLIUS, Inculturation, in: HÖDL, Hans, Gerald, Inkulturation. Ein Begriff im Spannungsfeld von Theologie, Religions- und Kulturwissenschaft, in: KLIEBER, Rupert / STOWASSER, Martin (eds.), Inkulturation: Historische Beispiele und theologische Reflexionen zur Flexibilität und Widerständigkeit des Christlichen, Wien 2006, 27.

⁴⁰³ ROEST-CROLLIUS, Inculturation, in: HÖDL, Hans, Gerald, Inkulturation, 28.

the idea of an openness of cultures to one another or what he called the universality of every culture.

It is difficult to see how a culture, leaving and breathing the religion with which it is interwoven, can be transplanted into another religion without both of them going to ruin... A positive outcome of the operation is hard to envision. The operation can only have a sense if Christian faith and the other religion, together with the culture which lives from it, do not stand in utter difference to each other. It makes sense if they are interiorly open to one another, or to put differently, if they naturally tend to draw near and unite. Inculturation therefore presupposes the potential universality of each culture.⁴⁰⁴

Ratzinger underscores the capacity of every culture for dialogue; the universality and openness of every culture to each other. Thus he said:

The meeting of cultures is possible because man, despite all the differences of his history and social structures, remains one and the same being. This one being man, however, is himself touched in the depth of his existence by truth. The fundamental openness of each person to the other can only be explained by the hidden fact that our souls have been touched by truth; and this explains the essential agreement which exists even between cultures most removed from each other.⁴⁰⁵

Ratzinger preferred the word “Interculturality” to the word “inculturation”. “Interculturality” he said denoted a meeting of two cultures and highlighted the reciprocity in this meeting whereas the word “inculturation” in his view connoted the notion of a faith stripped of culture planted in a culture stripped of religion. Thus he stated that this process of interculturality

... can mean the healing pass – over of a culture. Only appearing to die, the culture rises, coming full into its own for the first time. For this reason we should no longer speak of inculturation but of the meeting of culture or “interculturality”, to coin a new phrase. For inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religious indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse. But such a notion is first of all artificial and unrealistic, for with the exception of modern technological civilization there is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture devoid of faith. It is above all difficult to envision how two organisms, foreign to each other should all of a sudden become a viable whole in a transplantation which stunts both of them. Only if all cultures are potentially universal and open to each other can interculturality lead to a flourishing new form.⁴⁰⁶

This notion of inculturation by Ratzinger as connoting a Christianity bereft of culture planted in a culture bereft of religion may have arisen from the description of inculturation

⁴⁰⁴ J. RATZINGER, Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures. Meeting with the Doctrinal Commission in Asia (Hong Kong, 3 March 199), in: GRONCHI, Maurizio, About the Inculturation of the Christian Faith. Towards the Interculturality, Universität Wien, Katholische Theologische Fakultät (Gastvortrag 7.6.2017).

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

as “incarnation” of the gospel. However, the notion of inculturation in the understanding of many theologians contains the notion of a Christianity with a culture since there cannot be such thing as an abstract Christianity. It also involves the notion of culture with religion since religion is part of the culture of the people like the case of the Igbos. Inculturation involves dialogue which is a process of giving and taking in Christ between the meeting cultures.⁴⁰⁷ Whichever term that is preferred here, there is in both a call for dialogue between Christianity in whichever culture it is already inculturated or incarnated in, with the new culture to be evangelized.

Pope Francis emphasized that the Church is endowed with great richness through the cultural diversities. He confirmed the action of the Holy Spirit in every culture where the Gospel of Christ has taken flesh. This Gospel of Christ transcends every culture and cannot be reduced to a singular cultural expression.

*Whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel. The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression... In the Christian custom of an evangelized people, the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, showing her new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face. Through inculturation, the Church “introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community”, for “every culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived”.*⁴⁰⁸

Going further the Pope maintained that

Whenever properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the Blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. It is he who brings rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is not uniformity but a multi faceted and inviting harmony. Evangelization joyfully acknowledges these varied treasures which the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church. We would not do justice to logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous. While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural. Hence in the evangelization of new cultures, or cultures which have not received the Christian message, it is not essential to impose a specific cultural form, no matter how beautiful or ancient it may be, together with the Gospel. The message that we proclaim always has a certain cultural dress, but

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Hans Gerald Hödl, *Inkulturation*, 28f.

⁴⁰⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium*, no 116.

*we in the Church can sometimes fall into a needless hallowing of our culture, and thus show more fanaticism than true evangelizing zeal.*⁴⁰⁹

Post Vatican II theology has been open to cultures recognizing and confirming the beauty and truth that are found in them. Mbefo noted that “Post-Vatican Christianity is noted for building bridges through dialogue with non- Christian religions as well as with the ‘separated brethren’. Missionary work in Nigeria was pre-Vatican II. Its motive force derived from the type of thinking that informed the missiology of yesteryears”⁴¹⁰

6.2 BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

This analysis of the development of biblical interpretations in Africa will mainly make use of the write up of the African biblical scholar Justin S Ukpong titled *Development in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutic Directions* which was also made use of in my Master’s Thesis *The Understanding and Relevance of the Book of Job in the Context of Igbo Tradition and Faith Crisis*.

Historically, Africa is not a new comer in the arena of biblical interpretation. One can rightfully claim that Africa belongs to the cradle of systematic biblical interpretation with such names like Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others (Trigg. 1988: 21 -23).⁴¹¹ Thus Africa can be rightly described as the cradle of systematic Christian biblical interpretation.⁴¹² The earliest method that was used was allegorical. Though modern biblical scholarship may classify this method as uncritical, it served its own time. Modern biblical scholarship has metamorphosed itself into new methods which have replaced the allegorical method. Thus systematic biblical interpretation in modern times distinguishes itself in three methodological approaches: the historical critical method, the literary method and the contextual method.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹Ibid., n. 17.

⁴¹⁰ Luke Nnamdi Mbefo, 113f.

⁴¹¹ J. S. UKPONG, Developments in Biblical interpretations in Africa. Historical and hermeneutic directions, in: WEST, Gerald O./ DUBE, Musa W.(eds.), The Bible in Africa. Transactions, Trajectories and Trends, Leiden. Boston. Köln 2000, 11.

⁴¹² Cf. Nwaiwu, 13.

⁴¹³Cf. Ibid, 14.

The historical critical method approaches the interpretation of the biblical text from the background of the text and its history of origin, the culture in which the text originated and the ideas circulating at the time. The biography and social background of the author of the text and also the audience to which the text was originally directed to, also play important roles in the interpretation of the text. The biblical texts are compared to other literature written at the period. This method is also known as historical criticism and dissects itself into form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism etc. In the 18th century biblical scholarship, it was also known as higher criticism.

However, some scholars have also expressed reservations about a pure use of this method without the consideration of the effect. D.J.A Clines sees such as an ethical irresponsibility. According to him,

...in its quest for origins it screened out the present , and with that , the ethics of interpretation – including the ethics of keeping alive these texts by study and commentary and writing. ...commitment was to the ‘truth’, whatever that might be and wherever that might lead. And that is unquestionably a whole sight better than a commitment to falsity. But it systematically ignored the question of effect on the readers...⁴¹⁴

Be that as it may, biblical scholarship has applied many other modern forms of biblical interpretations. Thus,

Since the 1970s biblical scholarship has entered a broader spectrum of literary analysis employing variety of methods in its investigation of meanings of texts: new criticism, Aristotelian interpretation, comparative literature, Russian formalism, structuralism, folklore studies and readings influenced by psychological and sociological ideologies etc. In these new literary approaches, many scholars have focused their attention more on the final form of the text ... than on its literary history.^{415 416}

In the literary method, emphasis is laid on the underlying structure of the text. The meaning and messages of the text are discovered in the interaction between the reader and the text. The text reveals itself in this encounter and through the study of the underlying structure.

⁴¹⁴ D. J. A. CLINES, Why is there a Book of Job in: BEUKEN, W., A., M., (ed.), The Book of Job, Leuven 1994, 14.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. L.G. PERDUE/ W. C. GILPIN (eds.), The voice from the Whirlwind, 16.

⁴¹⁶Cf. NWAIWU, 114.

In Contextual biblical interpretation, the context of the reader is incorporated in the interpretation of the text thereby discovering the relevance and meaning of the text for the reader. Modern African biblical interpretation has mainly employed this method.⁴¹⁷

In the recent times, three stages have been distinguished in the biblical interpretation in Africa.⁴¹⁸ Though in themselves not totally exclusive from one another, they represent a thematic illustration of progressive changes in biblical interpretation in Africa.⁴¹⁹ We shall attempt a concise illustration of these stages.

The first stage in the modern biblical interpretation in Africa is characterized as the reactive and apologetic stage. Early biblical interpretations in Africa especially in the years between 1930-1970 could be classified into this stage.⁴²⁰ As the name implies, it was a biblical interpretative scholarship undertaken as a reaction to the early Christian missionary activities' rejection and condemnation of African traditional religion without proper examination or evaluation - especially those missionary activities of the 18 and 19th centuries. Concerned and conscientious Westerners and later on Africans themselves undertook studies within the framework of comparative religion to throw light on the continuity between the religious culture of African traditional religion and the Bible especially the Old Testament. The aim was to legitimize African traditional religion. What was sought was existential and not essential continuity. The importance of this stage was that it gave legitimacy and validity to Africa's past and Africans came to see the African Traditional religion as their Old Testament.⁴²¹ This stage gave way to another stage.

The second stage of biblical interpretation in Africa saw the emergence of two forms: Inculturation and Liberation theologies.

Inculturation was born out of the desire and longing to make Christianity truly African; a desire to initiate a dialogue between the Christian religion and the African culture in order

⁴¹⁷Cf. Ibid

⁴¹⁸J. S. UKPONG, Developments in Biblical interpretations in Africa. Historical and hermeneutic directions, 11. (His article deals extensively on this issue and is basically used on the analysis here).

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Ibid, 14.

⁴²⁰Cf, NWAIWU, 14.

⁴²¹ Cf. Ibid, 14f.

to make Christianity incarnate in African culture and that Africans themselves may be truly African and truly Christians. This desire had been strengthened by the documents of the Second Vatican Council especially *Nostra aetate* and by many Apostolic exultations. For example, this desire was strengthened by the echo of Paul VI exultation in his visit to Kampala “You may and you must have African Christianity.” He further stated

*You will be able to formulate Catholicism in terms that are completely suited to your culture and to offer the Catholic Church the precious and original contribution of 'negritude', of which it has particular need at this point in history.*⁴²²

In the same way John Paul II opined that

*The synthesis of culture and faith is not just an exigency of culture but an exigency of faith as well. A faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully accepted, completely thought out, and truly lived*⁴²³

The inculturation approach exhibited two kinds of models: “African in the Bible studies” and the “Evaluative studies”.

In the “African in the Bible studies”, there is the approach and attitude of highlighting African role in the Bible especially in the history of Ancient Israel and in the history of salvation. This became necessary to entangle the Bible from ideological use against Africans in the hands of racist ideologists.⁴²⁴

The other aspect of inculturation is the evaluative studies. As J. Ukpong pointed out, the aim of evaluative studies as it concerns biblical interpretation in Africa “is to facilitate the communication of the biblical message within the African milieu, and to evolve a new understanding of Christianity that would be African and biblical.”⁴²⁵ Here, the theological underpinning resulting from the encounter of the Bible with African traditional religion is evaluated. This evaluation goes beyond assessing the similarities between African traditional religion and the Biblical text to interpreting the biblical texts on the basis of those similarities.⁴²⁶ Evaluative studies as a biblical method makes use of the tools of historical critical method and is the most widely applied method in African biblical

⁴²² Paul VI, *Africae Terrae*, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 29.

⁴²³ John Paul II, *Letter of foundation to the Pontifical Council for Culture*, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 29.

⁴²⁴ Cf. NWAIWU, 15.

⁴²⁵ J. S. UKPONG, 16.

⁴²⁶ Cf. NWAIWU, 15f.

interpretation. Five forms of evaluative studies have been identified by Ukong which in themselves are not exclusive from one another but each however tends to lay emphasis on an aspect of the African biblical interpretation within the evaluative studies. These I summarized in my aforementioned work as follows:

The first approach seeks to evaluate, in the light of biblical witness elements of African culture, religion, beliefs, concepts and or practices, with the aim of arriving at a Christian understanding of them and bringing out their value for Christian witness.

The second approach occupies itself with what a biblical text or theme has to say in the critique of a particular issue in the society or in the church's life or what lessons may be drawn from a biblical text or theme for a particular context.

The third approach concerns itself with the interpretation of themes or texts against the background of African culture, religion and life experience. The aim is to arrive at a new understanding of the biblical text that would be informed by the African situation, and that would be African and Christian.

The fourth approach involves identifying and using concepts from either the Bible or African culture in order to show continuity between Christianity and African culture. These concepts act as "bridgeheads" in communicating the biblical message.

In the fifth approach, scholars occupy themselves with the biblical text in order to discover biblical models or biblical foundation for the aspects of contemporary church life and practice in Africa.⁴²⁷

The other aspect of the second phase of biblical interpretation in Africa is the Liberation hermeneutics. This is based on the fact that God does not support oppression and oppressive structures but God will that all men live as equal and subjects before him and in the freedom of the children of God. Liberation theology has its origin in the theological reflections concerning the struggles and need of liberation of the oppressed people. Its origin in Latin America was championed by theologians like Gustavo Gutirrez. It promotes the thesis that God has taken side with the oppressed in the society. However, liberation theology is not limited to the Latin America. It also has its manifestations in the struggles of the African Americans for their dignity and freedom. Johann Baptist Metz sees also the connection and symbiosis between New Political theology and liberation theology since both aim at affirmation of the truth that all men are created to be equal and live as subjects before God. Africans in their struggles to live as subjects have also employed theologies that are liberational. This is also exhibited in the reception and interpretation of the bible.

⁴²⁷Ibid, 16.

Two aspects are identified in the African Liberation theology: Black theology and the Feminist Hermeneutics.

Black theology has its origin in the struggle against the oppressive structure of the systems of apartheid that prevailed in South Africa until 1994. It drew its inspiration from the liberative theological exercise and movement of the African Americans “which existed for so long implicit in the Negro spirituals that gave heart to black slaves in the heavy days of their bondage and which became more articulate and explicit during the civil right campaign.”⁴²⁸ As Desmond Tutu said,

*Liberation theology more than any kind of theology issues out of the crucible of human suffering and anguish. It happens because people cry out, “Oh, God, how long?” “Oh God, why? ...” All liberation theology stems from trying to make sense of human suffering when those who suffer are victims of organized oppression and exploitation, when they are emasculated and treated as less than what they are: human persons created in the image of Triune God, redeemed by the one Savior Jesus Christ and sanctified by the Holy Paraclete. This is the genesis of all liberation theology and so also black theology, which is theology of liberation in Africa.*⁴²⁹

Two forms of Black theology in the African interpretation of the Bible are identified. In the first form, biblical text are reflected upon bringing into context the apartheid experience and the apartheid experience is brought into biblical interpretations. Thus, it “seeks to interpret the Bible in the light of the apartheid experience and to reflect on this experience in the light of the biblical message.”⁴³⁰ Here liberative motives in the bible are studied as tools of empowerment and liberation for the oppressed African people. In the second form, there is an effort through the use of historical critical method to free the Bible from repressive and unchristian ideological conspiracy as a tool of oppression in the hands of racist ideologists. Itumeleng Mosala is one of the theologians on this front and he recommends the use of historical- materialist analysis of the biblical text.⁴³¹

Mbiti emphasized that Inculturation theology and Black theology have different origin and different historical context and social background. Thus, caution should be exercised not to forget this fact or to confuse both. He thinks that theological thrust in Africa should

⁴²⁸ Desmond, TUTU, The theology of Liberation in Africa, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 54.

⁴²⁹Desmon TUTU, The Theology of Liberation in Africa, in:GUTIERREZ, xv.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Nwaiwu, 17.

⁴³¹ Cf.Ibid.

centre itself on anthropological poverty as it concerns the exploitation of the African person in his historical contact with other races.⁴³²

The other aspect of liberation theology in African Interpretation of the Bible is the Feminist hermeneutics. As Louise Tappa noted, “Today it is impossible for African theology... to emerge and to bloom unless both African churches and African theology start out from, and develop around the situation of women in Africa.”⁴³³ Here, theology applies the Bible as a liberative and emancipatory tool against the oppressive situations of women. Historical critical method and literal criticism as tools of biblical interpretations, but also disciplines like sociology and anthropology are applied in biblical scholarship. Five strands of this theology in its biblical interpretation in Africa are outlined:

In the first, the tendency of conventional hermeneutics’ interpreting the bible basically in male categories and presenting Christian history in the male categorical bent are reassessed. For example God is taken as a male and basically interpreted in male categories. Thus, such interpretation is reassessed. In the second form, those biblical passages that tend to portray women as sub-ordinate to men and comparatively and inordinately critical of women are re-assessed and re-interpreted. In the third aspect those positive roles and impact of women in the bible and in the history of salvation are highlighted and emphasized and attention is directed to biblical texts of such nature. The fourth aspect seeks to bring a basic hermeneutic category, guide or orientation for interpreting negative or positive motives in the bible about women. In the fifth aspect, the experiences of the African women are brought into biblical interpretation and biblical themes and texts are interpreted from their perspectives.⁴³⁴

The third and last aspect of biblical interpretation in Africa is exemplified in the Contextual biblical studies and inculturation hermeneutic. Here the non biblical African Christian is made a partner and is incorporated in biblical interpretation. “It integrates their

⁴³² Cf. Ibid.

⁴³³ L. TAPPA, “The Christ- event, from the view point of women: A protestant perspective, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 56.

⁴³⁴ Cf. NWAIWU, 18.

views and makes the African context the subject of biblical interpretation.”⁴³⁵In the Contextual method, the intended African context or situation for studies is x-rayed and analysed and the biblical text is systematically analysed and dynamically applied to this context.⁴³⁶

This work as it relates to the book of Job falls into the contextual phase of the development of biblical interpretation in Africa which also incorporates evaluative studies in inculturation. It aims at contextualization of the biblical interpretation of the Book of Job in the Igbo African context. It analyses the Igbo African context and the theologies in the book of Job and the language of prayer found there in as the biblical foundation of Igbo African *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism. It aims at a productive understanding of the Book of Job in the Igbo – Nigerian African traditional and social context. Thus this work aims to say that the mysticism of the book of Job as found in the language of prayer therein is also the mysticism of *Ofo na Ogu* Igbo prayer form. This what will be portrayed in the next chapter.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa, 25.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BOOK OF JOB AS BIBLICAL BASIS OF OFO NA OGU MYSTICISM

7. 0 INTRODUCTION

The mysticism of *Ofo na Ogu* theology finds its biblical basis and inspiration from the Book of Job, especially, in the lamentation of Job. The lamentation of Job as radical as it is, was not rejected by God. It was an expression of a missing God. To know God is to miss him. In this understanding, the lamentation of Job was an expression of faith in the Living God. This theology does not stifle questions, neither does it suppress doubts. It is not based on pure affirmation as in the case of the friends of Job but cries out to God in pain for redemption within the limited time of human history. But it does not stop the humans to strive for justice. The lamentation of Job which makes use of the language of prayer is similar to the Igbo *Ofo na iju ugu* prayer form here expressed as *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism. This is similar to the Jesus mysticism of political theology to use Johann Baptist Metz words. The attitudes of the friends of Job find their expressions today in the pure affirmation and retributive doctrine of the prosperity gospel preachers. An inculturated *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism as found in the Book of Job into Igbo Christian life will be a remedy or panacea against the current rapid advancement of retributive doctrine and pure affirmation especially by proponents of gospel of prosperity. It will help Igbo Christians to know that when one experiences temptations or calamities, it does not mean that one is a sinner. However, Christians can bring their doubts, questions and pains to God in prayer even in spontaneous, dramatic or even radical languages as found in the mouth of Job and most times, in the mouth of *iju Ogu* prayer offerer in Igbo land. They should be filled them with eschatological hope. The Book of Job will be examined with the aim of elucidating these points

7.1 HISTORY AND LAND

The Book of Job is a literary masterpiece that has filled people of different generations up to the modern times with admiration. According to the opinion of many scholars, the Book Job was composed between the 6th century BC and the 2nd Century BC⁴³⁷ However, there are some authors that place the composition of the book around the 7th century BC.⁴³⁸

The title of the Book of Job corresponds to the name of the principal actor of the book's narrative. The name "Job" might have been taken from the Akkadian word: *'ajja - 'abu* ... which means "where is my father".⁴³⁹ The word "father" here has a divine implication. Thus the word "Job" is interpreted as "where is my God."⁴⁴⁰ Here, there is a search for God and the redemption that comes from God amidst the torture and dehumanization of excruciating sufferings.

Though there are some scholars who believe that the Book of Job was a real story of a life experience of a man who suffered excruciatingly in flesh,⁴⁴¹ many others believe that it is a fiction that tells something that concerns every man in every age. Thus Schwienhorst-Schönberger writes that "the Book of Job does not narrate a single event of history, but an event that touches human being irrespective of individual and cultural differences. In this way, the Book of Job does not narrate a past event but something that is deeply present."⁴⁴² It is to be noted that in the traditional ancient community where this narrative originated, there was no clear-cut differentiations between fictions and real life story. In any case,

⁴³⁷ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Die Theodizeefrage im Alten Testament. Das Buch Job, 13.

⁴³⁸ D. WOLFERS, Deep Things out of Darkness. The Book of Job, Michigan 1995, 52f.

⁴³⁹ Cf. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Ein Weg durch das Leid. Das Buch Ijob, 13.

Cf. Jürgen EBACH, Streiten mit Gott. Hiob; Teil I, Hiob 1-20, 1996 Neukirchen – Vluyn, 4f. While referring to the possibility of the derivation of the name Job from Akkadian *aja abu* which could be interpreted as "where is my father" Ebach further maintains that the Hebrew reader of the book of Job could read a connection between the name Job and the Hebrew word for enemy (Ojeb) and hears in the name *ijjob* the verb *ajab* which means "to be hostile to", "to controvert", to dispute, to refute, to oppose, to challenge and may understand the name Job as "the one being hostile to".

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ein Weg durch das Leid. Das Buch Ijob, 13.

⁴⁴¹ Gustavo GUTIERREZ, On Job. God Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent, New York 1987, 14.

⁴⁴² SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 12. (comp. Nicht etwas historisch Einmaliges wird also im Ijobbuch erzählt, sondern ein Geschehen, dass das Menschsein unabhängig von individuellen und kulturellen Besonderheiten betrifft. So gesehen erzählt das Ijobbuch nicht etwas Vergangenes, sondern etwas zutiefst Gegenwärtiges).

whether Job had lived or had not lived is irrelevant in the understanding of the Book of Job. Ebach opines that though Job may not be a historical figure, the references and connections on the name of Job and other names found in the Book of Job with other biblical passages and tradition give life to the figure of Job. From such connections like the biblical references to the land of Uz, one may conceive that Job was an Arabian, perhaps Aramanian or Edomite, or Abraham's younger brother. Even though Job may not be a historical figure, these inferences give life to the person and figure of Job. The number of Job's children could also give insight to what the authors want to communicate about the person of Job. Job is said to have had ten children – seven sons and three daughters. These numbers are symbolic. They represent completeness and satisfaction. This is also the case with the number assigned to Job's animals. Thus it could be further said of the figure of Job that he was a rich, wise, satisfied Herdsman from Arabian land.⁴⁴³

The land of Uz is where the scene of the story of the book of Job is said to have taken place. The name Uz appeared in some passages of the Bible, for example in Gen 10:23 and Jer 25:20. There are some scholars that think that Uz has a specific location in the world map. G. Frederic Owen for example thinks that Wadi Sirhan, SE OF Jebel ed Druz is likely to be the land where the land of Uz was located.⁴⁴⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez thinks that Uz could have been part of Edom as indicated by the names of the friends of Job which are names of cities from the region.⁴⁴⁵ Although the vulgate counted Uz as a land belonging to the Orient, other scholars however think that Uz was more of a fictional name to the story of Job and therefore has no earthly location. For example Jürgen Ebach notes that the name Uz appeared as a person in Hebrew genealogy: As the first born of Abraham's brother Nahor (Gen 22:20f); as the son of Aram (Gen 10:23); as the grandson of Seir (Edom) (Gen 26:28). He maintains that one cannot localize Uz which is given as Job's homeland. However, the name shows a connection with Arabian nations.⁴⁴⁶ Schwienhorst – Schönberger has the same opinion. He thinks that in reference to 1:3 "son of the east" one

⁴⁴³ Cf. Jürgen EBACH, *Streiten mit Gott. Hiob, Teil I*, 4.

⁴⁴⁴ G. Frederick OWEN, *The land of Uz*, in: ZUCK, Roy, B., (ed.), *Sitting with Job. Selected Studies on the Book of Job*, 246.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Gustavo GUTIERREZ, *On Job. God Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, New York 1987, 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Jürgen EBACH, *Streiten mit Gott. Hiob, Teil I*, 4.

can at best imagine that the land in the mind of the writers may be somewhere east of Israel.⁴⁴⁷

As was earlier on said, whether Job was a historical figure or a fictional figure, or whether the land of Uz was historical location or not do not necessarily make much difference in the understanding of the Book of Job.

7.2 THEME OF THE BOOK OF JOB

There are differences in response as it concerns the main theme or the purpose of the Book of Job. However, one still observes an underlying similarity. For example Mettinger thinks that the underlying theme that the Book of Job deals with is the issue of God's relationship to evil and suffering.⁴⁴⁸ For Schwienhorst – Schönberger, the Book of Job deals with the question and problem of suffering – a question and problem which is universal in nature.⁴⁴⁹ G. W. Parsons opines that the aim of the Book of Job is to present how the proper relationship between God and humans is to be understood. It is not based on trade by barter, nor on the understanding of an exchange. It is not a give and gain bargain but "solely on the sovereign grace of God and man's response of faith and submissive trust."⁴⁵⁰ He further stated that "this involves (in a negative fashion) the refutation of 'retribution theology'; a dogmatic employment of the concept of divine retribution so that there was an automatic connection between deed and state of being."⁴⁵¹ For Jürgen Ebach the Book of Job deals with human suffering and the questions that arise out of this suffering – why do good people sometimes suffer and things appear to be going well for the evildoer? In this regard, there arise the questions of God's justice and the relationship between faith and experience.⁴⁵² Ortkemper opines that the Book of Job occupies itself only with a single

⁴⁴⁷Cf. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 13.

⁴⁴⁸ T.N.D. METTINGER, The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?, in: GILPIN, Leo, G., / CLARK, W., (eds.) The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job, 39.

⁴⁴⁹ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Die Theodizeefrage im Alten Testament, 13.

⁴⁵⁰ G. W. PARSONS, The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job , in: ZUCK, Roy, B.,(ed.), Sitting with Job. Selected Studies on the Book of Job, 22f.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵²Cf. Jürgen EBACH, Hiob Post. Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Hiobbuch zu Themen biblischer Theologie und zur Methodik der Exegese, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1995, 56f. „Im Hiobbuch geht es um das Leiden eines

theme: the conflict between the faith of Israel and the problem of the suffering of the innocent.⁴⁵³For Gustavo Gutierrez, the book occupies itself with the theme of sufferings and how humans can speak about God in the means of suffering and degradation. “How are human beings to find a language applicable to God in the midst of innocent suffering? This question, with all its implications for our understanding of the justice and unmerited generosity of God, is the great theme of the Book of Job.”⁴⁵⁴

One observes here an underlying agreement that the book of Job deals with faith crisis as a result of the problem of suffering in the world and belief in Almighty God who is Goodness itself. Thus it is my opinion that the suffering of the innocent in its relationship to the belief in a just God is the central theme of the Book of Job. It incorporates the possibility of a disinterested religion and finding the proper language to speak to God in the means of faith crisis that arise as a result of contradiction between faith and life experiences. Finding a language to talk to God in the means of degrading and defacing human suffering is the main theme of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism.

7.3 AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF JOB

There are different opinions as regards the authorship and composition of the Book of Job.⁴⁵⁵ In this work, the different opinions have been grouped into single authorship which encompasses allegorical interpretation and direct experience interpretation; there is also the multiple authorship model which contains diachronic and synchronic interpretation, and then the contextual interpretation which differentiates between the writer of the Book of Job, and its author. We shall now examine the authorship of the Book of Job based on these points.

Menschen und um eine Frage, die sich aus diesem Leiden ergibt: Warum ergeht es Bösen gut und Guten schlecht?“

⁴⁵³ Franz- Josef ORTKEMPER, Von Angesicht zu Angesicht. Gotteserfahrung im Alten Testament, Stuttgart 2010, 119.

⁴⁵⁴GUTIÉRREZ, 12.

⁴⁵⁵Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ijob. Vier Modelle der Interpretation, in: SEIDL, Theodor / ERNST, Stephane, (eds.), Das Buch Ijob, Frankfurt 2007, 21-37.

7.3.1 SINGLE AUTHORSHIP: ALLEGORICAL VERSUS REAL EXPERIENCE

According to some opinions, the Book of Job was composed by a single person or had single authorship. According to David Wolfers, the Book of Job “shares with the Books of Ruth, Jonah and Esther the quality of being a single author literary composition. It was written originally by a single author as a self contained work”⁴⁵⁶ According to this opinion, though there may be different literary styles or different literary worlds in the composition of the book, it does not necessarily mean different literary hands ⁴⁵⁷ In this regard, he holds that there are many other biblical stories where there are disparities and seeming contradictions as regards styles and method. In some of these cases, it may not be as a result of amalgamation of different sections from different sources as many modern interpreters making use of modern tools of biblical interpretation may think. It may be that the ancient world was applying literary method or a mode of story-telling that is unknown to the present biblical analysts and interpreters.⁴⁵⁸ Thus it could be improper to without proper consideration apply the modern tools of literary analysis to the ancient oriental text like the book of Job. David Wolfers thinks that the author of the book of Job was an exceptionally educated man of his time, an Israelite or a Judean who might have lived in the 7th Century. According to his analysis, the author was Isaiah or somebody close to him. Thus he said

*As we penetrate the Book of Job we shall find again and again that there are words, phrases and whole passages which cannot be understood without reference to the Book of Isaiah. This is particular the case with the two final chapters of poem, 40 and 41, which are replete with symbols whose significance is directly derived from the work of the prophet. Indeed the reader who examines Chap. 5 of this book attentively can hardly escape the conviction that Chapters 40 and 41 of Job are contemporaneous with the first Isaiah, and that their author either was he or someone closely associated with him.*⁴⁵⁹

Wolfers maintains that the book of Job can only be correctly interpreted and correctly understood only when one has the knowledge of the history which the book allegorically represents. He maintains that “analysis of the text of the Book of Job ... shows an allegorical level in which the book is concerned throughout with the event taking place

⁴⁵⁶ WOLFERS, 67.

⁴⁵⁷ D. WOLFERS, 55.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Ibid, 62.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, 54f.

during the 8th Century BCE, culminating in the siege of Jerusalem in 701 (or 700).”⁴⁶⁰ According to him, Job was an allegorical figure for Judah and their King Hezekiah during the time of Assyria conquests. The book of Job strongly portrays “the injustice of the punishment of Judah at just that time when there reigned a virtuous king who did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord ... (II Chron 29: 2; II Kings 18:3)”⁴⁶¹. The purpose of writing the Book of Job for him was to show that the terms of covenant between God and Israel were no more operational; “that they had been unilaterally abrogated by the Lord, or in the alternative, so transgressed by the people, they had become inoperative.” And “Job representing the Israelite nation, believed the betrayal to have been the Lord’s, while the Lord was equally convinced that His people had deserted Him and his ways.”⁴⁶² In his opinion, the Book of Job deals precisely and singularly with the history of Israel. He however notes the novelty of his opinion and interpretation.⁴⁶³

Robert Gordis also propounds this theory of the single authorship of the book of Job.⁴⁶⁴ He believes that the author must have composed the book over a long period of time.

Although Gustavo Gutierrez believes in the singular authorship of the Book of Job, he does not share this view of the allegorical portrayal of the Book of Job like Wolfers. He believes that the book is a record of a real life experience of a person who has gone through these pains and sorrows. Thus he thinks that Job himself in person could have been the author of the book of Job. According to him,

*...it could have been written only by someone who had suffered in flesh und spirit. Job’s protesting lament bears the seal of personal experience; so his confrontation with God and his final surrender and new certainty. The work is written with a faith that has been drenched in tears and reddened by blood. This champion of the gratuitousness of God’s love is like Paul of Tarsus in that he has known suffering and loneliness. The Book of Job, with its lights and shadows, its success and its limitations, reflects a personal odyssey*⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁰Ibid, 52f

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 69.

⁴⁶² Ibid, 15.

⁴⁶³Cf. NWAIWU, 116.

⁴⁶⁴ Robert GORDIS, in: SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ijob: Vier Modelle der Interpretation, 13.

⁴⁶⁵ Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ, On Job,. God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent, 14.

7.3.2 MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP – DIACHRONIC VERSUS SYNCHRONIC

Many scholars are of the opinion that the Book of Job exhibits different characteristics, literary styles and qualities which show that the book was composed by different authors or editors at different periods of the history of the people of Israel. For some of these scholars, the history of the development of the Book of Job can be reconstructed; others believe it cannot be reconstructed. A section of those who believe in multiple authorship of the book of Job think that the knowledge of the origin of the book of Job is a *sine qua non* to the understanding of the book of Job. Thus they maintain a diachronic interpretation and understanding of the Book of Job.⁴⁶⁶ Thus, for these scholars, without the knowledge of the development and origin of the book of Job, one cannot understand the message of the book of Job. In this way, a synchronic understanding of the book of Job is for this group out of the question.

However, there are other scholars whose opinion on the multiple authorship of the Book of Job takes another direction. While some of them opine that the history of the origin of the book of Job can be reconstructed, others among them think that it cannot be reconstructed. However, the binding point of this group is their opinion that while diachronic understanding of the book of Job is not to be discredited, the history of the development or origin of the book of Job is not a prerequisite for the understanding of the book of Job. In other words, whether one has knowledge of the origin of the development of the book of Job or not, the book of Job in its end form and present composition and structure communicates its inherent message, - independent of the knowledge of its origin. Thus a synchronic understanding of the book of Job is not only plausible but also very enriching.

Jürgen Ebach is classified under this group. While maintaining the importance of the pre-history and background knowledge of the book of Job, he notes however that the knowledge of the pre-history and background of the Book of Job and its reconstruction should not be misconstrued as its interpretation. According to him, chapter 1:1-5 of the Book of Job could be once an introduction of a narrative which goes till chapter 2 and

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ijob: Vier Modelle der Interpretation, 22f. (The analysis of Mendes view in this work is based on this article).

begins again in chapter 42:7. He maintains that the differences in language and contents which exist between this narrative aspect and the speeches of Job in the poetic aspect of the Book of Job make it highly probable that the book was not composed by a singular author. Some of the differences he noted were that the figures of Job in the different compositions of the book are situated in different social environment and also the name and attributes given to God in the both parts of the composition are different.⁴⁶⁷ In the narrative part of the Book of Job, God is addressed in his personal name written in the Hebrew Bible as Tetragrammaton J-H-W-H. This is because from the period after the exile till the present time Judaism the Jews restrained themselves from pronouncing the personal name of God. The name could be pronounced as YAHWEH. Sometimes God's personal name is translated with *adonaj* (Adonai) which was an attribute totally reserved for God and has connection with *adon* which is the Hebrew word for Lord.⁴⁶⁸ Although Job was not an Israelite, the God with which he was dealing with was the God of Israel. Thus Yahweh the God of Israel is portrayed as a universal God who rules over all the peoples of the earth. It is also portrayed that the problem treated in the Book of Job – the problem of suffering – is a universal problem that touches all peoples.⁴⁶⁹ Different from the narrative aspect of the book of Job, God is addressed in the poetic or dialogue part of the book with other names like El or Eloah which means Godhead and also with the name Shaddai which was originally the name of a mountain God understood in Hebrew as Almighty.⁴⁷⁰

A standard understanding of the development of the book of Job according to many authors was presented in my aforementioned work as follows:

The oldest and first form of the Book of Job is found within the framework: 1- 2; 42:7-17 of the Book of Job. This was a kind of wisdom educative narrative in which Job is presented to the reader as a person worthy of emulation (persona imitabilis). This Joban folk tale originated not later than the period of the Hebrew monarchy (ca.1000B.C.E- 587 B.C.E).⁴⁷¹ This was later

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Jürgen EBACH, Streiten mit Gott. Hiob, Teil 1, Hiob 1-20, 2.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid, 10.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Ibid. As Gutierrez also intimated, "The name "Yahweh" is found only in the prologue and epilogue and in the prose introductions to the discourse of God and Job's two responses. The name "Elohim" occurs chiefly in the prose sections. The archaic and poetic names "El," "Eloah," and "Shaddai" are found only in the lengthy section in verse. Cf. GUTIERREZ, 107f.

⁴⁷¹ L.G. PERDUE, W.C.GILPIN (eds.), The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job, Nashville 1992, 12- 13.

found to be simple, prompting a later extension. The first addition or extension of the book took place through the addition of the dialogue part (3- 27; 29- 31; 38-42:6). Perdue and Gilpin say that this addition may best be traced to the social upheaval incurred by the Babylonian exile (587 B.C.E. – 538) Elihu's speeches (32-37) were later added and possibly the song about wisdom (28). These poetic additions were probably derived from Persian period (538 – B.C.E. - 332 B.C.E.).^{472 473}

7.3.4 CONTEXTUALIZATION

Another model of interpretation of the book of Job is characterised as contextualization. It is proposed by Gregory in his *Moralia in Iob*. Gregory distinguishes between the writer of the book of Job (*scriptor*) who is Job, and the author of the Book of Job (*autor*) who is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not only the author of the Book of Job but also the author of the whole Bible. The Book of Job should not be interpreted in isolation from, but as part of the whole Bible. For Gregory, what is important is not the writer but the author of the book of Job. According to Gregory, how the Book of Job should be interpreted depends on the community present or the community to which the interpretation is meant for and how it will lead to the edification of this community. He warned against an interpretation which will prove as a hinderance (*impedimentum*) to an unprotected listener (*rudibus auditoribus*). A simple interpretation suffices for the lay faithful (*mentes secularium*).⁴⁷⁴

7.4 THE STORY OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The Book of Job, is a biblical book that narrates the experience of a man named Job who lived in the land called Uz. He was blameless, upright and God-fearing. The narrative tells us that God was proud of Job. However, Satan argued that Job was upright and God-fearing because God had blessed him and his household with material riches. Satan argued that if the situation was to be otherwise, if Job's wellbeing and material possessions were to be taken away from him, Job will curse God to his face. So Satan said, "Is it for nothing that Job is God fearing? Have you not surrounded him and his family and all that he has with your protection? ... But stretch out your hands and lay a finger on his possession, then, I

⁴⁷² Ibid.(It is certain there could be other dating assign to the stages of the development of the Book. What is of greater importance is that the Book of Job has a long history of origin).

⁴⁷³ NWAIWU, 111f.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, Ijob: Vier Modelle der Interpretation, 21-37, in: NWAIWU, 113.

warrant you, he will curse you to your face.”(1:8-12). “To believe “for nothing”, “without payment” is an opposite of a faith based on the doctrine of retribution.”⁴⁷⁵

God allowed Satan to tempt Job. Job lost everything he had – his donkeys, sheep, camels, but more painfully his ten children. To this, Job was sorrowful, but at first submissive to God’s will. Thus he said “Naked I come from my mother’s womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh” (1:21).

Satan went forward to argue that Job would abandon his faithfulness if he were to be stricken with sickness and demanded for the chance to do that. He was granted this chance by God, though with an injunction not to touch Job’s life. Job was then visited with bodily sickness, with ulcer covering all his body. Job sat in desperation among the ashes. His wife advised him to curse God and die. This he vehemently rejected. “We accept good things from God; and should we not accept evil?”(2:10). Then came his friends: Eliphaz (My God is fine gold) of Teman (cf Jer 49:20; Amos 1:11f), Bildad (son of Hadad) of Shuah (cf. Gen 25:2), and Zophar (little bird) of Naamath. They were terrified and overwhelmed by the magnitude of Job’s suffering. They also sat among ashes with Job in solidarity and remained seven days in this state without speaking a word to Job. The seven days signify the conventional time of mourning for the dead (Gen 50:11; 1Sam 31:13, Sir 22:12).⁴⁷⁶ Their silence was an expression of the state of shock as a result of Job’s situation (cf. Ps39: 3; Lam 2:10, Qo 3:7) and a “respectful compassion that showed how seriously they regarded their friends situation. The silent sharing of suffering is a manifestation of fellowship.”⁴⁷⁷ This ends the introductory narrative of the book. The next narrative will be found at the end of the book.

The poetic or dialogue aspect of the book(3:1- 42:6) begins with Job’s lamentation where Job first cursed the day he was born (ch.3). There developed three circles of speeches and disputations between Job and his friends(3-14; 15-21; 22-27). Job’s friends tried to protect the traditional doctrine of retribution in order to protect God’s justice and

⁴⁷⁵GUTIERREZ, 5.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 20.

⁴⁷⁷GUTIERREZ, 7.

righteousness. They gave Job different kinds of advice and tried in different ways to explain away or give reasons for his suffering. However, fundamentally they suggested that Job was suffering as a result of his sins. Job vehemently rejected the suggestion of his friends that he was suffering as a result of the evil he committed and held on to the profession of his innocence. His friends even grew more obstinate in their defence of the doctrine of retribution and God's justice based on this doctrine and on the situation of Job. Job, basing his argument from his own experience and from the universal experience of injustice questioned this doctrine of retribution and the justice of God especially as based on this doctrine.

In chapter 27, Job summarily told his friends that they had failed to convince him that he was suffering as a result of his sins. Both Job and his friends seemed to believe that a disastrous end awaited the wicked. It remained for God to determine who was the wicked. Chapter 28 was a praise of wisdom. Though it praised human practical reason and capacities, but wisdom is something far above all these. This wisdom is not found in the land of the living. In chapter 29, Job groaned and longed for his previous state and life. It reached a climax where Job took some twelve different oaths to prove his innocence; he challenged God to lawsuit and demanded that God should give response in writing to his questions (ch 31).

There came before God's response another figure in the person of Elihu (ch 32-37). He expressed his dissatisfaction with the proceedings. He tried to justify God's ways; rebuked the three friends of Job for not being able to counter and refute Job's view (cf. 32:3; 6-14; 34: 2-15; 35:4) and suggested that Job was guilty of the sin of pride. Then Yahweh appears from the heart of the tempest or whirlwind. God made two speeches (38:1-40:2; 40:6-41:26) with two short responses from Job. God's responses were more of counter questions on Job, leading him to the inexplicability of God's ways. Job came to realise that he was speaking about wonders that were too great for him to comprehend. He retracted of what he said and repented in dust and ashes (42:5-6). God reprimanded Job's friends for not speaking well about him like his servant Job (42:7-9). Thus, Job spoke well about God.

Job was later restored to wholeness and he received his former possessions in double fold (42:10-17)

The Book of Job may be schematically presented as follows:

I.	1: 1 – 2:13	Prologue
		Narrator
II.	3:1 – 42.6	Dialogue
	3	Job's soliloquy
		The first cycle of speeches:
	4-5	Eliphaz
	6-7	Job
	8	Bildad
	9-10	Job
	11	Zophar
	12-15	Job
		The second cycle of speeches:
	15	Eliphaz
	16-17	Job
	18	Bildad
	19	Job
	20	Zophar
	21	Job
		Third cycle of speeches:
	22	Eliphaz
	23-24	Job
	25	Bildad
	26	Job
	27-28	Job
	29-30	Job's challenge
	32: 1-6	Introduction of Elihu
	32: 7 - 33:33	Elihu's first speech
	34	Elihu's second speech
	35	Elihu's third speech
	36-37	Elihu's fourth speech.
		Yahweh and Job
	38-40	Yahweh's first speech
	40: 3-5	Job's first response
	40: 6 - 41:26	Yahweh's second speech
	42, 1-6	Job's second reply
III	42: 7-17	Epilogue
	42: 7-9	Yahweh's judgment of the friends
	42: 10-11	Job's restoration by Yahweh ⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁸ Cf SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Job, 21f. Comp. D.J.A. CLINES, The shape and Argument of the Book of Job, in: ZUCK, R., B., Sitting with Job, 127f.

7.5 SOME EXEGETICAL ELUCIDATIONS OF THE BOOK OF JOB

It is deemed important to make a few clarifications as regards some words or concepts that appeared in the Book of Job.

The “sons of God” made reference to in chapter 1:6 were not gods but super humans who were identified as angels. They were said to make up God’s court and council. Here, God was conceived as a king, who held audiences on certain days.⁴⁷⁹

Ebach notes that this idea of such a gathering or assembly is derived from the polytheistic religions of the nations surrounding Israel. In these religions, there was the idea and belief of council gatherings or assemblies of gods on the mountains or heavenly places where decisions were taken. Such gathering of different godheads would have no place in the strict monotheistic religion of the Israelites. Thus there was a reformulation and adaptation of this idea in the Bible so that it was not an egalitarian gathering of godheads on equal terms but a gathering of the heavenly beings around Yahweh as the Almighty and One God⁴⁸⁰

In chapter 1:10 Satan said that “Job is not God fearing for nothing.” It is noted that the Hebrew word used here for the expression, “for nothing” (German *umsonst*)) is *hinnam*. This Hebrew word has different meanings and is related to the Hebrew word *hen* which means something like comeliness, favour, grace. The word *hinnam* as used here has the same meaning similar to the Latin word *gratis* and means “gratuitously”, “voluntarily”, “free”, “without charge”, “without payment”, “without cause or reason”.⁴⁸¹ Satan was asking if God thought that Job’s righteousness was for nothing, or for no reason. In other word, it was not voluntary nor without payment.

Gutierrez also notes that the Hebrew word used here in reference to Job’s integrity is *tam*. As he notes “*Tam* means ‘innocence’ but with the connotation of personal integrity, of

⁴⁷⁹ The Book of Job; The New Jerusalem Bible, 757.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. EBACH, Streiten mit Gott. Hiob, Teil 1, 10

⁴⁸¹EBACH, Streiten mit Gott. Hiob, Teil I, 13.

something finished, complete, perfect, and therefore exemplary. Whence it conveys also the meaning of ‘just’.”⁴⁸²

There was also a double-implicational use of the Hebrew word *barak* which means praise. This word was ironically or sarcastically used by Satan in 1:11 “he will (praise) curse you to your face.” Here Satan used the word *barak* though he implied “curse” and not “praise”. The same Hebrew word was also used in 1:21 where Job blessed the name of God: “May the name of the Lord be praise” (*mebarak*). Here there was no ironical or sarcastic use of the word since the writer added immediately in the following verse 22 that “In all his misfortune Job committed no sin, and did not reproach God.”⁴⁸³

Furthermore, it is noted that Satan’s statement in 1:11 came in the form of a question and a safe-curse. Here, like most Hebrew curses in oath swearing, the end result of the curse or the repercussion of what (one swears) should happen to one if what one says does not happen or is not true is omitted; it is left unspecified. This means it can be stretched to any limit. Thus Satan’s statement is constructed like, “If he does not curse you to your face, ...(repercussion unspecified) let anything you wish happen to me. Satan meant, “I am perfectly sure he will curse you to your face.”⁴⁸⁴

There could be a connection between the Hebrew word *tilfa* in 1:22 which is translated as “reproach” and the prayer of lamentation. The Hebrew word *tefilla* is derived from this word and it means prayer of lamentation or complaint. Thus the Book of Psalm is known in Jewish tradition as the Book of *tefillot*. Thus the phrase or text in 1:22 could be translated as “He did not raise prayer of lamentation to God.”⁴⁸⁵ Job will later raise this prayer of lamentation to God.

The word Satan (*hassatan*) calls also for elucidation. It has a secular origin. In the word’s verbal mode (as a verb) it meant being inimical or hostile, to antagonize or oppose. It signified antagonizing behaviours between people (Gen 27:41; 50:15; Ps 38:21; 109:4.

⁴⁸² Ibid, 4.

⁴⁸³ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 18.

⁴⁸⁴ Francis I. ANDERSEN, The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job, in: GILPIN, Leo, G., / CLARK, W (eds.) The voice from the Whirlwind, 53.

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 18.

As a noun in a secular form it referred to political opponent or military adversary (1 Sam 29:4; 1 kg 5:18; 11: 14, 23, 25). In legal arena it may refer to a plaintiff or accuser (Ps 109:6). As Schwienhorst – Schönberger notes, the post exilic time saw an article added to the noun and a transformation to its religious connotation as a heavenly accuser.⁴⁸⁶

Ebach while noting that the word Satan (*hassatan*) means the troublemaker, someone who hinders, someone who is hostile further explained how the word took its place or came to play a part in the faith understanding of the people of Israel. It was the experience of the Israelites that sometimes those who were really good and innocent experienced suffering while the evil doers seemed to progress. In their understanding of God and the order of things in the universe this should not be the case. Thus there arose the idea that there could be an instance or an existence between the heavenly goodwill and its earthly realization; something that was preventing the will of God from coming to fulfilment. From this thinking arose the figure of Satan – the hinderer in its religious understanding. In Greek it is called *diabolos*. In the apocalyptic literatures and in the New Testament, Satan is an independent figure and clearly assumes the figure of God's rival. However, in the Book of Job, he was not yet God's rival but a figure in God's heavenly court whose operations were limited and were within the assignments of God.⁴⁸⁷ From later biblical tradition especially 1 Chronicles 21 there came the figure of an independent Satan in order to exonerate God from the evil in the world.⁴⁸⁸

7.6 THE DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The friends of Job had different conceptions of God and exhibited different theologies in their bid to explain Job's suffering. Fundamental to their theologies was the theology of retribution. We shall undertake an examination of their conceptions of God as expressed in their words, formulations and expressions during their dialogue with Job. Elihu's conception of God will also be examined and then Job's conception of God.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. Ibid, 15.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf EBACH, Streiten mit Gott. Hiob, Teil I, 11.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. Ibid, 12.

7.6.1 ELIPHAZ: GOD OF JUSTICE, IMMEASURABLE BRILLIANCE, TEACHER AND MERCIFUL

Eliphaz appears to be the oldest of the three friends (15:10) and the team leader.⁴⁸⁹ Thus he is the first to speak and claims to speak from experience (4:8). The God of Eliphaz is a God of justice who rewards each one according to his deed. This justice of God is based on retribution. This doctrine of retribution will run through the arguments of Eliphaz and his friends. Thus Eliphaz said to Job:

*Can you recall anyone guiltless who perished?
Where then have the honest been wiped out?
... those who plough iniquity
And sow disaster reap just that.
Under the breath of God they perish:
a blast of his anger and they are destroyed; (4:7-))*

He thinks that Job may have a hidden sin (4:7-11) and that the wicked is inescapably destined for destruction. For him Job is ripping what he has sown. Job has committed grave sin that is why he is suffering greatly. Thus Job's suffering is based on retributive justice (22:4-1; 21-30). Here Eliphaz asks Job

*Does Shaddai derive any benefit from your uprightness,
or profit from your blameless conduct?
Do you think he is punishing you for your piety
and bringing you to justice for that?
No, for your great wickedness, more likely
for your unlimited sins! (22:3-4)*

Eliphaz's God is also a God whose purity is so brilliant and immeasurable that it dwarfs all angelic presence, little to speak of human actions. Eliphaz comes to this knowledge through a special revelation from God (4:12-16). In this knowledge he maintains:

*Can a mortal seem upright to God,
Would anyone seem pure in the presence of his Maker?
God cannot rely even on his own servants,
Even with his angels he finds fault*

⁴⁸⁹Cf EBACH, Hiob, Teil 1, 56f.

What then of those who live in houses of clay

Who are founded on dust? (4:17-19)

“It seems that the idea of untrustworthy servants and angels is given to make an *ad minori* argument regarding the unworthiness of mortals.”⁴⁹⁰ He repeats similar argument in 15:15-16 where he says that “God cannot rely even on his holy ones, to him even the heavens seem impure. How much more, this hateful corrupt thing, humanity, which soaked up wickedness like water.” For Eliphaz, the lowliness and ignobleness of humans is a reason why they are visited with evil.⁴⁹¹

Eliphaz maintains further that God is the One, who holds creation and existence in being and sees to it that the evil doers do not succeed in their evil plans. He is also a Teacher-God and father who corrects. “Blessed are those whom God corrects! Do not scorn then the lesson of Shaddai” (5:17-18). The Hebrew word Eliphaz used here is *musar* (Greek *paideia*, Latin *disciplina*) which is a word which traditionally connotes the upbringing of youth (Proverbs 1:2; 8:10; 13:24; 23:13). This upbringing is like a coin with two sides: the painful side and the healing side. What Job is now experiencing is the painful side but he will be healed. So he should count himself as blessed (*makarios*).⁴⁹² There is the praise of this Creator God in the form of a hymn. (5: 9-16).

Eliphaz God is also a God of mercy, who “soothes the sore” and He is “the hand that heals”. He is the one that “delivers you from sorrow” and he will make evil not to touch you. “In time of famine, he will save you from death, and in war time from the stroke of the sword. (5:18-20). Job will be restored to wholeness if he accepts the ignoble nature of man; if he trusts in the doctrine of retribution which is the foundation of God’s justice; if he is ready to accept his sufferings as a way of learning; if he repents and turns to God for mercy.”⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ NAM, Talking about God. Job 42:7-9 and the Nature of God in the Book of Job, New York 2003, 33.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. EBACH, Hiob, Teil; I, 58.

⁴⁹² Cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 41.

⁴⁹³ Cf. EBACH, Hiob, Teil 1, 59.

7.6.2 BILDAD: GOD OF JUSTICE, POWER AND PURITY

Bildad's God is also a God whose justice is based on retribution. Thus, Bildad believes that it was for the sake of their sins that Job's sons died (8:3). This is because God does not pervert justice (8:4). If Job is righteous, he will be delivered from his sufferings (8:6a-7). He draws his advice from tradition and the authority of the fathers (vv 8f.) (cf. Qoheleth 1:9-10). The prosperity of the wicked is for a while because his light will certainly be put off, the light that shone on him snuffed, his own design will falter and his vigorous steps and strides weakened (18:5-7).

Bildad's God is also a God of power; might and purity. In chapter 25 Bildad brings to light the power and might of this God. Thus he talks about "sovereignty", "awe", "armies". Though God bring about peace, but this happens on his heights – in the heavenly places, among the angels (Cf: Is 24:21; Rev. 12:7-12) and the stars (Is 40:26; Si 43:10), not here on earth. At first Bildad does not mention the Name of this God. Thus he says: "What sovereignty ... is his who creates peace on his heights"v2. He speaks from "his armies", "his lightening" v.3. This intones the impersonality of God and suppresses or even eschews any relationality between God and humans. He intones the unfathomable distance between God and human being, who is born of a woman v.4. This distance is based on the ignoble nature of man and the high place of God. Even moon and star which are worshipped in Ancient Orient are not pure before God.⁴⁹⁴ Here, there is a suggestion of a distant God.

7.6.3 ZOPHAR: GOD OF WISDOM AND JUSTICE, UNFATHOMABLE, FORGIVING

Zophar's God is a God of wisdom. This wisdom of God is based on retributive justice and anyone whom God gave a little share in this wisdom knows that the justice and governance of the world is based on retribution. As a God of utmost wisdom he does not waste his words as far contrasted from the foolish babbling of Job. Job lacks wisdom and applies the method of intimidation. For Zophar, Job thinks that by using many words he would trick people into believing that he is upright (11:1-3). Zophar thinks that that is foolishness and

⁴⁹⁴Cf SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 144.

that Job needs real wisdom that comes from God. Such wisdom reveals to man the validity of retribution.

God's wisdom is emphasized by such constructions like "open his lips" (11:5). God is the abode of wisdom; opening His lips offers human the rare opportunity to deep secret things. This would lead Job to real wisdom and to understand that his hidden sins are the reason why he is suffering (11:6b) and make him to know that the world is run through deserving. According to Zophar who claims to argue from experience, Job's initial prosperity and his later downfall is a proof of the fact that the prosperity of the wicked does not last. (20:4-29). Zophar himself has come to this secret knowledge. That is why he knows its source and knows the result it will bring on Job. That is exactly why he knows that Job is babbling and full of words. Thus Zophar thinks that he is able to refute Job (11:2-3) because he has drank from this archive of knowledge:

There is also the concept of the unfathomlessness and greatness of God. This is brought in through the phrases: "higher than heaven", "deeper than Sheol", "longer to measure than the earth", "broader than the sea" (11: 6-7). This brings in the idea inherent in the Ancient Near East. In the Ugaritic text, the abode of El is unknown.⁴⁹⁵ Zophar gives Job advice to raise his hands in prayers to God and ask God for forgiveness and he will be restored to wholeness.(11:13-19). Thus, Zophar's God is also a God of forgiveness.

7.6.4 ELIHU: GOD OF JUSTICE AND MERCY, UNKNOWABLE GOD

Like the three friends of Job, Elihu also presents a God of unalterable justice. His justice is based on retribution. He rewards each person according to his or her deeds. Thus Elihu exclaims:

*Far be evil from God
Or injustice from Shaddai
For he pays people back for what they do,
Treating each as his own conduct deserves
Be sure of it: God never does wrong*

⁴⁹⁵ NAM, 54-54.(He notes that a Sumerian hymn contains an adoration of Enheduanna the high priestess for Inanna the goddess: "You (Inanna) are known by your heaven like height, you are known by your earth- like breath"

Shadai does not pervert what is just (34: 10-12)

Elihu is not pleased that the three friends of Job could not refute Job (32:12). He is not a friend of Job so his aim was not to console but to teach. He speaks with a kind of arrogance (36:4) and his words will be direct and cold (36:16-21). Now he believes that old age is not necessarily synonymous with knowledge; God is he who gives knowledge (32:7-9). That is exactly why Elihu, though young in age has access to this revealed wisdom and now he must speak. He “does not take into account Job’s situation or suffering; nor does he enter into Job’s harsh experiences or agonizing questions. His thoughts run doctrinal issue and his purpose is to defend what he considers as correct teaching.”⁴⁹⁶ This correct teaching is the doctrine of retribution.

The expression “Far be evil from God”(34:10) makes reference to Gen.18:25 “Far be it from you to do such thing” where Abraham was pleading for the course of the just – that God should not destroy the just with the unjust in Sodom. While Abraham meant that “it should not be”, Elihu here means “it is not”. While Abraham was speaking to God, Elihu is speaking about God.⁴⁹⁷ This God is impartial (34:19); and he protects the weak from the strong (34:27f). Since God is not vice regent, no force can make him to violate justice (34:13). He is a God that sustains his creation through his Spirit (34:14).

Elihu’s God is also a God of patience. His patience is as a result of his mercy. When he is not swift to effect his punishment, he is waiting for nations and individuals to repent of their evil ways and take the path of righteousness. (34:29-33). He uses the ways of apparition and sickness to bring the evil doers to repentance so that they may not perish (33:15-26). Thus, God is correcting Job through Job’s suffering. He is sounding warning to Job, ordering him to turn back and repent. If Job listens, he will be happy the rest of his life but if not, he will perish (36:10-16). For Elihu also, God is testing Job through his suffering (36:21). Elihu aims to concentrate not on the cause and source of suffering, but its purpose, - “its finality in divine providence.”⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶GUTIERREZ, 44.

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. EBACH, Teil 2, 107.

⁴⁹⁸GUTIERREZ, 45.

Elihu's God is also a God who is unknowable – far beyond human knowledge (37:23). His greatness is beyond comprehension (36:26). He is sublime in his strength (36:22). Job should use the intelligence that God has bestowed on men (35:11) to admire the work of God even when he cannot comprehend God (36:23). It seems that Job is not a beneficiary of God's intelligence on men. That is why he ignorantly babbles and talks nonsense (35:15f). But whether Job admires the work of God or not, it does not matter much to God because God is so great that he is not affected by the deeds of men (35:5-7).

7.6.5 ASSESSMENT

The friends of Job and Elihu were not wrong in their attributes to God. God is a God of justice and mercy; he is unknowable and mighty. He is the creator of the universe and the sustainer of everything there is. He is Wisdom itself and his purity is without measure. He is purity itself. All these said by the friends of Job were really correct of God. However, the theology of the friends and Elihu aimed at oppression rather than liberation. These attributes of God were employed by the friends of Job to suppress the subject of Job rather than to liberate him; to silence his pains and anguish rather than to heal them. They were attributes of God hijacked and coloured by human prejudice in order to justify tradition, what Job will later call "hearsay" (42:5). They were implored to intimidate Job towards false religion – a religion of pretence and denial. God detests this kind of religion. Job asked his friends "Do you want to defend God by prevarication, and by dishonest argument, and, taking his side like this, appoint yourself as his advocates?" (13:7-8). Job warns his friends that their false religion is a reproach unto God and God himself is not pleased with it: "How would you fare, if he were to scrutinise you? Can he be duped as mortals are duped? He would inflict a harsh rebuke on you" (13:9-10). Job was right because in 42:7, God says to the friends of Job "I burn with anger against you ... for not having spoken correctly about me as my servant Job has done." Job took an oath to preserve his integrity – not to slide to false religion (27:1-7). "His rebellion is against the suffering of the innocent, against a theology that justifies it, and even against the depiction of God that such a theology conveys."⁴⁹⁹ "It is a rejection of a way of theologizing that

⁴⁹⁹ GUTIERREZ, 14.

does not take account of concrete situations, of the suffering and hopes of human beings. At the same time it forgets the gratuitous love and unbounded compassion of God.”⁵⁰⁰

The friends of Job erred in the fact that they closed their mind and hearts to Job’s reality in order to favour and absolutise an abstract doctrine. “Beyond the frontier reached by the best human understanding ... lies the abyss of underserved suffering into which Job is plunged.”⁵⁰¹ The line that differentiated Job from his friends is that of experience. They have not experienced or are rather immune to the “abandonment” of God.

The friends of Job sought for God in a cold doctrine instead of seeing him in a suffering brother. Their earlier solidarity and compassion were short-lived since they had not the foundation which is based on love. “If the doctrine of the friends was to be outright correct, God will no longer be the Lord of the universe. He will have to follow and be controlled by human actions. The gratuitousness of God is put at stake. Then men would be taught to trust in their work rather than the grace provided by God. The world will be turned into a tit and tat arena.”⁵⁰²

In all, “if human beings cannot be condemned in order to defend God, neither can God be condemned in order to defend human beings.”⁵⁰³ This is a truth that will gradually reveal itself in Job. But that does not lessen the importance of calling for justice and crying out to God in pains.

7.7 JOB’S GOD: A MISSING GOD, A REDEEMER GOD

Job’s conception of God is that of a “missing God”, a God that has abandoned him, a God that no more seems to take notice of his plight. This is because of the depth of Job’s suffering and his belief that God has abandoned him though he is innocent. The concept of a missing God is already suggested in the name “Job”, which as we said at the beginning means “where is my father?” “Where is my God?”⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰Ibid, 29

⁵⁰¹F.I. ANDERSEN, 187.

⁵⁰²NWAIWU, 132.

⁵⁰³GUTIERRÉZ, 14.

⁵⁰⁴Cf. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 12.

In 19:7, Job does what the faith of Israel prescribed for someone who is in distress (Cf. Dt. 22:24; 2Kings 6:26; 8:3). He cries: “violence” but God gives him no response, he calls for help, he does not get justice. This is similar to the cry of Habakkuk “How long Yahweh, am I to cry for help, while you will not listen; to cry ‘Violence’ in your ear while you will not save? (Hab 1:2). Job maintains that he cries to God, and God does not give answer, he stands before God and God does not take notice (30:20). “The silence of God is hardest to bear for those who believe that the God of our faith is a living God and not like the ‘gods’ of whom the psalmist says: ‘They have mouths, but do not speak’ (Ps. 115:5)”⁵⁰⁵

Though the Psalmist says that God has crowned man with glory and beauty (Ps 8:6), Job experiences a God who has deprived him of his glory and taken the crown from his head (19:9).⁵⁰⁶ Thus in 19:6 Job says: “I tell you that God has wronged me.” He now experiences a God that is spying on him (10:12-14); one that afflicts him (10:16-17) that seems to be reckless with him (12:12-25); one that oppresses him (19:8-14), and persecutes him (19:22). This was not the kind of God that Job had known. There was a time when Job says God was his guardian, when Job thinks that God’s lamp shone over his head and God’s light was his guide in the darkness, when God protected his tent and dwelt with him (29:2-5). At that time, things were working well for Job and his children were around him (29:6-10). But now Job thinks that the Almighty terrifies him (23:16); darkness is all over Job (23:17). In 13:24, Job asks God to show him his face and stop treating him as an enemy. Job’s experience is similar to that of the Psalmist when he said:

*Your favour, Yahweh set me on unassailable heights,
But you turned away your face and I was terrified.
To you Yahweh, I call,
To my God I cry for mercy (Psalm 30: 7-8)*

Eliphaz had advised Job to turn to God and make peace with him (22:21). But Job cannot find God, the God he had known is now missing so Job asks: “Will no one help me to know how to travel to his dwelling place?” (23:3). Job cries out in his search for God:

*If I go to the east, he is not there;
Or to the west, I still cannot see him.*

⁵⁰⁵GUTIERRÉZ, xv.

⁵⁰⁶Cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 106.

*If I seek him in the north, he is not to be found,
Invisible as ever, if I turn to the south (23:8-9).*

Job's situation made him to think about the situation of the poor. He now realizes that it is not only his cry that God seems not to hear but also the cries and groaning of the poor who are being oppressed and tortured by the wicked (24:2-11). Despite all their groaning and sufferings inflicted on them by the wicked "yet God remains deaf to prayer" (24:12). Job complains about God (30:18-19), but also cries to God (30:20-23).

In 27:2, he experiences God as the one who denies him justice. Job experiences God both as his enemy but also as the giver of his life (27:3). He speaks from the breath of God *ruah* which he breathes – which makes him alive. Thus he experiences God as the God that brings flourishing and the God who brings to ruin. In as much as he wants to remain in the truth as regards his experience with God (27:4) "my lips will never speak evil, nor my tongue utter any lie", Job's negative theology is an authentic theology.⁵⁰⁷

Though Job experiences a missing God, he has hope that he shall see God and that he shall be consoled when he sees God. This comes from his idea and awakening confidence that he has a witness and defender who is going to plead his course.

*Henceforth I have a witness in heaven
My defender is there on high
Interpreter of my thoughts there with God,
Before whom flow my tears (16:19-20).*

Thus there is in Job the certainty that there is "another God" other than the one who afflicts him and delivers him into the hands of the wicked. However, this has not to do with two Gods but the One God against himself.⁵⁰⁸ It is God against himself, *Nemo contra Deum, nisi Deus ipse* (No one against God except God himself). This statement from Goethe is here appropriate. Job is gradually being set free from the idea that God is persecuting

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. EBACH, Hiob, Teil 2, 52.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 97.

him.⁵⁰⁹It can only be God who can be a witness, a defender, against God in a case judged by God in which Job is asking for justice.⁵¹⁰

Thus Job also experiences God as his living Avenger who is going to fight his course and establish justice for him even if he were not to be alive.

*I know I have a living Defender (Avenger)
And that he will rise up last, on the dust of the earth
After my awakening, he will set me close to him,
And from my flesh I shall look on God.
He whom I shall see will take my part:
My eyes will be gazing on no stranger. (19: 25-27).*

The Defender or Avenger (*goel*) from whom Job here speaks of is no other person than God himself.⁵¹¹

The Hebrew word for Avenger (defender, redeemer) *goel* originated from the solidarity-family life of the people of Israel. When a family member was in danger of losing his or her possession, or losing his or her freedom or losing his or her life because of debt, there was a responsibility on a member of the family or a relative to redeem the endangered person or his possession by paying for the debt (Lev.25:25, 48). That member of the family, whose responsibility it was to “buy” or redeem an endangered family member from his debt was called a *goel*. This word found its way into the faith life of the people of Israel. The result of the covenant between the people of Israel and God made this term to be appropriated in the people of Israel’s relationship with God. God is seen as the member of the family of his people Israel; the one who fights for their course, the one who redeems them, defends and avenges for them.⁵¹² In this relationship and understanding, God is seen in Isaiah 40-50 (Deutero Isaiah) as the redeemer of his people, who freed them from exile and brought them home to the promise land.

*And now, thus says Yahweh,
He who created you, Jacob,*

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid, 98.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. EBACH, Teil 1, 142.

⁵¹¹ Cf. SCWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 112f.

⁵¹² GUTIERRÉZ, 64

Who formed you Israel:

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by your name, you are mine. (Is. 43:1).

In this understanding, God gained for himself, what originally belonged to him.⁵¹³ Thus God was understood as the redeemer of his people. The words of Job in 19:25-27 is in the context of Old Testament lamentation tradition to be understood as a confession or prayer of trust. In the means of distress, the one who prays places his trust in God.⁵¹⁴ Thus Job sees God as his redeemer, his avenger, his defender. As Gutierrez stated,

It might almost be said, that Job, as it were, splits God in two and produces a God who is judge and a God who will defend him at the supreme moment; a God whom he experiences as almost an enemy but whom he knows at the same time to be truly a friend. He has just now accused God of persecuting him, but at the same time, he knows that God is just and does not want human beings to suffer. These are two sides of one God. This painful dialectical approach to God is one of the most profound messages of the Book of Job.⁵¹⁵

Thus Job sees God as a God who will grant him justice (23:5-7); a God of mercy and forgiveness (14:14-17). All these are contained in his lamentation which we next examine.

7.8 THE LAMENTATION OF JOB

Perish the day on which I was born and the night that told of a boy conceived. May that day be darkness, may God on high have no thought for it, may no light shine upon it. May murk and shadow dark as the death claim it for their own, clouds hang over it eclipse swoop down upon it. See let obscurity seize upon it, from the days of the year let it be excluded, into the reckoning of the months not find its way. May that night be sterile devoid of any cries of joy! Let it be curse by those who curse certain days and are ready to rouse Leviathan. Dark be the stars of its morning, let it wait in vain for light and never see the opening eyes of dawn. Since it would not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide sorrows from my eyes. (3:3-10)

After the seven days of silence of the friends, the patient Job of the narrative and first part of the book of Job opens up the oasis of his sorrowful heart, letting out a surge of sorrowful words in a description of inner despondency and revelation of the abyss and depth of the grief in which he is enveloped in. It is a painful sorrowful outburst of an immense and tense nature, a lamentation filled with curses, darkness and questions, going to the fundamental, to the root, to the origin of both Job's existence and creation itself. However, it is a

⁵¹³ Cf. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 112.

⁵¹⁴ Cf. Ibid, 113.

⁵¹⁵ GUTIERREZ, 65.

lamentation which transformed itself to a hopeful expectation; a hope which is based on God Himself.

Job's lamentation does not start with arguments or questions but with curses. These curses at the beginning of Job's lamentation aim not only at Job's very beginning but the very beginning of the world – the creation. In Job's curse of the day of his birth, there is a desire to turn back (to its pre-creation time) the creation of God in Gen1:2-3 where God created light and eliminated darkness. Such words and expressions like “darkness”, “murk and shadow”, “shadow dark”, “cloud” “eclipse” “dark be the star” are employed in a wish to negatively impact on this day and in a bid to obliterate it.

In biblical tradition, the birth of a child is celebrated and greeted as a joyous fulfilment. The child comes out of the mother's womb, symbolizing a journey from darkness to light. But for Job such an assumption is a deceit. The door of his mother's womb opens and only what Job sees are hardship and suffering (3:10).⁵¹⁶ That is why he calls for the annihilation of the day he was born. Job does not only wish that this day should be cursed, but also that it should be struck out of existence - annihilated. That means that a part of the creative time should disappear and with it everything that was created on that day. In his desire to strike out the day of his birth, there is a questioning on creation itself since the day of his birth is part of creation. In other words, in trying to annul or rescind God's creative act (3:4-9), Job seems to cast criticism on God's creative act. There is here a direct question on the order of the universe and the justice that exists therein. “Job's suffering causes him to see the universe as chaotic, as lacking the presence of God; from it God is absent as the one who creates it and shapes it into cosmos.”⁵¹⁷ “The creator who brings order into the world (Gen. 1:1-24) may be the God who brings chaos into that same world.”⁵¹⁸ But as Gutierrez noted, Job did not curse God but the day of his birth. But he did complain about God because he

⁵¹⁶Cf. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, 26.

⁵¹⁷GUTIERREZ, 8.

⁵¹⁸NAM, 78.

saw his suffering as an abandonment by God.⁵¹⁹ In his lamentation, Job does not only talk about his fate, but the fate of everything in time and space of the wide world universe.⁵²⁰

One may wonder how Job could imagine, that a creative act in the past could be reversed or be annulled. The logic of the reversal of the creative act is based on the fact that creation narrative in Genesis is not a record of historical event – it is not a historical narrative but an etiological (etiology, aetiology) narrative. That means, it does not give narrative of what happened in the past, but gives reason for what is (in the present). Job was no more experiencing the light of the creation. He calls on the chaos that existed before the creative act to come and claim what belongs to it⁵²¹ (in order to restore coherence between his birth and his present state).

The Hebrew word translated as curse (verfluchen) is *qahal*. In its literary sense, it means to disparage something (leichtmachen, etwas geringschätzig ansehen). Thus in Gen. 8:21 at the end of the great flood God said that for the sake of man he will not disparage the earth again. If the Hebrew word *qahal* was to be literarily interpreted in this text of Job it would then mean that Job was ready to disparage his past life because of his present condition. And that is exactly the case. Job's present situation made him regard his past life as absurd, meaningless, contemptuous and despicable.⁵²²

*Why was I not still-born
or why did I not perish as I left the womb?
Why were there knees to receive me,
breast for me to suck?
Now I should be lying in peace,
wrapped in a restful slumber, with kings and high viziers of earth
who have built their dwellings in desolate places,
or with princes who have quantities of gold
and silver cramming their tombs;
or put away like an abortive child, I should not have existed,*

⁵¹⁹Cf. GUTIERRÉZ, 8.

⁵²⁰Cf. EBACH, Teil1, 47.

⁵²¹Cf. EBACH, Teil1, 50f.

⁵²²Cf. EBACH, Hiob; Teil 1, 50.

*like little one that never see the light.
 Down there, the wicked bustle no more,
 there the weary rest.
 Prisoners, all left in peace,
 Hear no more the shouts of the oppressor.
 High and low are there together,
 and the slave is free of the master. (3:11-19).*

With v.11 begin the “why” questions. The “why” questions are characteristics of Psalms of complaint to God (Cf. Ps.13, 22:2; 42:10). But unlike the Psalms of complaint, there is here no pleading for the end of the distress or a confession of trust in God.⁵²³ In Job case, he does not speak directly to God. Most times he refers God in the third person singular or indirectly infers to God.

The cursing of the day of his birth (3:2-10) and the “why” questions (3:11-19) have similarities with Jer. 20:14-18. The causes of the lamentation in both texts are similar. The text of Jeremiah reads thus:

*Cursed be the day
 on which I was born!
 The day when my mother bore me,
 let it not be blessed!
 Cursed be the man
 who brought the news to my father,
 “A son is born to you”
 making him very glad.
 Let that man be like the cities
 which the Lord overthrew without pity;
 let him hear a cry in the morning
 and an alarm at noon,
 because he did not kill me in the womb;
 so my mother would have been my grave,
 and her womb forever great.
 Why did I come forth from the womb*

⁵²³Cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, 25.

*to see toil and sorrow,
and spend my days in shame? (Jer.20:14-18)*

The difference here is that the suffering of Jeremiah was as a result of the compulsion of bringing prophetic words of Yahweh to his people which most times were words of corrections, admonitions and also of warning. The prophetic words were most times highly uncomfortable for the people of Israel who were the receivers of these words but also uncomfortable for the prophet who was the bearer and deliverer of the prophetic words since most times they pinched him against his people and his people looked upon him as bringer of bad news, prophet of doom; they avoided him and also persecuted him. The prophet would have wished to bring comfortable and nicer words to the people.⁵²⁴ “The cries of Jeremiah and Job are cries of torment in a cruel situation. ...they are not a rejection of God. In fact, it might well be claimed that this manifestation of impressive feeling expresses, even if in an unconventional form, a profound act of self surrender and hope in God.”⁵²⁵

Three moments are critical in the survival of a human person here on earth – at conception, at birth, and at the challenging times of life here on earth by suffering. One would at these periods wish to survive. However, at these critical moments, Job wishes he was dead: at conception (3:3-10), birth (3:11-19), and life on earth with suffering (3:20-26). The real reason why Job wants to die is that he wants to have peace. He understands death as a place of freedom and peace, of self realization and equality in dignity. Death makes all equal – rich and poor. Every injustice ends in the grave. All oppressions end only when humans are no more. All the imposed barriers between the rich and the poor, lords and slaves, the wicked and their victims are eliminated in death. There is no expression of a better life after death, but an end to a state of suffering and wickedness which job sees on earth.

With 3:20, there is again the “why” questions. Job asks “Why give light to a man of grief? Why give life to those bitter of heart who long for death that never come...? Again in v.23 he questions again “Why give light to one who does not see his way, whom God shuts in all alone? Here Job though complaining of God does not address God directly. For him,

⁵²⁴Cf. EBACH, Hiob, Teil 1, 52.

⁵²⁵GUTIERRÉZ, 10.

God gives light to a man in grief, a man in bitterness of heart who would have preferred death. Following Job's question Kant also asks the reason why the Originator of our beings brought us to existence if in our own rightful judgment life in itself is not worth living. It is like the question of the Indian woman to Dschingiskhan who could neither offer reparation for the violence she suffered nor assure her of future security: "Why did you conquer us if you cannot protect us?"⁵²⁶ Job is asking for the reason for a life that is full of sorrows. Job still thinks that there is a life without suffering. But he will later drop this idea in 7:1-2. At the last verses of the chapter 3, Job returns to his concrete need.

At the theoretical levels, Job believes in the doctrine of retribution which was current in his time (Cf. 31:2-3). Job does not deny that he is a sinner since no human being can count himself blameless. In 14:4 Job asks "But will anyone produce the pure from what is impure? No one can!" In 7:21 Job asks God if God cannot overlook or tolerate his sin. He thinks that perhaps God is punishing him for the faults of his youth (13:26). But the weight and magnitude of his present suffering and pains is incomparable to any sin he might have committed. Job at one time thinks that God is punishing him for a hidden sin (40:8) and asks God to show him the sin that he has committed (10:2). By and large Job still maintains his innocence (10:6). But he does not remain only in his innocence. He is baffled at the prosperity of the wicked who ignore God (21: 6-9, 13-15) and at the injustice and oppression done to the poor by the wicked (24:2-14). Eliphaz had falsely accused Job of adopting the same way of the wicked and meant that it was the reason why God was punishing him. He falsely accused Job of the same acts the wicked do:

*Do you think he is punishing you for your piety
and bringing you to justice for that?
No for your great wickedness, more likely,
for your unlimited sins!
You have exacted unearned pledges from your brothers,
stripped people naked of their clothes,
failed to give water to the thirsty
and refused a bread to the hungry;
handed a land over to a strong man,*

⁵²⁶Cf. EBACH, Teil 1, 53.

*for some favoured person to move in,
sent widows away empty-handed
and crushed the arms of the orphans.
No wonder then if snares are all around you,
and sudden terrors make you afraid;
if light has turned to darkness, so that you cannot see,
and you have been submerged in the flood (22:6-11).*

In Chapter 29: 11-17 and Chapter 31 Job vehemently refutes this accusation. He cried out:

*I freed the poor in distress
and the orphan who has no helper.
The dying man's blessing rested on me
and I gave the widow's heart cause to rejoice.
Uprightness I wore as a garment,
fair judgment was my cloak and my turban.
I was eyes for the blind, and feet for the lame.
Who but me was father to the poor?
The stranger's case had a hearing from me.
I used to break the fangs of the wicked,
and snatch their prey from their jaws. (29:11-17).*

In the Old Testament, uprightness or justice (*sedaqäh*) and judgment (*mishpat*) are two components which are so dear to God's the heart and at the centre of God's demand on human dealings. Job has made these practices his second nature (cloak and turban) and he carried out these practices in his dealings with orphans, widows and strangers who represent the poor. The forefathers of the Israel were once also in such a precarious situation of needy (Dtn 25:5).

Job was the father to the poor (29:16). God was called the father of the poor (Ps 68:5). If you want to be faithful to the Lord, you must then be father to the poor (Cf. Isa 11:4; 22:21; 72:12; Ps 82:3f).⁵²⁷

*Be like a father to the fatherless and as
good as a husband to their mothers.
And you will be like a child to the Most High,*

⁵²⁷Cf GUTIERRÉZ, 40 (Cf. EBACH, Hiob, Teil 2, 73f).

who will love you more than your own mother does. (Ecclus./ Sirach 4:10).

Being a father to the poor also means offering resistance against those who oppress or exploit the poor (Cf. Ps. 3:7; 58:6; 72:4; 101:8). Thus the obligation from God to care for the poor means that the poor are not being punished as a result of their sins as the doctrine of retribution propounds. Job has kept all these obligations.

In his affliction and great misery Job wants to be heard. His desire is to speak out to God without fear. Thus in 9:35 he says: “Nonetheless, unafraid of him I shall speak.” This is because he believes he is innocent but especially, because he believes God knows that he is innocent. Also in 10:1 Job says “I shall give free rein to my complaining; I shall let my embittered soul speak out.” His complaints are directed towards God thus in 13:3 he says to his friends “My words are directed to Shaddai.” Job knows that his demand to debate with God is everything but easy and could prove to be a risky venture. But Job is not bothered anymore; he is ready even to stake his life in order to prove his innocence. Thus he says with every defiance:

*I am putting my flesh between my teeth,
I am taking my life in my hands;
let him kill me if he will; I have no other hope
than to justify my conduct in his eyes. (13:14-15)*

But he is confident that he would be vindicated because of his innocence. Thus he says in 13:16 “And this is what will save me, for the wicked would not dare to appear before him.” Job begs God to protect him in Sheol until his anger is over and there will be a situation of reconciling with God (14:13). This is a kind of expression of hope and trust in God since Job means that “God could protect Job against God and God’s anger.”⁵²⁸

In 16:18 he begs the earth not to cover his blood. This is because blood not covered with earth cry to heaven for vengeance and justice (Gen 4:10; 37:26; is 26:21, Ezk 24:8). Job does not remain totally hopeless in his situation of suffering. At different times he conceived God as his arbiter (Hebrew *mokhiach*) (9:33); his witness (*édh*) (16:19) and his liberator or defender (*goel*) (19:25). The knowledge that he shall meet God as a friend fills him with joy in the midst of trials.

⁵²⁸GUTIERRÉZ, 65.

7.8.1 LEGAL METAPHORS AND TWO SETS OF OATH

Job conceives his encounter with God in the form and terms of legal proceedings. Thus the Book of Job is permeated with legal metaphors. Job is influenced by the role he played in the community as a judicial person (29:1-17) He talks of taking God to court (9:16, 19; 13:17-18), of an arbiter, a witness, a defender, “defend my case”, “select my argument”, “advocates”. In his conception of his encounter with God in terms of legal proceedings, he says

I should set my case to him, advancing any number of grievances.

*Then I could learn his defence, every word of it,
taking note of everything he said.*

Would he put all his strength into this debate with me?

*No, he would only need to give his attention to me,
to recognize his opponent as upright
and so I would win my case forever (23:4-7)*

The above is permeated with legal metaphors. The two sets of oath he took have juridical implication.

In the ancient Near East, oath taken had several significances. First, it was the boldest approach to the claim of innocence, raising a person's position from a claim to evidence acceptable as proof. Secondly, an oath brought certain kind of legal context to an end. A court normally compelled a defendant to take an oath of innocence especially where there is insufficient evidence brought by a plaintiff to render judgment on a case (cf. Exod. 22:6-7). And when such oath was taken, the case came to an end in favour of the one who took the oath.⁵²⁹

Job begins his first set of oath by giving it a divine backing “I swear by the living God”(27:1). Job does that because he is very confident of his innocence and conscious of the Old Testament injunction never to use the name of God in vain (Dtn, 15:11). Giving divine backing to oath taking is a known practice in Ancient Israel. Apart from employing the name of God, most times the person who is taking the oath brings in the saving deed of God in the past to show his trust and reverence to God. For example, in 1Sam. 14:32 we find “for as Yahweh lives who gives victory to Israel” and in Jer. 23:7 “As Yahweh lives who brought the Israelites out of Egypt.” However, Job would not employ the saving deeds of God. He brings in the situation he is experiencing and how he feels about God. He does not want to dwell in the past but in the present. He does not want a pure formulation that

⁵²⁹NWAIWU, 142.

does not reflect his present state. He had already said “I tell you that God has wronged me”(19:6). Now he swears by God “who denies me justice.” This shows the depth of his despondency.⁵³⁰

Job also brings in the phrase “who filled me with bitterness”(v.2) which has a connection with the expression “bitterness of soul” which Job had already used four times in his lamentation. Two of these were in connection to his desperate situation (7:11; 10:1) the other two were in connection with general situation of humankind (3:20; 21:25). This is unique to the Book of Job for such formulation is not found in many psalms of lamentation.⁵³¹In the phrase “the breath of God in my nostril” Job recalls his dependency on God from whom he received his life (Gen. 2:7, Ps 104:29-30). In v.4, Job swears that his lips will never speak evil nor his tongue utter any lie. By this Job demolishes the insinuation of Satan (2:5) and the advice of his wife (2:9). In v.5, Job takes another oath maintaining that he will maintain his integrity till his dying day. He would not accept the insinuation and accusation of his friend that he has committed grave sin.⁵³²

He continues his oath by the statement “far from admitting you to be in the right” (27:5).

The unexpressed imprecation is self – inflicted. It has been suggested that the statement originally meant “May it be (my) profanation in the eyes of God if I should break my oath. Thus Job understands that he means that he should be “erased or eliminated” if his words are proven to be false (cf. 1 Sam 26:11; 2 Sam 20:20; 1 Kings 21).⁵³³ Job resists the temptation to be pious or religious at the cost of the truth. He will not confess a sin he never committed.^{534 535}

In v.5, he takes another act of oath of continuing in maintaining his uprightness – he will not falter. This a radical protest of his innocence. Despite being in utmost distressful condition, he is conscious of his integrity and is bold to defend it against people like Eliphaz and others who accuse him of wrong doing.

In using his very life to take oath, Job shows his innocence beyond doubt and by putting himself under divine scrutiny, he silences his accusers for the case is now beyond them. Now the case is between him and God. By this oath Job also challenges God’s continuous silence. The oath

⁵³⁰Cf. Nwaiwu, 142

⁵³¹ J.E. Hartley, 85.

⁵³²Cf. Nwaiwu, 142f.

⁵³³ Cf. Ibid, 86.

⁵³⁴ Cf. Schwi enhorst- Schönberger, Das Buch Ijob, 151f.

⁵³⁵ Nwaiwu, 143f

*taking is also an expression of Job's faith in God's justice for his oath taking has value only if God is committed to justice.*⁵³⁶

The second set of Job's oath is contained in chapter 31. This contains a total of fourteen transgressions⁵³⁷ which Job had consciously restrained himself from. Most of these were sins of the mind and intentions, whose observances were not strictly under the public scrutiny since their transgressions normally do not occur outwardly. That is why this set of oath is generally referred to as oath of purity. It shows the high level of Job's integrity. Though this set of oath taken by Job in ch. 31 is in itself unique in the Hebrew Bible, there are however oaths in the Bible that have forms similar to it. An example of such is the confession of innocence as found in the Temple (entrance) liturgy (Cf. Ps 15:24; Dtn 26:12-15) which contains a list of requirements and observances before one could worthily enter the sanctuary of God. There are also the original forms, in which hidden sins are confessed (Ex 22:7,9f; 1Kg 8:31f; 2Chr 6:22f). These show similarities especially in the area of confession of hidden sins. There is also a comparison of Job's oath in ch. 31 with an understanding in the Egyptian religion as contained in the Book of the dead. Here it is said that before a dead person is allowed into the underworld, he must make confessions of his sins after which his heart is weighed against a feather. It is only when his heart is lighter in weight than a feather that he is allowed into the underworld. That means, when his heart or soul bears no weight of sins and grudges. The inference to that is visible especially in 31:6 where Job talks of God weighing him on accurate scale and God will discover his integrity.⁵³⁸

In this second set of oath, Job maintains his integrity and innocence against the sins of concupiscence (2-4); fraud (5-7); greediness (7-8), adultery (9-12), breach of the rights of slaves (13-15), refusal to feed the poor (16-18), refusal to cloth the poor (19-20), refusal to assist or support the orphan (21-23), putting his trust in riches (24-25) worship of false gods in the form of heavenly bodies (26-28), hatred of the enemy or rejoice over the misfortune of an enemy (29-30), breach of the rights of strangers (31-32), hypocrisy (33-34), injustice

⁵³⁶Ibid, 144.

⁵³⁷Different number of the transgression (ten or twelve) is arrived by some opinions through combination of different related transgression. For example the transgressions against the poor in 31:16-23 could be combined as one. Cf EBACH, Hiob, Teil 2, 81.

⁵³⁸ Cf. EBACH, 80f.

against the cultivated land (38-40). After taking these oaths, Job demands that God should reply him. He is confident that if the accusations against him were to be written down in scrolls, he will be victorious in proving his innocence, thus wearing the scroll with refuted claims against him as a badge of honour (35-37).

7.8.2 PROGRESS IN JOB'S THOUGHT

In Job's lamentation and as the discussion and debate between Job and his friends continues, there is development and progress in jobs speeches and thoughts. At first he wants an abolishment of the day he was born and wishes he was still born(3:11) or is dead in infancy, or like an abortive child (3:16). He also conceives the impossibility of holding God accountable for the perceived injustice of God to him because of God's strength and might. Thus Job said :

*I cannot believe that he would listen to what I said ...
Shall I try force? Look how strong he is!
Or go to court? But who would summon him?
If I prove myself innocent, his mouth may condemn me,
even if I am innocent, he may pronounce me perverse (9: 16,19-20).*

He thinks that there is no need of formulating his arguments because he believes God will not listen to him (9:14-15).

However as the discussion continues, there is development in his thought. Job arrives at the conviction of holding God accountable and defending his innocence even if it means putting his life at stake (13:14-16). He talks of hope for a tree "when felled, it can start its life again ..." (14:7-17). But since this is not the same with a human person "he dies, and dead he remains" (14:10), Job abandons the idea of death he had in chapter 3. He now talks of taking shelter in Sheol until God's anger passes by (14:13). His desire and wish to live grows especially in a bid to get justice. Even if he were to die, let not earth cover his blood (16:18). Job begins to identify his concrete problems and comes out of impossible wishful thinking in chapter 3. He speaks of the isolation of friends and relatives (19:13-19) and speaks of God's continuous persecution (16:9-14; 19:7-12). From doubt of an arbiter (9:33-34), he conceives the hope of a witness who would stand for him (16:19-21) and the assurance of a redeemer (19:25)

and that he will rise up last, on the dust of the earth.

After my awakening, he will set me close to him,

and from my flesh I shall look on God(19:25-26).

Each affirmation of hope is immediately preceded by a renewed expression angry complaint and protest. The spiritual struggle with himself, with his friends and above all with God brings him to the conviction that for the time being amounts to no more than a cry of hope: that he will see, and with his own eyes, his liberator, ... and be able to look upon him as a friend.⁵³⁹

Job's oath in chapter 31 shows his absolute will to live and prove his innocence.

7.9 GOD'S APPEARANCE

Then from the heart of the Tempest Yahweh gave Job his answer (38:1)

Job has been demanding from God to tell him his misdeed (13:23). After taking his oath, he demands that God should give him a reply (31:35). Now God appears from the heart of the tempest. God makes two speeches and the phrase "From the heart of the tempest" is used at the beginning of each speech (38:1; 40:6). "From the heart of the tempest" is classical biblical expression to distinguish and underscore God's appearance.⁵⁴⁰

Job, though demanding for God's reply also expresses fear at the enormity and also consequences that may accompany God's appearance. Job has the fear that God will crush him at his appearance (9:13). The fear of God's manifestation is inherent in the Bible (Cf. Exodus 20:18-20) but this fear proves always to be false. God does not crush Job at his appearance nor condemn him. God rather replies Job. God's reply signifies that Yahweh is a God of justice (what Job had tried to doubt because of his experience); however Yahweh's justice is to be understood in the full and overall meaning of God's plan in human history. The first speech emphasizes the plan of God which enfolds and gives meaning to God's creative work; the second speech underscores God's government. Not only the appearance of God was essential in this "God event" but God's words were also essential. In God's reply to Job, "the words of God give the presence of God its full meaning."⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹GUTIERREZ, 66.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, 68.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 69.

God begins his speech with the rhetorical question “Who is this obscuring my intention with his ignorant words?” (38:2). The intention or plan of God always refers to God’s action in history in relation to the nations or to Israel, or to individuals.⁵⁴² Job has been questioning the intention and plan of God. Because of his suffering, he has expressed doubt as regards God’s justice. In chapter 3 he said that creation is void and meaningless. God will bring to Job’s consciousness that God’s plan has its origin in the gratuitousness of creative love. So God tells Job to get ready for a journey. “Brace yourself” (38:3) literally means “gird your lions”. It is a Hebrew expression meaning that one should get oneself ready for a difficult task, for a struggle.⁵⁴³

Job’s friends and implicitly Job had claimed to predict God’s future actions through the observance of human deeds. God attacks this presumption through rhetorical questions. The first set of questions are based on Job’s and his friends’ non participation in the act of creation.

*Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?
Tell me since you are so well-informed?
Who decided its dimensions, do you know?
Or who stretched the measuring line across it?
What supports its pillars at their base?
Who laid its cornerstone
to the joyful concert of the morning stars
and unanimous acclaim of the sons of God?
Who pent up the sea behind closed doors
when it leapt tumultuous from the womb,
when I wrapped it in a rob of mist
and made black cloud its swaddling bands;
when I cut out the place I had decreed for it
and imposed gates and bolt?
“Come so far” I said “and no further;
here your proud waves must break”(38:4-11)*

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Cf. Ibid, 69f.

These rhetorical questions show the limitedness of human knowledge or even minuteness of human *dasein* and how improper or foolish it is for Job and his friends to think that they could predict God's actions or pigeonhole God in the retributive doctrine. "God invites Job to reconsider the mystery and complexity – and often sheer unfathomability – of the world that God created."⁵⁴⁴ Job and his friends think that the world is made to serve humans' need. They think that everything in the world is for the service of man. They have an anthropocentric view of the world. If Job and his friends are so discerning about God, if they can calculate the actions of God who is almighty, then there is an intrinsic claim that they know everything about God – including his actions in creation. To know God's actions in creation intrinsically means to have participated in creation. This is to place oneself at God's level or even above God. If they know exactly and on their own why the world was created, that means that they were there as the foundation of the world was being laid and they should be able to answer these questions.

*Have you ever in your life given orders to the morning
or sent the dawn to its post,
to grasp the earth by its edges
and shake the wicked out of it? She turns it red as clay seal,
she tints it as though it were a dress,
stealing light from the evil-doers
and breaking and braking the arms raised to strike (38:12-15).*

"God commands the morning and sends the dawn to its post. In the ancient Near East, the dawn represented the epiphany of the sun god, who effect effective actions against inimical evil forces in all its cosmic manifestations. This is the motive behind the Israelite conception of God's judgment at dawn. (Zeph. 3:5; Ps. 5:4)^{545,546} Morning is also known as the time of God's action and just actions (Ps. 90:14; 53) as against the night which favours the evildoers. Though it is suggested here that the morning "grasps the earth by its edges and shakes the wicked out of it", however it is also true that morning does not destroy the evil-doers – it gives them light. "There is also the implication that the wicked are not

⁵⁴⁴D. J. A. CLINES, *The Shape of the Argument of the Book of Job*, 137.

⁵⁴⁵T. N. D. METTINGER, 47.

⁵⁴⁶NWAIWU, 148.

simply annihilated. In fact, the image of morning succeeding each night conveys the idea of an ongoing task symbolized by the light of the day: the task of establishing justice.”⁵⁴⁷

Rain is known in the Bible as agent of God’s reward but also that of his punishment. But in (38:25-27) there is no mention of functionality or utility. It is not for human reward, neither for his punishment. “It fall on land where no one lives, and the desert void of human dwelling, to meet the need of the lonely waste”(38: 26-27). Utility has no place here. Everything is just not meant for human use and not subject to human logical and rational calculation. God’s *modus operandi* eludes human calculation but it is base on all encompassing love and freedom. “If the rain falls on the bleak moors, this is not because of any necessity but because it pleases God. Utility is not the primary reason for God’s action; the creative breath of God is inspired by beauty and Joy.”⁵⁴⁸ God has a plan for the human history and the world. But his plan eludes and “overcomes” the human mind. It is not subject of retribution but divine freedom. “God’s love is a cause not an effect”

In 39:5-12 there is the mention of the freedom of wild donkey. The wild donkey refuses to be domesticated or to be subjected to utility or to human functionality. It simply roams freely in the wasteland. If the animals are free in this manner and for no human use, it is because God takes delight in them.

*God’s speeches are forceful rejection of a purely anthropocentric view of creation. Not everything that exists was made to be directly useful to human beings; therefore, they may not judge everything from their point of view. The world of nature expresses the freedom and delight of God in creating. It refuses to be limited to the narrow confines of the cause-effect relationship.*⁵⁴⁹

Thus through God’s speeches, Job is reminded of the incomprehensible character of God’s actions and creative plan founded on divine freedom and gratuitousness. Though it is observed that this first speech of God is based on the world of nature. God implies to mean that “what holds for the world of nature, holds with greater reason for the world of history.”⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ GUTIERRÉZ, 78.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 75.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, 74.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, 75.

After God's first speech Job realizes his littleness. In this littleness, he would keep silent. However, he does not acknowledge any sin, neither does God say that Job has sinned. He expresses humility but not resignation.⁵⁵¹ He has come to a certain level in the awareness of divine dealings and to a certain level of consciousness as regards the proper place of man which man has presumptuously overblown or inflated. However, Job is yet to be totally redeemed from the shackles of his previous presumptions and assumptions.

God's second speech underscores God's just governance of the world and his justice (*mishpat*). Job had most times focused his lamentation on his perceived God's (mis)judgment and injustice to him and cast criticism on God's (mis)management of the world's affairs. God will still want to engage with Job on this issue. He is not yet done with Job. He asks Job to get ready to answer more questions, for more task. God does not tell Job only to listen or only to keep quite. Job must also answer questions. He wants the participation of Job in this journey. This participation is going to be and has been a struggle, with all its doubts and questions. God embraces all of them in their different expressions and would want to transform Job from inside through them. "God does not want resigned silence that hides murmur of dissatisfaction."⁵⁵² God entertains sincere questions and doubts. But human beings must be participants in their journey to God. God then asks Job:

*Do you want to reverse my judgment,
put me in the wrong and yourself in the right?(40:8)*

This rhetorical question attacks any attempt to domesticate God and make God subject to human will and calculation. God tells Job in the subsequent verses (40:9-14) that the wicked cannot simply be destroyed. God respects human freedom because it is God himself that ordained and created it. God wants justice and fair judgment to reign on earth but God cannot impose it on created nature. Human beings have the ability in their freedom and in cooperation with the grace of God to install justice and fair judgment on created order. God has instituted the human freedom and God's power is "limited" where human freedom begins and the all-powerful God is in this sense a "weak" God. "The mystery of divine

⁵⁵¹ Cf. Ibid, 76.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

freedom leads to the mystery of human freedom and to respect for it.”⁵⁵³ God’s limits are safe-imposed. Human beings are valued greatly by God that made God to stop at their freedom and ask them for collaboration in the just governance of the world. There is in the Book of Job a meeting of two freedoms: Human freedom as represented by Job in his lamentation and the divine freedom as represented by God’s gratuitousness in his plan of creation. God’s just governance of the world can only be properly understood in the context of his gratuitousness. Behemoth and Leviathan which are symbols or primordial forces of chaos and which are also symbols representing the wicked in the Book of Job are not destroyed by God. They are creatures of God like Job. God instead puts them under control.

Job acknowledges that he has been speaking of marvel beyond him. According to Gutierrez, “the ‘marvels’ refer both to the works the mighty God has done in this world and to those of the ‘weak’ God who is heedful of human freedom and its historical rhythm.”⁵⁵⁴ Job comes to the realization that God does indeed have plan and can execute his plan (42:2). This plan is based on God’s freedom and gratuitousness. It is improper for human beings to claim the ability to dictate, control, rationalize and predict God’s plan. That will be speaking of marvels beyond them, misrepresenting God’s intention and usurping the place of God.

The logic at work in a knowledge that claims to know everything about the Lord, to account fully for the Lord’s actions, and to foresee how the Lord will intervene, leads in the final analysis to the replacement of God with the safe and to the usurpation of God’s place. It leads in other words to the denial of God. The God who finally asserts itself will be in the final analysis a prefabricated, domesticated god made of human hands (see Isa. 44:14-17).⁵⁵⁵

This leads to idolatry and speaks against the intention and submissions of the gospel of prosperity preachers of calculating God’s favour based on human actions.

Job acknowledges he had previously known God through hearsay (42:5) – through what people had told him about God, through tradition and theologies like those of his friends. But now there is a direct encounter with God which has transformed him. This encounter with God was not done through pure affirmation, not through self immunization to

⁵⁵³ Cf. Ibid, 77f.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, 79

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. This is the problem of Gospel of prosperity preachers and many other Pentecostal but also some Catholic preachers or preachers in other orthodox churches in Nigeria – the usurpation of God’s place by preachers and the claim to detect the mind of God and predict God’s action..

suffering, not even through escapism from the situation of suffering but through a confrontation with God in a desire to see God, through lamentation and through language of prayer. Job now sees God face to face which is a metaphor for inner transformation as a result of an inner experience with God⁵⁵⁶ and an attitude of contemplative love and not that of resignation.⁵⁵⁷ As Gutierrez further explains, “the justice of God is a fundamental datum of the Bible, and therefore God at no time rebukes Job for having demanded Justice. ... But in the just governance of the world God does not follow well-trodden paths that would limit God’s action. Moving through history, God walks a path of freedom”⁵⁵⁸

The epilogue of the book of Job witnesses a solidarity exhibited towards Job and the restoration of Job to wholeness. It is the part of humans beings to show solidarity to those who suffer and are oppressed. It is the solidarity of fellow human beings that helped in restoring Job to wholeness.

*The comfort of the close human community, not debate and doctrinal instruction, solves the problem of “all the evil that Yahweh had brought upon him.” The problem of evil that has a solution is not the abstract problem of the relation between power and goodness but is Job’s own problem of suffering and alienation.*⁵⁵⁹

7.10 JOB’S LAMENTATION AS THE MYSTICISM OF OFO NA OGU

The *Iju Ogu* prayer form of the Igbo people of the South Eastern Nigeria is very similar to the lamentation of Job in the Book of Job. As was already described, the *Iju Ogu* prayer offerer calls on Chukwu, or the gods including the ancestors to come and vindicate one who is unjustly suffering or unjustly being treated. The *iju Ogu* prayer form is accompanied by intangible *Ofo* – the inner power of truthfulness, righteousness, innocence and integrity of the person that is offering the *iju ugu* prayer form.

The Hebrew word *tam* which “means innocence but with a connotation of personal integrity, of something finished, complete, perfect, and therefore exemplary”⁵⁶⁰ is a perfect

⁵⁵⁶ SCHWIENHORST - SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 262.

⁵⁵⁷ GUTIERREZ, 85.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid, 90.

⁵⁵⁹ Edwin M. GOOD, The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job, in: PERDUE, L., G., / GILPIN, W., C., The voice from the Whirlwind, 69.

⁵⁶⁰ GUTIERREZ, 4.

connotation of the intangible *Ofo* in Igbo African tradition. As was already explained, the intangible *Ofo* represents the inner righteousness, innocence, blamelessness, righteousness, integrity and authority of the person offering the *iju Ogu* prayer form. The *Iju Ogu* prayer form can only be undertaken by one who has this intangible *Ofo (tam)* in him. This is because like in the lamentation of Job, the person that is undertaken the *iju Ogu* prayer also takes oaths with self inflicting consequences which are believed to be highly effective. The offerer swears that he or she has not gone against the ordinance of the land, the ancestors, the gods and the great God Chukwu. Neither has he or she oppressed or victimized anyone.

As I did point out in my previous work,

As similar to Job's lamentation and prayer of protest, iju ugu is made of series of oath taking. Like in Israel of old, oath taking was the boldest way among the Igbo people to claim one's innocence and brought certain legal contestation to an end. The offerer swears that if he has ever gone against the ordinances of the gods and nature or harmed the neighbour; if he has done anything to warrant the kind of suffering he is undergoing, the gods should punish him. But if he has not committed any transgression, the gods should stop afflicting him with undeserved suffering and set him free from his adversaries. The offerer of Iju Ugu most times calls on the ancestors to come and intercede for him. Sometimes he uses harsh words to drive home his message to the ancestors that they should have protected him against evil forces and misfortunes because it is their duty to do so. The offerer may say the iju Ugu prayer before the shrine of his personal god (chi).⁵⁶¹

The offerer of *iju Ugu* can also say his prayer in the openness – before heaven and earth especially when calling on Chukwu to come to his or her rescue. As I further explained,

This prayer is based on a similar belief as in the Book of Job that the world is run through deserving; that the gods reward with success and good things those who are upright and that evil follows evil men. There is also the belief that the entirety of the world belongs to God and is controlled by him. However, whereas in the Book of Job, Job conceives his affliction as coming from God, the traditional Igbos would not conceive their evil as coming from Chukwu but from some malevolent spirits and gods who take pleasure in afflicting humans. Thus the basic difference here is the difference between biblical monotheism and Igbo African traditional pantheism.⁵⁶²

As in the lamentation of Job, there is also personal petition to Chukwu in *iju ugu* prayer form for rescue and deliverance from one's present condition. This rescue from God should be based on justice- *Ofo*. Job's assertions:

*My footsteps have followed close to his,
I have walked in his way without swerving;*

⁵⁶¹ Nwaiwu, 156.

⁵⁶² Ibid, 156f

I have not neglected the commandment of his lips

In my heart I have cherished the words of his mouth (Job 23:8-12)

would be understood in Igbo culture as intangible *Ofo*. *Ofo* is on the side of Job because he is an upright man. But the most striking words of Job that portray the intangible *Ofo* in him is that in 29:14 “Uprightness I wore as a garment, fair judgment was my cloak and turban.” This expression shows his inner righteousness and uprightness. The uprightness is habitual, part of his life- his second nature. What Job is literally saying in the verses above in the Igbo contest is, “I have observed and fulfilled the laws and ordinances governing my relationship with Chukwu the Great God, with the deities and the spirits including the ancestors, I have not gone against the ordinances of the land and nature – neither in secret or in public. I have not oppressed my neighbour or victimized him, or cheated on him or stolen his property I have fulfilled my responsibilities towards my extended family, the orphans and widows; I have not been partial in decision taking or judgments, neither have I not taken bribe “*Ejim Ofo*” – I am innocent, my hands are clean.” This gives him the moral authority to undertake his protest – *iju Ogu*.

Job protests his innocence by further swearing:

*I swear by the living God who denies me justice,
by Shaddai who filled me with bitterness,
that as long as a shred of life is left in me,
and the breath of God breathes in my nostrils,
my lips will never speak evil
nor my tongue utter lie.*

*Far from admitting you to be right,
I shall maintain my integrity to my dying day.
I take stand on my uprightness, I shall not stir:
in my heart I need not be ashamed of my days.
Let my enemy meet the fate of the wicked,
my adversary, the lot of evil-doer (27:2-7)*

Job is here confirming and maintaining his integrity; that *Ofo* is on his side. He does that by oath taking. As earlier on said, the entire chapter 31 of the Book of Job is permeated by series of oath taking by Job in attestation of his innocence. I wish to cite a few of the oath-taking by Job:

*If my feet have wandered from the rightful path,
 or if my eyes have led my heart astray
 or if my hands are smirched with any stain
 let someone else eat what I have sown
 and let my young shoot all be rooted out.
 If my heart has been seduced by a woman
 or if I have lurked at my neighbours door
 let my wife go and grind for someone else,
 let others have intercourse with her!
 Have I raised my hand against an orphan,
 presuming on my credit at the gate?
 If so let my shoulder fall from its socket,
 let my arm break off at the elbow(31:7-11,21-22).*

These are strong words of oath-taking that are also typical of *iju Ogu* prayer form. An example of *Iju Ogu* prayer reads thus:

*Lord, King creator!
 If I have killed any person,
 If I have bore false witness,
 If I took another man's property,
 If I dug up another's "ji na ede" (yam and cocoyam)
 If I committed adultery,
 Or abducted another's wife,
 Chukwu Okike! – take away my life today.
 But if I have not, 'mmere gini bu ugu'
 (What have I done is the question of justice)
 Chukwu! – protect my life and my family.⁵⁶³*

Like in the case of Job, the *iju Ogu* offerer is asking for justice and vindication and like in the lamentation of Job there is oath taking in the *Iju Ogu*. In this oath taking, one sometimes swears with one's own life or one's own family. The *Iju Ogu* prayer offerer is convinced that *Ofo* is on his side and therefore nothing will happen to him. He sometimes tells the gods to do with him whatever they like if he is not saying the truth, thereby leaving

⁵⁶³ Cf. Nathaniel I. NDIOKWERE, *The African Church Today and Tomorrow*, Vol. II, Enugu 1994, 70f. Cf. also Andrew E. NWAORGU, *Cultural Symbols: The Christian Perspective*, Owerri 2001, 207.

the consequences sometimes open. Thus the *iju Ogu* prayer form contains also legal metaphors.

The *Iju Ogu* prayer offerer does not wish himself death or to die in the deplorable situation he is. He wants to live that is why he hopes that *Ofo* will protect him. But life for him also means being healthy, it means prosperity, it means wellbeing (*ogologo ndu n'ahu isike*), it also means living honourably. Job wanted to live honourably. Though Job cursed the day of his birth at the beginning of the dialogue part of the Book of Job and wished he died in infancy and sought the solace of the grave (cf chapter 3), he however changed this attitude as the dialogue progressed. Job's understanding broadens and the negative assumptions are dropped. Job then wished to live in the hope of justifying himself.

This lamentation and prayer of protest in the Igbo traditional religion is found in some other African cultures. It is quite similar to the *Songs of Sorrow* by G. Awoonor Williams, a Ghanaian poet. It reads:

*Dzogbese Lisa has treated me thus. It has led me among
sharps of the forest; returning is not possible and going forward
is a great difficult ...
I am not sitting in the row with the eminent;
I am in the world's extreme corner.
But those who are lucky sit in the middle and forget ...
Something has happened to me
The thing so great that I cannot weep ...
Agosu if you go tell them,
Tell Nyidevu, Kpeti and Kove that they have done us evil
Ask them why they idle there while we suffer
And eat sand.
And the crow and the vulture hover always
Above our broken fence, and strangers
Walk over our portion.
Tell them their house is falling and the trees in the fence
Have been eaten by termites
That the martels curse them.⁵⁶⁴*

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Nathaniel I. NDIOKWERE, *The African Church Today and Tomorrow*, Vol. II, Enugu 1994, 68f.

This lamentation is directed to the ancestors who were supposed to be protecting the household they left behind. The situation described by the poet shows it is assumed that they failed in this their duty, thus the protest. The lamentation of Job is directed mainly to God (13:3). A few times however he complained to his friends (19:21-22).

7.11 THE BOOK OF JOB AND POVERTY

Some questions have been raised whether the Book of Job actually represents the interest of the poor or captures what it really means to be poor. There is an opinion that though Job has lost all his wealth, he could still sustain his friends who came to visit him. He could also sustain the four servants who escaped the misfortune (1:15-17, 19). Job still had servants who were ignoring his calls. Job never complained of hunger but complained of his skin and that he could not sleep (7:4). This opinion thinks that “there is no systematic poverty of the long –term poor, who never owned cattle and who never were rich enough to feel the absence of a donkey lost. ... The picture of poverty in ch. 24 is not a depiction of real poverty; it is glamorized poverty; ... it does not know the world of the poor from the inside.”⁵⁶⁵

This opinion also criticizes Job’s attitude towards the poor. Though Job complained that they were laughing at him, but they were not the only people doing that (cf. 16:10; 17:2; 19:13-19). Job seems to reserve his harshest words for the poor,⁵⁶⁶ describing them as worn out with hunger, and he would have disdained to put them with dogs guarding his flocks (30: 1-3). He called them “children of scoundrels, worse, nameless people, the very outcast of the society.” (30:8). These poor people were despised on account of their poverty.

However, it is my view that the Book of Job and precisely chapter 24 captures the agony of the poor. A great majority of authors like Gustavo Gutierrez⁵⁶⁷ are very much convinced that the book of Job deals with the ordeal of the poor and oppressed. It is my view that one cannot say that Job’s reference to the poor as “children of scoundrels, worse, nameless people, the very outcasts of the society” (30:6) and his words about them in chapter 30 are

⁵⁶⁵D.J.A. CLINES, Why is there a Book of Job, in: BEUKEN, W., A., M., The Book of Job, 7f.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Ibid, 7.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. GUTIERREZ, 31-49.

good. But such tense descriptions permeate the entire Book of Job. Yahweh himself was not spared of a heavy dosage of such descriptions.

Job suffering has confronted him with the other side of reality which he had scarcely known. As he battles with this reality, he gives way to his emotions. Job would have expected solidarity from fellow humans especially the poor who had known this reality. The poor who should know the pain of poverty and thus have solidarity with Job, turn out to be despising him. That Job fought for the cause of the poor is incontestable. Job says in chapter 30

*Yet have I ever laid a hand on the poor
when they cried out for justice in calamity?
Have I not wept for those whose life is hard,
felt pity for the penniless? (30:24-25)*

Job showed solidarity to the poor when he was healthy. He was called father of the poor (29:6) which is a divine appellation (attribute) and an attitude that pleases God. But now the poor are despising him. What he is despising here is their lack of solidarity, their indifference to their reality, their becoming like the wicked who despise the poor. What Job does here in my view is to bring the hard realities of the poor before them. He reminds them of their naked reality. He does not want them to be immune to their sufferings – to slide to pure affirmation and denial. They themselves should be crying and complaining because of their lots caused by the wicked. They should be protesting and crying out to God. But they are busy mocking Job, even wanting to destroy him. Job knows that the cause of poverty most times is the injustice done to the poor by the wicked. Job also knows the agony and toil of the poor in its nakedness so he says:

*The wicked move boundary-marks away,
They carry off flock and shepherd.
They drive away the orphan's donkey,
As security they seize the widow's ox.
The needy have to keep out of the way,
Poor country people have to keep out of sight.
Like the desert donkeys, they go out to work,
Searching from dawn for food,
And at evening for something to feed their children.*

*They go harvesting in the field of some scoundrel,
 They go pilfering in the vineyard of the wicked.
 They go about naked, lacking clothes,
 And starving while they carry the sheaves.
 Two little walls, their shelter at high noon;
 Parched with thirst, they have to tread the winepress.
 They spend the night naked, lacking cloths,
 With no covering against the cold
 Mountain rainstorms cut them through,
 Unsheltered, the hug the rocks.
 The orphan child is torn from the breast,
 The child of the poor is exacted as security. (24:1-9)*

Thus “that the Book of Job portrays the agony in which poor people find themselves is beyond doubt... It portrays pains and suffering in their nakedness. While poverty and hunger remain sources of pains and agonies the book shows that there are different other situations that may be sources of pains and agonies like disease, oppression, segregations, violence, injustice death etc.”⁵⁶⁸ These other conditions are also the lot of the poor. Job committed himself to fighting against these evils in the world through love and solidarity and justice.

*The dying man's blessings rested on me,
 and I gave the widows heart cause to rejoice.
 Uprightness I wore as a garment,
 fair judgment was my cloak and my turban.
 I was eye for the blind
 and feet for the lame.
 Who but me was father of the poor?
 The stranger's case has hearing from me.
 I use to break the fangs of the wicked,
 and snatch their pray from their jaws (29:12-17).*

It is my belief that the suffering represented in the book is a universal one, which includes that of the poor. Job's attack on the poor does not in any way blur the fact that he knows the ordeal of the poor. It could be a tactical though painful way of bringing the ordeal of the

⁵⁶⁸ NWAIWU, 161.

poor to them. However, it also shows the radicality of Job's situation. He not only wished the obliteration of the day he was born, he challenged God and rebuked those who scorned him, even in the harshest of words, which should not be literally adopted.

Job's approach to suffering is a mystical approach of bringing questions to God in prayers. He made use of language of prayers which are most times radical and dramatic. In this language of prayers of Job, there are lamentations, hypothetical and imaginative thinking, oath takings and legal metaphors. Job's lamentation and his use of language of prayer is similar to *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism of the Igbo African people of Nigeria. Job speaks to God in contrast to his friends who talk about God. Through this speaking to God and bringing his sufferings to God in the language of prayers, Job was able to behold the face of God and attain a state of containment.

CONCLUSION

HOW DO THE IGBO CHRISTIANS SPEAK ABOUT GOD IN THE SITUATION OF SUFFERING AND CONTRADICTIONS OF FAITH AND EXPERIENCE?

*Now I bend low in grief,
despite my whole hearted belief;
Meditation, contemplation in wonder,
yet my Sorrows carry me yonder.
Does he who made the eyes not see,
I am swallowed in the ocean so deep?
He that the hearing ears did form,
yet I am left in my cries deformed.
Yet in Him will I still everly trust
For his love shall never ever be cut.
He that heaven and earth did made
Will have my whole being remade⁵⁶⁹*

This poem summarizes Job's encounter with suffering and with God as was analysed in the previous chapter. This informs the mystical approach of this work in relationship to Igbo Africans faith crisis.

In chapter three of this work we described the faith crisis of Igbo African Christians, which is not far removed from the general situations of other African Christians. The cause of this crisis is the pains and suffering they experience while still being faithful to Christian God and Christian religion. This suffering cuts across different aspects of their lives and comes in different forms as we have already explained. There is the belief among many Igbo Africans and many other Africans that God rewards or rather should reward uprightness in this earthly existence through wealth, good health and prosperity, and that God punishes or should punish wickedness also in this earthly existence through adversities that come in different forms. This is also the claim inherent in the gospel of prosperity. Despite their faithfulness to the teachings of the gospel many Igbo African Christians

⁵⁶⁹ Composed by the author – Saviour Chidoberem Nwaiwu.

experience great difficulties in form of poverty, sickness, premature death, violence and they experience their collective history as being disfigured and distorted through oppressions and dehumanization. These dialectics bring their Christian faith to crisis. Their faith is torn apart or at least called into question. The silence of God in their history of suffering is agonizing to them.

The disappointing frame of the African Christians after their encounter with Christianity as Africans and blacks is expressed in the poem by Ghanaian poet Kwesi Brew *Lest We Should Be The Last*:

*Lest we should be the last
to appear before you,
we left our corn in the barn
and unprepared we followed
the winding way to your hut.
Our children begged for water
from the women bearing golden gourds
on their heads,
and laughing on their way from the well;
but we did not stop,
knowing that in your presence
our hunger would be banished
and our thirst assuaged
by the flowing milk of your words.
Now we have come to you,
and are amazed to find
those you have loved and respected
mock you to your face.*

Thus, using the words of Gustavo Gutierrez in Igbo African context, the pertinent questions here are:

How are we to talk about a God who is revealed as love in a situation characterized by poverty and oppression? How are we to proclaim the God of life to men and women who die prematurely and unjustly? How are we to acknowledge that God makes us free gift of love and

*justice when we have before us the suffering of the innocent? What words are we to use in telling those who are not even regarded as persons that they are the daughters and sons of God?*⁵⁷⁰

In other words, it is very fundamental

*to find the words which to talk about God in the midst of starvation of millions, the humiliation of races regarded as inferior, discrimination against women especially women who are poor, systematic social injustice, a persistent high rate of infant mortality, those who simply “disappear” or are deprived of their freedom, the suffering of peoples who are struggling for the right to live, the exiles and refugees ...How can we preach the love of God amid such profound contempt of human life? How are we to proclaim the resurrection of the Lord where death reigns, and especially the death of children, women, the poor, indigenes, and the “unimportant” members of our society?*⁵⁷¹

The difficulty of talking about God in such situations of total degenerations is articulated in the poem from Antonio Cisneros titled *Oracion*:

*How difficult it is, my father, to write from
viewpoint of the winds
so ready am I to curse, so raucous-voiced for song.
How can I speak of the love, of the gentle hills of
your kingdom,
if I dwell like a cat on a stake surrounded by waters.*⁵⁷²

As Metz said, “there are questions that may be directed back to God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Jesus. Here though are questions for which I have a language, but no answer: Why God, suffering? Why sin? Why have you made no provision for evil?”⁵⁷³ In these dialectics and contradictions of life, the basic question here is: What language is proper for the Igbo Christians in their crisis situations?

The proper language to speak about God in the situations of suffering and degradation should not be that that suppresses human feelings in suffering or that does not incorporate these feelings of suffering in its expressions, or that is immune to suffering. This language should not be a suppressed language of pure affirmation, but a sincere language of prayer before God that incorporates one’s experience. It should be that of prayers and of questions;

⁵⁷⁰GUTIERRÉZ, xiv.

⁵⁷¹Ibid, 102.

⁵⁷² Cf. Ibid, 120.

⁵⁷³METZ , A Passion For God, 5.

it should acknowledge the pains of the sufferer and should encourage him or her to bring his doubts and questions to God in prayer. This was the case with the lamentation of Job. This should be the case of Igbo African Christians as contained in *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism. This discourages the attitude of pure affirmation in the Gospel of prosperity.

In other words, the language proper for the Igbo African faith crisis is the language of prayer as found in the Book of Job. This language finds its expression in the Igbo African *Ofo na iju Ogu* mysticism. This language of prayer found in the Book of Job is also what is highlighted in the New Political theology Jesus mysticism and anamnestic thinking. The anamnestic thinking is a biblical thinking that incorporates incidents of suffering in human world and history and beckons or cries out for the redemptive power of God. “Biblically, the name of God remains indelibly encrypted in the passion of humankind. God cannot be established ‘beyond’ or ‘above’ human suffering; on the contrary this suffering is the cost of affirming God.”⁵⁷⁴

This kind of thinking does not aim at pure affirmation as in the case of friends of Job and also proponents of gospel of prosperity. It entertains thoughts of doubt and fear, acknowledging them as spiritual struggle towards “seeing God” as in the case of Job. Questions based on incidents of human suffering are formulated and brought to God in prayers, Asking God “When would you come to restore they battered and forgotten?” It emphasises the time frame. It is eschatological – waiting for the saving power of God. It is a waiting that is based on God’s promise of redemption.

*The God-talk, as we know them from the biblical tradition contains promise of salvation, pared with the promise of a universal justice which also includes rescue of past suffering (mine trans.).*⁵⁷⁵

There is in anamnestic thinking a keeping alive of hope and an expectation of justice for the living and the dead. This is the kind of justice that Job was crying out for as he was begging the earth not to cover his blood and his cries to mount without cease (16:18). God gives the assurance of this justice by his meeting with and his reply to Job. God has a plan for this

⁵⁷⁴ J. REIKERSTORFER, “What Price God- Talk” in: Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology, Berlin 2006, 162.

⁵⁷⁵ J. B. METZ, Theologie als Theodizee? , in: BÖHNKE, 91.(vgl. Die Gottesrede, wie wir sie aus den biblischen Überlieferung kennen, enthält ein Versprechen der Rettung, gepaart mit dem Versprechen einer universalen Gerechtigkeit, die auch die vergangenen Leiden rettend einschließt).

world; a plan that is based on gratuitousness. Justice in God's administration of the world is based on divine freedom and gratuitousness. God does not condemn Job for demanding for justice, though God's plan in human history is greater than human comprehension. Job was right in his demand for justice and in his exercise of human freedom through lamentation, but most especially, because he directed this lamentation to God his Creator. It is an expression of faith in a God that redeems. God said that his servant Job spoke well of him (42:7) in his attitude to see the face of God, to ask and to bring his questions to him. The anamnestic thinking and theology seeks to bring these questions of concrete human suffering to God in prayers and asks for God's redemption. It makes these questions to continue burning in human consciousness so as not to descend into the abyss of forgetfulness. Thus incidents of human sufferings, dehumanization and dissubjectification in Igbo and the entire Africans' encounter with Christianity and the world especially in the forms of slavery, colonization, racism and also incidents of existential suffering like poverty, illness, and violence should not be stifled or subjected to pure affirmation. They should be open questions to God that we should bring to God in prayers.

The anamnestic thinking is different from Hellenistic thinking. The later is more abstract and less concrete with incidents of suffering. A basic element of this anamnestic theology which is also called question-unto-God theology is "remembrance". This "remembrancing" has some basic theological formulations as articulated by Reikerstorfer which I summarized in my aforementioned work as thus:

Firstly, the "other" is a condition (Voraussetzung) for encountering God – our relationship to the 'other' determines our relationship to God. Through the recognition of the 'other' the illusive mystery of God becomes present in the world.

Secondly, the 'other' who connects us to God are not only those others who we directly encounter, but also those people around the world who are threatened; the systematically disadvantaged and marginalized other.

Thirdly, the God we encounter in others remains incognito, but in the remembrance of the suffering of the others, this God comes near to us. There is then a call for solidarity with the 'other' who suffers.⁵⁷⁶

Talking about remembrancing as a tool against injustice and oppression Reikerstorfer, in line with a thesis stated by J. B. Metz, stated:

⁵⁷⁶NWAIWU,102f

*Only in this remembrancing could there be meaningful talk today of oppression and liberation as well as protest against the new forms of injustice – against segregation, continuing impoverishment, and a grinding poverty. In these times of globalization, a Christianity that renewed its cultic memory and cultivate solidarity with those who suffer in opposition to the worldwide oppression of human kind could prove itself to be an effective gadfly in the encounter with other cultures and religions.*⁵⁷⁷

Remembrancing brings the concrete incidents of suffering to human consciousness for humans to consciously mount resistance against their sources. Thus, it is the part of men and women, especially Christians to fight against injustice, segregation oppression and other social vices in the world especially against the poor and the disadvantaged – those who have no one to fight for their cause. “It says ‘Yes’ in remembrancing as a form of resistance which refuses to stop asking whether there is justice for the innocents who suffer unjustly.”⁵⁷⁸ That was exactly what Job did. This remembrancing is meant to be active and productive. As Reikerstorfer affirms,

*This remembrancing is not made to be sentimental, but political- an active, productive, and effective remembrancing with a critical and liberating intention. Faith is ignited in compassion: a compassion for God (“Gottesleidenschaft”) is the passion for engagement. In this version of the union of the love of God and the love of neighbor, faith stings and sharpens the “human conscience” in a world threatened by the decline of humanity.*⁵⁷⁹

“In the apocalyptic conception that God will limit the time of suffering , comes a hope against all hope , namely that God at the end of time will ‘will wipe all tears’ (Revelation 21:4). This theology holds the theodicy question open, with the hope that God will justify himself as God for only God can justify God.”⁵⁸⁰

As in the case of Job, there is an expression of a missing God in this theology because to know God is to miss him. It is a longing for God, for his saving presence, for redemption, for help, for end to suffering. God is called upon to demonstrate his might and sovereignty in the limited time of this world. Thus there is an evoking of the time dimension. It a theology based on faith in the promise of God and hope in the coming of God to save. I articulated a summary of this theology in my previous work based on the opinions of its proponents as thus:

⁵⁷⁷ REIKERSTORFER, 160f.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, 165.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid, 165.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Nwaiwu, 103f

In this theology, there is an expression of the missing God. In this line, J. B. Metz transforms the proposition of Thomas Aquinas that “To know God means not to know him” into “To know God means to miss him.”⁵⁸¹ This ‘missing of God’ is not an expression of loss but that of ‘agonizing absence’; it is not an expression of being hopelessly forlorn, but that of a longing for God. “The experience of the absence of God makes clear the urgent necessity of his presence...”⁵⁸² The question “where is God?” would be interpreted as meaning “when will God get here?” It evokes the ‘time’ dimension, a time understandable as a limited span – a time that has an end. The missing God theology goes beyond the “why” question of theodicy which aims at justification, to the “when” question of biblical apocalyptic tradition which aims at the end, at help. A theology of the missing God is therefore thoroughly apocalyptic. It seeks to break through the dominant view of history as a continuum; as endlessness. Unlike Hegel, it does not foster the view that history is the place of last judgment, and repulses the insensitive idea that “the blood of victims is dried by a process of evolving meaning.” Apocalyptic entails hope, a hope not to be confused with optimism which is a cheap hope that costs nothing. This apocalyptic hope rather entails risk – it leads to instability and uncertainty. In this situation, “apocalyptic is based on trust and confidence: a trust that God remembers those without hope and a confidence that God, will in a new act of creation, bring the history of this hopeless ones to its ‘end’.”⁵⁸³ It ignites a rare and impossible spark of hope in a situation of hopelessness which radically relativizes the present situation. It entails a waiting for the hidden coming power that saves.⁵⁸⁴ This waiting is not utopism since God has already proved himself in human history. Apocalyptic thinking is sensitive and compassionate, concerning itself with the questions of the abandoned and vanquished, and asking for when God will come to salvage the situation.⁵⁸⁵

Continuing in the description of this theology in the articulation of proponents, I further stated that

the theology is founded on the “memoria passionis et resurrection”; the remembering, anamnestic knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has shown in Jesus Christ his perfect love and saving deed. The hope on God is a hope which has found its root and strength in God’s faithfulness to his promise. The statement “God is love” (1Jn 4:16) is central not only because it makes sensible the human suffering, but also because it makes the cry to God sharper, louder and more persistent.⁵⁸⁶

The language of the anamnestic theology is known as the language of prayer. The language of prayer is dramatic, spontaneous, concrete, and most times radical. It reflects the situation of the suffering subject. It is simply a language of cries. It cries to God for help for redemption. This is the language of the lamentation of Job. This is found in many wisdom

⁵⁸¹ Cf. Jürgen MANEMANN, *Abandoned by God? Reflection on the Margins of Theology*, in: DOWNEY, John, K., et al (eds.), *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and political theology*, Berlin 2006, 26.

⁵⁸² J. EBACH, in: MANEMANN, J., 32.

⁵⁸³ Jürgen MANEMANN, 29.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁸⁵ NWAIWU, 104.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, 105.

and prophetic writings of the Bible. “cry then to the Lord ... allowed yourself no respite, give your eyes no rest”(Lam 2:18). In this language, the suffering subject finds his voice and asserts his being.

As Rahner was quoted to say “I do not pray because I believe, I believe because I pray.”⁵⁸⁷ Thus this language of prayer brings faith. It is not a faith that is spared of turbulence, but a faith that puts all its trust in God in the means of cries for help. It is a faith that is full of hope for redemption and deliverance. The language of prayer is not a language of humiliating surrender. As Reikerstorfer further notes, “The language of prayer does not lend itself to lessening anxiety or finding compensation. And it is never a language of humiliating surrender. It is much more the language of rebellion in which those who pray connect with their God within the ‘profound this-worldliness’ of profane life and find thereby a name, a face and a dignity.”⁵⁸⁸ For “indeed, it is in this rebellious language of prayer that God remains both the one we are calling for and the one bound up with history of humankind.”⁵⁸⁹ It is more of calls and cries unto God. It is a language that is founded in the Bible.

*The great tradition of prayer in the Old Testament Psalms and Prophets do not suffer from any sort of excessive affirmation. Even the praise of God is parked by abysmal experiences of crisis and failure – by the horizon of danger. Pure affirmation might not be so much an expression of confidence as a signs of our lack of courage and our inability to take on doubts, anxieties, and threats as we struggle for God.*⁵⁹⁰

The language of theology is in itself important, but it must not be blind to the concrete human situations of suffering or tries to explain them away as in the case of the friends of Job. Job remains true to the language of prayer for it originates from his experience. He speaks to God rather than talking about God. In speaking to God he brings in his situation, his doubts, his frustrations, his questions, his agonies into prayers. He calls on God for justice and for justification. As was already said, this kind of language is the language found in Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism and it is the proper language of speaking about God in the Igbo Christians situation of suffering.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. J. REIKERSTORFER, 168.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 167.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

Iju Ogu as described in the fifth chapter of this work is the prayer of an upright man who suffers unjustly or who is befallen by calamities. It is the Igbo traditional prayer of a persecuted just soul who asks for redemption and justification in the hands of the great God Chukwu or other deities. The offerer of this prayer as was already explained attests that he is just and has done nothing wrong, that truth and justice – ‘*Ofo*’ is on his side. He prays for vindication. In chapter seven of this work which deals with the biblical analysis of the Book of Job it is shown that the words of Job is similar to Igbo *Iju Ogu* prayer form. Thus the Igbo person would understand the lamentation of Job as *Iju Ogu* and that *Ofo* – truth – is on the side of Job since he was an upright man. It is said in Igbo parlance that *Iju Ogu* is accompanied by *Ofo* because without integrity and uprightness, there would not be a call for vindication.

Faced with crisis of faith as a result of faith cum life contradictions and faced with different difficulties and sufferings both historical and existential, the inculturated Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* traditional prayer form provides a source of strength and inspiration for the Igbo Christian faith and life. The integrity of the Igbo *Iju Ogu* prayer offerer as represented by the intangible *Ofo* inspires and encourages the Igbo Christians to a blameless life in the sight of God. The form of the *Iju Ogu* prayer - which makes use of the language of prayer and whose content calls for vindication and justification that is similar to the prayer of Job in the Book of Job—would encourage the Igbo Christians not to stifle doubts and questions in their Christian life but to bring their frustrations, doubts and questions to God in prayers and to ask for God’s redemptive power and intervention. This is because the language of *Iju Ogu* prayer form - accompanied by intangible *Ofo* as a form of inner integrity and righteousness -does not stifle questions. Contrary to this, the retributive logic of proponents of gospel of prosperity stifles questions and doubts; it degrades the suffering subject since it terms him a sinner or an unbeliever because of his sufferings, thereby multiplying his agonies and confusing him all the more. But the incorporation of the Igbo traditional concept of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism - prayer form of *iju Ogu* accompanied by the integrity of *Ofo* which is a biblical mysticism found in the Book of Job - into Christianity would restore the dignity of the praying subject since it will give him the courage to ask questions – to present his doubts and questions to God. It gives him the dignity of waiting and expecting answers from God. It gives him the courage to cry out in pain and it acknowledges that the

world is full of contradictions and that some sufferings are not as a result of human sins—there are sufferings that are simply unexplainable. Thus, the praying subject is offered the authority to examine self, to speak out, to declare, to protest, to ask for vindication and liberation, to solicit, to wait, and to expect – an authority to be a subject. As Appel puts it “One can say that in prayer the voiceless subject becomes his own voice – and also the voice of the other – and gets the strengthening to transform himself from an-in-itself closed existence to a fundamental openness (mine trans.)”⁵⁹¹

It fills the Christian with the eschatological hope that God will bring this history of suffering to an end. The waiting in hope for God should not be an idle waiting but one that involves political actions for justice and peace.

The *Ofo na Ogu* prayer offerer takes into account the contradictions found in life experience. He does not lend himself to blind logic but accommodates these contradictions in his prayers by calling on Chukwu to come and manifest himself in history and in this limited time by granting justice to the just and rescuing the innocent. This language of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism is bereft of pure affirmation. It is a language that mirrors and reflects the real situation of the Igbo African person; it entertains insecurity. It does not show superficial joy but rather it is a courageous language of hope and action, a language of protest; a language that calls for redemption. And as was already said, it is the language found in the mouth of Job in the biblical Book of Job and the language described by Johann Baptist Metz as God’s mysticism. It is a question-unto-God theodicy which does not give in to self immunization against suffering. It is an open eyes theodicy which takes into account the suffering in human history and adopts the language of prayer asking God to come and establish himself in the course of history and bring the human person to wholeness and this history of suffering to an end. If this mysticism of *Ofo na Ogu* is promoted and encouraged in Igbo Christian life – a mysticism of integrity and prayers – it will fill the Igbo Christians with the eschatological hope of the redemptive power of God while they remain steadfast in fighting evil in the world. It will prepare the Christians to accommodate the unanswered

⁵⁹¹ Kurt APPEL, Vom Preis des Gebets, in: DERS, Preis der Sterblichkeit, 222. Vgl. Man könnte sagen, dass im Gebet das stimmlose Subjekt zu seiner eigenen Stimme – oder auch zu Stimme des Anderen - wird und überhaupt erst eine Ausrichtung bekommt, sich von einer in sich beschlossenen Existenz zu einer fundamentalen Offenheit transformierend.

questions of life experience especially as it pertains to suffering and faith in God but still will make him not to stifle these doubts and questions. This is because it allows questions to God in prayer and does not require one to deny the life situations. It involves a waiting for God that requires actions on the part of Christians in accordance with the gospel.

A Christian inculturated *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism would be a mysticism of prayer and remembrancing. It is a mysticism that is against amnesia or the forgetfulness of history as a history of suffering. Thus it should not base all its hopes on world - progress as found in the technological world but also thinks of those that have suffered and are no more; those that are silent and who we tend to forget. This mysticism as mysticism of open eyes sees thus the sufferings in the world and the oppression therein. The mysticism of *Ofo na Ogu* is essentially against the methods of the proponents of gospel of prosperity especially in Nigeria of exploiting people by measuring faith in terms of progress and richness. It is against the doctrine of retribution as found in the gospel of prosperity. It is not against healing or progress in itself but against using them as a yardstick for determining who is a child of God or a true Christian. It is also against eliminating cross in the life of a Christian as the proponents of gospel of prosperity do. The mysticism of *Ofo na Ogu* calls for personal integrity as found in those ancient Igbo traditional people who embarked on the prayer of *iju Ogu*. It calls for purity and openness of mind among Igbo and other Christians. This purity of mind is a *sine qua non* for the offerer of Igbo traditional *iju Ogu* prayer.

For the Igbo African Christians and indeed for all Christians, faith must remain even when understanding fails. But the cry to God must not cease. There must remain a continuous search to encounter God; to behold his face; “somehow remaining in faith at the time of crisis and constantly searching the face of God is the best response to suffering. The victory of Christ over death should give Igbo African and indeed all Christians the hope that one day God “will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning, or sadness or pain. ‘The world of the past has gone’ (Rev. 21:4).”⁵⁹² This should not be taken as utopism since God has already proved himself in history. It does not exonerate humans from actively participating in the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth through resistance against evil, and through discipleship and solidarity

⁵⁹²NWAIWU, 162

with those who suffer. Anchoring themselves on the Book of Job and drawing inspiration from Igbo *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism, African Igbo Christians should be steadfast and firm with their faith in God while still bringing their doubts and questions to him in prayers and waiting for the advent of the saving power of God. As in the Book of Job, Job continued pressing on the God he believed in. He never gave up his pursuit of justice and to see the face of God his father. From the need of an arbiter (9:32-33) who only can be God, Job talked of having a witness in heaven who would stand for him and defend his cause (16:18-22). Then Job expressed hope on his living defender, avenger or redeemer (19:25-27) who is God. Thus

*if (Job) keeps pressing heaven with his questions, it is simply because he expects God to answer. He lays on God the obligation of answering, and not only of this moment; until he dies he will go on demanding justice (Job 19:25-27). His is a cry of a madman, for it expresses a hope his age found inconceivable. But thanks to this faith that perseveres to the end, his cry is, as it were the revelation of a step forward.*⁵⁹³

So does *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism advocate an in-faith-cry to God. As further expressed,

*The remarkable thing about this Book is that Job makes not a single step of flight to a better God, but stays resolutely in the field of battle under the fire of divine wrath. Although God treats him as enemy, through the dark night and the abyss Job does not falter, nor invoke another court, nor even appeal to the God of his friends, but calls upon this God who crushes him. He flees to the God whom he accuses. He sets his confidence in God who has disillusioned him and reduced him to despair. ... Without deviating from the violent assertion of his innocence and God's hostility, he confesses his hope, taking as his Defender the One who judges him, as his Liberator the One who throws him in prison, and as his Friend his mortal enemy.*⁵⁹⁴

So should be the case of Igbo African Christians – remaining steadfast in faith and crying out to God in prayers as in *Iju Ogu* prayer form.

It could be said that Job “splits God in two and produces a God who is judge and a God who will defend him at the supreme moment; a God whom he experiences as almost an enemy but whom he knows at the same time as a true friend.”⁵⁹⁵

The friends of Job are like today's vanguards of the gospel of prosperity who believe that one's situation in life shows whether one is an upright person or not. Job's experience taught him that such an assumption was and is false. This inspiration from the Book of Job

⁵⁹³ J. DELORME, Lecture, in: GUTIERRÉZ, 130.

⁵⁹⁴ J. de PURY, Job ou l'homme revolté, in: GUTIERRÉZ, 128.

⁵⁹⁵ GUTIERRÉZ, 65.

should make Igbo African Christians not to fall prey to the antics of the gospel of prosperity. It leads them to the consciousness that one's situation in life does not necessarily tell whether one is righteous or not.

Central to Old Testament theology as a thesis by Brueggemann rightfully indicates, is that expressed hurt and imaginative hopes are liberating forces. Oppress people are to express their hurt and give voice to their pains while still finding redemptive ways to overcome their oppression.⁵⁹⁶ "Giving expression to hurt links God to the hash situations that oppress the weak. Since this God desires to involve himself with the pain of those who believe in him, lamenting before him spawn hope supported by the belief that God may transform any situation, either in manifesting his presence or through providence."⁵⁹⁷ Expression of hurt leads to healing - spiritually, mentally and physically. Thus, like Job, the Igbo Christians should be open to complain to God as in the traditional *iju ugu* prayer. They are not to be ashamed of their cries and scares, not ashamed of their questions and doubts, but these should be incorporated in their prayers to God. "This cry cannot be muted. Those who suffer unjustly have a right to complain and protest."⁵⁹⁸ "That is why I cannot keep quiet: in my anguish of spirit I shall speak, in my bitterness of soul I shall complain" (Job 7:11). However, this cries should be accompanied by political actions and resistance.

Igbo African Christians' lamentation in the form of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism should be both horizontal and vertical. On the horizontal level, their agonizing voices should be directed to those established oppressive structures and government especially in Nigeria but also outside its borders that have created their deplorable states and wickedly seek to maintain these deplorable states for their selfish and ungodly interests. Their agonizing cries and groaning laments must not cease, but instead grow louder in order to upturn the selfish music of the oppressors, and wake them up from the comfort of their sleep, and heal them of the drowsiness they suffer as a result of stolen public funds, contaminated, self- and mass destructive liquor of corruption, and pathological state of accumulation and

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. J.E. HARTLEY, 98.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ GUTIERRÉZ, 101.

aggrandizement.⁵⁹⁹ These cries should resist their insensitivity, hardness of hearts and demonic egoism. These cries should be animated by biblical inspirations and the Spirit of God and followed by political actions that are based on the principles of the gospel. As Metz rightly opined

*Whoever would resist the vanishing of persons and their historical world, whoever would save their identities as subjects, their language that seeks truth, their ability to come to understand one another, their unsated hunger and thirst for justice, whoever wants to do these things will find it less and less possible without adopting a theological horizon.*⁶⁰⁰

Through hypothetical and imaginative thinking, the oppressed and disadvantaged faithful should explore ways of doing that, and through the symbolism of Jobian oath taking as represented by the integrity of the *Ofo*, they should be ever determined not to compromise on their integrity.⁶⁰¹

*In protesting against injustice inflicted on him, Job is much more truthful witness of faith in Yahweh than all those who grow accustomed to injustice to the point of making it a necessary element in the system of human life. This is what has happened in the case of Job's friends and God's false friends*⁶⁰²

On the vertical level while remaining in faith, the Igbo, Nigerian, African and indeed all Christians should continuously aspire to encounter God who has taken side with those suffering. In their search to encounter God, they should not be afraid to outpour their doubts and sorrows to the God who is their father (the meaning of the name “Job” is where is my father; where is my God). In this outpouring, they should not cease to ask God to come and intervene in the world of suffering and firmly make visible his reign on earth which situations of suffering blur.⁶⁰³ The prayer here emphasizes temporality. “When will you come Lord?”; joining it with the hope of the early Christians and the promise of the Lord “Maranatha, come Lord Jesus” (Rev.22:20; Rm13:12, Phil 4:5-6, Jm5:2; 1Pet4:7).

The cry of the oppressed to God which comes in the form of the language of prayer should, as in the case of Job, not be a cry of despair but that filled with hope - hope of the saving power of God. This is also the same with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus’ cry on the

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. NWAIWU, 163.

⁶⁰⁰ METZ, A Passion for God, 80

⁶⁰¹ Cf. NWAIWU, 163.

⁶⁰² ECHEGARAY in: GUTIERREZ, 112

⁶⁰³ Cf. NWAIWU, 163f.

cross “*Eloi, eloi lama sabachthani?* ...– My God my God why have you forsaken me”(Mark 15:34) was not a cry of despair but a cry filled with hope and trust in God his Father in whom he totally surrendered himself to in total submission and trust.

*He who has been ‘abandoned’ abandons himself in turn into the hands of the Father. He confronts the forces of evil and sin when, in communion with the hopes of the human race, he asserts that life, not death has the final say. It is there that Jesus experiences and proclaims the resurrection and true unending life, and becomes “the source of eternal salvation.”*⁶⁰⁴

And

*even in his lament Jesus ‘spoke correctly of God.’ His cry on the cross renders more audible and more penetrating the cry of all the Jobs, individual and collective, of human history. ... the cry of Jesus is the cantus firmus, the leading voice to which all the voices of those who suffer unjustly are joined.*⁶⁰⁵

Thus the cry of the Igbo Africans in the *Ofo na Ogu* prayer form should be that filled with hope and expectations of the saving power of God. In this regard, they should inculcate the language of the cross in their cries which according to Gutierrez is a synthesis of language of prophecy and language of contemplation.⁶⁰⁶“The language of contemplation acknowledges that everything comes from the Father’s unmerited love and opens up ‘new horizons of hope’. The language of prophecy attacks situation – and its structural causes – of injustice and deprivation in which the poor live, because it looks for the suffering features of Christ the Lord in the pain ravaged faces of an oppressed people”⁶⁰⁷This language of the cross should be ever present in the Christian enterprise of all Christians, in this case, the Igbo African Christians. There is also the need for the proper understanding of the meaning of the cross of Christ.

Christ’s cross was a cross of innocence and uprightness as opposed to a world of wickedness. It was a cross he carried because of his righteousness and truthfulness. Thus, Jesus had the (intangible) *Ofo* in Him. He was an innocent man who suffered though he was innocent. His cry on the Cross (Mk 15:34) was a cry of an innocent man being persecuted. In this sense, it was a prayer of *iju Ogu*. Thus Christ was a man of *Ofo na Ogu*. This cross of uprightness and integrity must be highlighted in the Igbo interpretation of the

⁶⁰⁴ GUTIERRÉZ, 100

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, 101.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 97.

cross of Jesus for it to be understandable in the Igbo tradition. *Ofo* was on the side of Jesus, and he cried aloud in the prayer of *Iju Ogu*. And God did not allow his cry to be in vain. On the third day, God resurrected Jesus from the dead. In this sense of hoping that the righteous will be vindicated, the word *obe* will acquire a deeper understanding. The Igbo Christians would normally say *Obe Nso Jesu* which means the Holy Cross of Jesus. An addition of the word '*Ofo*' may help to bring out the integrity in the cross of Christ and help the Igbo Christians to only carry cross as a result of integrity and uprightness but to resist oppression by crying aloud both in prayers and in actions. In that sense one can say *Obe Ofo Nso Jesu*, which mean the holy cross of uprightness of Jesus.

The denial of this cross of righteousness in the lives of Christians can lead to flight to pure affirmation as is the case with prosperity preachers. The flight to affirmation is a denial of the real situations of the Igbo Christians and in extension, of African Christians. As I did point out in my aforementioned work,

*the preachers of gospel of prosperity promise their followers and others who may join them solutions to all their problems. They propagate the message that true followers of Christ should prosper since Christ's victory over death means victory over all forms of material needs and spiritual afflictions. Though they do not live up to their promises, the preachers of prosperity gospel continue to confuse and draw many Catholics and other Christians in Nigeria and Africa at large to themselves.*⁶⁰⁸

Proponents of the gospel of prosperity derive their logic from retributive justice. Like the case of the friends of Job in the Bible, they do not look at the reality on the ground but maintain a blind logic which contradicts reality. This blind affirmation derived from the doctrine of retribution has made its inroad into Igbo an indeed African Catholicism and is spreading rapidly so much so that most Igbo and African Catholics and Christians succumb to its confusing logic. One can say that it is almost becoming the order of the day, being injected and ingrained into the kerugmatik and liturgical life of the Christian enterprise in Africa by some Church functionaries like priests and preachers.

Pure affirmation does not confront the real problem and the root cause of them. It does not ask critical questions, questions directed unto God as we see in the biblical traditions- in the Psalms, Book of Job and other biblical writings. Here, critical questions concerning the condition of the sufferer are brought unto God. In this line of thought Reikerstorfer

⁶⁰⁸NWAIWU, 160

asked: “Don’t we also devalue prayer when we isolate it from the crisis of assent we each experience in our lives, crisis that should not be left out of our prayers but brought directly into our affirmation?”⁶⁰⁹

He further noted that

*The purely affirmative believer does not recognize that God can only be experience as a God of controversy and struggle. The God of comfort who encourages us in situation of despair, the God worthy of belief and worship, is a God whose survival is always at threat. A person who has never tasted despair, never faces the abyss of profound futility and senselessness can never find support and rescuer*⁶¹⁰

Be that as it may, Christianity is not only about cries and pains. There are joyful experiences and inner fulfillment in the faith encounter of Christians with God. These joys should not be diminished or suppressed. But these should not be joys that are deaf to the cries of the other and the suffering in the world. In this regard Metz noted that “... the faith of Christians does not only sing, but cries out, as final words of the Bible show. There is a hint of something unreconciled in Christianity. To banish this would be an expression not of faith but of smallness of faith.”⁶¹¹ This is exactly what the proponents of gospel of prosperity in Nigeria and beyond do - to banish doubts and reconcile all things in a single logic of retribution. Thus, as Metz further noted “whoever hears the message of the resurrection of Christ in such a way that the cry of the crucified has become inaudible in it, hears not the Gospel but a myth.”⁶¹² While there is a support for the Igbo liturgical life which is mostly characterized by songs and dances, the cries of the oppressed should not be drown in the shouts of joy. There should be room for expression of pains and doubts.

An integral part of the *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism is the examination of conscience by the offerer. Against the experience of suffering the *iju Ogu* prayer offerer examines himself or herself whether he or she in any way contributed to the cause of the suffering of the world - knowingly or unknowingly, spiritually or existentially. In the event of self examination, the

⁶⁰⁹ J. REIKERSTORFER, What Price God-Talk, 167.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, 165.

⁶¹¹ METZ, Theology as Theodicy?, in: DERS., A Passion for God. The Mystical – Political Dimension of Christianity, edited and translated by J. Matthew ASHLEY, New York – N.J. 1998, 56.

⁶¹² Ibid.

questions the *iju Ogu* prayer offerer poses to himself and the society at large are similar to those found in the Jesuit Spiritual Exercise which reads:

*I want you to set your eyes and your hearts on these peoples who are suffering so much – some from poverty and hunger, others from oppression. Then..., standing before this people thus crucified... (a)sk yourself: What have I done to crucify them? What do I do to uncrucify them? What must I do for this people to rise again?*⁶¹³

Imbibing this spirit of self examination as found in *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism which is similar to the one in the Jesuit spiritual exercise will be a catalyst towards a positive change of humans and the society. It is a change of the society from the self. This begins with self examinations but also includes concrete actions. In the question “What have I done to crucify them?”, the Christian first examines himself if he has contributed to the problem and suffering of the society through actions or inaction (omissions). The question “What do I do to uncrucify them?” calls for prayers but also concrete positive actions and measures on the part of the Christian. It calls for concrete decision and discipleship. The decision and action here may require one to first start the change from oneself – to become an example of the just society that one wishes to have; to be the change and uprightness that one is yearning for; like Job, to inculcate this in one’s daily life. But it also calls for concrete political actions, actions that would change the society, actions that involve resistance of evil and oppressions and would naturally lead to sacrifice. These are imbibed in the mysticism of *Ofo na Ogu*.

The Church in Nigeria has also a vital role to play to confront the faith crisis of Christians in Nigeria. As I also expressed in my aforementioned work,

*The church in Nigeria and Africa on her part must like God take side with the sufferers. She must resist the modern temptation of exulting wealth and ranks, for it sends wrong signals to the vulnerable worshippers. (That is exactly what the preachers of gospel of prosperity do.) On the contrary she must encourage hard work and honesty, while at the same time countering the deceits of the prosperity preachers for the Bible does not promise the faithful suffering free world, but the victory of Christ over death ignites the hope that there will one day be elimination of evil and its pains. She should exhort the faithful to be in solidarity with one another especially with those who suffer. While encouraging them to create a better society, she should not fail to make them to understand the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith.*⁶¹⁴

⁶¹³Ignatio ELLACURÍA, Las Iglesias Latino Americanasinterpelan a la Iglesia de Espana, in: SOBRINO, Jon, Jesus the Liberator: A Historical – Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth, in: ASHLEY, Matthew, J., Introduction: Reading Metz, in: Metz, A Passion for God, 16 f.

⁶¹⁴ NWAIWU, 164.

Thus in the face of “those social contradictions and antagonisms that are the stuff of painfully lived historical experience, and within which historical subjects constitute themselves ...”⁶¹⁵ the Christian church especially in Nigeria cannot maintain an apolitical, indifferent posture or claim to be politically innocent. This is because the Christian Gospel is already political in the sense that it advocates for a certain way of action and maintains certain fundamental convictions based on the fundamental claim that all men are called to be subjects in the face of God.⁶¹⁶ The idea of God is itself inescapably political because the name God stands for this fundamental claim that all men are called to live as subjects and all Christians are called to work towards this realization. In line with this, “every theology is already political in that it knowingly or unknowingly pursues particular interests, mediates a worldview, and transmits and influences a temporal consciousness. It must give an account of these if it wants to remain free which is to say honest.”⁶¹⁷ As Metz said, “nothing makes religion more guilty than the attempt to buy its political innocence by refusing to take part in the historical struggles for a state of affairs in which all human beings are called to be subjects.”⁶¹⁸ He further noted that,

*Such witnessing to God is not allowed political innocence. In the end, witness is intimately involved, with eyes that see, in that history where people are crucified and tortured, hated and miserly loved; and no mythos far-removed from history, no world-blind gnosis, can give it back the innocence that is lost in such a historical trial. The God who comes near in Jesus obviously is not primarily interested in how and what we think about him, but rather first in how we behave toward the other; and only in this- how we deal with others- can it be known how we think about God and what we think of God.*⁶¹⁹

In line with this, the church in Igbo land, Nigeria and Africa should animate and encourage the Christian faithful so that the integrity and innocence of the oppressed and questioning subject in *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism moves him with a spirit of Christian solidarity to resist and fight against those oppressing structures in the society. There are here the two-fold prayer-action implementations as is the case in New Political Theology: mystical and political. ‘From prayer it seeks freedom from what is alleged to be plausible in the

⁶¹⁵ METZ, Faith in History and Society. Towards A Practical Fundamental theology,74.

⁶¹⁶Ibid, 78.

⁶¹⁷Tiemo Rainer PETERS, Johann Baptist Metz – Theology of the Missing God, in: DOWNEY., John., K., et al, Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology, 15.

⁶¹⁸ METZ, Faith and History,79.

⁶¹⁹METZ, A Passion for God: Religious Orders Today, in: DERS., A Passion for God, 163.

mechanism and prejudices of society, as well as the capacity for that selflessness which demands action in the interest of others, of “the least of our brothers and sisters”⁶²⁰. As Metz stated,

*The faith of Christian is a praxis in history and society that understands itself as a solidaristic hope in the God of Jesus as the God of the living and the dead, who calls all to be subjects in God’s presence. In ... (discipleship) Christians prove themselves in historical struggle on behalf of men and women: they commit themselves to a reality in which all persons become subjects in solidarity with one another...*⁶²¹

Ofo na Ogu mysticism responds to the call of New Political Theology that theology should confront conditions in the society that are contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ like oppression, exploitation and racism.⁶²² The Political theology’s features of narrative, memory and solidarity are essential to *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism. The remembrance of the death and resurrection of Christ which is at the core of the Christian faith reminds us of the freedom and liberation which has been obtained through this specific concrete suffering of Christ. This liberation remains present but also in future, it is eschatological.⁶²³ It does not excuse us from the struggle for a world where all men are subjects. This is imbibed in *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism. It is a call to bring our questions, doubts, pains and disappointments to God in prayer and wait patiently for God while taking actions in Christian discipleship, in solidarity with the oppressed and vanquished, in resistance against evil.

The Church must also provide the platform for the oppressed and suffering people to express their hurts. One way of doing that is by reinstating lament as a part of worship.

As Gutierrez said, “In Job there is a question of telling the innocent who are beset by unjust suffering that God loves them and that their legitimate demand for justice for themselves and others acquires its fullest measures and greatest urgency in the universe of gratuitousness.”⁶²⁴ Furthermore, “Those who believe in God must therefore try to lighten the burden of the poor by helping them and practicing solidarity”⁶²⁵

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 93.

⁶²¹ METZ, Faith in History and Society, 81.

⁶²² METZ, A Passion for God. The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity, 43.

⁶²³ Ibid, 107-108.

⁶²⁴ GUTIERREZ, 16

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

*Talk about God presupposes and, at the same time leads to a living encounter with God in specific historical circumstances. It requires therefore that we discover the features of Christ in the sometimes disfigured faces of the poor of this world. This discovery will not be made apart from concrete gesture of solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are wretched, abandoned, and deprived.*⁶²⁶

Every African theological venture should in my view be an effort to restore the wholeness of the African subject, against what has been described as anthropological poverty. In the voice of prayer through *Ofo na Ogu*, the person praying discovers and asserts his subject and those of others.

Ofo na Ogu mysticism maintains the need to formulate questions to God in prayers bordering on concrete human situation, but also questions for the church and society bordering and relating to peculiar situation of the African person in the world order. *Ofo na Ogu* theology questions the sometimes unconscious but most times assimilated symbolic order that was built in centuries of slavery and colonization which forbids Africans from questioning or even being subjects by as individuals or groups deciding their fate and destiny. *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism advocates concrete human actions and resistance against oppressions and exploitations. *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism is against the pure affirmation and retributive logic of gospel of prosperity preachers.

In the adoption of *Ofo na Ogu* mysticism, the concept of retribution inherent in Igbo belief system is eschewed and rejected for it does not conform to the free and gratuitous plan of God in nature and history.

⁶²⁶Ibid, 17.

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ABSTRACT

ENGLISH

The Nigerian Church in particular and the African Church in general is undergoing what is described as a crisis of Faith and identity. This crisis borders on God, on the world and on suffering. In a nutshell, it borders on theodicy and also on the identity of the African Church. How can one speak of a loving God in the means of suffering? And, how can one be authentically African and authentically Christian? The Igbo Christians are part of the Nigerian and African Church. Their responses to the faith crisis have varied through the times, ranging from relapse to African traditional religion, syncretism, and more recently to a kind of Pentecostalism known as the gospel of prosperity. The proponents of this kind of gospel maintain that all Christians are called to be prosperous and safe from earthly worries and problems. Formulated differently they maintain that God is with those who make progress in life and Christianity is about prosperity and not about poverty. Christ has died for all the righteous and taken away all their problems and that those who are experiencing problems may not be real Christians or true believers. Here, there is a kind of pure affirmation derived from doctrine of retribution. Regrettably, this kind of theology has made its inroad into Igbo African Catholicism both among the lay people and the clergy. This is different from what is seen in the biblical tradition, in Psalms, Prophets and the Book of Job where doubts and pains are acknowledged and where critical questions regarding the situations of the sufferer are brought to God through the language of prayer.

In line with the biblical tradition, Igbo African prayer life and system is not always that of pure affirmation. Among the different kinds of prayer forms in Igbo traditional religion, there is the Igbo protest prayer form of *Iju Ogu* which does not aim at pure affirmation but which, in the face of great tribulations and oppressions, poses questions unto the Great Spirit – Chukwu, questions that are critical and of great urgency. This prayer form is accompanied by inner uprightness and innocence called (intangible) *Ofo*. The offerer asks God for vindication, for justice, and for well being. The language of *iju Ogu* prayer form is similar to the language of prayer of Job in the Book of Job and similar to the open eyes or God mysticism according to Johann Baptist Metz.

This work explores the faith crisis of the Igbo African Christians in its historical, existential and cultural aspects. It also explores the manifestation of the faith crisis whose present form is the gospel of prosperity. This work seeks to bring the similarities and inner connectedness between the language of prayer in the Book of Job, the mysticism of God or open-eyes mysticism according to Johann Baptist Metz and the Ofo na Ogu mysticism (Iju Ogu) of the Igbo African traditional religion and how the appropriation of this kind of mysticism find therein will be of great spiritual benefit to the Igbo Africans in their Christian lives and in their faith crisis.

DEUTSCH

Die Nigerianische Kirche im Besonderen und die „Afrikanische Kirche im Allgemeinen erlebt heutzutage das, was man als Identitäts- und Glaubenskrise bezeichnet. Es handelt sich bei dieser Krise um Gott, um die Welt und um das Leid. Wie kann man von einem liebenden Gott sprechen inmitten all des Leidens? Es geht hier also um die Theodizee Frage. Es geht aber auch um die Frage: „Wie kann man authentischer Afrikaner und gleichzeitig authentischer Christ sein?“

Die Igbo Christen und Christinnen gehören zu der Nigerianischen und gleichzeitig zu der Afrikanischen Kirche. Ihre Reaktionen auf diese Krise sind im Laufe der Zeit und aufgrund ihrer Christlichen Geschichte unterschiedlich, und variieren daher angefangen von der Rückkehr in die Igbo-Afrikanische Religion und auch Synkretismus, bis in die in jüngster Zeit auftretende Art von Pentakostalismus, die man als Gospel of prosperity (Wohlstandsevangelium) bezeichnet. Die Führer dieser Art von Pentakostalismus behaupten, dass alle Christen berufen sind, reich zu sein und von weltlichen Sorgen und Problemen verschont bleiben. Kurz und bündig gesagt: Gott ist ein Gott des Reichtums und des Wohlhabens. Bei der Christlichen Religion geht es daher um Reichtum und um das Reichwerden an sich und nicht um Armut. Anders gesagt: Gott ist an der Seite der Reichen und nicht an der Seite der Armen und der Armut *per se*. Die Anführer meinen, dass Christus für die Gerechten gestorben ist und für die Gerechten alle irdischen Sorgen vernichtet hat. Die Menschen, die arm sind und Probleme haben, sind daran selbst schuld, denn sie sind nicht die echten Christen. Es gibt hier einen Zusammenhang mit der reinen

Affirmation aus der Einsetzung der Doktrinen der Retribution und dem Tun-Ergehen. Bedauerlicherweise sind viele Igbo-Katholiken – sowohl Laien als auch der Klerus – von dieser Art des Pentakostalismus ergriffen und beeinflusst.

Die reine Affirmation, die man im Wohlstandsevangelium (Gospel of prosperity) in Nigeria sieht, ist das Gegenteil von dem, was in der biblischen Tradition steht, nämlich in den Psalmen, den Propheten und in dem Buch Ijob. Hier geht es überhaupt nicht um die reine Affirmation, sondern um den Anruf Gottes, um die Sprache des Gebetes. Der Gerechte und Unschuldige, der leidet, stellt Fragen an Gott durch das Gebet. Die Sorge, die Ängsten und die Zweifel des Beters werden in das Gebet hineingenommen und durch die Sprache des Gebetes vor Gott gebracht. Diese ist oft dramatisch und radikal. Also eine Sprache des Protests. In ähnlicher Weise gibt es unter den vielen Arten von Gebeten in der traditionellen Igbo-Religion die *Ofo na Ogu (iju Ogu)* Gebetsform, die gar nicht von der reinen Affirmation geprägt ist sondern - wie im Fall Ijob - der Gerechte und Unschuldige, der leidet, stellt Frage an Gott – Chukwu- über die Ungerechtigkeit, die er erlebt und die in der Welt ist . Er bitte hier um Gerechtigkeit und um Rechtfertigung. Hier besteht eine Ähnlichkeit zu der Sprache des Gebetes von Ijob im Buche Ijob und zu dem Mystizismus Gottes nach Johannes Baptist Metz, der diesen Mystizismus auch als „Mystizismus der offenen Augen“ bezeichnet.

Diese Arbeit hier untersucht die Glaubenskrise der Igbo-afrikanischen Christen und Christinnen in ihren historischen, existentiellen und kulturellen Richtungen. Die verschiedenen Ausdrücke und Manifestationen der Krise werden hier untersucht. Es wird in dieser Arbeit versucht, die Zusammenhänge zwischen der Sprache des Gebetes im Buch Ijob, des Gottes-Mystizismus nach Johann Baptist Metz und dem *Ofo na Ogu* Mystizismus (der Iju Ogu Gebetsform) ans Licht zu bringen und wie die Aneignung dieses Gebetsmystizismus eine große spirituelle Bereicherung für die christlichen Igbo Afrikaner in ihrem christlichen Leben und eine große Hilfe für sie in ihrer Glaubenskrise sein wird.