



Human Dignity Stance of *Umunna* Solidarity in Igbo Traditional Society: A Challenge to African Christianity

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ABSTRACT

The fulcrum of social justice is the respect of human dignity. Before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) saw the light of the day in 1948, the pre-colonial Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria have already defined what constitutes the foundation of peaceable society. They invested the norms of human dignity on the *umunna solidarity*. *Umunna* is the assemblage of brethren born within an androgynous lineage. In this social arrangement, individuals are lost as persons without the community, hence their popular cliché, “*umunna* is power.” This social arrangement protects the individuals from being dehumanized. Here everyone who belongs to the *umunna* receives a uniform treatment, the king and the subjects alike. It is in this context that human rights and dignity become community property. However, this pristine social arrangement has been lost consequent upon the contact and interaction of Igbo people with Western Christianity. The overwhelming consequences have become individualism of persons resulting to the vitiation of human rights and dignity of persons. Thus after a critical considerations of the entire vista, this paper notices that Christianity, despite its long contact with the Igbo people, has not taken any deep root and as such

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may not be consulted in serious matters in Igbo life and existence. It, therefore, proffers African Christianity, among other traditional values of human dignity, the community living and social solidarity of *umunna* of the Igbo people as major ways that Christianity can become relevant in Africa and among Africans.

Keywords: Human dignity; Umunna solidarity; Igbo; traditional; society, Africa, Christianity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Igbo adage “*egbe bere ugo bere*” which means (live- and- let- live) says it all, about the Igbo values of justice and human dignity. The fundamental point here in the Igbo mentality is human person being acknowledged as the apex of God’s creation. The Igbo believes that by according human person rights and respect, God is also recognized in his essence. Rights and respect accorded to the human person is the fulcrum of social justice. The principle of “live – and – let- live,” is extended to ones mother, father, wife, or wives, husband, children, sisters/brothers, that make up a nuclear family. It further extends to two or more families related by descent on father side, in one line from a living or dead common ancestor called *umunna*. The onus of maintaining values of rights, respect and human dignity lies on *umunna* to which moral authority is invested.

Morality for the traditional Igbo person consists in both vertical and horizontal expression of “live – and – let – live.” Obedience to this principle connects a person and his/her god as well as dead ancestors. Hence for Ifeanyi [1] and scholars like Ejizu and Nwala, morality is among other things considered by the Igbos to be very essential for promotion of justice and enhancement of human dignity. In the combined social and moral arrangement of *umunna* solidarity, the rights and respect of the individuals are protected, as each person belonging to the *umunna* is guided in his/her actions. Describing the Igbo traditional morality of pre- colonial Nigeria under this arrangement, Tasie writes:

There existed laws, customs, and set forms of behaviours, observances and taboos which made up the moral code and ethics of a given community. Anti-social behaviours such as falsehood, adultery, incest, stealing, etc were followed by strict sanctions and grave consequences. The rebuke one received from elders, the financial and material implication of placatory and purificatory rites for offences against the gods, the fear of the pervasiveness of the

gods who see every-thing and who punish in the present life and the hereafter, and the fear of what happens to the individual after physical death (a fear which looms large in African religious thought) were major restraining influences on anti-social behaviours [2].

For Tasie [3] and for many, this was a glorious past for Nigerian and other African communities. It was a near ideal society in which everybody was his brother’s keeper. In the principle of *umunna* solidarity, covenants were kept, articles of trade displayed for sale at cross roads and by road sides were quite safe and almost everybody earned a living through legitimate means. In such living condition dignity of human person is much cherished. Human rights and respect are accorded to each person in his/her status in the community of *umunna*.

Many today would believe with Tasie that the golden era was shattered as it were by emergency of Christianity that detached the people from their traditional way of life. The result is the present ugly situation of injustice and utter disregard for human life and human person, giving rise to a general moral decadence and an existence of various ills and crimes such as rape, stealing, armed robbery, killings, kidnapping, cultism etc. The general loss of qualms of conscience and an utter absence of fear of God reflected by the foregoing become more worrisome when one thinks of in-road and growth made by Christianity in Igbo land.

Indeed the contemporary Igbo society is not bereft of preachers of religion. Like other societies of the continent of Africa religion is really a phenomenon. As Uche [4] submits, a causal walk through any street in any of the cities of Africa testifies to this. Tasie quoting another scholar, Harold W. Turner [5] paints a vivid picture of new religious movements thus:

It is in Black Africa that the largest concentration occurs, exceeding the combined total of the rest of the world. It has been estimated that there are some 10,000

or more such movements in Africa embracing perhaps ten million adherents [6].

For Uche [7], it is a big surprise that as the preachers of religion multiply in Arithmetic progression; evil and crime against justice and human dignity continue to multiply in geometric progression. Tasié sees it as an enigma, that a society would be so religious yet so morally depraved. There is, therefore, an obvious question: Could one accuse the imported religions into Africa to be responsible for the present negotiation or watering down of the innate religiosity of the people that gave rise to the cherished religious virtues of justice and respect for human dignity? This paper also attempts to respond to this question. It describes Igbo as a people and tribe of Nigeria. It illustrates *umunna* solidarity in Igbo traditional society. It critically evaluates the religious perception of a traditional Igbo person that is also found in *umunna* solidarity and projects it as both a challenge and a model to African Christianity. It proffers ways of possible reconciliation and harmonization of Igbo traditions with African religious perception of Christianity. The paper aims at provoking thought towards addressing what Nebechukwu calls “considerable loss of African dignity to colonialism” [8], by utilizing rich African heritage which includes high level religiosity seen in *umunna* solidarity.

2. THE IGBO PEOPLE AND THEIR WORLDVIEW

The Igbo as a word generally refers to the territory, language and people of Southeastern Nigeria, West Africa. As a people they constitute one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, numbering about thirty five million Chukwu [9]. In the present Nigerian political and administrative structure, they are found in seven states, comprising five which are almost completely Igbos namely: Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo; and two others namely: Delta and Rivers.

The Igbos are shrewd, undaunted and determined in nature and according to Uwalaka [10] were the leading lights in the struggle for the country's independence, and have so far played heroic and prominent roles in national development. The Igbo traditional structure consists of a number of nuclear families making up the *umunna*, three or more of which form the village group. According to Chukwu [11] in a

traditional Igbo society members of these groups share a common market place, a common deity, and common ancestral cults. They perceive themselves as descending from a common ancestor or group of ancestors. Authority in the village group was vested in a common lineage heads, influential and wealthy men and women, who command respect and obedience from the members of *umunna*.

The Igbo worldview is the same with that of other ethnic groups in the sub-Sahara region of Africa, which is basically a religious one. Studies done by cultural anthropologists and sociologists have shown that the worldviews are an amalgamation of their cosmology and ontology. For Chukwu the elements of these worldviews that pervade the entire spectrum of the region include:

The meaning of life, death and the hereafter; creation; initiation; values; idioms, and proverbs; a deep sense of religiosity; respect for the sacred; belief in Supreme being; ancestor veneration; extended family system; etc [12].

Chukwu goes on to support scholars like Uchendu [13] that Igbo worldview holds that in the cosmological order, there is one world divided into two spheres: the world populated by all created beings both animate and inanimate, and the invisible world, the dwelling of the creator, deities, disembodied and malignant spirits, and the ancestors. For Chukwu and Uchendu the invisible world is the future abode of the living after their earthly lives are over. Though there are two spheres (physical / visible and spiritual/ invisible) in the world, there is an inseparable continuum between the two spheres by a constant interaction and exchange between the inhabitants of the “two worlds.”

Although for Chukwu the cosmo- ontology that pervades the world of Igbo people and their philosophy of life are branded by some western scholars as primitive, uncritical, and often located in the realm of mythology, nevertheless, such philosophy and worldview continue to exert considerable influence on the life of the Igbo people. Chukwu finally outlines a recap of the Igbo worldview thus:

Belief in a complex spider – web- like universe in which all beings are linked together,
Continuity of interactions of all visible and invisible beings,

Interactions that could lead to positive or negative results,

The Igbo people also hold tenaciously to the existence of God, described in western terminology as the prime mover or the uncaused cause,

The Supreme Being or God does not exist in isolation from other gods,

The Supreme Being is more transcendent than immanent; however, God's immanence is extrapolated from the activities and functions of the other pantheons,

The Igbo world is hierarchically structured, but this structure does not undermine the egalitarian nature of human beings who are at the centre of the intricate web of the universe [14].

Madu [15], who states that certain characteristic features can be predicated of the Igbos, insists that Igbo world view is basically a religious one. To him the Igbo social structure embraces a net work of relationships. Religion, law, justice and family structure are so inter woven with one another that it is difficult to speak of one without mentioning the others. This may be due to the fact that there is no sharp demarcation between the spiritual and the physical universe in Igbo worldview. Madu is in agreement with Ejizu [16] that the Igbo have a sense of community in which man lives in relationship with dead members, the unborn and other spiritual beings. They also have a sense of enhancement of the human life, for human life is believed to be the prime value, and every other thing is expected to serve its realization. Obi [17] discovers too that the relation of life (*ndu*) is over and above all, on the cultural value of people of the community. He states that regardless of challenges "Igbo culture celebrates, cherishes, and nurtures *ndu* (life)" [18].

3. UMUNNA SOLIDARITY IN IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIETY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Central to the Igbo ontology is the complex interrelatedness of all human beings. A person is born into a vast network of extended family. The saying "it takes a village to raise a child" is a dictum among the Igbo people of the Eastern Nigeria in particular Africa in general. This philosophy undergirds the vast network of interrelatedness. Everybody is related to everybody in one form or the other. Life is lived communally and in solidarity with others, while individualism is abhorred. Igbo ontology basically

defines human person in terms of relationships and belongingness [18].

For the Igbos in various aspects of relationships and belongingness human persons live in solidarity with one another. Strongest of these is *umunna* solidarity. *Umunna* is derived from two words *umu* (children) and *nná* (father). *Prima facie umunna* literary means children of the same father [19]. Its corollary *umunne*, literally means children of the same mother. *Umunna* and *umunne* could actually be used in the same sense referring to children who belong to the same father or mother. According to Chukwu the two terms can also refer to a complex of inter-relationship of people who share common ancestors or lineage. They can also be used interchangeably to denote the same group of people. The context in which each is used clarifies its meaning. Igbo communities that are patrilineal emphasize *umunna*, while *umunne* is emphasized by matrilineal ones. Since most Igbo societies are patrilineal *umunna* is more common and generally used.

Citing Uchendu [20] Chukwu also points out that *umunna / umunne* is widely used among the Igbos to denote kindred and inter-relatedness. It is impossible to think of an Igbo person not having an *umunna*. The belief in common ancestors as the source of their being underpins participation in the *umunna / umunne* family structure. There is no limit to the size of *umunna / umunne*. The number of nuclear families that constitute an *umunna* and the population of an *umunna* vary. Qualification for *umunna* membership is simply birth into a nuclear family that constitutes *umunna*. Marriage into a nuclear family also qualifies a woman as member of the *umunna the nuclear family belongs to*. However, actually membership is not automatic as one acquires it by initiation or simple registration. Once acquired, the membership becomes permanent unless one is ostracized from the community for breaking certain taboos of the community, committing certain sins considered grave in the community, or disobeying important laws or orders of the community. Ostracization of a member of *umunna* is never permanent as that is lifted once a given condition is fulfilled and adequate remorse and repentance shown. The various attributes of membership of *umunna* very well portrays Igbo value of human dignity; one can identify in them respect for fundamental human rights, human liberty and freedom, justice, free will, personal judgment etc. Chukwu further reveals that in a traditional Igbo community, communality or belongingness

predicates the concept of *umunna*. The Igbo find solidarity in relating to their *umunna*. In his own words:

Consequently, the Igbos recall the spirit of *umunna* whenever they find themselves outside their natural *umunna*, by forming another community. The Igbos do this by first identifying with those who speak the same language as them, even if they do not belong to the same community [21].

In *umunna* belongingness status of each person in the society is duly appreciated and recognized, yet all is given equal treatment. Every person is important and recognized as such. All rights of *umunna* membership are accorded each person. Such rights include: Rights to attend *umunna* meeting; rights to speak one's mind and hold opinion in furthering of *umunna*; rights to lay complaint against a fellow member of *umunna* or a non – member in *umunna* meeting and right to a fair hearing in all complaints whether from or against one. Meetings of *umunna* are usually summoned by a special dirge (*ekwe*) whose sound is largely attended to.

Umunna is in itself an extended family that includes people who share past, present and future together. Its promotion of human interpersonal relations makes a clear projection of human dignity. Oraegbunam [22] notes sexuality as the drive for human interpersonal relations among Igbo people. For him a principal element of human sexuality is the yearning for relations with the other. He is of opinion that this yearning gives rise to human relationship which is about sharing and unity. He further argues that human beings and relation is primary in purpose, with regard to sexuality than procreation among the Igbo people. By implication then, sexuality that summons man to both interpersonal and intrapersonal growth is a good ground for human dignity so also is *umunna* solidarity.

From Ifeanyi's [23] point of view, the means by which Igbos generally hope to achieve the good life has been rightly divided by Nwala [24] into two, namely, material and non-material means. The material means include: Such concrete acts perceptible to the external senses, as hard working, good eating and drinking, good housing and proper dressing, etc. The non- material means, on the other hand include; the metaphysical and general moral values highly cherished by the traditional Igbo person. Ifeanyi quoted Nwala thus:

The metaphysical conditions relate to fundamental beliefs of the community concerning the nature of the universe, the relationship of the various human and natural forces and responsibilities of every member of the community towards the cosmological and ontological order [25].

Consequently, in Igbo tradition of *umunna* solidarity much as virtue of charity or mutual help is advocated and sustained as a necessary and important attitude of the community for the interest of its weak or poor members, care is taken to ensure that no individual is humiliated or reduced to the degraded level of living on charity of other. Rather, the poor is compelled and assisted to work in whatever degree for means of livelihood. In Igbo traditional community bodily handicapped persons are not left to be street beggars. They are taken to become the responsibilities of their immediate nuclear families that have to seek the assistance of the extended families or kindred.

In Igbo principle of "egbe-bere-ugo-bere" (live-and- let-live) a high sense of justice is maintained. According to Ifeanyi the Igbos generally express what justice demands with such sayings as *onye emegbula ibe ya* (let no one cheat his neighbor). He agrees with Arinze that justice can be described as "one of the main pillars of Igbo morality" [26] and further insists that for the Igbos, it is the basic virtue that guides man's relationship with his neighbours as well as with the transcendent beings. The Igbo people believe that each person or god should be allowed to enjoy his/her rights and be given his/her due. For only in this way could a person be enabled to win a good life both here on earth and hereafter. Ifeanyi also identifies cooperation and hospitality as other moral principles that are highly esteemed by the Igbos as profitable in maintaining and enhancing human life. These two moral principles are among the vital points in *umunna* solidarity. A popular Igbo adage, "when the right hand washes the left hand and the left hand washes the right hand, the two will be clean" expresses fully the Igbo value of cooperation as a moral principle of dignified life. This is why Ilogu [27] alongside Ifeanyi's thought notes Igbo hospitality as mainly directed to strangers and travelers, as a clear part of *umunna* solidarity of traditional Igbo society. The Igbo sees a brother/sister around his/her house as a guest to be shown hospitality. It is a common custom in Igbo land to invite an *umunna* member to a meal to come and share with

him/her whatever that is available. The adage “*Onye nzuzu bu onye n’ amaghi na nwanne ya bu onye obia*” (it is a foolish man that does not know that his brother/sister is a guest) is a common one among the Igbos. The Igbo custom is such that a poor and hungry member of *umunna* is not abandoned to take to stealing in order to live, guiding against violence and humiliation. The practice of care and hospitality in *umunna* solidarity is a manifest expression of traditional Igbo value of human dignity.

4. RELIGION FOR TRADITIONAL IGBO PERSON

For a traditional Igbo person religion is first and foremost a personal thing connecting his health and life, his entire world views as well as his gods/God. Huntingford illustrates this in his anthropological study of North-East Africa, when he gives a common formula of prayer among the Arusi tribe in Ethiopia thus “O God (YaWaq) you have given me a good day, give me a good night....., take from me all sickness and ill-luck, be propitious to me” [28]. Over and above one supreme God, a traditional African has personal God/gods that must be worshipped and appeased. For Tasie [29] this instills fear in him. As a follow up to the personal aspect of religion for a traditional African, Ikwuagwu, however, thinks that there are no elements of formal dogma or theology or theologians in African Traditional Religion that makes it personal to its adherents when he states that traditional religion:

Has no missionaries and does not proselytize to convert others. There is no element of religious fanaticism, “crusades” or “Holy Wars” that result in killing follow human beings in the name of religion, religious conversion or defense of one’s faiths. He adds that in the African Traditional Religion people are born into it, not converted [30].

That religion is first and foremost a personal thing doesn’t entirely exclude the community. In fact, as Ikwuagwu would agree, it is a characteristic of Traditional Religion to be community oriented. The Traditional Igbo practices his religion in communion with the community in which he lives [31]. The individual does not practice his religion in isolation, but rather in and with the community.

For a traditional African, religion is part and parcel of his life. He was born hail and healthy because a certain dead person that reincarnated

in him lived well while alive on earth. He is kept alive because the gods connected with his family and community is at peace with them. His progress all through depends on how much he escapes the anger and victimization of the gods, as well as wickedness of evil people around him. Religion is, therefore, important to him not just for the attainment of heaven or hell when he dies but for the welfare and sustenance of his earthly life. Morality for him too is strictly observed on that line. Certain sins are directly against the earth goddess and are referred to as “*Nso Ala*”. If one is unrepentant when he commits any sin, he faces the risk of being uprooted from the earth. To live morally keeps one at peace with the earth goddess (*A/la*). Material goods and values lacked by a person in this present earth can be adequately compensated in the next world at his reincarnation. One, therefore, needs to live morally even in view of the next life.

For a traditional African man religion is a practical thing involving him, his life and his environment. If he is going to toilet in the morning and falls down injuring himself he will think some spiritual power must have been responsible for it. If he has to pray, he prays spontaneously and directly to a god/God. No one teaches him the best way to pray and the wordings to use. In the traditional religion, even the existence of god is perceived in a practical sense. Supporting this Ikwuagwu submits that:

In the African traditional life there are no atheists. Only a fool would doubt or negate the existence of God, therefore, would refuse to worship him. The existence of a “strange fellow” as God is a matter that concerns not only the individual, but also the entire community. In the African Traditional Religion no one shows a child the Supreme Being. The child learns of it in the early stages of his life [32].

In a moment of joy, the birth of a child into a family for instance, God is thought of as the ultimate cause of the joy. For the life of the child to be sustained God is also acknowledged. The mother of this child having to be physically taken care of with all the necessary health-care measures is not enough for a traditional Igbo man. Something has to be done for the child to obtain the protection of God, gods or the ancestor/ ancestors. In a moment of sorrow, the death of a close one for instance, a god or an ancestor is believed to have caused it. During the burial care and precautions are taken to ensure

another death may not occur. No perspective of living is taken for granted.

For a traditional African, religion is much attached to morality; the two concepts themselves being attached to life. Agreeing with this Ifeanyi opines that the Africans believe that on creating man God had equipped him with a special faculty for moral life. For him this “faculty technically known as conscience” [33] is believed by the Africans to be innate in man guiding him and informing his ethical life. For him too, a Traditional African, therefore, religion is very much tied to morality such that to express disregard for morality in any form at all and for whatever reason is generally considered atrocious and punishable by the deities.

5. UMUNNA SOLIDARITY IN IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIETY: A CHALLENGE TO AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

The core point in *umunna* solidarity for the Igbos is the acknowledgement of belonging to a common ancestors or lineage. The Igbo people have a good sense of tracing their belongingness. Nuclear families in kindred know their history through which they trace their age positions. Kindred making up a village also know the degree of their relatedness. In marriages this knowledge of history is made use of to ensure sanity and legitimacy. Knowledge of history too influences the Igbos’ worship of gods. Each segment of *umunna* of a village from its history identifies idol-god/gods its members worship. *umunna* solidarity helps the Igbos to keep abreast with history in all facets of life; social, economic and spiritual. To them, as for Onuigbo [34] history is important as it provides unique perspective in human behaviours. In Christianity salvation begins with history and salvation history forms the basis of Christian faith. Inability to be influenced by this history is a big challenge to African Christians.

Basic to Igbo worldview is that people relate to spiritual beings in their surroundings, and these spirits wield extraordinary power over human beings. The first among them is God, then the ancestors, and other spirits which cause both good and evil. As “world view underlies the life any cultural or racial group leads, whether such a group is aware of it or not” Nebechukwu [35] religion, therefore, impacts much to Igbo traditional value of human dignity reflected in *umunna* solidarity. A traditional Igbo man/

woman leads his/ her daily life in fear and acknowledgement of a supreme being God the creator together with lesser gods (deities), the ancestors and the other spirits.

A traditional Igbo man vows his application of the principle of “live-and –let live” in his daily life thus professing his respect for the value of justice and human dignity. His confidence in the protection of God/gods, the ancestors and other spirits spring from this. The Igbo practical knowledge (faith) and morality that regulate human relationship with God, with the nature and with one another Odoemena [36] is a big factor in the traditional African value for human dignity. A traditional Igbo allows this practical knowledge to control, regulate and guide his/ her behaviour towards his/her neighbour.

A traditional African believes that whatever happens in human world has a correlation in the spiritual World. This is partly why he is always conscious of his religiosity, as whether alive or dead its benefits are assured. For Nworie [37] this is also part of the reasons why there is an issue in one receiving a befitting burial, and why much premium is laid on that. This certainly links up with his value for human dignity. It is also part of his seeking communion with the spiritual world while still here in this material world. He reckons that human life is something that transcends this world and, therefore, sacred. Ifeanyi seems to have put it more succinctly when he writes:

It is also remarkable that to the Igbo *ndu* (life) is understood to be a never-ending reality. It is understood as “endless”, and so, continuing even after it has been terminated on earth by physical death. They believe however, that the nature of each person’s life after death is dependent on how he had lived on earth before death [38].

The *umunna* solidarity of Igbo traditional society reveals the Africans’ deep sense of religion succinctly brought out by Ikwuagwu when he writes:

Religion, more than anything else, colours the Africans’ empirical participation in the universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. This is the philosophical understanding that underlines African myths, proverbs, oral traditions, symbolic values, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, ethics and social relationships [39].

When both Elechi Amadi and George Tasie hold that Christianity does not have the same powerful hold on people as African Traditional Religion, especially on its use as ethical instrument not as effective, one may begin to question the acclaimed superiority of Christianity as a religion. Similarly, when Idowu accuses Christianity of miscarriage of purpose, and “replacing the old fear of the divinities with the relieving but harmful notion of a God who is ready to forgive perhaps even more than man is prone to sin,” the God in whom “goodness and severity, have been put asunder” [40], one may also begin to suspect Christianity. Since religion to the Igbos is both personal and community affairs, as Obama would say “to serve as the centre of the community’s political, economic and social as well as spiritual life” [41], such fear-inspiring actions towards the welfare of the community exhibited in *umunna* solidarity cannot be but something positive in terms of religion.

The Africans have a sense of value and awe for nature. This is evident in their attentive observation and wonder of natural phenomena like life cycles, birth, growth, death, transience of being, and man’s limitation by sickness. Worthy of note too are their experience of and relationship to land and the skies; to hills, mountains, thick forest, big trees, rivers, wild animals, moon, stars and sun. All these they attribute to the causative will and powerful authority of a supreme being God (*Chukwu*) who is also the creator of human being. All these phenomena and forces of nature together with the minor gods and the spirits of their dead ancestors, under the control of all powerful God the creator, exert an uncontrollable fear to the Igbo people who believe their life is controlled by this supreme God and his forces. Accordingly they are guided by these forces in their actions including *umunna* solidarity.

There are supernatural, transcendental, divine, mystifying and spiritual realities in Christian religion: guardian Angel, other Angels, the Holy Spirit, Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints whose existence, relationship and interference in Christian living are known to the Christians. The level of moral depravity in the present day society of enormous Christian presence, indicates that these together with the experiential knowledge of the incarnate word of God Jesus Christ, do not move the Igbo Christians [Here African Christians are those who claimed to have been converted to Christian faith and have also abandoned the African traditional way of

living/African traditional culture] towards the same fear of similar realities by the traditional Africans adherents of African Traditional Religion. What is at stake here is actually the level of belief. Otherwise if awful nature and natural phenomena, coupled with belief in ancestral spirits and deities surrounding supreme God can instill fears how much more could these much higher realities in the Christian context, to the people of the same mentality and background. Even the early missionaries to Africa saw and presented these Christian religious realities as much, powerful, awful and mysterious. It is on this point that Mbefo [42] agreeing with Asiegbu [43] states that these “missionaries saw their work of evangelization in terms of an army campaign against the ‘citadel of Satan’”. In themselves the missionaries exhibited a manifest belief of presenting a worship of a supreme God accompanied with subordinate deified realities imbued with power, awe, mystery and wonder far much greater than whatever the traditional African would ever believe in. Mbefo concretizes his view by pointing to an intimidating statue “installed by the missionaries at the Ozubulu Church” [44].

Another big challenge that the African Traditional Religion has over Christianity for the Igbos is in the area of morality. Not believing in the “theory of apocalyptic eschatology when the present heavens and the present earth will pass away and there will be a new heaven and a new earth” (Madubuko [45], the traditional Africans have a different religious aspiration from the adherents of some World religions. According to Madubuko this is to be “harmoniously related to the beings of various realms of the cosmos to be in tune with the world” [46]. In order to maintain this harmonious relationship, religion to a traditional African is very much integrated with morality. For Madubuko, the traditional Africans have no illusion that the beings of their spiritual World, especially the Supreme Being and the “major deities” cannot be deceived. Rather, they are aware that these beings see and judge with objectivity. Conscious of divine justice the traditional Africans work towards successful living through scrupulous observance of various taboos, laws and customs handed down by ancestors. A big challenge to African Christians indeed one must agree is this. The moral philosophy to be noted here is that the attainment of harmonious relationship with the gods and ancestors guarantees one the fortitude to attain old age, dying peacefully to stay with ones ancestors and finally reincarnate to another

life. Note that if these ideas can influence and instill into traditional Africans a positive moral living, then how much more should a religious aspiration that aims at earning a treasure that "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man" (1C or. 2:9 cf. Is. 64:3) what God has prepared, motivate African Christians even to a greater positive morality. Here Nzomiwu observes in many African communities, "a conscious sense of responsibility to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the community of faith, which has arisen in response to this Gospel" [47] but decries its non-rootedness in African soil due to its nature of presentation to the African man by the early evangelizers.

6. CONCLUSION

President, Barack Obama's assertion may be apt here to drawing a conclusion of this work as he avers, by the time the sixties rolled around, many mainstream Protestant and Catholic leaders had concluded that if American religious institutions were to survive, they would have to make themselves "relevant" to changing times by accommodating church doctrine to science, and by articulating a social gospel that addressed the material issues of economic inequality, racism, sexism and American militarism [48].

Here certain salient points emerge:

- The first is that religion has the tendency to be subjective at least in its definition, must reflect objectivity in its practice.
- The second point is that religion must impact positively on the society in its changing mood.
- The third is that religion must respond to the challenges of the society.
- The fourth is that religion must engender value for justice and human dignity.

All these four points have to be noted and addressed if a religion must achieve its aim. Critical analysis of African Christianity as a religion, as it is today, reflects manifest subjectivity in its theory and practice. In African society Christianity "has become a formidable force" [49], yet all forms of atrocities and abominations of man's inhumanity to man are being witnessed. This cast aspersion to the genuineness of the faith to the people. It may, Although it seems that for an African Christian, centrality of Jesus in all aspects of living is not certain, but this is definitely a big challenge to

therefore, be noted, though with regrets that Christianity as a religion has not sufficiently engendered in the Africans the value of justice and human dignity.

Thunderous sounds are heard from all corners of villages and cities; form of prayers, worship and preaching on daily basis; people spent time and money to travel long distances in search of a deeper spiritual experiences; series of strategies are explored by multitude of members of Christian denominations in form of dissemination of information, creation of awareness and sensitization aimed at "packaging and selling out" ones denomination to attract more adherents; imposing, magnificent, and well-architectural designed structures of Christian places of worship are seen in many cities. All these are encouraging signs and manifestations of ever growing Christianity. They are within the frame of the doctrine and teaching of Christianity too. But because they have not reflected a sufficient objectivity in the practice of religion, they have not helped to engender the quest for value of brotherhood, love, justice and human dignity in the society.

Much as no one may rightly deny the ritualistic nature of African (Igbo) Traditional Religion, nor refuse to accept the superiority of Christianity, it is good to acknowledge, appreciate and recommend the high level of religiosity in the latter evidenced by the value of love, brotherhood and human dignity of its adherents. Today, there is much talk about enculturation. This is why the observation of Obijiaku [50] that it is a welcome development for the African Christianity but it has to be undertaken in a sound theological manner that will show thorough coalesce of the African and Christian traditions should be noted. Obijiaku further submits that this "will help to fix the perceived ambivalent stance of many Christians in Africa towards the sacrament of reconciliation" [51]. Part of this enculturation is to emulate the rich religiosity of the traditional African people. Ogar [52] also sees it as an opportunity for the African churches to have engagement in enculturation that will ensure that the African followers of Christ enter more deeply into the gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African cultural values given its high human dignity stance as *umunna* solidarity of traditional Igbo society, therefore, stand as the way forward. his/ her morality and entire religiosity. This is why Kanu [53] thinks that the challenge can be tackled by a theological construction of images of

Christ by the African theologians. It is certain that the problem is not the images of Christ as presented to the African Christians, but their personal faith in these images. African Christianity has to rise to the challenge of a high level of objectivity in the religion's practice of its adherents. The case of this way today and the other tomorrow does not reflect a deep religious faith. It must learn and master the religious life and teaching of Christianity's founder, Jesus Christ, as handed down by the early followers. The present African Christianity calls for a new orientation and a re-appraisal of its pastoral priorities and strategies towards a more objectivity.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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