

THE INCULTURATION OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL:
THEORY AND THEOLOGY
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE IGBO OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by
RICHARD A. PRUITT

Robert Baum, PhD., Thesis Supervisor

DECEMBER 2007

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

THE INCULTURATION OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL:
THEORY AND THEOLOGY
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE IGBO OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

presented by Richard A. Pruitt,

a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Robert M. Baum, Advisor

Professor Nathaniel P. Desrosiers

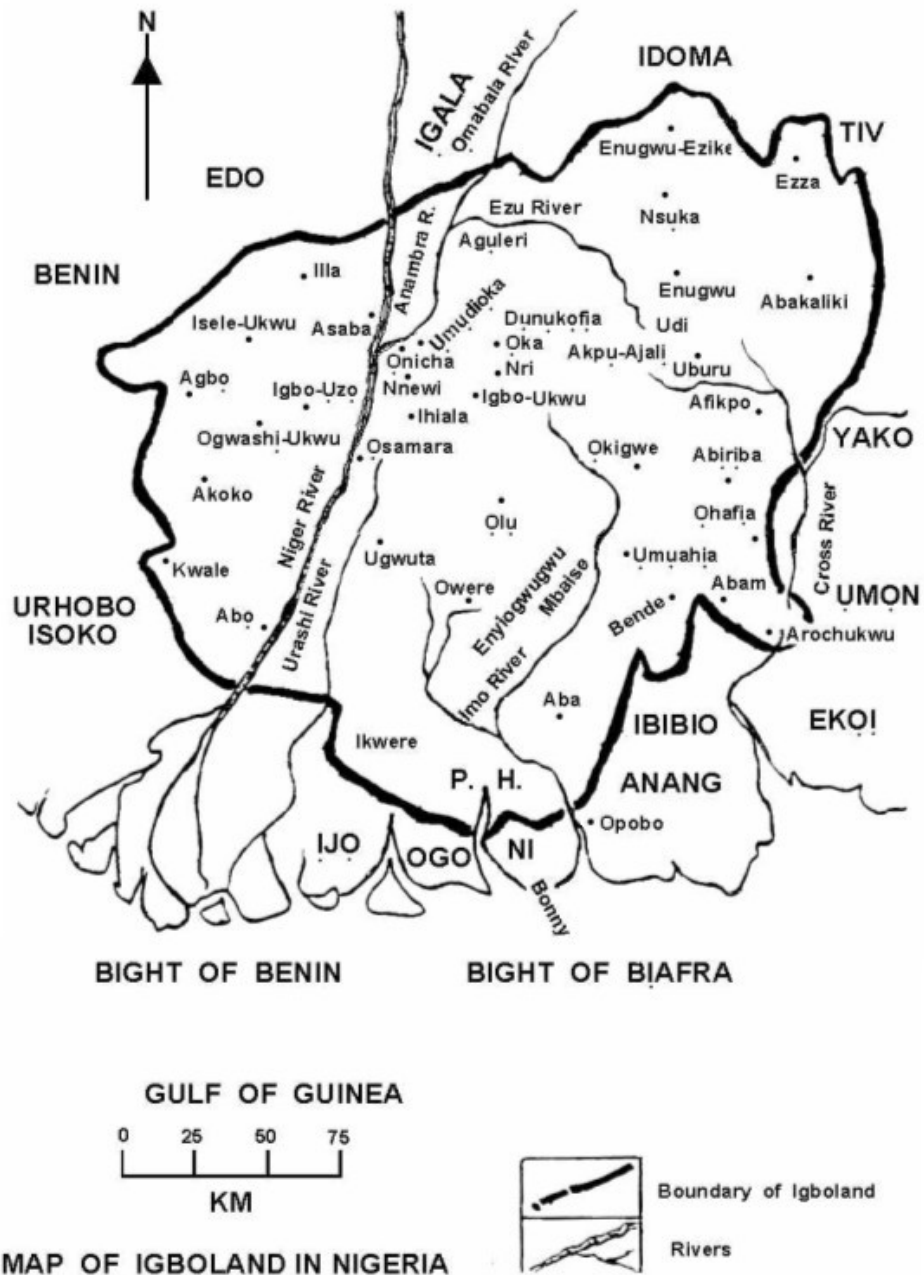
Professor Christopher Okonkwo

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the faculty and staff of the Religious Studies department at the University of Missouri. I am most grateful for the positive learning environment that each professor fostered. In particular, I wish to thank my adviser Dr. Robert M. Baum for his dedication, sacrifice of time, and tenacity in “holding my feet to the fire.” His patient advice and camaraderie through out what seemed to be *at times* an interminable process—I am sure for both of us— proved most helpful and, in the end, most gratifying. Although he had his own research, writing, teaching, and other departmental duties to consider, he somehow managed time for our marathon sessions. Thank you, Dr. Baum. I also want to thank Dr. Nathaniel Desrosiers and Dr. Christopher Okonkwo, who also served on my thesis committee and Dr. Philip Clart for their encouragement, advice, and willingness to add the reading of my paper to their already busy schedules.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
MAP OF IGBO TERRITORY	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
Why the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria?	2
An Early, First-century Encounter	5
CHAPTER ONE – FRAMING THE DEBATE AND CLARIFYING THE TERMS ..	13
Conversion	13
Inculturation	19
Syncretism	23
Conclusion	26
CHAPTER TWO – IGBO CHRISTIANITY AND THE PROCESS OF INCULTURATION	28
Igbo Society and Religion	31
Political Factors	31
Religious Factors	34
Other Social Factors	39
Christianity in Igboland	42
Roman Catholic	42
Protestant	44
African Independent Churches	46
The Role of the Igbo Bible	48
Some Present Theological Concerns	50
Charles Ok. Onuh	51
Peter Nlemadim DomNwachukwu	55
Conclusion	58
CHAPTER THREE – INCULTURATION THEORY AND THEOLOGY INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY	60
Inculturation Dialogue	60
Inculturation and the Role of Scripture	64
Inculturation and Syncretism	72
Inculturation and Conversion	75
Future Trends	80
FINAL COMMENTS	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86



(Maps courtesy of Okonko Research <http://igbology.igbonet.net/>)

THE INCULTURATION OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL: THEORY AND THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

One of the most urgent problems within many Christian denominations is how to relate the Christian Gospel to diverse cultures. The importance of culture in the missiological process cannot be overstated; for culture is the social framework wherein an individual or group interprets the information or events of one's experiences. As a social framework, "collectively created patterns of meaning"¹ form a basis for understanding why an individual or group behaves or reacts in one manner or another. Consequently, Christian experience or "Christianity" as a religion, like any other religion (be it indigenous or foreign), must be realized within a given culture if it is to be relevant and meaningful in any way.²

In this paper, I will argue that the Christian Gospel message³ is fundamentally and essentially not limited by any one cultural expression and, as such, is trans-cultural. I have selected the term "trans-cultural" to describe the characteristic or property of being

¹ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Developments in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973), 19. For Geertz's well-known definition of culture, see "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief: Studies in Twentieth-century Theory and Method in Religion*, eds. Nancy K. Frankenberry and Hans H. Penner, (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1999), 176-217, esp. xx. "[Culture is] an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."

² See Carl Starkloff, J.S., "Inculturation and Cultural Systems: Part 1," *Theological Studies* 55:1 (Mar 1994): 72. "No human phenomenon can escape some determination as part of a cultural system."

³ Although defining the "Christian Gospel message" varies among Christian denominations, for the purposes of this paper, I will define the Gospel message from the interpretive tradition that faith in Christ as savior and lord alone results in conversion or salvation.

able, as I will argue, to expand beyond the experience or limits imposed by any prior culture.⁴

In order to defend this thesis, I will provide a cursory review of a first century New Testament account of what may be the earliest Christian effort to spread beyond its original cultural setting. Next, I will review and analyze debates involving the concepts of conversion, inculturation, and syncretism as dynamic aspects of religious change. Establishing adequate working definitions for these terms will prove essential to the support of the thesis. Following this, I will present a more modern account of Christian development among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria (see map, iv) and offer it as an ongoing example to demonstrate the difficult yet determined effort of some to embrace the Gospel message within their own unique cultural context. The final chapter will address specific issues raised in the test case that are relevant to inculturation theory and theology in academic discussion.

WHY THE IGBO OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA?

Since the missionary venture of Matteo Ricci to China (late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries),⁵ modern-era missionaries, church officials, and theologians have wrangled with identifying the irreducible concerns of the Christian faith and allowing it

⁴ The use of the term “trans-culture” does not suggest that Christian faith may exist *outside* culture; rather to highlight a process of cultural adaptability. Hesselgrave and Rommen refer to this as the “supracultural message of the gospel.” See David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), 1. Adeboye describes this particular phenomenon as “transnational.” See Olufunke A. Adeboye, “Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria,” in *Entreprises Religieuses Transnationales en Afrique de l’Ouest*, pages 439-65 (Paris: Karthala, 2005).

⁵ For works on Matteo Ricci, see: George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), 23-107; Charles E. Ronan and Bonnie B. C. Oh, *East meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988). Two years after Ricci’s death, Nicolas Trigault took a draft of Ricci’s memoirs to Rome. He published a Latin translation in 1615. An English translation of Trigault’s work was made by Louis J. Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci 1583-1610* (New York: Random House, 1942).

to “live and grow” within a local context.⁶ Ricci’s effort to adapt Christianity to a local context epitomizes the ongoing struggle of rooting a new religious expression in cultures and societies far removed from its place of origin.

The Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, although first evangelized two hundred and fifty years after Ricci’s efforts in China, have taken significant strides over the past century to embrace Christianity within their own cultural context. Particularly suited to what Simon Ottenberg describes as a “cultural contact situation,”⁷ the Igbo have adapted remarkably to the vast social, economic, and religious changes imposed since the early 1800s; an evaluation maintained by numerous scholars.

Nevertheless, European trade, colonial rule, Western missionary activity, and civil war have had a profound impact on this region. For example, some issues that will be noted in this paper include the disruption of traditional Igbo political structures (including title-taking), the suppression of traditional female roles in society and, in the wake of civil war unemployment was rampant and the governmental take-over of schools

⁶ In the case of Ricci, and the ensuing “Chinese Rites Controversy” (that lasted over three hundred years), Catholic Church officials wavered back and forth as to whether Chinese Christians could participate in traditional funeral rites for their departed loved-ones. At issue was whether participation in the funeral rites constituted “idolatry” or simply a cultural expression of mourning. Catholic Church officials have struggled to adequately address the issues. For works related to the Chinese Rites Controversy, see George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985); Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A conflict of Cultures*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Stephen Uhalley Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu, *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001). Since the 1960s many Chinese Christians have been addressing the issue from within a local context. See Bong Rin Ro, *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985). Other examples include: Mary Yeo Carpenter, “Familism and Ancestor Veneration: A Look at Chinese Funeral Rites,” *Missiology: An International Review* 24:4 (October 1996): 503-17; Daniel M. Hung, “Mission Blockade: Ancestor Worship.” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Jan 1983): 32-40.

⁷ Simon Ottenberg, “Ibo Receptivity to Change,” in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, eds William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 130-43, esp. 139. Ottenberg defines a “cultural context situation” as one culture coming into contact with another (or many) and the many alternative opportunities that the traditional culture consequently encounters. See also John E. Ebergbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes, and Survival* (UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 1-2.

promoted nationalism at the expense of Igbo culture.⁸ Yet, despite these impacts, Ottenberg maintains, “paradoxically, of all Nigerian peoples, the Ibo have probably changed the least while changing the most.”⁹

I have selected the Igbo because of the number of Igbo scholars who have published works documenting the ongoing efforts of many Igbo Christians to develop their own distinct Christian experience despite the lingering effects of colonialism, culturally-insensitive missionary techniques, and civil war. The Igbo have managed to incorporate divergent social, economic, political, and religious structures while sustaining their own core distinctiveness—a property that, I argue, is characteristic of the Christian Gospel as well.

Although the circumstances of introducing the Christian Gospel change from one location and time to another, the complex task of communicating a faith potentially belonging to all cultures through human vessels enamored with their own particular culture has remained the most challenging dilemma of the missionary process. This problem will be apparent in the Igbo case study. However, this is not a new problem.

⁸ For issues related to the impact on Igbo political structure and title-taking see Ottenberg, *Leadership and authority in an African Society: the Afikpo Village Group* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971). For an evaluation of female suppression among the Igbo see Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005). Regarding educational impact, see Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria...*, 242. “[T]hese new schools were directed at strong control of both nationalism and any vestige of Igbo culture.” Ottenberg recognizes that changes have occurred but disagrees with Njoku’s assessment. See his review of Njoku’s book, Ottenberg, “Review of: The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes and Survival by John E. Eberegbulam Njoku,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24:3 (1991): 640-41.

⁹ Ottenberg, “Ibo Receptivity to Change,” 142. Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria...*, 241. “Despite the hardships of the recent past, the Igbos are continuing their cherished tradition and evolving role in modernity.” Furthermore, Njoku maintains that even though many Igbo converted to Christianity “this new religion never altered their basic cultural continuity” (242).

AN EARLY, FIRST-CENTURY ENCOUNTER

In the first century CE, the Apostles, particularly Peter, James, and Paul recognized the difficulty of transplanting the Gospel message beyond its culture of origin. The experience and efforts by these Apostles in Acts 10-11, Acts 15, and theologized by Paul in Galatians 1-3, demonstrate how such a problem was not only encountered but resolved in such a manner that “converts of other nations”¹⁰ were not required by the founding Apostles of Christianity to follow in the Abrahamic covenantal act of circumcision in order to become members of the “household of faith”—specifically, the newly emerging Christian community. The following synopsis of these particular passages highlight the complexities encountered when the Apostles as they communicated their religious tradition across cultural lines.

The Gentile Pentecost – Acts 10-11

The Acts narrative offers a glimpse into the early efforts of the Apostles to establish the Christian faith in and beyond its relative confines in Judea and the Galilee regions of Palestine and its predominant Jewish constituency in the mid-first century CE. This particular narrative begins with Cornelius, a Roman centurion, receiving an angelic visitation. In this visitation, his earnest seeking of God was affirmed and he was instructed in minute detail to send for the Apostle Peter (Acts 10:1-8).¹¹ The next day Peter also experienced a vision in which he witnessed a sheet coming down from heaven replete with animals, reptiles, and birds of all kinds. “A voice” told him to approach the sheet, kill the animals, and eat them. When Peter refused, the voice said, “What God has

¹⁰ Within the NT tradition, “converts of other nations” were referred to as Gentiles; a Jewish term used to identify a person whose ethnicity was not Jewish.

¹¹ All Scriptural references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

made clean, you must not call unclean.”¹² This “vision” was repeated two additional times (Acts 10:9-16).

Within the Acts narrative, the author (traditionally known as Luke) devotes significant space and detail to this episode, which is typically referred to as the “Gentile Pentecost.”¹³ Indications of its importance to the overall narrative may be seen by its extended structure (i.e., the repetition of the visions from scene to scene in Acts 10-11). Another key indication of the central importance of this narrative is its pivotal use and reference in Acts 15:7-9, as I will note below. Finally, this scenario (which culminates in Acts 15) represents the final proclamations of Peter and the other Jerusalem Apostles.¹⁴ From this point forward, the Acts narrative narrows its focus to the missionary endeavors of Paul and his efforts to establish the Christian faith across cultural lines. The story introduced in Acts 10-11 identifies a pivotal event in the overall Acts narrative, prepares

¹² See Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. by James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 80. Conzelmann notes that the original intention of the vision was concerning foods. However, at the time of narrative, “the two themes (Jews and Gentiles, foods) were already mixed together.” See also Mikeal C. Parsons, “Nothing Defiled AND Unclean: The Conjunction’s Function in Acts 10:14,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 27:3 (2000): 263-74, esp. 263-5. Parsons gives a unique exposition on the difference between “defiled AND unclean” and “defiled OR unclean.” Furthermore, he identifies “defilement” as what happened to a Jew who ate or had fellowship with Gentiles and “unclean” as what a Jew understood a Gentile was by nature. The Spirit informs Peter that God has cleansed in both directions; the Jews are released from any cultural barrier to go to the Gentiles and the Gentiles are released from any cultural barrier to become part of God’s family. It is possible that Paul may have held a similar understanding of “defiled” and/or “unclean” by his reference in Gal 2:15, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.”

¹³ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J., *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 447-48, Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 396. Although, Dibelius suggests that Luke adapted various traditions together to form the narrative. See M. Dibelius, “The Conversion of Cornelius,” in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, edited by H. Greeven, (London: SCM, 1956) 109-22. Also Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostle*, 80.

¹⁴ Edith M. Humphrey, “Collision of Modes?—Vision and Determining Argument in Acts 10:1-11:18,” *Semeia* 71 (1995): 70. See also, Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 447-48; Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 396; Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 115, 117.

the reader for the events of Acts 15, and, as Conzelmann notes, highlights the author's "view of history and ... concept of the church."¹⁵

In this critical section in Acts, Luke depicts "Gentiles" becoming Christians without having to embrace aspects particular to and deemed important to some Christians of Jewish ethnicity. Here the author uses the issue of circumcision; but only as it applies to *Peter*—a Jew having table fellowship with non-Jews. It should be noted that the criticism maintained in Acts 11 is that Peter entered the house and ate (had fellowship) with the "uncircumcised" and not directly that the "uncircumcised" received the Gospel.¹⁶ The irony of the narrative is in how submissive and obedient Cornelius was (to his vision) in contrast to the Apostle Peter. In fact, the only "nay-sayers" in the narrative were (initially) Peter and certain members of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 10:14, 28; 11:2-3).

Paul's "Gospel" – Galatians 1-3

The central topic in Paul's letter to the Galatians seems to parallel the same issue introduced in Acts 10-11 and debated in Acts 15.¹⁷ In this letter, Paul sought to establish his apostolic calling and the source of the Gospel he proclaimed. Paul claimed that his

¹⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 80. See also Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 447. Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 383-84; and J. Julius Scott, Jr., "The Cornelius Incident in the Light of its Jewish Setting," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34:4 (Dec 1991): 475-484.

¹⁶ In Acts 15, the issue of circumcision is again at the forefront of the discussion. Only here, the issue is over the Gentiles having to be circumcised. In chapter 11, no such issue is raised. I would argue that circumcision serves as Luke's "test case" for inculturation, only from different perspectives, in Acts 11 and 15.

¹⁷ For contrasts and parallels, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 208-12; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 9-28, esp., 16-22 and 222-28; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 22-26; Timothy George, *Galatians* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 46-50; and James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For an interesting and fairly recent discussion of the issues, see Joe Morgado, Jr., "Paul in Jerusalem: A Comparison of His Visits in Acts and Galatians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (Mar 1994): 55-68.

Gospel was a result of revelation (1:12). This detail seems important to him and established the foundation from which he justified his understanding of “the mystery” of the Gentile inclusion in Christ through faith alone (3:8).¹⁸

The conflict of table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles and the issue of Gentile circumcision are again at the center of the conflict (2:11-13, and allusion to circumcision in 2:12, 3:3). For Paul, the Gentile Christians have gained access to the family of God by faith in Christ and are in need of no further requirement (2:15-21).¹⁹ Based on this argument, I would argue that it is possible to understand 3:1-9 as Paul’s attempt to separate the act of faith in Christ from the fulfillment of a cultural expression of that same faith. However this aspect cannot be elaborated on at this time.

The Deliberations at the “Council” of Jerusalem – Acts 15

The events of Acts 10-11 and issues raised in Galatians 1-3 (as noted above) culminated in a meeting of the apostles and “the whole assembly” in Acts 15. The nature and occasion of this gathering was to determine whether “Gentile” converts, like their Jewish counterparts, must become circumcised in order to identify with the Christian community.²⁰ According to the narrative, this crisis was precipitated by unknown individuals who came from Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria—a church known to be more cosmopolitan in its ethnic orientation—and taught that “Gentiles” must be circumcised in

¹⁸ On this “mystery,” Dunn states, “How it was that Christian Jews felt able thus to disregard the explicit injunctions of Gen 17:9-14 is one of the great unsolved mysteries of Christianity’s beginnings” See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter...*, 70.

¹⁹ See Martyn, *Galatians* 245, 252-60; Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 112-18; Matera, *Galatians*, 92-104; George, *Galatians*, 187-202.

²⁰ See Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 442-45; Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 115-22, esp., 121-22; Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 538-61.

order to be admitted into the fellowship of the church.²¹ As a result, Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the Apostles (Acts 15:2-4).

After considerable debate (Acts 15:7), Peter gave testimony of his experience bringing the Gospel message to the “Gentiles” (Cornelius’ household, Acts 10-11). According to Peter, it was God who gave them the Holy Spirit and had chosen to cleanse their hearts and make “no distinction between them and us” (15:9). However, Peter then remarks that to impose the requirement of circumcision on the Gentile believers was tantamount to “putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear (Acts 15:10).” John Christopher Thomas suggests that the “yoke” Peter was referring to was certain Jewish Christians’ understanding of the importance of specific applications of the Mosaic Law.²² However, I argue that Peter’s conclusion seems to suggest that culturally derived mandates imposed on *other* cultures somehow “tests” God and that the *ethnē* as a whole need not follow in customs common to Jewish Christians in order to join the community of faith (Acts 15:11).

Following Paul’s and Barnabas’ testimonies (15:12), the narrative suggests that James interpreted all the testimony given to mean that God had received the believing “Gentiles” as his own people (15:13-22). Quoting the LXX version of Amos 9:11-12,²³

²¹ Paul refers to them as “certain people...from James” in Gal 2:12 although James denies that they were “sent” by him or any other Apostle (Acts 15:24).

²² See John Christopher Thomas, “Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 44; Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 548; Cf., Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 117. Author’s note: However, I would argue that it is also possible to see the “yoke” as the perceived exclusive nature of a particular culture and its inability to embrace the world at large. In that sense, the yoke would be the burden of “making one culture of everyone” so that they might receive the blessing of God.

²³ For more discussion on James’ curious use of Amos 9:11-12 see Thomas, “Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible,” 46-9; James B. Shelton, “Epistemology and Authority in the Acts of the Apostles,” *The Spirit & Church* 2:2 (2000):243-44; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 271; and David B. Whitlock, “An Exposition of Acts 15:1-

James concluded that his assessment was in agreement (consistent) with the prophets (15:15). It is interesting to note that James does not begin with the Scripture; rather he begins with the experience of the Church. On this matter James Shelton remarks,

[In Luke] the Scripture does not determine the meaning of the Heilegeschichte-event which the Church experiences; rather the Church recognizes that the divine visitation of salvation in their midst correlates with the old....The meaning of the text is understood in light of the present or impending move of God. (Hence we have the *sensus plenior* of Hosea 11:1 citing the exodus account. This is in keeping with the spirit of all OT prophesy.) The Scriptures do *not* determine what God *has* to do; rather it is the later sovereign and saving act of God that determines the meaning of the earlier Scripture. The Old Testament as previously interpreted does not compel God to conformity. The Old Testament is finally understood in the *audacity* of God to offer salvation [equally to all].²⁴

While reflecting on James' application and use of the Amos passage, Luke Timothy Johnson states, "The work of God precedes the perception of the text's agreement."²⁵ In other words, James, based on the testimony given and consensus of those gathered, applies and interprets the Scriptures in a manner consistent with their perception of what they deemed to be God's actions.

SUMMARY

In light of the manner in which the events unfold in Acts 10-11 and 15, I argue that it was the conclusion of the convening council of Apostles and elders in Jerusalem that the Christian message of "faith in Jesus as savior and lord," popularly known as the Gospel, was not the property of one particular culture but capable of expanding far beyond the limited scope of any one culture. As Conzelmann rightly concludes, "It is not by chance that the Apostolic Council occupies the middle of the book. It is the great

29," *Review & Exposition* 92:3 (1995): 377; Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 554-56; Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 117.

²⁴ Shelton, "Epistemology and Authority in the Acts of the Apostles," 238. See Shelton for a more extensive argument on how Luke used Scripture in Acts.

²⁵ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 265. See also Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 555-56; Conzelmann *Acts of the Apostles*, 117.

turning point, the transition from the primitive church to the ‘contemporary’ church.”²⁶

The events and apostolic decisions depicted in these biblical passages not only supports the thesis of this paper but also serves as a foil for the ensuing discussions and analysis of the introduction and development of Christianity among the Igbo.

Furthermore, the hermeneutic principle employed by James demonstrates the Apostle’s awareness that biblical passages formerly interpreted in one manner may be reinterpreted to support and explain the community’s perceived consensus of God’s salvific activities in the world. In regard to this phenomenon even Robin Horton, a leading sociologist and expert in African religions, acknowledges that,

The structure of the Bible, indeed, seems particularly fitted to make the character of the Judaeo-Christian god function as a dependent variable in relation to its social context: for different parts of the book provide widely differing models, and it is possible to select from amongst them a god congruent with almost any social setting.²⁷

Such a notion seemed absent during the colonial expansion of Western Europe (sixteenth to early twentieth centuries) and numerous Protestant and Catholic missionary efforts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the quest for understanding and grappling with the process of inculturation have gained fresh impetus since the mid-1960s. Charles Van Engen has observed how Christian missions has again recognized that,

Originally the gospel was not Western at all—it was Middle Eastern. It began among Aramaic-speaking Jews. Then it took shape in all the cultures surrounding Jerusalem... in Greek, Roman, North African, Ethiopian, Indian, Near Eastern and Arabic cultures. It expanded to the Franks, Scandinavia, the British Isles, and on and on. To closely associate any culture with biblical faith, one must ignore the historical expansion of the Church.²⁸

²⁶ Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 115.

²⁷ Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion, and Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 40.

²⁸ Charles Van Engen, “The Uniqueness of Christ,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Third edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 163.

A review and analysis of Christianity's introduction and development among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria exemplifies this struggle. Christianity as a religious tradition was born within an *existing* cultural and religious tradition—not to mention a colonized territory—in the first century CE. In like manner, Igbo Christianity was born within an existing cultural and religious tradition—not to mention a colonized territory—in the nineteenth century. The manner of the tradition's continued development and expansion beyond its prior cultural setting, in either scenario, is indicative of the trans-cultural property of the Gospel message advocated in this paper.

Having introduced the fundamental scope of this paper, attention will now turn to exploring the challenges to this thesis and explicating the terminology needed to support its assertions; specifically, the notions of conversion, inculturation, and syncretism.

CHAPTER ONE

FRAMING THE ACADEMIC DEBATE AND CLARIFYING THE TERMS

In order to build a foundation to demonstrate the trans-cultural nature of the Gospel message and illustrate its occurrence in the Igbo test case, one must examine the academic debates involving the concepts of conversion, inculturation, and syncretism. The manner in which each concept is nuanced will prove critical since each has significant bearing on how religious and cultural change is understood and evaluated, not only in the Christian missionary process in general but in the Igbo example specifically.

CONVERSION

Numerous theories on the nature of conversion have been developed in the twentieth century; most since the 1960s.¹ Not surprisingly, most theories advanced during this period have been from anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists attempting to understand or explain why people would “convert” or join a new religious tradition; particularly a religious system not indigenous to the local culture. Lewis Rambo has observed that one end-all or be-all theory or definition of conversion is not possible due to the “complexity and variety of conversion processes.”² Because conversion is a complex process, a variety of analytical approaches to the nature of conversion are needed in order to “illuminate different aspects of [the] phenomenon.”³

¹ David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, “The Sociology of Conversion,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 167.

² Lewis R. Rambo, “Theories of Conversion: Understanding and Interpreting Religious Change,” *Social Compass* 46:3 (1999): 259.

³ Rambo, *Theories of Conversion...*, 259. “Various theoretical approaches include some dimensions and exclude others.”

Snow and Machalek have noted that the one theme pervading theories on conversion is that “the experience involves radical personal change.”⁴ Theological definitions of conversion link the experience with some conception of a deity or metaphysical experience involving some revelation whereas social scientific theories tend to focus on sociological, environmental, or other causes involving exposure to competing worldviews. At issue in most theories is whether conversion involves abrupt, progressive, or multifaceted change.

A. D. Nock’s classic 1933 definition of conversion is a “reorientation of the soul involving a deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another.”⁵ This definition held sway and influenced many conversion theories into the 1970s and early 80s. A crucial aspect of Nock’s theory of conversion maintained that the new convert rejected his or her traditional ways, that is, they acknowledged that the old ways were wrong, in favor of the new religious tradition.⁶ However, most recent scholarship has tended to deemphasize or scrutinize this particular understanding of conversion, especially within religious traditions where exclusivity is not particularly emphasized. Nevertheless, Nock did acknowledge that some “conversions” are the result of reasons other than radical “soul” change. He used the word “adhesion” to identify a mode of involvement with a religious group or ritual without necessarily embracing a new way of life.⁷

⁴ Snow and Machalek, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 169.

⁵ Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 7.

⁶ Nock, *Conversion*, 7.

⁷ For variations on Nock’s distinction between conversion and adhesion, see also David F. Gordon, “The Jesus People: An Identity Synthesis,” *Urban Life & Cult* 3 (1974): 159-78; W. C. Shepherd, “Conversion and Adhesion,” in *Religious Change and Continuity: Sociological Perspectives*, pages 251-63, ed. Harry M. Johnson, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979).

Within an African context, Robin Horton's 1971 definition of conversion has been central to the ongoing debates about conversion theory.⁸ His "intellectualist" approach, as it has come to be known, attempts to explain additions or changes to indigenous religious practice as a consequence of an individual's or group's attempts to make intellectual sense of invasive thought systems. He argues that conversion to a new system of belief is possible when an individual or group is exposed to a larger worldview—that is, as a person or group "moves" from a micro-society (microcosm) to a macro-society (macrocosm; the wider world).

For Horton, religious beliefs within a micro-society are challenged and often abandoned when the traditional beliefs are disrupted and no longer function as they once did.⁹ In other words, when the perceived benefits of local deities and rituals seem no longer apparent or able to address present concerns due to an encounter with the wider world, the need for a supreme deity becomes increasingly important. As Robert Baum states, "In Horton's theory one finds that converts are trying to restore the balance in their lives as the extreme localism of their world breaks down."¹⁰

For Horton, the experience of a larger worldview necessitates a greater need for a "supreme being." Rather than describing conversion as an "all-or-nothing jump from error to enlightenment, and as a more or less inevitable consequence of exposure to the 'true message' carried by God's appointed bearers,"¹¹ Horton, working within a West

⁸ See Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41:2 (April 1971): 85-101; "On the Rationality of Conversion, Parts 1," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 45:3 (1975): 219-36, and "On the Rationality..., Part 2," 45:4 (1975): 373-99.

⁹ See also Robin Horton and J. D. Y. Peel, "Conversion and Confusion: A Rejoinder on Christianity in Eastern Nigeria," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 10:3 (1976): 482-83.

¹⁰ Robert M. Baum, "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 60:3 (1990): 372.

¹¹ Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, 315.

African context, views the potential of conversion as a human phenomenon seeking to explain, predict, and control the experiences and events of one's life.¹² He states,

For one salient feature of Christian proselytization in Yorubaland [northern Nigeria] has surely been the identification of the Christian God with the indigenous supreme being Olorun, and the presentation of Christianity as the 'true' way of contacting this being. Indeed, it would seem that missionaries all over Africa have usually striven to discover the name of the indigenous supreme being, and, where successful, have then gone on to tell the people of his 'true' nature. Hence the African convert has not accepted an addition to the pantheon of lesser spirits. Rather, he has accepted change and development in his concept of the supreme being. Although some readers may find this point too obvious to be worth stressing, I see it as the key to further development of an intellectualist theory of conversion.¹³

Since Christianity (and Islam) already possessed highly developed concepts of a supreme being, Horton theorized that West African "converts" embraced this new notion of supreme being as a means to explain, predict, and control the changes they were facing.

Caroline Ifeka-Moller's definition of conversion is in opposition to Horton's intellectualist approach. Ifeka-Moller defines conversion "to mean a change of affiliation from cult to church, or from orthodox Christianity to spiritualist church."¹⁴ Within her perspective, conversion to a new religious persuasion is predominantly the result of social structural factors, and that these factors "contribute to differential rates of conversion to Christianity in eastern Nigeria."¹⁵ However, the social factors noted by Ifeka-Moller, such as social changes resulting from economic change brought about by colonial intrusion, desire for better education (particularly the opportunity to gain literacy), or the desire to adequately address traditional values does not seem to contradict Horton's

¹² Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, 5-6, also see 315-17. "Above all, there is now a very general agreement that the phenomena of 'conversion' can only be understood if we put the initial emphasis, not on the incoming religious message, but rather on the indigenous religious frameworks and on the challenges they face from massive flows of novel experience."

¹³ Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41:2 (April 1971): 100.

¹⁴ Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 8:1 (1974): 57.

¹⁵ Ifeka-Moller, "White Power...", 57.

perspective all that much; a point well-made in a rather spirited rejoinder to Ifeka-Moller's 1974 article by Horton and Peel in 1976.¹⁶

For Lewis Rambo, conversion is a process consisting of seven stages including, (1) context, (2) crisis, (3) quest, (4) encounter, (5) interaction, (6) commitment, and (7) consequence.¹⁷ Depending on the experiences to which one is exposed (context) and if a conflict occurs that cannot be adequately addressed through the present belief system (crisis), an individual or group may actively seek (quest) a new solution to their problems. Within the process of questing, one will likely encounter and interact with some system of belief or action that promises a solution to the quandary at hand, to which the individual or group commits and faces, for better or for worse, consequences (whether expected or not). In this sense, Rambo states, "[Conversion] is a complex process that transpires over time, shaped by the expectations of those advocating a certain type of conversion and the experience of the person who experiences the process."¹⁸ Furthermore, Rambo notes that scholars within the human sciences, "almost without exception, neglect, trivialize, or totally reject the role of religion and/or spirituality in their theories of conversion."¹⁹ However, he has determined that such a position is faulty in that it neglects the crucial detail of understanding "what one converts [to]."²⁰

Perhaps a more appropriate definition of conversion in the context of this paper is one proffered by Robert Baum in "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity." The Diola are a West African people primarily located in Senegal. For Baum, conversion is a term that

¹⁶ Horton and Peel, "Conversion and Confusion..." 481. "The antithesis of "intellectualist" and "social structuralist" approaches is in any case a false one."

¹⁷ For a more extensive treatment of Rambo's theory of conversion, see Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 170.

¹⁹ Rambo, "Theories of Conversion," 264.

²⁰ Rambo, "Theories of Conversion," 264.

“indicates an individual’s decision to accept a new source of religious authority.”²¹ In a manner similar to Rambo’s “process of conversion,” Baum sees conversion, “as the beginning of a long process of integration into a new religious tradition.”²² Although he does not discount the radical-conversion experience (such as that described by the Apostle Paul in Acts 9), Baum suggests that conversion is typically a process that need not necessarily involve the abandonment of former beliefs and traditions; especially if the traditional religious systems are not “narrowly exclusive” and open “to incorporating foreign ritual forms and ideas.”²³ An individual’s or group’s cosmology is rarely undermined *in toto* upon conversion and, in many instances, may maintain its general ideological makeup throughout a person’s life.

Baum addresses the conflict often experienced after conversion to Christianity when a new convert encounters a clash between old ideas and perceptions (of how to make sense of the physical and spiritual world) and new ideas and perceptions existing within Christian teaching. Many times, according to Baum, these two conceptual systems “overlap in some ways, but diverge in many others.” In the process of accounting for these competing modes of explanation, the new convert may react in one of five ways: (1) radical conversion—the new convert embraces the new ways and rejects the old; (2) “mission” conversion—the new convert accepts the authority of the missionary or mission society to interpret religious texts and determine the correct course of action; (3) indigenization—the new convert actively works to resolve the conflict between the old and the new by finding answers for the spiritual questions of the old in the new; (4) syncretism—the new convert maintains two sources of religious authority (one for some

²¹ Baum, “The Emergence of a Diola Christianity,” 370-71.

²² Baum, “The Emergence of...,” 371.

²³ Baum, “The Emergence of...,” 371.

areas of life and the other for other areas of life); or (5) “re-conversion”—the new convert is unable to resolve the tension between the competing systems of belief and returns to the traditional religious belief.²⁴

Thus, I would argue that conversion identifies the acknowledgment of a new source of religious authority for one’s life. As I will demonstrate in the Igbo case, such a transition rarely, if ever, involves a radical transformation of cosmological understanding or cultural identity even when accompanied by a transformation of character or attitude. Among the Igbo, the newly converted regard this experience as a fulfillment or completion of the quest and purpose of their former religious authority.²⁵ Consequently, the new convert seeks to answer his or her own relevant and cultural concerns from this new source of religious authority. The success or failure of this quest directly affects the nature, depth, and permanence of the conversion experience and is immediately relevant to the process of inculturation. This argument will require some “unpacking,” and will be addressed more directly in relationship to Igbo concepts of conversion in chapter three.

INCULTURATION

A number of concepts have circulated in recent years to describe various processes at work when the Christian Gospel “moves” cross-culturally. The most prominent terms include indigenization, contextualization, and inculturation. However, as I will describe below, indigenization and contextualization address methodological aspects of adapting Christian faith to a new culture whereas inculturation, more adequately describes the ongoing interaction, or synthesis, between that faith and culture.

²⁴ Baum, “The Emergence of...,” 375-76.

²⁵ See Cyril Okorochoa, “Religious Conversion in Africa: It’s Missiological Implications,” *Mission Studies* 9:2 (1992): 174-79.

The term “inculturation” is of Roman Catholic origins.²⁶ According to Gerald Arbuckle, Catholic theologians were not satisfied with “contextualization” as a term denoting the process of relating the gospel to culture. They felt that it tended to emphasize external contacts between the gospel and the local culture—what Aylward Shorter defines as acculturation²⁷—rather than “the ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them.”²⁸ In other words, inculturation describes a two-fold process of the Christian message affecting local culture and local culture, at the same time, influencing a culturally-particular Christian experience (Christianity).²⁹ Furthermore, the missionary is also affected by the inculturation process when, after participating in the process of a different culture embracing Christian teaching, returns home and, whether consciously or subconsciously, introduces new ways of processing old ideas or new concepts altogether. However, this particular phenomenon is not the focus of this study and cannot be elaborated on at this time.

Defining inculturation in this manner is closely akin to a more modern use of the word “indigenization.” Mark Mullins notes that, “In the social sciences, indigenization is understood more broadly as the process whereby foreign-born religions are transformed through contact with native religion and culture ... [and] includes cultural adaptations in

²⁶ The first use of the term “inculturation” is taken from the Foreword of *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits* (Washington: Jesuit Missions, June, 1978); see esp. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation.”

²⁷ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 6-7. “Although acculturation is a necessary condition of inculturation, it is a distinct sociological concept. By acculturation is meant the encounter between one culture and another, or the encounter between cultures.”

²⁸ Gerald Arbuckle, “Inculturation and Evangelisation: Realism or Romanticism,” in *Missionaries, Anthropologists, and Cultural Change* (Williamsburg, VA: College of William and Mary, 1984), 171-214.

²⁹ For a more extensive treatment of the Jesuit’s understanding of this “two-way” process, see Carl Starkloff, J.S., “Inculturation and Cultural Systems: Part 1,” *Theological Studies* 55:1 (Mar 1994): esp. 66-69.

social organization, liturgy, leadership, and theology.”³⁰ However, his definition of indigenization goes beyond the more traditional (missiological) use of the term that focuses on organizational independence (i.e., self-government, self-support, and self-propagation). From Mullins definition, it is important to recognize that it is the “native religion and culture” that is promoting the “cultural adaptations.”

Contextualization involves the process of transmitting or translating the Gospel message using local idioms and language and culturally recognizable methodologies.³¹ Typically, this process is initiated from an entity outside the existing culture—that is, from the “top down.” Once initiated, the process often moves in surprising and unplanned directions. Indigenization most adequately describes the process of the local culture experiencing, expressing, and further propagating the Christian faith within a local context—from the “bottom up.” For all practical purposes, contextualization and indigenization involves similar processes, only from different perspectives.³² Other terms frequently used in this manner include incarnation and enculturation. Each term serves to identify methodological aspects and promote the dynamic process of enabling meaningful Christian experience within a local context.

In the context of this paper, indigenization and contextualization are generally used synonymously to describe the functional aspects of the inculturation process by which the Christian Gospel, so to say, infuses itself into a new culture; transforming it on some levels and, at the same time, taking on the unique characteristics and concerns of

³⁰ Mark R. Mullins, “Christianity Transplanted: Toward a Sociology of Success and Failure,” in *Perspectives on Christianity in Korea and Japan: The Gospel and Culture in East Asia*, (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 65.

³¹ For a more comprehensive work on issues involving contextualization, see David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000).

³² Though it is not necessary to distinguish these terms too narrowly, for the purposes of this paper, inculturation occurs from the “outside in” whereas indigenization occurs from the “inside out.”

that culture. As Shorter explains, “inculturation implies that the Christian message transforms a culture. It is also the case that Christianity is transformed by culture, not in a way that falsifies the message, but in the way in which the message is formulated and interpreted anew.”³³ Through this process Christian experience is transformed from the status of a “foreign religion” to one incarnated into (profoundly rooted in) the local culture.³⁴

One final observation of the inculturation process is how the implantation—or transmigration—of the Christian gospel is dynamically affected by the increasing emergence of a more globally-minded and pluralistic society. Ever-increasing means of communication and transportation and the proliferation of the worldwide web bring diverse cultures into closer proximity and facilitates reciprocal forms of interaction. A truly global and pluralistic society is resistant to imperialistic motivations and Western notions of superiority. However, the theory of inculturation presented in this paper, over against imperialistic motivations, may very well legitimize the introduction of the Christian Gospel to new cultures without the insidious notions of superiority often associated with colonialism. Through this process, which is described biblically as a mystery,³⁵ Christianity ceases to be a foreign religious practice and becomes particular to its cultural context. Culture is consequently embraced and affirmed in particular and often surprising ways. Furthermore, converts are able to experience Christian faith in

³³ Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*..., 14.

³⁴ See Diane Stinton, “Africa: East and West,” in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, John Parratt, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 105-136, esp. 115. “The associated concept of ‘incarnation’ theology specifies the theological rationale: just as Christ became incarnate to reveal God’s message of salvation, so the gospel must be ‘incarnated’ in every culture.”

³⁵ Ephesians 2 – 3, esp. 3:5-6, “In former generations this *mystery* was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: *that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*” (NRSV; emphasis mine).

relevant and culturally specific ways and the missionary (and those s/he subsequently influences) is also—in some manner or another—changed.

SYNCRETISM

The chief concern, of course, leveled at the advocacy of the inculturation process is the perceived danger of syncretism. At a 1966 symposium on syncretism, Helmer Ringgren defined syncretism simply as “any mixture of two or more religions.” Furthermore, he made it clear that within such a process “element[s] from several religions are merged and influence each other mutually.”³⁶ Ringgren’s definition (though not unique to him) is perhaps the most common in use among theologians and missiologists and is generally used with negative connotations.

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, in its 1978 consultation on “Gospel and Culture,” defined syncretism as the mixing of “the gospel with cultural elements incompatible with [the gospel].”³⁷ The report does not, at that point, attempt to define a criterion for incompatibility although it does strongly advocate cultural sensitivity and enlisting the support of “mother-tongue” linguists to translate the Scriptures into the vernacular.³⁸ However, later in the document, the report advocates the practice of reading the Scripture in community as the most effective means of protecting the church from harmful or incompatible syncretism.³⁹

³⁶ Helmer Ringgren, “The Problems of Syncretism,” in *Syncretism, Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Cultural Contact, Meeting of Religions, Syncretism, held at Abo on the 8th-10th of September, 1966*, ed. Sven S. Hartman (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969), 7.

³⁷ See “The Willowbank Report: The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 483-506, esp. 492.

³⁸ “The Willowbank Report...,” 490-492.

³⁹ “The Willowbank Report...,” 502.

Andre Droogers, recognizing the elusive and inflammatory nature of defining syncretism, has developed a more neutral definition “as religious interpenetration, either taken for granted or subject to debate.”⁴⁰ Such a definition acknowledges that what may be contested by some may not be contested by others and opens the door for renewed discussions on the nature and implications of syncretism, both in an objective and subjective sense, within the inculturation process. The importance of Droogers’ definition of syncretism becomes painfully obvious when one recognizes, as Wolfhart Pannenberg has demonstrated, that syncretism is present within all Christian experience and may, in fact, be a positive attribute because it demonstrates how the Christian Gospel message is “incarnate within other cultures.”⁴¹ Obviously, a broader understanding of syncretism is needed to overcome this impasse in missiological analysis.

Leonardo Boff identifies five models for understanding syncretism: (1) syncretism by addition—the convert simply adds various rituals and beliefs to their own religion; (2) syncretism as a mixture—the convert mixes various aspects in order to satisfy specific needs without careful evaluation; (3) syncretism as agreement—a superficial belief that there are diverse paths to truth or salvation despite obvious or recognized conflicts; (4) syncretism as translation—the translation of the new belief system via the expressions used in the indigenous belief system; and (5) syncretism as adaptation—a generational process whereby the new religion “becomes” the way of life.⁴²

⁴⁰ Andre Droogers, “Syncretism: The Problem of Definition,” in *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, eds. Jerald Gort, Hendrick Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 20-21.

⁴¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, Volume II (London: SCM, 1970), 85-88, esp. n. 37.

⁴² See Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. Jown W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 89-93.

Baum defines syncretism as a state of maintaining “dual allegiance by recognizing two sources of religious authority.” In this frame of mind, the person determines that each tradition possesses “areas of knowledge and expertise as well as its own areas of ignorance or error.”⁴³ His definition is closely akin to Boff’s third model of syncretism: syncretism as agreement, although Baum would not identify such beliefs as “superficial.” In this state the individual either does not detect what another group or culture might deem contradictory or simply overlooks the conflicts or incoherency such a position may hold. Droogers would consider such issues as types that are “subject to debate.”⁴⁴

With regard to Boff’s fifth model of syncretism, Carl Starkloff states, “Boff’s understanding of adaptation differs from that of most missiologists; here he clearly means ... inculturation.”⁴⁵ As a Jesuit theologian reflecting on the Thirty-Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus and the 1978 “Letter” of Pedro Arrupe, Starkloff understands the introduction of the term “inculturation” to identify a “a long and almost imperceptible organic process not unlike the process of bodily nourishment.”⁴⁶ Droogers would see this form of syncretism as “taken for granted.” Obviously, both views of syncretism (Boff’s models number three and five) stand at opposing poles and must be weighed carefully for a correct understanding of the inculturation process and any accompanying accusations of syncretism.

⁴³ Baum, “The Emergence...,” 376.

⁴⁴ Droogers, “Syncretism: The Problem of Definition,” 20-21.

⁴⁵ Starkloff, “Inculturation and Cultural Systems, Part 2,” 282, n. 92.

⁴⁶ Starkloff, “Inculturation and Cultural Systems, Part 2,” 282. See also *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits* (Washington: Jesuit Missions, June, 1978), esp. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation.”

CONCLUSION

In light of the discussion at hand, if culture is defined as the social framework wherein an individual or group interprets the information or events of one's experiences and conversion is defined as a change of religious authority often while maintaining a traditional cosmology, then Christian experience cannot exist in any other form than as a blending with one's culture and *present* cosmological understanding. It may be a truism to state that all Christian experience ("Christianities")—in whatever cultural setting or historic period—is syncretistic in one manner or another. Consequently, syncretism is best considered within the context of the inculturation process as a whole with recognition that the fear of syncretism, as Starkloff notes, "is found in those who need to maintain strong institutional structures as they are."⁴⁷

Many African theologians have written works on the process of Christian inculturation or indigenization within their own context and this is particularly evident among the Igbo.⁴⁸ The challenge of indigenizing Christian teaching without allowing it to lose its core distinctiveness has been and will continue to be an ongoing struggle.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁷ Starkloff, "Inculturation and cultural Systems, Part 2," 281.

⁴⁸ Examples include: Cyril Okorochoa, "The Meaning of Salvation: An African Perspective," and Kwame Bediako, "Jesus in African Culture," in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness, et al., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994). G. C. Oosthuizen, *Theological Battleground in Asia and Africa* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972). Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture* (New York: Nok Publishers, Ltd., 1974). Peter Nlemadim DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), Charles Ok. Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), Frederick E. Chiromba, *Evangelization and Inculturation* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: 1989), E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). John Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4:3 (1980): 129-24. A. O. Nkwoka, "Jesus as Eldest Brother, (Okpara): An Igbo Paradigm for Christology in Africa Context," *Asian Journal of Theology* 5:1 (1991): 87-103. Samuel Rayan, "A Reflection on Worship," in *Third World Theologies*, ed. K. C. Abraham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990). Tite Tenou, "Themes in African Theology of Mission," in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, ed. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993). All of these works have been utilized as research for this project.

⁴⁹ For an excellent consideration of what constitutes the core essentiality of the Christian gospel see Robert W. Wall, "Reading the Bible from within Our Traditions: The "Rule of Faith" in Theological

test case scenario that follows will provide interesting insights into the phenomenon of the inculturation of the Christian Gospel and further support the thesis that the Christian message is fundamentally and essentially not limited by any one cultural expression and, as such, is trans-cultural. Furthermore, the following chapter will examine some of these concerns and provide a model of the inculturation process at work among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria.

Hermeneutics,” in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies & Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 88-107. Author’s note: Obviously, the indigenization process does possess certain inherent risks for many church leaders. I maintain that the local clergy (or missionary) must safeguard and identify what they deem the irreducible concerns of the Christian faith and, at the same time, facilitate the local development of recognizable and meaningful methods of worship within a local context.

CHAPTER TWO

IGBO CHRISTIANITY AND THE PROCESS OF INCULTURATION

This chapter seeks to better understand the process of Christian inculturation among the Igbo (Ibo) of Southeastern Nigeria. Numerous published works are available on the origins of Christianity in Nigeria and, particularly, Igbo society.¹ Here, I will examine the manner in which Christianity has become rooted within Igbo society. Particular attention will be given to understanding the concerns of conversion, inculturation, and syncretism among the Igbo. The state of Christian experience among the Igbo and how deeply Christianity has affected their daily rituals and routines is of central importance to the argument of this paper. Some aspects of the sociological ramifications of colonial rule in Nigeria, particularly in relationship to Christian experience among the Igbo, will also be considered.

In order to explore these concerns I will: (1) highlight several prominent social and religious themes in Igbo society; (2) offer a brief survey of Catholic, Protestant, and African independent efforts to evangelize the Igbo; and (3) conclude with a look at specific concerns Igbo Christians and theologians feel must be addressed in order for Christianity to thrive in Igboland.

¹ See Rev. Samuel A. Crowther and Rev. John Christopher Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859* (London: Dawson of Pall Mall, 1968); Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976); Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, (New York: Nok Publishers, Ltd., 1974); Samuel N. Nwabara, *Igboland: A Century of contact with Britain, 1860-1960* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press Inc., 1978); and Charles Ok. Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992).

“Igbo”² is both the language and the name of an ethnic group in Nigeria. This group is unified by geographic, linguistic, social, political, and cultural factors (even though differences do exist). The Igbo primarily occupy the southeastern and south central parts of the delta area of Nigeria and constitute one of its largest ethnic groups.³ Presently, Igboland’s population estimates vary wildly between fifteen and thirty million within a nation of well over 135 million people.⁴

The first Christian mission established in Igboland was that of the Yoruba-born Samuel A. Crowther and the Anglican Church Missionary Society (hereafter CMS). Edmund Ilogu notes that the CMS mission along the Niger River “was largely an African mission, in the sense that from the earliest beginning almost all of its personnel was led by and consisted of peoples of African descent, especially from the colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone.”⁵ Crowther, who was enslaved as a boy but later rescued by the British Navy, received an education in Freetown and was subsequently trained for ministerial

² “Igbo” and “Ibo” refer to the same ethnic people. Ibo was used by foreigners because of the difficulty in pronouncing the Igbo double consonant “gb.” See Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage*, 9.

³ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 9. In the present political structure of Nigeria, the Igbos make up the Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Abia, and parts of the Delta, Cross River, Awka Ibom, and Rivers States of Nigeria. They share common boundaries with other ethnic groups: north – with the Igalas, the Idomas and the Tivs; east – with the Ekoi; south – with the Ibibios, Efiks, Ijaws, and the Ogonis; west – with the Binis and the Isokos.

⁴ The *World Fact Book* (CIA) estimates the population of Nigeria at 135 million (source: <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields/2119.html>). See also, Onuh, 9, and John E. Eberegbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria* (UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 1990), 3, 16. “In 1987, the government-estimated population of Nigeria was 103 million, the largest population of any country in Africa, with an estimated annual rate of growth of 3 percent....the estimated population in 1988 [in Igboland] was about 15 million.” In regards to the Igbo population, Mushanga (2001) notes “over 20 million,” [Tibamany mwene Mushanga, “Social and Political Aspects of Violence in Africa,” in *Social Problems in Africa: New Visions*, ed. Apollo Rwomire (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 166]; Okafor (2004) states “about twenty-five million,” [Clement Okafor, “Igbo Cosmology and the Parameters of Individual Accomplishments in *Things Fall Apart*,” in *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, Volume 1, Omenka the Master Artist: Critical Perspectives on Achebe’s Fiction*, ed Ernest N. Emenyonu (African World Press, 2004), 86]; Okpala (2003) states, “around 30 million,” [Benneth Okpala, *Toasting the Bride: memoirs of Milestones to Manhood*, 2nd Edition (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing, 2003), 21]. However, the Okonkwo Research group (<http://igbology.igbonet.net/docs/igboworld/>) estimates the Igbo population at 40 million.

⁵ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 81.

service by the CMS. After his training Crowther joined J. F. Shone, a German missionary, and traveled to what is present-day southern Nigeria to establish a mission station at Onitsha (Onicha), an Igbo town on the eastern bank of the Niger River.⁶ The mission was established on July 27, 1857. According to Samuel Nwabara, the CMS considered Onitsha a strategic point of entry into Igboland because of its location along the Niger River and its proximity to a British trading station.⁷ From this humble beginning, Christianity has become the dominant religion in southeastern Nigeria.⁸ Before addressing the process of this development, it will prove helpful to survey several broad social and religious concepts prominent within traditional Igbo society.

⁶ A detailed accounting of the Crowther's expedition is chronicled in the CMS mission papers, Reverend Samuel Adjai Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1855). Also, see Samuel A. Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859* (London: Church Missionary House, 1859). Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 160; Nwabara, *Igboland ...*, 47; Edmund Illogu indicates that other missionary societies had made earlier attempts, however the CMS mission in Onitsha is generally regarded as the "place of active beginning of the evangelization of Igboland." See Illogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 56; Peter Nlemadim DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 51. Portuguese merchants arrived in Benin in 1485 and opened the door for "spasmodic missionary activities" in the early 1500's but had little and short-lived success. The second, and more successful, missionary endeavor began about 1842 when Methodist, Church Missionary Society (CMS), Baptist, and Catholic missionaries established works in Nigeria.

⁷ Samuel N. Nwabara, *Igboland: A Century of contact with Britain, 1860-1960* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press Inc., 1978), 49. Unfortunately, the linkage between the British trade and Christian missionary efforts—in the minds of the Igbo—constantly plagued the efforts of the CMS. (See also 50-51).

⁸ Contemporary scholarship on Nigerian Christian statistics is woefully lacking. The last comprehensive work on this particular region was published in 1966. See John B. Grimley and Gordon E. Robinson, *Church Growth in Central and Southern Nigeria*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966). Paul Kaiser (University of Pennsylvania) estimates that 40% of the Nigerian population is Christian, 50% Muslim, and 10 % follow "indigenous" or "traditional" religions. See Paul J. Kaiser, "Federal Republic of Nigeria Briefing Paper," *AP Comparative Government and Politics: Nigerian Briefing Paper* (NY: College Board, 2005), 8. (source: http://www.seabury.pvt.k12.ks.us/SummerReading/2007/AP_Politics/nigbriefpap.pdf; viewed Aug 28, 2007).

IGBO SOCIETY AND RELIGION

Political Factors

The Igbo have been and continue to be highly democratic. Functioning in autonomous communities, the concept of consensus building was, and still is, prominent in most traditional Igbo societies.⁹ Phoebe Ottenberg describes this political system as “non-hierarchical” and “ultra-democratic” in their values.¹⁰ One of the distinctive features of the Igbo among Nigerian communities involves giving room for dialogue and for the sharing of differences of opinion.¹¹ Although the British occupied the area for about seventy years, they found that maintaining colonial rule was more difficult than they had experienced in other West African areas because of the acephalous political nature of the Igbo, who possessed a deep suspicion of any centralized political authority. Ironically, according to Simon Ottenberg, the Igbo receptivity to Westernization might have occurred even more rapidly and with less difficulty had the British understood this aspect of Igbo society and allowed local villages and cities to govern themselves in traditional Igbo ways.¹²

The Igbo have an old saying that states, *Igbo amaghi eze*, meaning “Igbos know no king.” According to Francis Arinze, the meaning of this proverb in practical terms is that no one person rules any Igbo community. He states,

⁹ See Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture: Ozo Title Institution in Igboland (Nigeria)* (Munich: African University Studies, 1993), 77. “The characteristic nature of traditional Igbo political structure [is] always the same, however, the details vary from place to place.”

¹⁰ Phoebe V. Ottenberg, “The Changing Economic Position of Women among the Afikpo Ibo,” in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, edited by William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits, 205-23. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 205.

¹¹ See Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 14-17; John E. Ebergbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes, and Survival* (UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 19-22; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*; DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 1.

¹² See Simon Ottenberg, “Ibo Receptivity to Change,” in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, eds William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 131, also 133-36, 142-43.

The Ibos are unique among the other peoples of Nigeria in the decentralization of political authority in Iboland in the past. While the Yorubas had their mighty Obas and the Fulanis their powerful Emirs, the Ibos' greatest political organization was often the town, village-group, or commune. Only Onitsha and some Western Igbo towns had their Obi or Kings, but the influence of these rulers was limited practically to their own towns.¹³

Crowther and Taylor noted that Onitsha's king did occasionally issue directives, however, such decisions were considered at a convening "Council" in order "to discuss what steps should be adopted."¹⁴ Richard Henderson's research found that "reports about these decision-making assemblies suggest that decisions were worked out publicly."¹⁵

Each traditional Igbo community (*Umunna*) is governed by elders (*ndi okenye*). These members earn titles of nobility (titles of the land) based upon age and wealth and use their influence to shape and direct the affairs of the community at large. Although the *ndi okenye* do not have absolute authority over the rest of the members of the village (in a Western sense), these elders serve as a guiding influence for the entire community and work together to settle political, social, and religious disputes within the community. This committee of elders is normally composed of first sons (*okpara*) from each family in the village.¹⁶ However, women, at least prior to the introduction of Christianity and colonial rule, might also acquire titles of nobility and function as heads of families.¹⁷ Aspects of title-taking in Iboland, especially as it relates to Christian inculturation, will be discussed further in chapter three.

¹³ Francis A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion* (Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1970), 7.

¹⁴ Crowther and Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks...*, 330.

¹⁵ Richard H. Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 473. Henderson goes on to remark, "Major decision rested at least to some degree upon direct public expression of sentiment, though the regulation established was then promulgated as the king's will. The process appears analogous to the people's assemblies in the city-states of ancient Greece, except of course that in Onitsha the mass of the citizenry ... were not otherwise politically passive."

¹⁶ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 2.

¹⁷ See Ifi Amadiume, *Male daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1987), 140; Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria*, 19-20.

In regards to Igbo women and gender issues, Sylvia Leith-Ross described the Igbo women of the early twentieth century as a “rare and invaluable force, thousands upon thousands of ambitious, go-ahead, courageous, self-reliant, hardworking, independent women.”¹⁸ Her observations were first published in 1939—ten years after violent demonstrations led by Igbo women, known as the Aba riots. Ifi Amadiume, a prominent Nigerian sociologist, refers to this event as “both peaceful and violent mass demonstrations, riots, and finally open war with the British colonial government in 1929”¹⁹ According to P. Ottenberg, the Aba or women’s riots constituted a historic turning point in the British administration of Nigeria. She writes,

In the history of the British administration of Nigeria, Ibo women have constituted a unique and unforgettable human force. When they changed almost overnight from apparently peaceable, home-loving villagers into a frenzied mob of thousands who in December, 1929, attached administration authorities while their men stood passively by, they brought about a sudden interest in the preciously little-known Ibo-speaking peoples. This uprising, precipitated by an unfounded rumor that Ibo women were to be taxed by the government, arose from uneasiness on the part of the women concerning their economic position, which had already suffered from the world depression and...other non-economic grievances.²⁰

Amadiume has conducted extensive research on issues of gender and female opportunities (or the lack thereof) within Nigeria and Igboland (Nnobi) in particular. Her findings, published in the 1987 book, *Male daughters, female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, is both widely-acclaimed and controversial. It is her observation that economic and political opportunities common within traditional Igbo society were undermined with the coming of Christianity and colonial rule. However, P. Ottenberg seems to refute Amadiume’s claim of widespread colonial oppression of women when she states, “Afikpo women now have greater physical mobility and economic

¹⁸ Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 337. Leith-Ross was the wife of a colonial official who wrote of her impressions of Igbo women in the Owerri province. This book was first published in 1939.

¹⁹ Amadiume, *Male daughters, Female Husbands...*,” 13.

²⁰ Phoebe V. Ottenberg, “The Changing Economic Poisiton of Women among the Afikpo Ibo,” 205.

independence than they had in the days before British occupation.”²¹ Granted, Amadiume’s research was in Nnobi (early 1980s) and addressed the repression of women’s leadership roles while P. Ottenberg’s research was in Afikpo (early 1950s) and addressed women’s economic mobility.²² Nevertheless, in this context it goes without saying that issues involving women and gender do vary from region to region among Igbo scholars. Igbo women’s economic and political matters (including title-taking), especially as they relate to the topic of Christian inculturation, will be explored in more detail in chapter three.

Religious Factors

Before the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the Igbo already had a clearly-defined system of customs in both religious and secular areas although they did not distinguish the two as separate entities. In practice, there was no clear line drawn between secular and religious life.²³ For example, local agriculture production, community government, titles for elders, and the naming of children all had and have religious significance.

As a whole, Igbo possess a strong belief in the supreme god, *Chukwu*, and acknowledge the existence of gods/spirits (both lesser and greater) as the cause of most events. *Chukwu* (the Great God), also referred to as *Chineke* (the Creator God), is the creator of everything, primarily transcendent, regarded as always good and benevolent,

²¹ P. Ottenberg, “The Position of Women among the Afikpo Ibo,” 208.

²² Nnobi is located in the Idemili local government area in the Anambra State of Nigeria (about 25 km east/southeast of Onitsha (Amadiume, 17) and Afikpo (at least in the in the 1950s) is a village group “on and near the west bank of the Cross River about 90 miles north of the Atlantic coast, consisting of 23 villages bound together by a common government and numerous social, ritual, and economic ties” (P. Ottenberg, 206).

²³ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 1.

and not the cause of harm to humankind.²⁴ According to Arinze, in Igbo thought, *Chukwu* “rarely receives sacrifices but is regarded as the ultimate recipient of the sacrifices offered to the inferior [lesser] spirits.”²⁵ However, Edmund Ilogu notes that public and private shrines to *Chukwu* (or *Chineke*, the creator God) exist throughout many parts of Igboland.²⁶ Although definitions of *Chukwu* are fairly uniform among Igbo scholars, Donatus Nwoga suggests that the concept of *Chukwu* as the Supreme God has developed as the result of contact with Christianity and is not necessarily original to Igbo cosmology.²⁷

In Igbo cosmology, the gods/spirits were created by *Chukwu* and, since they are closer in proximity to humans, may become immanent (but not contained) within the air and in objects, such as rocks, trees, and bodies of water. Dualism is central to Igbo religiosity.²⁸ The gods/spirits—what Ilogu calls “godlings”—mitigate and govern circumstances that encompassing all aspects of life.²⁹ For example, *Ani* or *Ala* (also written *Ali*, *Ana*), the goddess of the earth, is watchful over nature. She is the Great

²⁴ Regarding this kind and benevolent understanding of *Chukwu/Chineke*, see Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 38. “It is often surprising to many students of Ibo life and society why a culture that has so strong orientation towards individual achievement and competition does not have any noticeable incidence of suicide....The explanation can be found in this Ibo belief that a man can come upon fortune and success any day, and that *Chineke* in his intentions for man is positively good. There is therefore no religiously rooted pessimism, no world denying religious creeds that create psychological complications from which man seeks escape through suicide.” See also Elizabeth Isichei, “Ibo and Christian Beliefs: Some Aspects of a Theological Encounter,” *African Affairs* 68:271 (Apr 1969): 123.

²⁵ Arinze, 10. Since *Chukwu* is entirely transcendent, most “think it more courteous and more within man’s range to appeal to the spirits to obtain requests from God.” (10) See also Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 24-29.

²⁶ See Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 40.

²⁷ Nwogo connects the origins of *Chukwu* as the supreme god as an amalgamation of Christian theology and missionary efforts to “find” an equivalent notion of the supreme god by combining their own notion with the local deity of the people of Aro (Aro-*Chukwu*). However, his view is not widely supported by other Igbo scholars. See Donatus Ibe Nwoga, *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought*, (Nigeria: Hawk Press, 1984). Cf., Isichei, “Ibo and Christian Beliefs...,” 123.

²⁸ Isichei, “Ibo and Christian Beliefs...,” 124.

²⁹ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 35. For a more extensive list of the Igbo pantheon of gods, see Ilogu, 34-36; Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 10-17.

Mother Spirit, “custodian of public morality,” and has domain over fertility and agriculture.³⁰ Ilogu, Isichei, and DomNwachukwu note that *Ala* is the most prominent deity throughout Igbo society and revered by nearly all traditional Igbos.³¹ The gods/spirits are above humans but below *Chukwu*. Furthermore, the Igbo also possess a strong belief in the power of the ancestors to influence and affect daily activities.³²

Each Igbo has his or her own *Chi*, or personal god/power. The *Chi* functions as *Chukwu*'s witness to the destiny selected before the individual's birth.³³ An individual's *Chi* is different from the *Chi* of another. Furthermore, in Igbo thought, there are as many *Chi* as there are Igbo. Although similar to the Western concept of fate or destiny, obedience to one's *Chi* in cooperation or partnership with and demonstrated by the individual's initiative determines achievement in life.³⁴ I will address the importance of this characteristic more directly in the following section (*Other Social Factors*).

Henderson describes the *Chi* as “the spiritual essence of the living self that guides and determines the course of that person's life from birth to death.”³⁵ Chinua Achebe

³⁰ For example, if one were to commit incest in a particular field, the Igbo believed that *Ala* might curse the field and diminish its productivity or cause it to be infertile altogether. See Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 15; also Edmund Ilogu, “Christianity and Ibo Traditional Religion,” *The International Review of Missions* 54 (1965): 339, “What she [*Ala*] sanctions constitutes right conduct, and what she condemns is tabooed.

³¹ Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, 35; Isichei, “Ibo and Christian Beliefs...,” 124; DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 25. Other gods within traditional Igbo society include: Anyanwu (the sungod), Igwekaala (the sky god), and Amadioha/Kamalu (the god of thunder and lightning); others include Ahiajoku (god of agriculture), Ikenga (god of fortune and industry) and Agwunsi (god of divination and healing). See also, Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, 34-36.

³² See Ilogu, “Christianity and Ibo Traditional Religion,” 336. “At death, the ancestors are believed to have entered the spirit world, and as spirits they share in the ordering of the community. They are always happy to plead with the gods for the well-being of their offspring.”

³³ Ilogu, “Christianity and Ibo Traditional Religion,” 338.

³⁴ See Achebe, “Chi in Igbo Cosmology,” 164-68; Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, 36-37; Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 15.

³⁵ Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 107. “It is believed that when an individual chooses ‘to enter the world’ (*inye-úwa*), he makes a pact with a particular essential being (*chi*), selecting his length of life and his future activities; the choices so made are marked by the *chi* on his hand as his ... ‘destiny.’” See also Ibe Chukwukere, “Chi in Igbo Religion and Thought: The God in Every Man,” *Anthropos* 78:3-4

notes that the *Chi* is more closely associated with a person's fortune rather than character. "*Chi* is therefore more concerned with success or failure than with righteousness and wickedness ... [although] not totally indifferent to morality."³⁶ Arinze notes that the "ordinary Iboman regards his *Chi* as his guardian spirit on whose competency depends his personal prosperity."³⁷ *Chi* may also be understood as the spark of life, or as Achebe states, "a single ray from the sun's boundless radiance," that remains with a person throughout life.³⁸

I would argue that a person from the West might conceptualize *Chi* as "fate," as "God's will," or, because of the association of *Chi* as the spiritual presence imparted by *Chukwu*, equate *Chi* in terms similar to the Trinitarian concept of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ It is important to recognize that the Igbo do not conceive of *Chi* as one overarching "being" who is manifested uniquely in each one. Furthermore, it must be noted that this is notably different than the typical Trinitarian concept of the Holy Spirit as one person or power who is manifested differently in each. For the Igbo, the *Chi* is the non-physical identity of a person in the spiritual world. In other words, as Achebe remarks, "we may visualize a person's chi as his other identity in the spiritland—his *spirit being* complementing his

(1983): 519-534, esp. 523, "*Chi* is seen as basically a sort of spark of [*Chukwu*] dispensed to every Igbo person, *qua* individual."

³⁶ Chinua Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," in *Morning yet on Creation Day* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), 167. "What we know of chi can thus be summed up as follows: every person has an individual chi who created him; its natural home is somewhere in the region of the sun, but it may be induced to visit an earthly shrine; a person's fortunes in life are controlled more or less completely by his chi" (167).

³⁷ Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 15.

³⁸ Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," 170.

³⁹ See Chukwukere, "Chi in Igbo Religion and Thought," 522-23. "Ilogu (1965) similarly draws a close analogy between the Euro-Christian idea of God and Igbo concepts of chi... "spirit," and "belief in a Supreme Spirit." See also Ilogu, "Christianity and Ibo Traditional Religion," 335.

terrestrial *human being*; for nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it.”⁴⁰

The goal of Igbo religiosity is *Ezi-Ndu*, the good (viable) life. True salvation in Igbo society is to obtain a “good life”⁴¹ or “fullness of life”⁴² and to become an ancestor.⁴³ In Igbo thought, salvation is not a heavenly or spiritual concept alone; rather it is concept encompassing both heaven and earth. As Achebe notes, nothing in the Igbo world stands alone, “there must always be another thing standing beside it.”⁴⁴ In other words, salvation cannot entail only the heavenly or some future eschatological understanding of a world to come, but also encompasses the here and now—the present life.

Cyril Okorochoa identifies the concept of *Ezi-Ndu* as the key to understanding Igbo cosmology.⁴⁵ Although this aspect will be analyzed more adequately in the following chapter, it must be noted here that success in life for the Igbo is a consequence of the spiritual power. If one desires the success, blessing, or victory of another, then one must acquire or discover the spiritual power that enables the success or victory. Because the goal of life and cosmology are so closely linked together, the Igbo is inclined to “discard” a former religious system in favor of what s/he deems “more realistic.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Achebe, “Chi in Igbo Cosmology,” 160.

⁴¹ See Cyril C. Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa* (Brookfield, VT: Gower Publishing Company, 1987), 94ff. The good life is not merely a spiritual hope (e.g. heaven or to become an ancestor), rather it is success in this life complete with, for example, a healthy family, many children, bountiful harvest, and living a long and prosperous life.

⁴² Cyril C. Okorochoa, “Religious Conversion in Africa: Its Missiological Implications,” *Mission Studies* 9:2 (1992): 171.

⁴³ After death, an ancestor is one who functions in a place of overseeing the community and family in order to help them with their journey through life.

⁴⁴ Achebe, “Chi in Igbo Cosmology,” 160.

⁴⁵ Okorochoa, “Religious Conversion in Africa,” 171-74.

⁴⁶ Okorochoa, “Religious Conversion in Africa,” 172.

Other Social Factors

Ottenberg notes that the Igbo are considered industrious and adept at accommodating cultural changes.⁴⁷ Ilogu observes this same phenomenon but refers to it as “a cultural inclination towards adaptation.”⁴⁸ Because the average Igbo consider his/her success to involve a, so to say, partnership with their own *Chi*, Ilogu states, “every man is expected to prove of what kind his own *Chi* is, by various economic and social activities” and points to this cultural and cosmological understanding as the background of “the strong achievement motivation” characteristic of the Igbo people.⁴⁹ Achebe also demonstrates the cooperation that exists between the *Chi* who “controls” a person’s fortune in life and the balance with individualism and initiative inherent to the Igbo people.⁵⁰ Consequently, I suggest that it is this mix of cultural and cosmological identity that inclines the Igbo to recognize the opportunity of advancement, both socially and economically, afforded through Western education.

In general, the Igbo believe hard work to be a virtue and often demonstrate great skill in commerce.⁵¹ However, their industrious nature has caused resentment on the part of other Nigerians. As Njoku states:

Because Igbos are known by their African neighbors as hard workers, “The go-and-get people,” and petty traders, they have come to be hated by their Nigerian counterparts.⁵²

Since the Igbo were more receptive to Western academic training, they quickly gained the skill sets often required and in demand for business and governmental positions within post-colonial Nigeria. In contrast, the people of northern Nigeria were primarily

⁴⁷ See Ottenberg, “Ibo Receptivity to Change.”

⁴⁸ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 91, 117.

⁴⁹ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 36-37.

⁵⁰ Achebe, “Chi in Igbo Cosmology,” 164-68.

⁵¹ See Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture*, 45-47; Njoku, *The Igbos...*, 14.

⁵² Njoku, *The Igbos...*, 15.

educated within Islamic educational institutions, placing them at a disadvantage and allowing a disproportionate number of civil service and higher paying positions to go to Igbo workers.⁵³

Hatred for the Igbos erupted in 1966 when Northern Nigerians, aided by the pro-Islamic military, persecuted many Igbo, and forced most of them to flee to the south. Isichei notes that six to eight thousand were killed in the September/October (1966) massacres and nearly one million Igbo “poured back to their crowded homeland, abandoning jobs and property it had taken them a lifetime of struggle to acquire.”⁵⁴ In the wake of this uprising, the fleeing Igbo attempted to establish their own independent state in the southern area of Biafra. This action resulted in civil war in 1967 and ended with Igbo defeat in 1970.

Prior to and since the civil war (1967-70), mobility has been a common characteristic among the Igbo. Although they were not considered nomadic, their willingness to move and settle in other areas kept them open to change and new ideas and also contributed to the hostile sentiments of their neighbors.⁵⁵

Colonial intrusion into Igboland brought many changes in the religious traditions of the people. Igbo resolve to adapt to new structures of government and western education and to adopt the Christian missionaries’ message led many colonial officials and missionaries to believe that the Igbo lacked deeply rooted cultural and religious

⁵³ See Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 244-247; also for a Christian perspective of the circumstances leading up to the war, see Anthony O. Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories, and Trends*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, 326-335, (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), 328.

⁵⁴ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 246.

⁵⁵ See Njoku, *The Igbos...*, 14; and Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 4.

ideas. Peter Nlemadim DomNwachukwu, an Igbo Christian minister and scholar observed:

Early missionary endeavors by Euro-American mission groups took little or no cognizance of these important features of Igbo traditional society. Christian churches with Western cultural models were planted in Igboland and Christian practices with Western cultural biases were imposed on the Igbo. Igbo culture, customs, traditions, and institutions were treated as inferior to their Western counterparts by most missionaries. In some cases, missionaries arbitrarily replaced Igbo customs, traditions, and institutions with Western ones. As a result, Christian converts were subjected to the agony of going through the very difficult process of becoming Western in an Igbo society, in the name of religion.⁵⁶

Because the Igbo desired Western education and socio-economic development, not to mention the perceived protection from colonial rulers that belonging to a church afforded, DomNwachukwu believes “many who came under the influence of the missionaries paid lip-service to the ‘foreign faith’ and stayed superficially committed because of its development-oriented appeals.”⁵⁷ For him, the Igbo seemed to accept the changes on a surface level while retaining their own religion, heritage, and values.

However, in light of the observations made earlier in this paper regarding conversion and syncretism, what DomNwachukwu deems “superficial” may, in fact, not necessarily be superficial. As Baum has noted, the convert may be attempting to resolve the conflicts he or she encounters between the old and the new by finding answers for the spiritual questions of the old in the new. As a result, the convert may not detect what another group or culture might deem contradictory or simply overlook the conflicts or incoherency such a position may hold for lack of a better answer.

⁵⁶ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 2.

⁵⁷ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 3.

CHRISTIANITY IN IGBOLAND

Roman Catholic

Catholic missionaries followed the CMS to Igboland in 1885. They included the Society of African Missions, who settled on the West bank of the Niger; and the Holy Ghost Fathers, who occupied the Eastern part. Although they came to Igboland after the CMS, Catholicism expanded more quickly throughout Igbo territory. The Catholics immediately employed education as their chief means of evangelization and were successful at attracting large numbers of Igbo. With regard to the Catholic's strategy, Onuh remarks,

They employed many methods to win converts. These methods included the rescuing and buying over of slaves; the care of the sick and the destitute; the distribution of charity; and most especially, through the establishment of schools.⁵⁸

In time, the Catholics determined that, although Igbos flocked to the schools, the Igbo people were reluctant to abandon traditional religious practices, leading many Catholic missionaries to assume that conversions were superficial or external and the people “only nominally Christian,” or possessing a “shallowness of faith.”⁵⁹ Justin Ukpong believes this state of affairs was caused by the absence of “cultural dialogue” and states,

A careful analysis of the situation reveals that the observed acts of syncretism among African Christians is not so much a sign of lack of Christian commitment as an expression of the fact that Christianity, as transmitted to the African, has not been made to respond fully to his culturally based religious aspirations.⁶⁰

Eventually, Catholic missionaries resorted to the methodology of building Christian villages or compound around the missionary's home. Onuh believes the intent of this

⁵⁸ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 106.

⁵⁹ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 111, 115.

⁶⁰ Justin Ukpong, “The Emergence of African Theological Theologies,” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 510.

strategy was to limit contact with the outside community and eliminate traditional influences deemed unacceptable to the mission. Achebe states,

With this method, the Christians were separated and segregated from their kit and kin who were traditionalist, in order not to be ensnared into traditional religious practices. This strategy, however succeeded in estranging the Christians from their traditional culture, and thereby paved a way for the consequences which one observes among Christians in Igboland today.⁶¹

However, it should be noted that the Christian village/compound also provided sanctuary and protection from the persecution many Igbo Christians experienced.

During the first half of the twentieth-century, Catholic missionaries not only sought to purge what they perceived to be negative in Igbo culture (*e.g.* abandonment of the ill and diseased, twin killing, and human ritual sacrifices) but also other aspects which had far-reaching implications such as the immediate banning of polygamy,⁶² burial ceremonies, masquerading, dancing, local cosmetics, title-taking, and festivals. Although attendance at the schools remained high, the cultural vacuum created by the imposition of European Catholic (and Protestant) values was quite disruptive. In his classic novel *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe sums up the general sentiment of the Igbo people regarding the missionary's strategy: "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."⁶³

During the second half of the twentieth century, Catholic efforts in Igboland have continued to witness the syncretism of Catholic and Igbo traditional religious beliefs.⁶⁴ In Onuh's perspective, the fact that divination, fortune telling, and the active use of

⁶¹ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 110.

⁶² Specifically, African societies subscribing to such a practice only involves polygyny. *Polygyny* is the practice of having more than one wife at a time as opposed to *polygamy* in which either marriage partner may have more than one spouse.

⁶³ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1958), 124-25.

⁶⁴ All expressions of Christian experience necessarily involve levels of syncretism (religious interpenetration, either taken for granted or subject to debate). The use of the term "syncretism" here identifies the inclusion of rituals and practices deemed incompatible with Roman Catholic practice. Of course, there is a wide range of opinion as to what qualifies as "incompatible."

traditional “medicine” men and women has continued to increase among Catholic Christians today raises a serious question as to the depth of conversion effected in these early years.⁶⁵ However, Onuh’s observation may also attest to the growing influence of the African Independent Churches and their desire to indigenize Christian faith and local tradition.

Protestant

As mentioned earlier, the CMS established the first mission in Igboland in Onitsha, in 1857, by a primarily African missionary team. However, it would take about fifty years before they would move to Owerri and establish a second mission. During that time, around 1882, Crowther and most of the leadership of African descent were replaced by what Ilogu describes as white “Oxford and Cambridge-trained missionaries” from England.⁶⁶

Although the Catholics were active in many parts of Igboland building schools and outstations during the same period, the CMS was slow to move further into Igbo territory. One possible reason may be that the British government did not establish colonial rule in Owerri until 1902 and the Anglicans functioned as the official British church.⁶⁷ Until Nigeria gained independence from the British in 1960, the colonial government was often accused of limiting or outlawing various traditional practices in favor of CMS dictates. However, Ilogu directly attributes the lack of CMS progress to the

⁶⁵ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 115.

⁶⁶ See Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 81-83.

⁶⁷ Njoku, *The Igbos...*, 77. Also, DomNwachukwu, 52, “Most colonial administrators were members of the Church of England, which was the main denomination supporting the CMS work in Nigeria.”

removal of Crowther's team and their replacement's failure to "use [the] Ibo cultural framework to interpret the Christian Gospel message."⁶⁸

After the CMS established its mission in Owerri, other missionary groups established mission stations in Igboland. The Primitive Methodists founded churches along the railroad to Enugu in 1913. The Southern Baptists started their first Igbo mission (in Ihiagwa) in 1917. The Assemblies of God arrived in Nigeria in 1940 but did not organize their first Igbo district (with Igbo elected officials) until 1980. The Presbyterians entered Igboland much later (latter 1960s) due to compliance with a 1909 and 1911 agreement with the other major Protestant missions in Igboland to limit competition. According to Presbyterian documents,

Despite this agreement [to respect one another's territory], most denominations intruded into districts and areas assigned to other denominations..., the Presbyterian Church still maintained the original agreement. This is why [the] Presbyterian Church is seen as a later-comer....⁶⁹

The intent of the 1911 agreement, at least in theory, may have been to encourage Protestant groups to coordinate their efforts from time to time in order to conserve scarce or limited resources when developing schools and hospitals and to avoid theological confusion among converts. Nevertheless, as DomNwachukwu has observed, the Protestants (and Catholics) were often competing with one another.⁷⁰

The consensus among mission historians is that the Protestant churches enrolled thousands of students in their schools and provided care to thousands of Igbo at their hospitals; however, the rate of conversion within the mainline denominational churches remained relatively low. Although churches have been filled with attendees, some

⁶⁸ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 89.

⁶⁹ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 62-63.

⁷⁰ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 63.

Christian leaders maintain that Christianity within the mainline denominations is still a “foreign” religion to most Igbo lacking cultural identity.⁷¹

Since the civil war (1967-1970), the government has taken control of all primary and secondary schools, effectively ending the principal means used by Protestant and Catholics to missionize Nigeria. As a result, missionaries have been forced to explore new methods of evangelism and determine what role, if any, they may play in fostering a Christianity that is “at home” in Nigeria and Igboland.

African Independent Churches

While the Protestants and Catholics focused on schools and hospitals, a new wave of Christian expression exploded across southern Nigeria and soon swept across Igboland. Since the 1920s, independent churches—that is, churches not founded by foreign missionaries or interests—have gained momentum through highly charismatic prophetic-type leaders. There are many indigenous churches in Igboland, including numerous Aladura (prayer people) church movements, The Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, The Redeemed Christian Church of God-Nigeria, and the Scripture Union-Nigeria.⁷² Many of these groups, as Andrew Walls has observed, did not begin “with a conscious desire to set up a new church, but with a society or movement within the old one.”⁷³ Scores of other groups have sprung up since the end of the civil

⁷¹ See DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 5; Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 86-89.

⁷² Scholarly accounts of AICs are rare. However, for research of an Aladura church, see Harold W. Turner, *History of an African Independent Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); and *African Independent Church II: The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord, Aladura* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). For the Eternal Sacred Order and Scripture Union-Nigeria see DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 65-69. For The Redeemed Christian Church of God-Nigeria, see Adeboye, “Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa,” 439-65.

⁷³ Andrew Walls, “The Challenge of the African Independent Churches: The Anabaptists of Africa?” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 113. “For example, the Aladura churches of Western Nigeria spring

war and are usually led by a single charismatic leader who claims special revelation in some specific regard and a personal divine “call.” Peter DomNwachukwu notes that, “The problem of obtaining accurate numbers of these churches is compounded by the current trend whereby divisions occur in them almost every day [and] new groups emerge continually under different names.”⁷⁴

Indigenous movements seem to attract greater numbers of Igbo than both Protestant or Catholic missions and are more prominent in southern Nigeria.⁷⁵ The defining characteristics of these churches are often an emphasis on the power of prayer, healing the sick, and prophetic utterance—which has given rise to their designation as “spiritual” churches.⁷⁶ Mainline denominations typically criticize the indigenous churches as “syncretistic” and “cultish.” However, more and more independent/indigenous groups who were once, as David Barrett observes, “treated as sectarians and fanatics by the rest of the world ... are at last being recognized as what they had claimed to be all along, namely genuinely Christian bodies concerned ... with indigenizing the apostolic faith in terms intelligible to African societies.”⁷⁷

from the Precious Stone Society—within the Anglican church until the church authorities took action on account of the members’ views of infant baptism.” [Originally published in *The Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3 (Apr 1979):48-51.]

⁷⁴ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 67.

⁷⁵ David B. Barrett, “The African Independent Churches: Developments 1968-70,” *Afer* 12:2 (Apr 1970): 123. See also DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 65; Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture* 61, 102, 110. The presence of more AI churches in southern Nigeria is due in large part to the fact that Islam is more widely accepted in northern Nigeria.

⁷⁶ Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 171. “These small sects began to emerge in the 1920s and 1930s [throughout Nigeria and West Africa] and were called ‘spiritual’ or ‘prophet’ churches because of their emphasis on prayer, healing, revelation, and biblical literalism.” See also Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 1995), 65; C. G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some ‘Spiritual’ Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 136-141;

⁷⁷ Barrett, “The African Independent Churches,” 123-24. See also, David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 269-70. For discussions on how the AICs are impacting contemporary theological discussions see Bekiako, *Christianity in Africa*, 252-65; Diane Stinton, “Africa, East and West,” in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, John Parratt, ed. (New York:

Furthermore, Ilogu indicates that the “emergence of many prophetic and sometimes unorthodox Churches ... have sprung up possibly as a means of solving ... the problems created by the interaction of Christian ethics and traditional morality”⁷⁸ and identifies two sources of inspiration to this group of churches in Igboland: American Pentecostalism and Igbo traditional religious experience.⁷⁹ It has been in the Pentecostal independent indigenous churches that the Igbo (and other African groups) have been most able to bring their questions and concerns. Olufunke Adeboye likens the independent Pentecostal movement in Nigeria to a “cultural movement” in that it seems “highly responsive to the contexts in which it finds itself” and one that has “lent itself to easy domestication in the cultures in which it has been embraced.”⁸⁰ Benjamin Ray, in *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* may best express the reasons when he states,

As in the New Testament, indigenous African Christianity believes in an intentional world of invisible spiritual agents and in the power of prayer and ritual symbols to cope with life’s problems. These are the principles that unite the indigenous churches and that make indigenous Christianity an African religion. In their own way, the African-founded churches have successfully taken on what Archbishop Tutu recognizes to be one of the major challenges facing Christianity in Africa: the effort to “root the Gospel in Africa, contextualizing and indigenizing it” and making it “authentically African.”⁸¹

THE ROLE OF THE IGBO BIBLE

The first Christian Bible translation in Igboland was published in 1917 and was translated by Archdeacon Thomas J. Dennis, an Anglican missionary. Although this translation was initially used only within Anglican churches, other denominations quickly made use of the text and, according to Anthony Nkwoka, “all new denominations from

Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119-20; Walls, “The Challenge of the African Independent Churches,” 116-18.

⁷⁸ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 10.

⁷⁹ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 61.

⁸⁰ Adeboye, “Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa,” 439.

⁸¹ Ray, *African Religions...*, 195.

‘non-Christian’ ‘messianic, revivalistic, and nativistic’ Sabbath Churches (Kalu) to the most vibrant Pentecostal Churches, and in some cases even the Roman Catholics” continue to use the “Dennis” Igbo Bible.⁸² The most recent Igbo translation, completed in 1988, is the Living Bible Version. Ironically, the most widely used Bible among Igbo Christians is the (English) King James Version. This text, published in the early seventeenth century, is the standard Bible of Nigerian Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians and may demonstrate how the proliferation of English among the Igbo has adversely affected the publication of a newer Igbo translation.⁸³

Perhaps an issue of more relevant than Bible translation in Igboland is an emphasis on Bible reading. The Scripture Bible Union, an organization devoted to promoting the reading of Scripture, has been active throughout much of the twentieth century, particularly since the 1960s. Andrew Ingenozza notes how the widely circulated and used Scripture Union Bible reading cards in Protestant Churches has instilled the culture of Bible reading among Protestant Igbo members.⁸⁴

According to Nkwoka, “Christianity is a religion of the Book in Igboland” and he remarks that much of Igbo Christianity “may be summarized by the phrase, ‘Is it in the Bible?’”⁸⁵ Ingenozza writes,

With so much belief in witchcraft, sorcery and sundry preter-natural powers, many would go to any lengths to counter perceived or imagined forces of evil. These forces may also be seen to be

⁸² Anthony O. Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories, and Trends*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, 326-335, (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), 326.

⁸³ Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” 327.

⁸⁴ See Andrew Olu Ingenozza, “Contextual Balancing of Scripture with Scripture: Scripture Union in Nigeria and Ghana,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories, and Trends*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, 292-310, (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001). Also, Nkwoka, 328, “Waning missionary control and the war were two of the factors, among others, that led to greater autonomy in Igbo Bible reading. The advent of Igbo reading and understanding of the Bible gave rise to early schismatic movements in the Igbo Church.”

⁸⁵ Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” 326. Also, Walls, “The Challenge of the African Independent Churches,” 116.

operating in the social, economic and political spheres. In a continent where the people are known to be very religious, it is not surprising that many use the Bible in addition to other methods in dealing with their problems. Churches and fellowships have continued to mushroom as a result, offering varied and often conflicting solutions purportedly based on the Bible.⁸⁶

The role of the Bible in African Independent Churches cannot be overemphasized; particularly the use of and affinity for the Old Testament.⁸⁷ Nkwoka states,

Certain days in the week are devoted to Bible teaching, then there are also the Bible lessons of every Sunday morning...there are usually no fewer than ten Bible references for a single sermon. Prayers are based on the exposition of certain Bible passages while relevant passages must punctuate the prayers to tell God why He should answer a particular request....The one discovery (or recovery) from the Bible that seems to have towered above any other in these new Christian movements in Igboland is the central place of healing in the Bible....Faith healing is an incontrovertible aspect of Igbo Christianity.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, he notes that Bibles of any translation are in short supply due to the current economic hardships. As a result, “there is presently a dearth of Bibles and many Nigerian Christians, especially the Igbo, are yearning for the printed Word of God.”⁸⁹

SOME PRESENT THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS IN IGBO CHRISTIANITY

Numerous works have been written by African scholars on the process of Christian inculturation or indigenization within an African context.⁹⁰ Since Nigerian independence from Great Britain in 1960 and the Biafran civil war of 1967-70, many Nigerian theologians and pastors, both Catholic and Protestant, have written on the state of Igbo Christianity and need for spiritual and theological renewal. Several scholars have already been noted and their research will prove helpful in the analysis in chapter three.

⁸⁶ Igenoza, “Contextual Balancing of Scripture with Scripture...,” 292.

⁸⁷ Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” 327. “The strong affinity between the Igbo and the Hebrew cultures all the more makes the Igbo to feel very much at home with the Bible.” Also, Walls, “The Challenge of the African Independent Churches,” 116. “In some ways, the radical Biblicists among the independents may be compared to the Anabaptists in Western Church history: the same wild variety, the same strong cohesion as ‘people of God,’ the same insistence on following the Word as they heart it.”

⁸⁸ Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” 330, 331.

⁸⁹ Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” 327.

⁹⁰ Several of these works have been utilized for research in this paper, including: DomNwachukwu (2000), Onwubiko (1992), Onuh (1992), Chiromba (1989), Ilogu (1974), Idowu (1965), Mbiti (1969, 71).

However, a more detailed review of two specific works will identify a number of conflicts existing between traditional society and Christian practice.

For the purposes of this study, I have selected the research of Charles Onuh and Peter DomNwachukwu for three reasons. First, their research is less theoretical and more practical in nature. Their approach consistently engages the topic of inculturation on a popular level with emphasis on the ongoing interaction between Christian teaching and daily experience. Second, since Onuh is a Roman Catholic priest in Nsukka and DomNwachukwu a Baptist pastor in Owerri, their research provides an “on the ground” or active Catholic and Protestant experience.⁹¹ Finally, I selected these theologians because their works have been published recently (Onuh 1992, DomNwachukwu 2000). The following information is a brief survey of their findings.

Charles Ok. Onuh

Onuh suggests that such issues as linguistic elements, social structure, Igbo nomenclature, recreational elements, Igbo moral standards, traditional political framework, associations, hospitality, concepts of the Supreme God, and the Igbo’s deep sense of the sacred must be contemplated and integrated in order for Christianity to be truly understood and expressed in Igbo society.⁹² He identifies “dialogue” as the chief means of achieving this goal. “A critical analysis of the first century experience of

⁹¹ Onuh specialized in Theological Anthropology at Teresianum, Rome and DomNwachukwu received his PhD in World Religions from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. According 2003 Vatican figures, Catholics number 18.9 million in Nigeria (source: “Factfile: Roman Catholics around the World,” (source <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/4243727.stm#nigeria>; viewed Aug 28, 2007). The Nigerian Baptist Convention, affiliated with the World Baptist Alliance (an umbrella consultative organization representing most of the world's Baptists), claim 9300 churches and 2.5 million members in Nigeria (source: <http://www.bwanet.org/default.aspx?pid=437>; viewed Aug 28, 2007). Statistics specific to Igboland are not available. For other information about the influence of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, see Denton Lotz, “Who and Where in the World are the Baptists?,” *Baptist History and Heritage* (Winter 2005): 1-2.

⁹² Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 100-103.

Christianity in Igboland reveals a fundamental mission gap in the faith—culture dialogue.”⁹³ Onuh continues,

This role of Christianity ought to be considered as very important and, therefore, urgent. If Christianity makes use of the positive elements for the consolidation of the faith—engrafting and incarnating Christian principles with the cultural framework of the Igbos—there will be a strong hope of a lasting Christianity in Igboland.⁹⁴

The following is a summation of what Onuh believes to be “positive elements” within Igbo society that must find expression in Igbo Christianity:⁹⁵

- Linguistic elements—including the special place and use of proverbs, folklore, and poetic symbols in conveying important values. Proverbs possess such a prominent place in Igbo society that failure to incorporate their use in liturgy and song would be tragic.
- Family life (including the extended family) and village responsibilities are so profoundly integrated within Igbo thought and have such “overwhelming influence on the people” that such contexts cannot be excluded.
- Igbo concepts of the Supreme Being are very similar to the Christian concept of God. “The only aspect that is lacking is the Trinitarian mystery.” Onuh believes Igbo understanding of lesser gods/spirits is already a predisposition to accepting the Trinitarian doctrine presumably because the Igbo recognize lesser gods/spirits functioning as a mediator between Chukwu and physical creation.
- Naming ceremonies (Igbo nomenclature) are used to express divine attributes and are necessarily theological in nature. “Employing such names as baptismal names would not only be singing the praises and glory of God, but would even promote the consciousness of the divine-human relationship and interaction within the family.”
- Political structures greatly influence Igbo society. Christianity must integrate Igbo title-granting (titles of the land). Without acquiring the *Ozo* title or ability to function as an elder representative in the community, Igbo families possess no active voice in the community and are consequently regarded as “second class citizens.” If the Igbo man is not allowed to take the titles of the land, he is excluded from participation in nearly all aspects of the community. “One would expect that Christianity ought to clear the obstacles in the political elements through a dialogue with this system, and make it possible for Christians to enter into these strategic arms of the community.”
- Community celebrations, such as festivals, music, and dancing are essential to the identity of any people. In particular, song, music, and dance must be incorporated as a main means of expressing Igbo worship and theology.

Through the process of dialogue, Onuh believes it is possible to “purify” aspects deemed incompatible with biblical teaching;⁹⁶ a task that is not without its difficulties

⁹³ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 112.

⁹⁴ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 105.

⁹⁵ See Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 100-103.

and relates directly to the discussion of syncretism in this paper. For example, it is unclear how Onuh considers Igbo traditional beliefs in gods/spirits as a “predisposition” to the Trinitarian concept.⁹⁷ Additionally, certain title-granting ceremonies require sacrifices and the pouring of libations to other gods/spirits (such as to *Ala* or *Idemili*) in order to legitimize the title. In fact, some traditional titles, such as *Eze* (priestly-king role), are selected by the gods through ritual. Such an act is generally regarded as “idolatrous” within Christian circles and would require a transformation of meaning within the ceremonial act so as to be consistent within Christian practice *and* recognized as legitimate within traditional Igbo society. Onuh does not address these titles.⁹⁸

Onuh’s research seems particularly cognizant of the working definition of syncretism preferred in this paper: “religious interpenetration, either taken for granted or subject to debate.”⁹⁹ Primarily focused on Igbo rites at birth and titles of community headship, Onuh states:

While inculturation has an objective to make the Christian faith penetrate the root of culture, so that a Christian can feel at home in his culture and from this as a basis practice fully his faith, syncretism is an attempt solely to accommodate two different systems. Inculturation attempts to boost the faith with the use of the *positive potentials* (emphasis mine) of the culture, while syncretism endangers and destroys the faith. With this in mind, one has attempted to situate the Christian faith within the cultural pressure points of the Igbo. The Igbo birth rites [and rites of

⁹⁶ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 102.

⁹⁷ It may be that Onuh has in mind that since the *function* of the gods/spirits is that of an intermediary, their role may be likened to the pluralist function at work within the Christian Godhead (Trinity). Ilogu comments on a similar notion. See Ilogu, *Christianity in Igbo Culture*, 39. Ilogu’s comments regarding the Igbo belief in gods/spirits as a predisposition to Trinitarian belief are also brief, however, he seems to indicate that the functional pluralism at work within the Trinity (i.e., the Father has committed all things to the Son; the Son does the will of the Father and intercedes on the behalf of people; the Spirit teaches what the Son prescribes, convicts the world of sin/righteousness, and draws people to the Son).

⁹⁸ It is likely that Onuh does not address the Christian inclusion of such titles as the *Eze* (priest-king) because of its inherent association with traditional religion. Chinua Achebe, in *Arrow of God*, provides interesting insights into the importance of the *Eze* title and selection process in traditional Igbo society. In Achebe’s fictional account, British colonial authorities fail to understand the importance of this process for the Igbo and proceed to appoint the *Eze* to function as a governmental leader over a village or group of villages. However, for the Igbo, the god through ritual—and not any person—selects the *Eze*. See *Arrow of God* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 92, 107, 126.

⁹⁹ Andre Droogers, “Syncretism: The Problem of Definition,” 20-21.

traditional headship] are the entrance gates to the Igbo culture for an individual. If the faith can be situated in order to influence this cultural gate, the flourishing of a culture-centered faith would be assured.¹⁰⁰

Onuh definitely considers many areas of “religious interpenetration” compatible with Christian faith and defines what some may regard as syncretism as “positive potentials.”

For example, Onuh cites one such instance in which a Christian, because he was the eldest member of the community, accepted the traditional headship of the extended family (*umunna*).¹⁰¹ The elder (Christian) described his installation thus:

I inquired from other Christians who did such before me. I feasted them – (all the elders Ndishi, Onuobu and Ogaa ‘provosts’ in the *umunna*). But I did not kill goat and hen. I went to the market and bought a chest of goat, a hand of it and a chest of hen (*obu ewu*, aka *ya*, and *obu okuko*) and gave them. They [the elders] were very happy. They did not perform anything as sacrifice as I told them beforehand. They ate and thanked me and went home....¹⁰²

As head of the community, he is *ipso facto* the custodian and depository of the traditional symbols of the ancestors and a historic connection with the past of the community.

Consequently, the elder is responsible to the ancestors.¹⁰³

Within traditional Catholic and Protestant circles, such an alignment between a Christian becoming the head of the community and the cult of ancestors has been viewed as syncretistic. However, the testimony noted above seems to indicate that aspects do exist in which “religious interpenetration” may be “taken for granted”—that is, not considered contradictory to Christian principle. The consumption of the ritual feast and

¹⁰⁰ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage*, 232.

¹⁰¹ According to Simeon Eboh, the *umu-nna* (lit. children of the same father) refers to children of the same ancestors who cannot inter-marry. “This is called the extended family to distinguish it from what the Western world regards as a family. *Umunna* is made up of a number of nuclear families. This lineage is the central or basic social unit in Igbo society. The lineage is made up of the descendants in the male line of the founder-ancestor whose name the lineage is sometimes called. It involves many nuclear families with allegiance to an ancestor “father,” one shrine, one totem animal and no inter-marriage among the members. A village is made up of several lineages or sublineages.” See Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture: Ozo Title Institution in Igboland (Nigeria)* (Munich: African University Studies, 1993).

¹⁰² Research information given by Mr. Gbriel Onah of Imilike Ani in Nsukka area of Igboland on June 30, 1989. Cited in Onuh, 216.

¹⁰³ Onuh, 217.

the recognition and acknowledgment of responsibility for the community (as the representative of the ancestors) are not, for Onuh, necessarily contradictory to Christian faith. Onuh's perspective on title-taking has important implications in the ongoing debate regarding syncretism and will be addressed in more detail in chapter three.

Peter Nlemadim DomNwachukwu

DomNwachukwu is alarmed by the lack of attention given to comparing and contrasting Christian teaching with Christian practice in the Owerri area. It is his observation that conversions in present-day Igboland (for the most part) remain superficial; an affiliation change at best.¹⁰⁴ He believes the time is right for the Igbo to take a serious look at the present state of Christianity in Igboland and claims that his book, *Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo* (2000) is the first of its kind to do so.¹⁰⁵ Although his book is certainly not the first book published about Igbo Christianity, it may very well be the first scholarly work published by an active pastor of an Igbo church whose field work and research is based upon an ongoing congregational experience of a particular Protestant group.

DomNwachukwu's research is highly critical of the "conversion experience" of many Igbo.¹⁰⁶ He does not question Igbo sincerity *per se*; rather he questions the false expectations of Igbo conversions imposed by Christian missionaries. Because the Igbo (like many people) do not make a "sharp demarcation between secular and religious concerns" and because nearly every choice they make has a religious consequence,

¹⁰⁴ This is not to imply that there are not Igbo's who possess a deep faith in Christ (past or present) or to denigrate the fact that many have suffered persecution and even martyrdom. Perhaps someone will conduct the necessary research and write about this important part of the Igbo Christian story. DomNwachukwu is addressing a specific concern from his particular perspective. He is seeking a deeply personal and culturally relevant Igbo Christianity.

¹⁰⁵ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 1-15, esp. 4.

Western concepts of conversion (rejection of the old in favor of the new) are ineffective in determining true conversion among the Igbo.¹⁰⁷ This raises the question broached by Kenneth Cragg, when he remarks, “If the old is taken away, to whom is the new given?”¹⁰⁸

As noted in the working definition of conversion in this paper, conversion does not require the rejection of the “old” when the “old” also includes the day-to-day experience and society of a people. However, when conversion is viewed as a change or transfer of religious authority, conversion may very well occur while retaining most of traditional experiences. With this in mind, Kwame Bediako states,

Theological investigation of the traditional religions therefore also becomes a quest for what Bishop Kenneth Cragg calls ‘integrity in conversion: a unity of self in which one’s past is genuinely integrated into present commitment, so that the crisis of repentance and faith that makes us Christian truly integrates what we have been in what we become.’¹⁰⁹

DomNwachukwu argues that authentic Igbo Christianity must be based on the Bible; a biblical translation that must, he asserts, be derived from the Hebrew and Greek text using “Igbo concepts, symbols and metaphors as their communication vehicles.”¹¹⁰ Such a focus, according to DomNwachukwu, would enable the Igbo to develop “authentic Igbo Christianity.” Apparently, for DomNwachukwu, the failure to gain “genuine” conversions rests on the mission church’s failure to use the Igbo Bible consistently as the basis for moral and spiritual conduct.¹¹¹ I will comment on this claim more directly in chapter three.

¹⁰⁷ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 156.

¹⁰⁸ Kenneth Cragg, *Christianity in World Perspective*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 57.

¹⁰⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 1995), 258. See also, Kenneth Cragg, “Conversation and Convertibility, with Special Reference to Muslims,” in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, edited by John R. W. Stott and Robert Coote, 193-208 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 194.

¹¹⁰ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity ...*, 8, 88, 205.

¹¹¹ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity ...*, 88.

Nevertheless, on this subject, David Adamo laments, “They [early missionaries] did not teach us how to use the Bible as a means of protecting, healing, and solving the daily problems of life.”¹¹² As noted earlier, The Igbo Bible (translated by Anglican Archdeacon Thomas J. Dennis) has been available since 1917, however, according to Nkwoka, “the role of the Bible in the Igbo Church would have been more amazing, had it not been for the religious colonization of the Bible by the missionaries.”¹¹³ The mission-trained clergy maintained “absolute control” over the interpretation of the Scriptures and the Roman Catholics Churches, which, at least prior to Vatican II, utilized the Latin translation, only allowed the priests to read and interpret the biblical text.¹¹⁴ Although Adamo’s and Nkwoka’s comments do not directly support DomNwachukwu’s claim regarding the “genuineness” of Igbo conversion, their assessments do support his notion that the early Christian missions did control Igbo access to Scripture.

Returning to the theme of the importance of dialogue in this survey, DomNwachukwu also identifies dialogue as the primary methodology necessary for Christianity to become indigenous in Igbo society. He feels the topics of discussion are not as important as the fact that issues important to the Igbo should be discussed in open forums where all may participate. “The Igbo love to talk; they enjoy dialogue as a group.”¹¹⁵ As Christian issues (Bible stories, Christian literature, etc.) are presented, the Igbo will naturally “pick up on” one aspect or another important to their worldview. The

¹¹² David Tuesday Adamo, “The Use of Psalms in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories, and Trends*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, 336-49, (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), 336.

¹¹³ Nkwoka, “The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria,” 327-28. The 1,075 text is still the most widely used vernacular translation in Igboland followed closely by the King James Version, which is the predominant translation within Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. (326-27)

¹¹⁴ Nkwoka, 328.

¹¹⁵ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 135.

presenter or preacher must dialogue on these issues and discovering meaningful *Igbo* methods of cultural expression.

Without dialogue, there is no learning and no integration. According to DomNwachukwu, Christian expression in Igboland lacks cultural depth. He argues that it lacks cultural depth because the present methods of evangelism and discipleship fail to utilize dialogue as its primary methodology. Therefore, it is his assessment that:

- Sermons must include a lengthy time for questions and discussion. DomNwachukwu refers to this a “dialogical preaching.”¹¹⁶
- The use of drama would only be relevant as long as opportunities of discussion and explanation accompany the presentation.
- Small group bible studies are extremely effective methodologies because it is dialogical in nature.¹¹⁷
- The use of crusades is “way overused in Igboland” and runs contrary to the dialogical method of communication. “Its use in any Igbo community is irrelevant and non-productive.”¹¹⁸
- “Christian literature is also of little use unless someone is available to interpret and explain the content (especially to the illiterate) and able to answer questions from prospective converts.”¹¹⁹

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to understand the present state of Christianity in Igboland by looking through the lens of Igbo writers while taking into account the definitions of conversion, inculturation, and syncretism offered in chapter one. Furthermore, I have noted the emerging consensus that the growth and development of Igbo Christianity has been stunted by the intrusion of Western ideology, methodology, and theology. Since the end of the civil war, a resurgence of cultural identity has emerged

¹¹⁶ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 165.

¹¹⁷ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 168-173.

¹¹⁸ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 168. Author’s note: My Igbo informant, Patrick, concurs with this sentiment and noted that his church conducted annual and “expensive crusades over a five-year period that failed to produce one new convert.” It was his assessment that only “Christians attend crusades, traditional Igbos are not attracted to these events.”

¹¹⁹ DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity...*, 177.

and theologians throughout Igboland have been invigorated to discover an authentic Christian expression within an Igbo context.

Since, as I have endeavored to demonstrate, the Christian message is not limited by any one cultural expression, and as such, is trans-cultural, the national clergy or visiting missionary must safeguard and identify what they deem the irreducible concerns contained within Scripture and, at the same time, enable the community to develop appropriate methods of worship within a local context. It seems apparent that many local church leaders (Protestant, Catholic, and Independent) are aware of the implications involved and are accepting the challenge of developing a truly Igbo Christianity. The following remark, recorded by Charles Onuh at a meeting of the Bishops in Onitsha, seems to express the sentiment of many involved in the inculturation process: “The task of the next century is to see that our Christians not only believe with their heads, but that they also become Christians to the marrow of their bones.”¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo*, 119. (This is a quote from the *Pastoral Letter of Onitsha Provincial Bishops*, 13.)

CHAPTER THREE

INCULTURATION THEORY & THEOLOGY INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In chapter two, I surveyed the contemporary developments of Christianity among the Igbo with some attention to historical details. This test case provides an example of “how” the Gospel message is trans-cultural. Several issues have been and continue to be critical to the support of this thesis. First, the definitions of conversion, inculturation, and syncretism offered in the first chapter will prove important to the advancement of inculturation theory in the twenty-first century. Second, two additional themes emerged in the Igbo scenario—namely, the importance and role of dialogue and Scripture in society; most particularly in the process of Christian inculturation.

The Igbo model of dialogue is built on mutual respect and the local use of Scripture occupies a central place in the Igbos’ attempt to forge its own Christian identity. The Christian missionary endeavor can learn much from this model. In this final chapter, I analyze the issues of dialogue, the role of Scripture translation, syncretism, and conversion in the inculturation process and argue the relevance of these issues in the broader academic discussion of inculturation theory and theology.

INCULTURATION AND DIALOGUE

As noted in chapter two, the Igbo have built their concept of dialogue on mutual respect. Dialogue is essential to the ongoing process of inculturation and to the understanding of issues involving conversion and syncretism. Prior to Nigerian independence and the civil war, it is likely that any such dialogue between Christian

missionaries and Igbo Christians transpired within an environment of inequality. I will address this notion and its reasons more adequately below.

Furthermore, it may seem important to begin a discussion of inculturation by determining the “irreducible concerns” of “historic Christianity” or of any particular culture. Within the limited confines and scope of this paper, it would be too daunting to proffer what might constitute the irreducible concerns of the Christian Gospel or, for that matter, debate what might constitute the irreducible concerns of a given culture. However, if such a dialogue were to be conducted, with any measure of success, it would require an environment of mutual respect with a common goal in mind; namely, how to best foster a relevant and meaningful Christian experience within a given culture.

Hypothetically, if such a dialogue were to occur, what criteria would guide the discussion? Certainly it could not be the exclusive concerns of the missionary entity nor could it be the exclusive concerns of the local culture. For that would only lead to an unhealthy elevation of one culture over another and presuppose that any one culture possesses the exclusive right to determine the path of Christian experience. A measure of reciprocity ensures mutual respect and continuity among diverse “Christianities.” The alternative results in either domination or alienation. History is capable of demonstrating the oppressive consequences of ethnocentrism.

Nor could such a discussion end with a resolve to adopt a position of moral relativism; a sort of “to each his/her own” approach where every culture decides its own ethical or moral path—with nothing to guide it except its own tradition—leaving nothing to link the Christian experience of one culture, time, and place with that of another. If moral relativism were to be the guiding principle, “Christianity” might cease to exist in

any historically recognizable form. Ironically, any effort to promote moral relativism as a corrective to ethnocentrism may find the latter completely out of control. As Sanneh points out, “It is hard to see how you could have cultural relativism [that includes moral relativism] without ethnocentrism.”¹

Even a cursory survey of the history of the Christian movement may adequately address the dilemma over how best to guide its cultural experience (whether Protestant or Catholic). Andrew Walls details the fictional account of a supposed traveler who managed to visit five groups of “Christians” separated by time and space.² Each group expressed particular concerns that must have seemed alien to the visitor. Nevertheless, in Wall’s assessment, an essential continuity is observable: a continuity of thought about the ultimate significance of Jesus, continuity of a shared religious history, continuity on the use of Scripture and, in some manner or another, of bread and wine (or its equivalents), and water all within an attempt to worship the God of Israel.³ Although these issues of continuity are debated, the Christian groups from Wall’s scenario have been traditionally recognized as part of historic Christianity.⁴

¹ Lamin Sanneh, *Religion and the Variety of Culture* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 2, 47-48. Sanneh links cultural relativism with moral relativism because of the tendency within the social sciences to use cultural relativism—that is, the attempt to understand each culture in its own terms and to avoid judgment—as a “grand strategy by which to bring down Christianity, or at least the Christianity we associated with missionary ambition.” (2). For a further discussion on the conflicts inherent between notions of cultural relativism, morals, and Christian theology, see Paul G. Heibert, “Cultural Relativism and Theological Absolutes,” *Direction* 2:1 (Jan 1973): 2-6.

² Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 3-7. Walls’ fictitious “space traveler” visits Christian believers in Jerusalem (37 CE), Nicea (325), Ireland (600), England (1840) and Nigeria (1980). [This article was originally published as “The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture,” *Missionalia*, 10:3 (1982): 99.]

³ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 7, 23.

⁴ For example, see Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999); also Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Volume 1, Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001). “The Christian movement has always been greater than any individual or local church community has imagined it to be. It’s history reflects an enormous diversity of beliefs and practices over the past two millennia....Narrating a faithful history of the movement requires an accounting of such

The irony of Wall's fictional scenario is that the continuities shared between these groups are what have historically linked (and will likely continue to link) each group together as part of the *same* religious faith and tradition while at the same time, when juxtaposed against each other, might hardly "be recognizable to others, or indeed even to themselves, as manifestations of a single phenomenon."⁵

What can account for this connection? It may seem Pollyannaish to presume, but the Scriptures⁶ translated into the vernacular and a commitment to identify with the historic faith of the first century apostles' faith in Jesus as savior and lord will serve to guide and shape the Church of each day and each culture in such a manner so as to identify it with historical "orthodox" Christian experience. The role of Scripture will be addressed more directly in the next section.

A challenge within Catholic and Protestant Christianity over the last five hundred years has been an ongoing struggle to overcome a mono-cultural vision, a vision that has sought in vain to establish its own ethnocentric version of "Christian culture," and embrace a more appropriate vision that recognizes the plurality of cultures and, through mutual love and respect, recognize that Christ must be profoundly rooted (incarnated),

diversity, of the differences that have often separated various parties from one another, without reducing their common story to the perspective of one....The Christian movement is one that has continuously diversified itself through its expansions, all the while claiming to remain the same." (vii)

⁵ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 7. See Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), vii. "Narrating a faithful history of the movement requires an accounting of such diversity, of the differences that have often separated various parties from one another, without reducing their common story to the perspective of one. We are compelled to bring together in a common history individuals and communities who in life often struggled to distance themselves from each other, and whose ecclesiastical descendants often remain at odds with one another today. Many of these differences arose as a result of the Christian faith crossing historical borders of language, culture, and identity. Time itself has introduced further changes in meaning, expression, and practice. The Christian movement is one that has continuously diversified itself through its expansions, all the while claiming to remain the same."

⁶ By Scriptures, I mean the books and letters canonized at the council of Nicea in 323 CE.

via a Christian community, in every nation.⁷ Cultural pluralism involves the recognition that every culture possesses strengths and weaknesses, deserves to be respected, and shares a common worth. Such a lofty goal will only be possible through dialogue founded on mutual respect.

INCULTURATION AND THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE

For Kwame Bediako, the most fundamental characteristic of the Christian religion is that it is “infinitely translatable.”⁸ Because of this phenomenon, Bediako states,

“it is possible to say that the earlier concern to seek an ‘indigenisation’ of Christianity in Africa, as though one were dealing with an essentially ‘Western’ and ‘foreign’ religion was, in effect, misguided because the task was conceived as the correlation of two entities thought to be unrelated. Such an effort was bound to lead to a dead end ... precisely because it fastened too intently on the ‘foreignness’ of the Western modes of the transmission of the Faith, and correspondingly paid too little attention to actual achievement ‘on the ground.’”⁹

While Bediako prefers the term “translatable,” Pope Paul VI, as Aylward Shorter notes, preferred to use the term “transpose.”¹⁰ The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*¹¹ (number 63) states:

The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of living, of looking at life and the world which distinguish this or that human gathering, have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language ... The transposition has to be done with the discernment, seriousness, respect and competence ... The question is undoubtedly a delicate one. Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* –December 8, 1975

⁷ See Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Part Four, “The Teaching of the Catholic Church on Inculturation Today,” 179-238.

⁸ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 1995), 109.

⁹ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 119.

¹⁰ Shorter, *Toward a Theology...*, 13.

¹¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World) was an exhortation given by Pope Paul VI on December 8, 1975, in Rome at St. Peter’s Church. An English translation of the full address may be viewed at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P6EVAN.HTM>. According to Aylward Shorter, “The 1974 Synod [of Bishops] asked Paul VI to embody the fruits of their discussions in a document of his own.” See Shorter, *Toward a Theology...*, 215-19.

In regards to this address as a whole, Shorter states, “The document [*Evangelii Nuntiandi*] offers an advanced theology of a multicultural Church which has probably not been surpassed by any other official [Roman Catholic] statement ... Subsequent papal and synodal statements have been no more than additions or corrections.”¹²

The musical term “transpose” offers a rich metaphor to the thesis of this paper. For even though a song may be transposed into numerous harmonic “keys,” the consequence of such a transposition may render the song “un-sing-able,” though not unrecognizable, to a host of other vocalists. In other words, even though a vocalist may be incapable of singing or enjoying a song in a harmonic key appropriate to another, the meaning and substance of the song remains virtually the same and is, for all practical purposes, considered to be the *same* song. This metaphor, along with that of the seed planted in soil, serves to illustrate how Christian faith may find that “it is at home” in any culture.

John Mbiti is convinced that the Christian faith is at “home” in Africa. Since God is one, Mbiti maintains, “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the same God who has been known and worshipped in various ways within the religious life of African people.” Consequently, he is “not a stranger in Africa prior to the coming of missionaries.” Mbiti has consistently endeavored to stress that the missionaries did not bring God to Africa. On the contrary, “God brought them,” so that by the proclamation of the Gospel through the missionary activity, Jesus Christ might be known, for “without Him [Jesus] the meaning of our religiosity is incomplete.” Mbiti goes on to state:

¹² Shorter, *Toward a Theology...*, 215.

The Gospel enabled people to utter the name of Jesus Christ ... that final and completing element that crowns their traditional religiosity and brings its flickering light to full brilliance.¹³

Hesitant to brush aside the role Western missions has played in the inculturation process altogether, Lamin Sanneh states, “The subject of Western missions needs to be unhinged from the narrow colonial context and placed in the much wider setting of African culture.”¹⁴ The transcultural nature of the Christian Gospel is often overshadowed or obscured so long as the focus is on the transmission of the Gospel rather than on what converts do (and did) with the Gospel. Sanneh is careful to note that the transmission of the Gospel is an integral part of the equation; however it is not the whole equation. Rather, what local converts do with the Gospel is of greater importance.

The most important aspect of the transmission process for Sanneh is the crucial role that Bible translation has played in Western missions. The availability of the Scriptures in the vernacular—what Sanneh calls the “mother-tongue”—serves not only to accentuate what is noble and positive within a culture but also as a corrective to its own moral ills—what Ukpong refers to as “inhuman social practices”—of that society.¹⁵ Additionally, the availability of the Scriptures in the vernacular elevates the culture to a position of equality with that of any other.¹⁶

The role of “mother-tongue” Scripture in African theology may become clearer when juxtaposed with its role in emerging Chinese theology. Wang Weifan, one of the most noted contemporary theologians in China, concurs with Sanneh when he states,

¹³ John Mbiti, “Response to the Article of John Kinney,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3:2 (Apr 1979): 68.

¹⁴ Lamin Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective,” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7:4 (Oct 1983): 165.

¹⁵ Justin S. Ukpong, “Inculturation: A Major Challenge to the Church in Africa Today,” *AFER* 38:5 (Oct 1996): 263-65, esp., 264.

¹⁶ See Lamin Sanneh, “Religion and the Mother Tongue: A Postlude,” in *Religion and the Variety of Culture: A Study in Origin and Practice* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 62-73.

“The greatest contribution of the Protestant missionaries was perhaps their translation of the Bible.”¹⁷ Wang asserts that the heart of indigenous Chinese theology is the Scriptures although its application and direction is notably different than that in West Africa for reasons that will be made apparent below.

According to Wang, the first generation of Chinese theologians did not appear until the early twentieth century; nearly one hundred years after the entrance of Protestant Christianity into China because “westerners were in control, they were unwilling to raise men of talent to positions above themselves...unwilling even to look for a small number of capable people to receive advanced training and become theological thinkers for the church.”¹⁸ Strong parallels exist in regard to the advancement of African theologians in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, the increasing availability of the Scriptures in the vernacular reversed that trend and produced marked changes in the direction of indigenous theology for both.

Two of the most noted Chinese thinkers of this early era were T. C. Chao (1888-1979)¹⁹ and Y. T. Wu (1893-1979).²⁰ Wu’s most ardent concern, according to Edmond Tang, was:

...to “find a bridge between the church and atheistic socialism, between belief and non-belief, the ‘circumcised and the uncircumcised.’ He saw the realm of God extending beyond the narrow circle of believers to include all people who put Christian love into practice without even being conscious of it. He also saw the special meaning of Christ as the sustainer of the whole cosmos.”²¹

¹⁷ Wang Weifan, “Chinese Theology and its Cultural Sources,” *Chinese Theological Review* 11:2 (1997): 81.

¹⁸ Wang Weifan, “The Pattern and Pilgrimage of Chinese Theology,” *Chinese Theological Review* 6 (1990): 30-31. The quotation is cited by Wang from a lecture given by T. C. Chao in 1950.

¹⁹ For an in-depth analysis of the most prominent early twentieth-century Chinese theologians, see Wing-hung Lam, *Chinese Theology in Construction* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1983). Lam’s book is based on his dissertation for the Church History Department of Princeton Theological Seminary.

²⁰ Wu is most famous for establishing the “Three Self Patriotic Movement” (self-government, self-financed, and self-propagation) in the early 1950s in the hope of uniting all Protestant denominations in the common task of assisting the new government (communist PRC) in social and political reforms.

²¹ Edmond Tang, “East Asia,” in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, John Parratt, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

Wu's successor, K. H. Ting, developed this notion of the "cosmic Christ" most fully. Within the Scripture, the Chinese theologians see the social, ethical, and philosophical dimensions of Christ, who transcends all cultures and geographies, fulfilling traditional Chinese Confucianism and values.²²

In contrast to the Chinese "cosmic Christ" and the manner in which Chinese interpret the Christ of Scripture, Sanneh states,

In the historical record of the missionary encounter with African societies, this Jesus—born of Mary in Bethlehem, who grew up in Hebrew society and culture and was marked with all the Jewish characteristics of time, space, and blood—became the Africans' brother, example, and savior. By contrast, the cosmic Christ—stripped of the inconveniences of his tribal Jewish heritage, equipped with standardized toneless gestures, and refined in the astringent essence of rational formalism—never took root among the tribes.²³

What is ironic in this comparison is how the Bible (translated into the mother-tongue) serves as the foundation of both Chinese and Africa theology—with each appealing to its own traditional roots for justification.

Furthermore, the Bible functions as both an affirmation and corrective in the development of its own unique Christian community while maintaining a connection to historic Christian faith. Weifan asserts, "To speak of a 'Chinese theology' in no way implies a distancing from or rejection of the rich spiritual heritage which has accrued through the centuries since the time of the Apostolic Church."²⁴ Likewise, Sanneh maintains, "Africans found in the many great stories of the Bible, including the parables of Jesus with their homely, down-to-earth figures, a sublime evocation of the oral culture that in traditions were handed down from mouth to mouth and recounted in family and

²² See Wang Weifan, "Chinese Traditional Culture and its Influence on Chinese Theological Reflection," *Chinese Theological Review* 13 (1999): 8-18.

²³ Lamin Sanneh, "Bible Translation and 'Ethnic Mobilization in Africa,'" in *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, pages 155-81, Robert M. Fowler, Edith Blumhofer, and Fernando F. Segovia, ed., (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 170.

²⁴ Wang Weifan, "Chinese Theology and its Cultural Sources," 77.

community settings ... [and] came as the ringing assurance of voices people knew and trusted.”²⁵

How is it that the Scriptures in the vernacular may have both a positive and corrective affect within a given culture and, at the same time, connect a local Christian experience with historic Christianity? Walls identifies two important principles necessary in order for Christians to be both “at home” and at the same time maintain the particular uniqueness of Christian faith: (1) the “indigenizing principle,” and (2) the “pilgrim principle.” Each principle stands in tension with the other. The “Indigenizing Principle” associates Christian believers with the particulars of their culture and group whereas the “Pilgrim Principle” reminds them that to be faithful to Christian teaching will, at times, “put him out of step with his society.” Walls goes on to state,

For that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system. Jesus within Jewish culture, Paul within Hellenistic culture, take it for granted that there will be rubs and frictions—not from the adoption of a new culture, but from the transformation of the mind towards that of Christ.²⁶

Edmund Ilogu addresses Wall’s “Pilgrim” notion as a “foreignness” inherent in the Gospel as it “intervenes in human affairs.” He states

For the Gospel, as the Good News of God’s intervention in human affairs, is bound to be “foreign” in all lands inhabited and systematized into cultural patterns, influenced by time and place and peoples.²⁷

For Ilogu, the Christian Gospel is less “foreign to Iboland than the Gospel’s real nature suggests” and remarks,

The pity is when, owing to racial bigotry, personal idiosyncrasy and lack of sympathetic approach to the peoples of a missionary area, the foreignness of the Gospel is added to by man-made features.

²⁵ Lamin Sanneh, “Religion and the Mother Tongue: A Postlude,” 66.

²⁶ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 8. [This article was originally published as “The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture,” *Missionalia*, 10:3 (1982): 99.]

²⁷ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 86.

I would argue that the “indigenizing” principle and the “pilgrim” principle function as, so to say, two sides to the same coin and enable the Gospel to have both a positive and corrective affect within a given culture while connecting local Christian experience with historic Christianity.

The most promising safeguard throughout this difficult process is the ongoing teaching and training of the Scriptures.²⁸ Charles van Engen noted that one critical hermeneutical principle involves the “church reading the Scriptures in community.”²⁹ Through this process, the national body of believers learns corporately what God expects and what it means to be uniquely Christian. Traditionally, this process has occurred within Catholic and Protestant Christianity through contemplation and adherence to various biblical texts. Consequently, the people must have the Scriptures available in the local language.³⁰

The Scripture, and not any one culture, must be allowed to guide the process of a truly indigenous faith. In a manner similar to that described by Lamin Sanneh, I suggest that the national church will in time, as they read and study the Scriptures, identify areas in which local custom or rituals are “incompatible” with biblical principles and recognize, as all Christians may, that Christian faith is essentially not limited by any one

²⁸ G. C. Oosthuizen, *Theological Battleground in Asia and Africa* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 11. “The church which is rooted in the Word of God is *eo ipso* indigenous, for genuine loyalty to the national community is conditioned by the Word of God itself. After all, true loyalty is already presupposed in the Ten Commandments. It is the gospel which through its inherent creative power molds the potential forms of the people. The Holy Spirit will lead an indigenous people to create an indigenous Church.

²⁹ Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 17.

³⁰ “As Lamin Sanneh points out (1993), no other act of the missionary empowers people and dignifies their culture more than Bible translation. It takes people seriously and says to them that God speaks their language.” (from Paul G. Heibert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995], 371.)

cultural expression and, as such, is trans-cultural. Nkwoka, in an article about Igbo Christology, states,

Christianity as a leading world religion has encountered many cultures and peoples. The popular but false notion of Christianity in Africa is that it is a European or white man's religion imposed on colonized Africans. For people like Professor Kihumbu Thairu, God is pantheistic and no right thinking African should accept the 'Jewish God' and all his goodness which were a colonial bait of the 'pink people.' But the fact is that the Christian faith in all its ramifications is *sui generis*, being a direct derivation from, and essentially dependent on the unique Jesus-event. *Consequently, though it was born in the Jewish cultural milieu, it transcends Jewish (Cf. 1 Cor 1:21-24, Acts 25:14-19), Hellenistic or European culture (emphasis mine).*³¹

Here the efforts of Matteo Ricci and the theorists and theologians I noted coalesce. Each theorist and theologian maintains that the revelation of God is embedded in some manner or another within the cosmology and religious traditions of the indigenous people with the missionaries' primary role serving to identify the corollaries and effectively translate the Christian scriptures into the vernacular. Although Ricci has been criticized for his approach, his efforts should not be unduly dismissed. Shorter may be correct in his assessment when he states,

The great Jesuit missionaries, Ricci, de Nobili, Paez, and others, were not theoretically or theologically equipped, let alone supported, by the church of their time, to carry their inculturation through successfully. But their abortive endeavors were a sign of the Church's yearning for a more fully developed Catholicity.³²

It has only been since the advent of the twentieth century—and most notably since Vatican II—that the Church, both Catholic and Protestant, in practical and tangible ways, has moved away from a mono-cultural vision for the world and embraced a more appropriate pluralistic view of culture.

³¹ A. O. Nkwoka, "Jesus as Eldest Brother, (Okpara): An Igbo Paradigm for Christology in Africa Context," *Asian Journal of Theology*, 5:1 (1991): 88. [Professor Thairu is a medical doctor who (according to Nkwoka) is so obsessed with "his doctrine of Afrocentricity that he has to teach theologians the right theology. Though he was trained in Europe, no good African, according to him, must see any good thing in the 'pink people.'" Cf., K. Thairu, *The African Civilization* (Kampala, East African Literature Bureau, 1975), 59-78.]

³² Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 163.

INCULTURATION AND SYNCRETISM

As noted in chapter two, Onuh has identified Igbo title-taking as an important aspect of traditional Igbo society that must find expression within Igbo Christianity. Ilogu describes the *Ozo* title-holder in Igboland comparable to the English society title of “Lord.”³³ Although the title-taking system has been traditionally viewed as “incompatible” with Christian faith—such as those closely associated with offerings and libations to various gods and ancestor veneration—Onuh sees it as a “positive potential.” As already stated, Onuh views the title-taking system as essential for Christians to enter into leadership positions within the community. However, title-taking has even broader economic and sociological significance.

Simeon Eboh indicates that title-taking (*ozo*) among males is generally arranged within three classifications: (1) *Umu-Okorobia*—mainly young and untitled men; this group forms a sort of “seniority” system for determining eligibility for community work and other community-specific assignments. (2) *Ndi Ofo Ozo*—a status half-way between the first and third levels of title and usually entails expensive rituals; the *Ofo Ozo* is an important step in the *ozo* title system and communicates a status of privilege. (3) *Ndi Nze*—elders who assume the *Ozo* title; except for the titles of *Obi*, *Nri*, and *Eze*, no greater title exists in Igboland.³⁴ Within this group there are many types of *ozo* (what Ilogu calls “the sacred society”³⁵) with the names, ceremonies, and requirements varying

³³ Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 71, also 224-29.

³⁴ The limited scope of this paper will not permit a detailed discussion of these other equally important titles. However, it is interesting to note that neither Onuh, Eboh, or Ilogu address the incorporation of (“Christianizing”) the *Obi*, *Nri*, or *Eze* (priest-king) titles. I suggest that they have not addressed the incorporation of these titles because they are so imbedded with indigenous concepts and religious overtones making these particular titles not readily adaptable to Christian application.

³⁵ Ilogu, “Christianity and Ibo Traditional Religion,” 339.

“from place to place according to local needs.”³⁶ Although not all titles are “equal” and some titles may not be within the “grasp” of some, such as those selected by the gods through ritual or titles that require huge sums of money or titles limited a specific gender, title-taking in general among the Igbo is not restricted to a specific class like it is in, say, British society.

According to Eboh, the title system is integral to Igbo society because it indicates advancement “in religious and political authority.”³⁷ Aside from the socio-political implications of the title system, title-taking also functions as a means of financial support for those who acquire the *ozo* title. Eboh links title-taking with the concept of “social security” in that the “cash and kind” expended to acquire titles is then distributed among the elders “in hierarchically ascending order, with [an] ascending scale of payments.”³⁸

Eboh also notes the existence of titles for women—such as the *Lola* title, which he states is equivalent to the male *Ozo*—even though such titles are fewer in number and are constructed within a patrilineal system.³⁹ Nevertheless, Eboh notes:

This picture does not mean that women in Igbo traditional society ... do not have the same rights as men. We do not have the “minor/inferior roles” and the “major/superior roles.” It is a very dangerous hermeneutic to interpret the social roles of woman and man with a European system of values. The African women are played [sic] a very important role and respectful social function. They are a power to reckon with.⁴⁰

In other words, by and large in traditional Igbo society, women possess spheres of influence and men possess spheres of influence with each respecting the roles of the

³⁶ Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture...*, 60-61.

³⁷ Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture...*, 54.

³⁸ Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture...*, 57-58. Also, see P. Ottenberg, “The Position of Women among Afikpo Ibo,” 215, n. 25. “When a person joins a title society, he pays a fee which is divided among the title-holders. Thus, if he lives long enough after taking a title, he may receive more in new member’s fees than he spent in joining the society.”

³⁹ Eboh, 57. See also chapter five, “The Wife of an *Ozo*-Titled Man (*Lolo-Ozo*), 151-166. The *Lolo-ozo* is the eldest wife of an *ozo*-man. (161)

⁴⁰ Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture...*, 160.

other.⁴¹ Eboh insists that total equity is inherent within traditional Igbo society and suggests Christian *Ozo* title-taking as a path to equity among the sexes even though he does not advocate total equality between the sexes (in a modern Western sense). Even though Eboh woefully acknowledges, “with the coming of Christianity, *lolo* title-taking began to lose its grip among the women folk,”⁴² he does not adequately explain why he regards the title system among the Igbo as a means to female equality.

In regards to female roles and titles within Igbo society, Ifi Amadiume advocates (among other things) the revival of a truly “dual-sex political system in local administration, with clearly defined spheres of interest” and the creation of “female titles parallel to male titles.” Within such a system, “the traditional female ruler’s cabinet deals with ‘female affairs’ and the traditional male ruler’s council deals with ‘male affairs’”⁴³ She notes that a “flexibility of gender constructions” exists in ritual and political matters. Amadiume states,

Traditional Igbo dual-sex social systems were mediated by the flexibility of gender construction in the Igbo language and culture. The conceptualization of daughters as males in ritual matters, and politically in relation to wives, is a good example of this gender flexibility and did not imply that daughters should be seen as ‘man-like.’ Another example of the looseness of gender association is

⁴¹ The socio-political influence of Igbo women has already been demonstrated through the research of Leith-Ross, Amadiume, and P. Ottenberg in chapter two. The 1929 Aba riots provides a good example of Igbo women being “a power to be reckoned with.”

⁴² Eboh, *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture...*, 160; 163. “Those who pursue [equality] to its logical conclusion are today ‘emancipated’ like a pendulum removed from a clock and now no longer free to swing or like a flower which has been ‘emancipated’ from its roots. These women have been cheapened in their search for mathematical equality with men. Equality is law, mathematical, abstract, universal, indifferent to conditions, circumstances and differences. Equity is love, mercy, understanding and sympathy ... allows for the consideration of details, appeals and even departs from fixed rules which the law has not yet embraced. In particular, it is the application of law to an individual person...[relies] on moral principles...is guided by an understanding of the motives of the individual. Equity is the ‘African way of life,’ the ‘foundation’ and the ‘ideal’ of African society.” (160).

⁴³ Ifi Amadiume, *Male daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1987), 194-95. Amadiume goes on to state, “As subsistence in the household and the subsistence economy as a whole are regarded as women’s responsibility, both legislative and executive rights over the markets should be regarded as ‘female affairs.’ This would give women effective power to check male politicians who monopolize the distribution and sale of food items, traditionally a female domain. The Women’s Council should retain judicial powers in the ‘very female affairs,’ notably those affecting women’s health and sanity.”

the fact that in Igbo grammatical construction of gender, a neuter particle is used in Igbo subject or object pronouns, so that no gender distinction is made in reference to males and females in writing or in speech. There is, therefore, no language or mental adjustment or confusion in references to a woman performing a typical male role.⁴⁴

Admittedly, Amadiume's suggestions have far reaching implications (which are neither the focus of this study nor can be elaborated on at this time) and her approach to the subject of women's influence and title-taking within Igbo society is quite different from Eboh's.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, their concerns are not mutually exclusive in that each identifies European colonization and early missionary influence as having contributed more substantially in suppressing the role and opportunity of Igbo women than that of traditional Igbo society.

As suggested earlier in this section, title-taking and the role of Christian men and women within Igbo society remains an important on-going issue within Igbo society and is central to debates involving syncretism and Igbo inculturation. Onuh and Eboh consider the inculturation of Christian faith and title-taking in Igbo society as a necessary step in developing a more equitable socio-political system within Igboland. Onuh, Eboh, and Amadiume all consider dialogue as the chief means forward.

INCULTURATION AND CONVERSION

DomNwachukwu's implication in chapter two that the failure to gain "genuine" conversions (among the Igbo) rests on the mission church's failure to use the Igbo Bible consistently as the basis for moral and spiritual conduct has not been sufficiently studied. Furthermore, I am not aware of any research that may adequately distinguish "genuine" from "superficial" conversion experiences. While his claim may be valid, perhaps

⁴⁴ Amadiume, *Male daughters, Female Husbands...*, 17.

⁴⁵ Amadiume advocates that "Nigerian women should make the ultimate demand for total equal opportunities for men and women and full representation in government as of right." (197)

identifying between such notions is too parochial. I would argue that Isichei is correct when she states “that conversion is an emotional or spiritual reality which cannot be properly discussed in the language of intellectual dialogue” while acknowledging that a focus on “the intellectual dimension, where analysis seems possible and appropriate, is not to deny the existence of other and less measurable dimensions.”⁴⁶ At issue in this paper is not whether conversion is “genuine” or “superficial,” rather it is to understand what fundamentally occurs when one “converts.”

Following Baum’s definition of conversion, I have argued that conversion identifies the acknowledgment of a new source of religious authority for one’s life and that such a transition rarely, if ever, involves radical transformation of (1) cosmological understanding or (2) cultural identity even when accompanied by a transformation of character or attitude. Understanding conversion in this manner is consistent with Igbo cosmology. However, both aspects require some “unpacking” before clarifying this claim.

First, in a technical sense, cosmology identifies the philosophical study and explanation of the nature of the universe. In this paper, I have nuanced the term more broadly to identify how a person might view the creation of the universe or explain the causes of good and evil. In other words, a person’s cosmology identifies their religious “world view” or their basic explanation of how the “world” operates—that is, how they perceive the world—and what religious or spiritual factors affect the outcome of daily experience. In a similar fashion, Robin Horton identifies cosmology as “a system of ideas

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Isichei, “Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Mission,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 3:2 (1970): 209-10.

about unobservable personal beings whose activities are alleged to underpin the events of the ordinary, everyday world.”⁴⁷

Since the foundation of Christian experience involves the “acceptance” of an “unobservable personal being,” conversion to Christianity affirms rather than undermines a traditional cosmology, such as that found among the Igbo. For example, Igbo conceptions of the existence of a “personal” Supreme God who is good, benevolent towards people, the creator of all things and the acceptance that the Supreme God has created “lesser spirits”—some good, some evil—who are above humans but below God and who, at times (at least in the biblical record) has profoundly affected daily experience are consistent with New Testament (NT) descriptions of God, angels, and demons.

Furthermore, the Igbo notion that the earthly and the heavenly “mirror” one another is conceptually consistent with the NT depiction of Jesus as the object of worship and reflection of God in human form (at least in the Johannine literature, Colossians, and Hebrews) and corollaries may also exist between Igbo understanding of *Chi* as the life-giving and empowering “spark of God” and the role of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels (e.g., Luke and John), Acts, and some of Paul’s writings (like 1 Corinthians). In fact, I would argue that Igbo cosmology heightens rather than reduces these notions when conversion to Christian faith occurs and may explain why nearly all African Independent Churches are more charismatic or “Pentecostal” in affiliation, are characteristically prophetic in nature, hold the Bible in high regard, stress the importance of prayer,

⁴⁷ See Horton, “African Conversion,” 101.

healing, and other miraculous powers, and, I might add, consider “power encounters” (demonstrations of the miraculous power of God) essential to evangelism.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, concepts common to Western Christianity—such as the inherent “sinfulness” of humanity, the concept or need for the Atonement, “heaven” as the goal of the Christian life, the Incarnation, and a strict adherence to Trinitarianism, to name a few—are in conflict with Igbo cosmology and cannot easily be resolved.

As I have already noted, Okorochoa identifies Igbo cosmology as the key to understanding the determining factor in religious conversion to Christianity. Sociological factors (i.e., Ifeka-Moller) and intellectual concerns (i.e., Horton) have some bearing on the process—but only “as catalysts.”⁴⁹ For Okorochoa, because the Igbo (and he would say all *homo religiosus Africanus*) cosmologically equate the goal of life—gaining success in the physical world—and the recognition of spiritual authority (power), conversion cannot be understood as an abandonment of one’s cosmology but as a change in spiritual authority. As a result, conversion among the Igbo does not “make sense,” like in might in many Western societies, as a philosophical or mental acquisition of a new ritual or belief system, or primarily as a challenge to be “saved from sin,” or even as “a decision to accept eternal life” in an eschatological sense. I would argue that the notion of “accepting Jesus as lord” is consistent with Igbo cosmological recognition of “true” power and involves a change of authority.

Within the context of understanding conversion, as Baum’s research among the Diola of Senegal demonstrates,

⁴⁸ See Ilogu’s evaluation of a “missed” opportunity for Samuel Crowther and the early missionary team during the Onitsha smallpox epidemic (1872-73) and the importance of “power encounters” as visual signs for Igbo evangelization, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 87-88.

⁴⁹ Okorochoa, “Religious Conversion in Africa,” 168.

A person's decision to adopt a new religion does not imply a complete break with the religious ideas of the past. In converting, new adherents accept a new source of religious authority but do not initially understand the full implications of the new teachings. *New concepts are often understood through the categories of experience sustained by their prior religious knowledge* [emphasis mine]. Only gradually can these deeper structures of thought be influenced by new religious experience. This persistence of pre-conversion modes of enquiry and explanation encourages the convert, where permitted, to establish links between the teachings and attitudes of his pre-conversion life and the demands of the new religion.⁵⁰

Building on Baum's foundation, I argue that a high degree of probability exists that a convert will "re-convert" and return to his or her former belief system when the terms of conversion require an abandonment of former ideas without sufficient time to, so to say, "connect the dots" by relating new religious ideas through prior religious understanding.⁵¹

Second, I have defined a person's culture as the social framework wherein an individual or group interprets the information or events of one's experiences. Their cultural identity is the interpretive framework in which they exist. As Baum observes, new converts often "see strong similarities between their old and new faiths and, while accepting a new religious authority, retains some sense of continuity with older views of *their* world (emphasis mine)."⁵² I maintain that "their world" involves two essentials: their basic cosmology and cultural identity. As a result, the new convert generally views the conversion experience as a fulfillment of the quest and purpose of the former religious authority and demonstrates this to be so because s/he seeks to answer relevant and cultural concerns from this new source of religious authority. The success or failure of this quest directly affects the nature, depth, and permanence of the conversion experience and is immediately relevant to the process of inculturation.

⁵⁰ Baum, "The Emergence of..." 394.

⁵¹ For field study analysis of this phenomenon, see Baum, "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity," 376-98; and Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, 75-89.

⁵² Baum, "The Emergence of..." 375.

FUTURE TRENDS

In the course of this analysis, I have demonstrated how issues involving syncretism and conversion have direct implications for an adequate understanding of the inculturation process. As demonstrated by the test case presented in chapter two, issues involving the importance of dialogue and Bible translation have emerged as important ingredients for a “successful” inculturation of the Christian Gospel. Dialogue must be founded upon mutual respect and Scripture must be available in the mother-tongue. Furthermore, awareness that all “Christianities” are syncretistic in one manner or another and an understanding that conversion does not imply a divorce from one’s worldview are critical for an adequate inculturation of the Christian Gospel.

In light of this theoretical analysis, the obvious question to ask is, “So what?” or “What relevance does inculturation theory and theology have today?” While reflecting on this query, Shorter states,

Inculturation, it is said, was appropriate to the 1960s in Africa and the Third World generally. It belonged essentially to the euphoria of political independence and the spirit of hopefulness and freedom that prevailed after the Second Vatican Council. However, it was quickly found to be irrelevant.⁵³

A contributing development of this “irrelevancy” is the ever increasing multicultural nature of the world in general and the Church in particular. The existence of “separate, well-defined, if not encapsulated, cultures” is more and more difficult to find.⁵⁴ Perhaps in some rural areas one might find a single “enclosed” society. However, technological advances in travel and communication along with ever-increasing economic interdependence will continue to produce a variety of integrated cultures such as is already

⁵³ Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 242.

⁵⁴ Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 245.

prevalent in urban areas. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that cultural integration will result in the demise of cultural identity altogether.

In urban cosmopolitan areas many individuals will continue to seek out, identify, and fellowship with others of similar background and interest. Local Christian communities have always constituted the matrix of the Christian religion at-large. And, as Shorter states, “ultimately, inculturation is a community project.”⁵⁵ This particular aspect will be address in more detail in the final chapter. Suffice it to say, local Christians communities will continue, as they always have, to develop appropriate means and ways of Christian expression that promote cultural identity and “make sense” within their world view.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 266.

⁵⁶ For future trends in analytical studies of inculturation theory, the reader should consider Hesselgrave and Rommen’s, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Model* (2000) and for ongoing practical (grass roots) developments, consult Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (1999).

FINAL COMMENTS

In this paper, I have endeavored to argue that the Christian Gospel is not limited by any one cultural expression and, as such, is trans-cultural. The Lukan narrative of the first-century Apostles, and the manner in which they understood the nature of the Gospel, demonstrates an early recognition of the trans-cultural aspect of this thesis. The Igbo experience serves as a constant reminder of the deep cultural desire to make Christianity “at home” within its society and to illustrate the trans-cultural property advocated in this thesis.

In the course of this study, I have defined culture as the social framework wherein an individual or group interprets the information or events of one’s experiences and conversion as a change of religious authority often while maintaining a traditional cosmology. Consequently, Christian experience cannot exist in any other form than as one blending with one’s culture and present cosmological understanding.

Furthermore, I have suggested that all Christian experience (“Christianities”)—in whatever cultural setting or historic period—is syncretistic in one manner or another. Even though much of the Church, both Protestant and Catholic, has moved markedly away from its mono-cultural worldview to one that recognizes a pluralism of cultures, the dilemma of such a thesis has been and will likely continue to be the complex difficulty of communicating a faith purported for all cultures through human vessels enamored with their own particular culture.

I have offered two metaphors to help explain the manner in which the Gospel functions within society. First, the Gospel is like a seed that is capable of growing in any

receptive soil. Second, the concept of musical transposition may provide the most striking analogy offered. A harmonically transposed song may render the song “un-singable” to countless others; nevertheless it remains the same song. This metaphor, along with that of the seed planted in soil, illustrates how the Christian message finds itself “at home” in any culture.

Finally, the inculturation of the Christian Gospel is not primarily a theoretical concern in an academic sense; rather it is a theological concern in a practical sense. As was demonstrated in the test case, the practical outcome of theory is “lived experience.” Even Lamin Sanneh observes that culture, “in being spiritual and intellectual, is at heart a theological matter.”¹

When anticipating theological concerns of any culture, two things must be remembered. First, it is important to remember that theological deliberation arises out of daily circumstances. Theology is a spiritual or religious response to a local concern. Meaningful theological debate and development is necessarily “occasional and local in character.”² The concerns of one ethnically and culturally bound people will be different from those of another ethnically and culturally bound people; the same would be true even within multi-ethnic environments. One group may very well transfer and adopt the theology of another, but other concepts may seem irrelevant.

Second, theology must be built upon subjective concerns. In other words, theological concerns are best determined from within, not from without. John Mbiti asserts,

We are tired of being advised. Let the Bible be our human adviser and the Holy Spirit our Divine Adviser....Some of us are getting tired of seeing all sorts of articles and references under the big

¹ Sanneh, *Religion and the Variety of Culture*, 50

² Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History...*, 10.

banner: AFRICAN THEOLOGY (or some similar wording). The substance of these articles often turns out to be advice on how African theology should be done, where it should be done, who should do it, what it should say, ad infinitum. Some of these self-made theological advisers, whether they be African or foreign, have little to produce beyond their generous advice; and others want to play the role of theological engineers who meticulously sabotage spontaneous theological output by African Christians.³

Mbiti's concern is that African theology must be conceived and explained according to an African agenda. This "truism" is obvious in practical terms when considered from one's own agenda but hardly obvious when considered beyond one's cultural perspective about another's agenda.

Some theological truths may enjoy a measure of universality while others simply will not. For example, the Nicene Creed (fourth century) has been passed down from one generation to another and from one culture to another. However, it doubtlessly possesses a different relevance for generations and geographies far removed from those who painstakingly penned it or may possess no practical relevance whatsoever. Alternatively, consider a theological concern among some African independent churches that have developed very strict rules for women regarding worship during the menstrual period. This concern, though irrelevant in most Western Christian circles, "is a major one for certain African Christians, just as it apparently was for the old Hebrews and it needs an answer, and an answer related to Christ."⁴ In order for theology to be functional,⁵ it must arise from local concerns. After all, "theology is about doing things, about things that

³ John Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4:3 (1980): 122.

⁴ Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis...", 101.

⁵ "Functional Theology," in the context of this paper, is my term to denote a theology that has immediate and practical consequences. Theology has a *function* in local society. It involves the process of understanding and putting into practice what the Bible "has to say" about a daily relevant need.

deeply affect the lives of...people.”⁶ Gordon Fee refers to this as “worthwhile theology.”⁷

Such a radical theory of theology challenges traditional notions of what it means to belong to a religious community claiming a “universal” truth regarding the way of salvation.⁸ According to L. Susan Bond, “The evangelistic mandate to take this gospel into all the world...means we have to forsake religious privilege in order to envision a world where there are no clean or unclean, no insiders and no outsiders, and where we all gather to share the earth’s bounty at a common table.”⁹

⁶ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 10.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 2. “The only worthwhile theology ... is one that is translated into life, [it is] ultimately a matter of lived-out faith.”

⁸ L. Susan Bond, “Acts 10:34-43,” *Interpretation* 56 (Jan 2002): 80.

⁹ Bond, “Acts 10:34-43,” 83.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham, K. C., ed., *Third World Theologies*. Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1958.
- _____. "Chi in Igbo Cosmology." In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 159-75. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975.
- Adeboye, Olufunke A. "Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria," in *Entreprises Religieuses Transnationales en Afrique de l'Ouest*, 439-65. Paris: Karthala, 2005.
- Amadiume, Ifi. *Male daughters, female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 1987
- Arinze, Francis A. *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*. Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1970.
- Baëta, C. G. *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some 'Spiritual' Churches*. London: SCM Press, 1962.
- Barrett, David B. *Schism and Renewal in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- _____. "The African Independent Churches: Developments 1968-70." *Afer* 12:2 (Apr 1970): 123-26.
- Baum, Robert M. "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 60:3 (1990): 370-397.
- Bediako, Kwame. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 1995.
- Bond, L. Susan. "Acts 10:34-43." *Interpretation* 56 (Jan 2002): 80-83.
- Chiromba, Frederick E. *Evangelization and Inculturation*. Gweru, Zimbabwe: 1989.
- Carpenter, Mary Yeo. "Familism and Ancestor Veneration: A Look at Chinese Funeral Rites." *Missiology: An International Review* 24:4 (Oct 1996): 503-17.
- Chukwukere, Ibe. "Chi in Igbo Religion and Thought: The God in Every Man." *Anthropos* 78:3-4 (1983): 519-534.

- Conzelmann, Hans. *Acts of the Apostles*. Translated by James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Cragg, Kenneth. "Conversation and Convertibility, with Special Reference to Muslims." In *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture-The Papers of the Lausanne Consultation on Gospel and Culture*, edited by John R. W. Stott and Robert T. Coote, 193-208. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Crowther, Samuel A. and John Christopher Taylor. *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859*. London: Church Missionary House, 1859.
- Dibelius, Martin. *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*. Edited by Heinrich Greeven. Translated by Mary Ling. New York: SCM, 1956.
- DomNwachukwu, Peter Nlemadim. *Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo in African University Studies*, Series VII, Vol. 210. New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2000.
- Droogers, Andre. "Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem." In *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, edited by Jerald Gort, Hendrick Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels, 7-25. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Dunne, H. *Generation of Giants*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962.
- Dyrness, William, A. *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Eboh, Simeon Onyewueke. *The Gospel of Christ and African Culture: Ozo Title Institution in Igboland (Nigeria)*. Munich: African University Studies, 1993.
- Eitel, Keith E. "Contextualization: Contrasting African Voices." *Criswell Theological Review* 2 (1988): 323-334.
- Engen, Charles Van, Dean S. Gilliland, Paul Pierson, eds. *The Good News of the Kingdom*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- _____. *Mission on the Way*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.
- _____. "The Uniqueness of Christ." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Third Edition, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 162-68. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999.

- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Acts of the Apostles*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
- Fung, Ronald Y. K. *The Epistle to the Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Gallagher, Louis J. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci 1583-1610*. New York: Random House, 1942.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Fontana Press, 1973.
- _____. *Islam Observed: Religious Developments in Morocco and Indonesia*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973.
- _____. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983.
- George, Timothy. *Galatians*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994.
- Gernet, Jacques. *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Gordon, David F. "The Jesus People: An Identity Synthesis." *Urban Life & Cult* 3 (1974): 159-78.
- Grimley, John B. and Gordon E. Robinson. *Church Growth in Central and Southern Nigeria*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966.
- Heibert, Paul G. "Cultural Relativism and Theological Absolutes." *Direction* 2:1 (Jan 1973): 2-6.
- Heibert, Paul G. and Eloise Heibert Meneses. *Incarnational Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995.
- Healey, Joseph and Donald Sybertz, eds. *Towards an African Narrative Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Henderson, Richard H. *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972.
- Hesselgrave, David J. and Edward Rommen. *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000.
- Horton, Robin. "African Conversion." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41:2 (Apr 1971): 85-101.
- _____. "On the Rationality of Conversion: Part 1." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 45:3 (1975): 219-36.

- _____. "On the Rationality of Conversion: Part 2." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 45:4 (1975): 373-99.
- _____. *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion, and Science*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Horton, Robin and J. D. Y. Peel, "Conversion and Confusion: A Rejoinder on Christianity in Eastern Nigeria." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 10:3 (1976): 481-98.
- Humphrey, Edith M. "Collision of Modes?—Vision and Determining Argument in Acts 10:1-11:18." *Semeia* 71 (1995): 65-84.
- Hung, Daniel M. "Mission Blockade: Ancestor Worship." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Jan 1983): 32-40.
- Idowu, E. Bolaji. *Towards an Indigenous Church*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- _____. *African Traditional Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973.
- Igenzoa, Andrew Olu. "Contextual Balancing of Scripture with Scripture: Scripture Union in Nigeria and Ghana." In *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories, and Trends*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, 292-310. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Ilogu, Edmund. "Christianity and Ibo Traditional Religion." *The International Review of Missions* 54 (1965): 335-342.
- _____. *Christianity and Igbo Culture*. New York: Nok Publishers, Ltd., 1974.
- Ifeka-Moller, Caroline. "White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 8:1 (1974): 55-72.
- Irvin, Dale T. and Scott W. Sunquist. *History of the World Christian Movement, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. "Ibo and Christian Beliefs: Some Aspects of a Theological Encounter." *African Affairs* 68:271 (Apr 1969): 121-34.
- _____. "Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Mission." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 3:2 (1970): 209-27.
- _____. *A History of the Igbo People*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.

- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- Langer, Susan K. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. New York: New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1956.
- Lam, Wing-hung. *Chinese Theology in Construction*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1983.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Martyn, J. Louis. *Galatians*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
- Matera, Frank J. *Galatians*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- Mbiti, John. "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology." *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4:3 (July 1980): 119-24.
- _____. "Response to the Article of John Kinney." *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3:2 (Apr 1979):
- Micheelsen, Arun. "I don't do systems: an interview with Clifford Geertz." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 14:1 (2002): 2-20.
- Minamiki, George. *The Chinese Rites Controversy from its Beginning to Modern Times*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985.
- Morgado, Joe Jr., "Paul in Jerusalem: A Comparison of His visits in Acts and Galatians." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (Mar 1994): 55-68.
- Mushanga, Tibamany mwene. "Social and Political Aspects of Violence in Africa." In *Social Problems in Africa: New Visions*, edited by Apollo Rwomire, 157-72. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001.
- Njoku, John E. Eberegbulam. *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes, and Survival*. UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 1990.
- Nkwoka, Anthony O. "Jesus as Eldest Brother, (Okpara): An Igbo Paradigm for Christology in African Context." *Asia Journal of Theology* 5:1 (1991): 87-103.
- _____. "The Bible in the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria." In *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories, and Trends*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, 326-335. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Nock, Arthur Darby. *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

- Nwabara, Samuel N. *Igboland: A Century of contact with Britain, 1860-1960*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press Inc., 1978.
- Nwankwo, Josephat Okanumee. *Ethical Challenges of Authority in a Pluralistic Society in European University Studies*, Series XXIII, Vol. 648. New York: Peter Lang, 1998.
- Nwoga, Donatus Ibe. *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought*. Nigeria: Hawk Press, 1984.
- Okafor, Clement. "Igbo Cosmology and the Parameters of Individual Accomplishments in *Things Fall Apart*." In *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, Volume 1, Omenka the Master Artist: Critical Perspectives on Achebe's Fiction*, edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2004.
- Okorochoa, Cyril C. *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*. Brookfield, VT: Gower Publishing Company, 1987.
- _____. "Religious Conversion in Africa: Its Missiological Implications," *Mission Studies* 9:2 (1992): 168-81.
- Okpala, Benneth. *Toasting the Bride: Memoirs of Milestones to Manhood*, 2nd Edition. Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing, 2003.
- Ogbuene, Chigekwu G. *The Concept of Man in Igbo Myths*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999.
- Ogden, Shubert M., ed., *Existence and Faith*. London: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers, 1961.
- Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Onuh, Charles Ok. *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992.
- Oosthuizen, G. C. *Theological Battleground in Asia and Africa*. New York: Humanities Press, 1972.
- Ottenberg, Phoebe V. "The Changing Economic Position of Women among the Afikpo Ibo" In *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, edited by William R. Basom and Melville J. Herskovits, 205-23. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959.
- Ottenberg, Simon. "Ibo Receptivity to Change." In *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, edited by William R. Basom and Melville J. Herskovits, 130-43. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959.

- Parratt, John. *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Parsons, Mikeal C. "Nothing Defiled AND Unclean: The Conjunction's Function in Acts 10:14." *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 27:3 (2000): 263-74
- Rambo, Lewis R. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- _____. "Theories of Conversion: Understanding and Interpreting Religious Change," *Social Compass* 46:3 (1999): 259-71.
- Ray, Benjamin C. *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.
- Rayan, Samuel. "A Reflection on Worship," In *Third World Theologies*. Edited by K. C. Abraham. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.
- Ro, Bong Rin, ed. *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*. Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985.
- Ronan, Charles E. and Bonnie B. C. Oh. *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.
- _____. "The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7:4 (Oct 1983): 165-71.
- _____. *Religion and the Variety of Culture*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996.
- _____. "Bible Translation and "Ethnic Mobilization in Africa." In *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert M. Fowler, Edith Blumhofer, and Fernando F. Segovia, 155-81. New York: T & T Clark International, 2004.
- Segal, Robert A. "Weber and Geertz on the Meaning of Religion." *Religion* 29 (1999): 61-71.
- Scott, J. Julius. "The Cornelius Incident in the Light of its Jewish Setting." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34:4 (Dec 1991): 475-484.

- Shepherd, W. C. "Conversion and Adhesion," in *Religious Change and Continuity: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Harry M. Johnson, 251-63. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979.
- Shelton, James B. "Epistemology and Authority in the Acts of the Apostles." *The Spirit & Church* 2:2 (2000): 231-47.
- Shorter, Aylward. *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977.
- _____. *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- Snow, David A. and Richard Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 167-90.
- Starkloff, Carl F. "Inculturation and Cultural Systems (Part 1)." *Theological Studies* 55 (March 1994): 66-81.
- _____. "Inculturation and Cultural Systems (Part 2)." *Theological Studies* 55:2 (June 1994): 274-92.
- Tang, Edmond. "East Asia." In *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, edited by John Parratt, 74-104. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Tenou, Tite. "Themes in African Theology of Mission." In *The Good New of the Kingdom*, edited by Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Thomas, John Christopher. "Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 57-77.
- Turner, Harold W. *History of an African Independent Church*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- _____. *African Independent Church II: The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord, Aladura*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Uchem, Rose N. *Overcoming women's subordination in the Igbo African culture and in the Catholic Church envisioning an inclusive theology with reference to women*. [S.l.]: Dissertation.com, 2001.
- Ukpong, Justin. "The Emergence of African Theologies." *Theological Studies*, 45 (1984): 501-36.
- _____. "Contextualizing Theological Education in West Africa." *African Christian Studies* 3:3 (1987): 59-75.

- _____. "Inculturation: A Major Challenge to the Church in Africa Today." *AFER* 38:5 (Oct 1996): 258-267.
- Uhalley, Stephen Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu. *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001.
- Wall, Robert W. "Reading the Bible from within Our Traditions: The 'Rule of Faith' in Theological Hermeneutics." In *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies & Systematic Theology*, edited by Joel B. Green and Max Turner, 88-107. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Walls, Andrew F. "The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture." *Missionalia* 10:3 (1982): 93-105.
- _____. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Weifan, Wang. "The Pattern and Pilgrimage of Chinese Theology." *Chinese Theological Review* 6 (1990): 30-54.
- _____. "Chinese Theology and its Cultural Sources." *Chinese Theological Review* 11:2 (1997): 76-84.
- _____. "Chinese Traditional Culture and its Influence on Chinese Theological Reflection." *Chinese Theological Review* 13 (1999): 8-18.
- Weifan, Wang and Ji Fengwen. "Forty Years of Chinese Christianity." *Chinese Theological Review* 8 (1993): 44-62.
- Whitlock, David B. "An Exposition of Acts 15:1-29." *Review & Exposition* 92:3 (1995): 375-78.
- Winter, Ralph D. and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Edition. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999.