



CULTURAL DYNAMICS: THE LEGACIES **OF** **ARCHBISHOP A.K. OBIEFUNA**

Editor
B. A. C. Obiefuna

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PREFACE

“Our Culture is our Identity” is the title of a pamphlet written by Chinedum E. Ofomata, an Enugu based Igbo scholar and publisher. That title is the summary of what culture is to a people. Every person is born into a community, and every community is bonded by culture. A person is a person because he is a product of culture. It is culture that defines one’s perception of reality and the world around. Cultural patterning shapes the thinking, behaviour, and attitudes. It develops values. It establishes socialization processes unto understanding the sources of life and death and after death; human relations and interactions with the spirit world; understanding of, and attitude to, work and implements of work, suffering and healing, marriage and childrearing, peers and elders, totems and taboos (especially incest), education, trade, political system, myths, rituals and symbols, and the issues of punishment and reward. From this, the simple presentation of culture as a people’s way of life comes to fore. What it means is that a people without culture is unthinkable. A person that denies his cultural origin is relatively psychotic. Cultures are known primarily by language, name, dressing, and attitude. For instance, to refuse to speak one’s vernacular, example, Igbo, is a denial of one’s culture.

It is not hidden that Christianity is in tension with Igbo culture. The reason is that it has been difficult for people to make the clear differentiation between Igbo culture and Igbo Indigenous Religion (IIR). Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna, the pioneer Bishop of the Catholic diocese of Awka is very much knowledgeable in this and tries to ensure appreciable integration of Christianity into Igbo culture and Igbo culture into Christianity. Religion makes culture to have force but religion is not culture, they are not equal in dimensions. They are separable if only their specific contents are known. That is the function of religious leaders, especially now that all are Igbo. They should patiently study the two and guide the people aright. That is what A. K. Obiefuna did. His pastoral letters testify to this. Examples are: *No more Anonymous Christians, The Church and Culture; A Case Study in Awka, Idolatry in a Century Old Faith*, and *Sunday is our Weekly Easter*.

It is to contribute to clarifying the relationship between religion and culture and, in particular, the relationship between Igbo culture and Christianity that this volume is prepared. Because Archbishop A. K.

Obiefuna is the foundation Bishop of Awka and lays emphasis on the marriage between Igbo culture and Christianity, as his successors are equally doing, that the teaching priests of the diocese thought it wise to have Memorial Lectures in honour the Archbishop. Since he is deeply concerned with culture, the maiden Memorial Lecture addresses issues of culture and the changes that go with it. That is why the title of the book in your hand is, **CULTURAL DYNAMISM: THE LEGACIES OF ARCHBISHOP A. K. OBIEFUNA.**

I wish to unequivocally express our gratitude to His Excellency, Most Rev. Dr. Paulinus Chukwuemeka Ezeokafor, the Catholic Bishop of Awka, for his unalloyed support and encouragement for this Lecture. He did not hesitate to give approval when the idea was presented to him. His support was total that he became part of the publicity for the event.

I wish to thank my colleagues in the teaching ministry in the secular tertiary institutions for their wonderful cooperation. Do keep up the spirit. In a special way, I thank the contributors to this volume. I imagine the stress. The good Lord will reward you abundantly. Fr Dan Onuorah deserves to be mentioned. It is not only that he is not from our diocese but also his contribution to the volume gives colour from Oraukwu end. I thank Rev. Fr. Dr. Kenny Udumka, CSSp, Mr and Mrs Buchi Obiefuna and Mr. and Mrs. Francis Nwachukwu for their encouragement.

My appeal is that we pick as many copies as possible for diocesan libraries, parish libraries, seminary libraries, personal use, and for gifts. What you read here will agitate your mind for more questions which answers will contribute to more insights into the way out of the tension between culture and Christianity in Igboland. That is a major way to address new paganism in our time. That is the solution to syncretism. That is the foundation for authentic Christianization of Igbo culture.

B. A. C. Obiefuna.

**ARCHBISHOP A. K. OBIEFUNA:
THE DYNAMICS OF CHURCH AND IGBO CULTURE**

Hyacinth Eme Ichoku

Preambles:

The advertised topic for this paper is *Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna: The Dynamics of the Church and Culture*. I believe the framers of the topic intend a discourse on Obiefuna's approach in the changing interaction between Church and Culture in Igbo land where the late Archbishop was an outstanding Church minister and a crusader for the faith. It is important to remember, however, that during his episcopacy in Awka diocese (1978 to 1992) and during his reign as the Archbishop of Onitsha and the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha (1995 – 2011) Obiefuna was confronted with many culture-faith conflicts arising from traditional religionists and even more from those who profess the Christian faith but were deep in traditional religious and cultural practices.

These practices involved commitments to traditional religious rites and beliefs that were incompatible with the Christian faith. They still exist like stumps rooted in the fertile soil of Igbo cosmology and anthropology and have not been eradicated with Christian evangelization even after over a century. While much of Igbo land has been converted to Christianity (or so it seems) especially in rural areas, we still find the trappings of the Christian beliefs and practices merely superimposed on patterns of pre-Christian superstitions and beliefs. In many ways these traditional beliefs still provide the Igbo man with an understanding of his existential needs. It is to this that they return in times of crises and existential needs both material and psychic. It also sometimes serves as a demonstration of their "belongingness" even among the elites. Thus in spite of western influences, education, and great efforts of Christian missionaries, many Igbo people still look at their tradition for the explanation of the metaphysical.

Dealing with these traditional religious practices particularly when some elites of the church were deeply involved in their practices and promotion could challenge even the most ardent apostle of the Christian faith. Such was the challenge that Arch Bishop AK Obiefuna faced during his episcopacy years.

However, this topic speaks not just to Archbishop Obiefuna's fundamental theological and existential understanding, orientation, and practical interpretation of issues arising from interface between faith and culture in Igbo land under his episcopal ministry in Awka and Onitsha Archdiocese, but more broadly to the Igbo fundamental paradoxical tendency to quick and spontaneous adaptation and yet resistance to new cultural experiences, particularly their encounter with colonialism and the Christian faith. Archbishop Obiefuna in the dynamics of Church and Culture provides a window to interrogate the broader issue of Igbo response in encounter with other peoples and cultures. In other words, this fundamental Igbo response to the Christian faith whether in acceptance or resistance is not an isolated response from their fundamental attitude in response to changes in their other spheres of life including changes in cultural, political, legal, social, economic structures in their encounter with other groups. Why did the hero, Okonkwo, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* commit suicide? It was a suicidal resistance to a new order brought upon his community by the white man, and in defense of the tradition of his people. Even today, we still see this suicide tendency in the Igbo response to the Nigerian questions: whether Nigeria should be or not. The whole idea of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra, IPOB, is, for example, a suicidal resistance to an order that has willy-nilly come to be. So the topic speaks also to the Igbo fundamental orientation to continuity and change.

Perhaps, the key message of *Things Fall Apart* which magnificently mirrors the character of the Igbo man, is that change can be devastating. It comes with conflicts and tensions. Colonial rule and Christianity introduced fundamental changes in the life of the Igbo people and indeed confronted the Igbo man with a new

“world Order” so to speak. The challenge of Archbishop Obiefuna in his entire ministry can therefore be summarized as the challenge of reconciling the Igbo people and their culture in their encounter with change, but more specifically, in response to a new religion - the Christian faith.

To understand the Igbo response in their encounter with new peoples and cultures, and in this particular case their encounter with the Christian faith, it is important to explore briefly the Igbo anthropology which I consider as crucial to understanding why the Igbo behave the way they do and their overall attitude to change and progress.

Igbo Cosmology/Anthropology¹

The Igbos of Southeast, SE, Nigeria are perhaps the most resilient and intensive ethnic group in Nigeria, and perhaps in Africa as well. The great slave scholar of Igbo descent Equiano was reported to have traced the origin of the Igbos to Jewish ancestry. Although some other researchers have dismissed such claims, more recent studies such as Daniels (2014) a renowned Jewish Professor at the University of Basel, Switzerland, has attempted to reconstruct the Jewish identity of the Igbos² and to re-establish this claim. Inkelas and Smith (1974) note that while every population includes within it some individuals who have developed qualities for quick and spontaneous adaptation to requirements of the modern world, some ethnic groups seem more likely to generate such individuals. The authors singled out the Swiss Protestants, East European Jews, Parsis of India and Igbos of Nigeria as groups that represent this tendency more than any other groups. These ethnic groups share

¹ This part of the paper draws extensively from Ichoku HE (2019) Igbo Cultural Values and Sub-optimal Economic Development of the SE Nigeria: Resolving the Contradictions. A Paper Presented to the Faculty of Social Sciences Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Anambra State

² Daniels LIS (2014) Jewish identity among the Igbo of Nigeria: Israel's lost Tribe and the Question of Belonging in the Jewish State, AFric, First Edition.

the same achievement-oriented ethos and motivation³. These are ethnic groups that are achievement and success oriented with high propensity for hard work and adventure. The Parsis of India are described as one of the most successful minority and migrant groups in the world. Tata group, the Godrej and Wadia families are some of India's top corporate dynasties of this ethnic minority. These ethnic groups, unlike most other societies, are secular societies with outward orientation and receptivity to change.

Secularity of Igbo Culture

Although the Igbo are said to be religious, a number of Igbo historians and anthropologists have pointed out that the most important cultural characterization of the Igbo ethnic groups is its secularity. A secular society is here defined in the sense of outward-looking society in contrast to sacred⁴ or inward looking societies. Sacred is used here not in any religious sense but in the sense of protection from violation. While secular societies are permeable and out-word looking, sacred societies are impermeable.

Simon Otternberg (1962) describes the Igbo society as an "open society" in which positions of prestige, authority and leadership are not inherited but achieved⁵. Secular cultures are highly individualistic and demand from their members the willingness and ability to respond and adapt to new situations and new cultural elements. Unlike sacred societies that are impermeable that do not tolerate the violations of existing cultural order, secular societies are permeable and accommodating of new cultural elements. It is this cosmology that distinguishes the Igbo from most other cultures and endows the Igbo man with the personality traits that make him behave the way he does.

³ Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith, *Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Developing Countries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 5.

⁴ Odi

⁵ OTTENBERG, SIMON 1959 - Igbo receptivity to change. In *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*. W. R. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits, eds. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 1

According to Ndukaihe (2006) secular societies are organized along more flexible principles that tend to accommodate and promote variations and multiple choices rather than uniformity. Because they are open societies, they are accessible to contacts with other societies. This explains why the Igbo, although with their own traditional religions have embraced western style of life more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria. It is therefore not surprising that the Igbo embraced Christianity and western education and lifestyles more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria⁶.

These fundamental Igbo personality trait and values give rise to other important cultural elements that have conferred great economic advantage to the Igbo. Comparing the Igbo culture and the cultures of other majority ethnic groups in Nigeria, Chinua Achebe asserts puts it summarily⁷:

The Igbo culture being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive, gave the Igbo man an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots in securing credentials for advancement in Nigerian colonial society. Unlike the Hausa/Fulani, he was unhindered by a wary religion and unlike the Yoruba unhampered by traditional hierarchies. This kind of creature, fearing neither god nor man, was custom-made to grasp the opportunities, such as they were, of the white man's dispensation. And the Igbo did so with both hands. Although the Yoruba had a huge historical and geographical head-start the Igbo wiped out their handicap in one fantastic burst of energy in the twenty years between 1930 and 1950⁸

Being fundamentally outward oriented and receptive to change, the Igbo culture tends to be highly enterprising, optimistic,

⁶Ekechi, Felix K. (1972) *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914* Routledge.

⁷ Chinua Achebe (2013) *There was a Country: A Memoir* Penquin Random House

⁸ Achebe C (1983) *The Trouble with Nigeria* p 46

persevering, individualistic and intensively competitive. As an outward looking people part of the Igbo character is the tendency to adventure. As Odi (1999) observes, part of the Igbo way of life is to adventure, that explains why they are one of the most restless of people and most travelled⁹

Igbo culture tends to reward success and achievement more than most other cultures. It is this inherent cultural orientation to relative personal eminence, and achievement and to be recognized as successful¹⁰ that creates the intensive competitive spirit, a tendency to dominate in whatever occupation that gives them the opportunity for material success. Achievement or success defines completely the disposition of the average Igbo man. He wants to be successful, he wants to be recognized and celebrated as successful.

Because he is receptive to change and hungry for personal eminence, the Igbo person likes what the famous Igbo Historian Adiele Afigbo¹¹ calls “large identity”. Large identity is for him a mark of success. Large identity could be in the form of wealth, big houses, big cars, big titles, big family etc. “My Mercedes is bigger than Yours” is the Title of the a novel by Nkem Nwankwo but it also aptly characterizes this tendency for larger identity of the Igbo man. Large identity could also be in the form of exposure, (that is, perhaps, why the Igbos are the most travelled, and Christianized of all ethnic groups in Nigeria). He enjoys a sense of “been-to” because it is a mark of success and achievement but he also wants to be celebrated as successful. His adventure is in search of material success. But he must also return home to show off, to be recognized as having acquired new and larger identity. Big funerals are important to him because he would then be perceived to have lived a successful life.

⁹ Odi A, (199) The Igbo in Diaspora: the binding force of information *Libraries & Culture*, 34(1) 158-167

¹⁰ Brautigan 1997 p1072

¹¹ Adiele Afigbo (1981) *Ropes of Sand*, Oxford” Oxford University Press

That Igbo embraced Christianity than any other group in Nigeria is an extension of this quest for larger identity, the secularity or outward-looking and achievement or success orientation of the Igbo race. The adoption of the Christian religion is for the Igbo an additional garb, a mark of a larger identity, not a substitute for his garb of traditional religion. In many cases, especially in the rural areas, we find a thin veil of external trappings of Christian beliefs and practices superimposed on the original patterns of pre-Christian superstitions and beliefs which still provide the people with a framework for their interpretation of their existential world and reality.

As Ottenberg (1959) notes,

The introduction of Christianity has given greater religious choice, and characteristically, many Ibo have accepted Christianity without rejecting all their traditional religious beliefs. The whole pattern of culture contact by its very nature introduces new cultural alternatives. Although this is usually the case, the Ibo, traditionally accustomed to thinking, acting and making decisions in terms of a range of alternatives – are more at home in the culture contact situation than members of other societies with different orientations. (p. 129)

While colonialism, exposure to modern influences and forces of globalization have multiplied the paths to success and building larger identity, innovation and change, the Igbo remain conservative as they do not easily discard their traditional beliefs and values which give consistency, continuity and stability to their society. That is perhaps why Ottenberg (1959) observes that: “Yet, paradoxically, of all Nigerian peoples, the Ibo have probably changed the least while changing the most” (p 142)¹²

¹² Simon Ottenberg (1963) Igbo receptivity to Change in Continuity and Change in African Cultures, Willim C, Bascom R, Herskovits M (edts) Journal of Negro education

The Igbo Religious Patrimony and their Continued Influence on their Behavior

Fundamentally, the Igbo people are spirit-conscious people¹³. Traditionally, they believe in a supreme God but also in a diversity of other spirit and indeed that everything has a spirit dimension. Major milestones in life such as birth, marriage, death and burial, long journeys and taking of social titles provide occasions for religious rites. Obiefuna himself attributed the persistence of traditional religious beliefs even among converted Christians to the fact that we are traditionally spirit-conscious. The world around us is not pure matter. Thus, “everything has a spirit dimension in it. When we eat, the spirits are around. While we drink the spirits are around. While we sleep they are there and not a few are disturbed by spirits during sleep. How many people today complain of being disturbed by praeternatural powers during sleep?” (p.7). Most of them tremble before these spiritual forces as they see them wherever they go and whatever they do.

This spirit-consciousness is the reason that in spite of over a century of Christianity in Igboland, education, and modern influences, these traditional religious beliefs and accompanying religious practices still exercise considerable influences on the average Igbo Christian. There is easy recourse to traditional beliefs and practices which, in spite of professing the Christian faith, still provide them the framework for interpreting the existential universe, particularly in times of crises. A people who have easily accepted Christianity easily relapse to traditional religious practice at the least opportunity. The current wave of revivalism of traditional religion, particularly among the Igbo youth highlights this challenge. In addition, some of the traditional religious beliefs and practices, have also in many cases been absorbed and mixed with Christian beliefs and practices leading to different forms of syncretism. This is evident in healing ministries that are widespread in Igboland today.

¹³ AK Obiefuna (1985) *Idolatry in A Century-Old Faith*

Implications for Igbo Anthropology for Christian Evangelical Mission

Unless we understand this anthropology of the Igbo it will be difficult to really understand the contradictions and paradoxes of the Igbo race, its acceptance of Christianity and at the same time easy recourse to traditional religious beliefs and practices. The church must, therefore, be aware of the cultural assumptions and characteristics of the Igbo people in order to understand how the Igbo people respond to the Christian faith. These contradictions both facilitate and impede the evangelizing mission of the church. As an adventurous and widely traveled people in search of material success, the Igbo can also be a mission agent for the church wherever he goes. His quest for larger identity is evident in his laud presence wherever he may be and in whatever activity he engages, whether in bazar sales in a Church in Lagos or Kano, or in South Africa or China. They can also easily import ideas including other forms of religious beliefs and practices back home as an expression of larger identity. At the same time evangelizing such a people could also be a challenge. Their attachment to their tradition and religious beliefs and spirit-consciousness will always lead to a recourse to their traditional beliefs and practices. Their Christian faith could be a veneer, an additional garb covering much deeper rooted traditional religious beliefs and practices.

It is based on these cosmology and anthropological frameworks that we may understand AK Obiefuna's fundamental approach in dealing with these contradictions in Igbo attitude to change. How he managed the resistance of traditional religious practice to conversion and change.

A. K. Obiefuna's Principles of Evangelistic Approach to the Challenges of Igbo Traditional Religion and Culture

AK Obiefuna's approach to the challenges posed to the church's evangelical mission by traditional religious beliefs and practices derive fundamentally both from the Church's centuries of evangelizing other peoples and cultures and his understanding of

the cosmology and anthropology of the Igbo person. For example, he understood clearly, the Igboman's orientation to adopting and assimilating other cultures but also his spirit-consciousness.

We see his consistent method in dealing with the several issues in interfacing between the Christian faith and Igbo traditional religious and cultural beliefs. Some of the more celebrated cases include:

- Ozo title-taking –
- Okuko Onye Uwa in Awka Town
- Ifu ozu Ajadu in Nanka
- Ajadu in Agulu, Nri, Amaokpala, etc.
- Nma Nka in Neni

The principles adopted by A. K. Obiefuna in resolving the sometimes intricate conflictual relations between Christian faith and traditional religious beliefs and practices can be understood through his eloquent and theology laden homilies but more importantly through his numerous books and pastoral letters including: *The Church and Culture: A Case Study in Awka*, and *Idolatry in a Century Old Faith*.

For example, *The Church and Culture: A Case Study in Awka*, was a pastoral response to the vexing cultural problem that was already existing even before the creation of Awka diocese and so was one of the first and urgent pastoral issues that he had to deal with. The crux of the issue was whether Catholics would be part of the rite or not.

1. Understanding the Issues Involved in the Traditional Religious Practice.

The first principle of Bishop Obiefuna in resolving Faith-conflictual culture practices was to study and understand the cultural practices in its different dimensions, in order to understand their the level they are or are not consistent with the Christian faith.

For example, in *The Church and Culture: A Case Study in Awka*, Obiefuna concluded that:

Awka Catholic Community is but one of the many communities particularly in Igboland that have vexing cultural problems to study in the light of the Christian revelation. May this attempt therefore be a source of reference for those who in their pastoral work, will be in search of solutions to similar problems” (p.8)

Similarly, in dealing with the problem of Ozo title taking in Awka, Obiefuna set up a committee to study and understand the issues involved and the extent the traditional rites of this institution conflicted with the Christian faith.

Studying each case of inter-faith conflict is crucial in order to identify the points of agreement and disagreement so that solution could be more focused and efforts at resolving them could be more productive.

2. Dialogue

A. K. Obiefuna, always advocated for dialogue even in the midst of violence, coercion, deprivation, against Christian faithful by traditional religious believers. For instance, in dealing with the problem of title taking in Awka town, based on the outcome of the report of the committee that studied the case, he engaged the proponents of the traditional institution in dialogue. This involved several meetings and months of bargaining to expunge all idolatrous practices if Christians were to participate in Ozo title-taking. The final outcome of dialogue was written and signed. Obiefuna recalls that on the day the agreement was to be signed, July 6 1978 when he and his team were made to stand outside for one full hour as the titled men contended and debated over what had to be removed. It was when they agreed on removing the “idolatrous” content that they were called back for the purposes of signing the agreement (Faith and Culture, p.58).

3. Cultural Crises and Conflicts: Prayer cannot be Relegated

Obiefuna showed that prayer was a fundamental part of resolving cultural crises that touch on the faith. This is more especially when a crisis has become protracted. Prayer preceded the immediate resolution of Awka faith crisis. At the height of the faith crises in Awka diocese, at its beginnings, Obiefuna convened a prayer summit on March 9 1980. In preparation for this prayer summit, he directed that from February 29 to March 8, there would be a Holy Hour daily in the Cathedral Church of Awka from 5.30pm to 6.30pm. The directive further states that “On Fridays, the Stations of the Cross will take place immediately after the Holy Hour and not before it.” The intention was stated thus, “During this Holy Hour, all will ask Our Lord to effect a change of heart in all His faithful and in all men of goodwill in this Awka town so that peace, order and love may return to all hearts, all families, all yards and all villages in this town” (Faith and Culture, p.41). Sometimes human expertise in conflict resolutions and dialogue may require asking for divine assistance and intervention. Lifting up heart and mind in prayer is part of the faith-culture dynamics.

4. The Principle of Freedom and Respect

Obiefuna was aware that the interface between faith and culture could also be conflictual so he emphasized the freedom of each party to be. In fact, in many cases in which he had to deal with this church-culture relationship, it was always in the context of conflict and warring camps. To avoid such conflicts and as a matter of principle of conflict resolution especially in a society diverse beliefs and cultural practices, he taught that respect for the freedom of other faiths was a pre-requisite for a harmonious society. This is predicated on the right-to-be of each of the religio-cultural divides by its faithful adherents.

For instance, in the case of *Okuko Onye Uwa*, he first acknowledges that the ceremony is traditional rite which must be set within the same traditional context unless one risks religious iconoclasm while refusing a people’s religious freedom. On the

other hand, he insisted that freedom is basic to authentic human development which all true culture must strive to achieve. 59.

5. Clear Directive in Keeping with Orthodoxy:

Obiefuna, was always decisive in giving clear directives to the pastors and the faithful of the diocese as to what should be done or attitude pastors and their faithful must adopt in dealing with each cultural practice. This he always did through his preaching, diocesan announcements, church bulletins, pastoral letters and other diocesan communication channels. In the case of *Okuko-onye-uwa*, for example, his directive to the pastors and the faithful was clear. Catholics cannot be involved in *okuko onye uwa* as it would amount to double ritualization of the sacredness of marriage for one and the same marriage which amounts to profanation of a sacrament. Going against this the Catholic “should consider himself/herself as no more fit for the sacrament nor be allowed to perform catholic marriage at all”.

6. Renewed Catechesis: Attention on Quality Witnessing

Obiefuna observed that many Christians continued to revert to neo-paganism on account of their shallow faith arising from inadequate catechesis. He anchored perseverance in faith on renewed catechesis. He warned pastors of souls: “Unless this is done we cannot forecast what will happen in the future to the Church in this part of the world. We need not glory in numbers for faith has nothing to do with statistics. Sane realism is important. What has become of the once flamboyant Church in Europe? Why do we not learn from history?”¹⁴ (p.12) Catechesis builds solid faith and according to him “In all generations and among all peoples faith is essential for authentic Christian living. The faith must be continually renewed, Idolatry in all its ramifications, whether among the whites or among the blacks, can only be conquered by solid faith in Christ” (p.13).

¹⁴

To press down his point, Obiefuna raises a number of questions: how much solid knowledge of the faith was communicated to the multitude that fills our churches? Did they understand the faith as a gift of God? Did they understand it as a personal call? Are the sacramental administrations in our church accompanied with adequate catechesis? Is there no founded fear that we just dish out the sacraments to people who are least prepared for them? Would it not be better to spend more time on the catechesis of sin and conversion than have confessions every day? Would it not be better to prolong the age for confirmation than line up over one thousand noisy and distracted candidates of very tender age for confirmation at each pastoral visit of the Bishop? Would it not be better to spend more time on the meaning of our new birth in Christ through baptism than rejoice on the huge statistics of the number baptized during the year?

Finally, Obiefuna' advocacy for the divine pedagogy of patient wait which consists in untiring patience with man's weakness and unfaithfulness in observing God's laws. The doctrine must be continually taught in an ever renewed catechesis of the faith and trying various pastoral methods to root the salvific presence of the church in society. In all, patience is not losing hope with the understanding that missionaries do not always get the fruits of their labours (cf. ICor. 1:5-9).

These principles that guided AK Obiefuna in dealing with the challenges of interfaith conflict in his time are still very efficacious and relevant to our pastoral ministry today. It is important, therefore, that our church leaders, pastors and lay faithful should adopt these principles in dealing with these same faith issues which are resurfacing with renewed vigor, particularly among our youth today.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to demonstrate how the Igbo cosmological and anthropological orientations have shaped their response to change in their encounter with new world order opened by colonialism and

Christianity. It shows that the Igbo people are fundamentally a secular race or what has been referred to as an open race. Its secularity incentivizes individual success and the quest for larger identity. These cultural characteristics, unlike sacred societies, allow them to embrace change through adoption and assimilation of other cultures and values.

On the other hand, the Igbos are a spirit-conscious people. Everything around them has a spirit dimension. Everything, including personal milestones and social institutions such birth, death, marriage, and social relationships, has a religious ritual around it. This lends to easy recourse to traditional religious institutions, beliefs and practices for protection and to seek answers to life existential problems.

The adoption of Christian gab has provided opportunity the Igbo the opportunity to acquire larger identity without rejecting all their traditional religious beliefs. The whole pattern of culture contact by its very nature introduces new cultural alternatives.

Thus the Igbo orientation to change, not just in respect of their interface with other faiths, but also in other dimensions of economy, politics, social organization, and urbanization arising from their contact with a new world opened by colonialism and westernization has generated some paradoxes and contradictions: openness to change and easy recourse to tradition. It is within this context that A. K. Obiefuna's approach to resolving these contradictions in respect of the interface between Christian faith and traditional practices may be understood.

In doing so I have identified key principles that guided his approach to resolving these frictions and conflictual situations. These principles include: understanding the traditional religious practices, dialogue, prayer, freedom and respect for the other, clear directives to guide the pastors and the people of God, and renewed catechesis.

These principles built on clear understanding of the traits and values of the Igboman and his attitude to change helped Obiefuna to reconcile and integrate the Christian faith and Igbo

culture. In many communities in Awka diocese in particular, where violent reactions characterized the encounter of Christianity and traditional religion, he was able, through these principles, to restore peace. It is his commitment to evolving fundamental approaches to the faith-culture challenge that makes him stand tall as a man of profound thought and apostolic zeal.

**EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY OF FAITH AND ULTURE:
THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF
ARCHBISHOP A. K. OBIEFUNA,
PIONEER BISHOP OF AWKA DIOCESE**

Ignatius Nnaemeka Onwuatuegwu

Abstract

This article examines Obiefuna's contributions as the first Bishop of Awka Diocese and later as Archbishop of Onitsha, highlighting his dedication to priestly formation which laid a foundation for effective spiritual leadership. His visionary initiatives in establishing parishes and seminaries exemplified his commitment to fostering a vibrant and accessible faith community. Obiefuna's advocacy for the Eucharist and Perpetual Adoration underscored his belief in the transformative power of Christ's presence, creating a culture of prayer that engaged the faithful in their daily lives. His prophetic witness during periods of political turmoil illustrated the Church's critical role in advocating for justice and human dignity. The personal challenges he faced offered profound insights into the nature of suffering within the Christian narrative. This article ultimately seeks to illuminate Archbishop Obiefuna's varied legacy, emphasizing his integral role in promoting a dynamic Church that actively participates in the cultural and social concerns of its community, thereby reinforcing the relevance of faith in a changing world.

Keywords: Church, Culture, Catholicism, Leadership, Human Dignity.

1. Introduction

Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna's illustrious life and ministry resonate as a profound narrative of the intersection between Church and culture, particularly within the Nigerian context. He is one of the finest fruits of the Nigerian (Igbo) Christianity. His storied journey exemplifies not only the mission of the Church but also the adaptive

capacity of faith traditions to engage with the cultural dynamics of their time, underlined by his unshakeable commitment to the teachings of Christ. Throughout his distinguished career, Obiefuna made extensive contributions as a theologian, educator, and ecclesiastical leader, leaving an indelible imprint on both the spiritual and social fabric of his community. In the words of Bishop Etokudoh, Archbishop Obiefuna was meaningfully dedicated to duties and was a man of deep spirituality, moral rectitude and wise counsel (Etokudoh, 2011).

As the first Bishop of Awka Diocese and later as Archbishop of Onitsha, he effectively bridged the gap between pastoral responsibility and cultural engagement, recognizing that the vitality of faith traditions is intrinsically linked to their ability to resonate with the cultural realities of their people. His profound devotion to priestly formation at Bigard Memorial Seminary, along with his visionary evangelization initiatives, fortified a foundation that emphasized both spiritual depth and social responsibility. He was a cheerful and jovial person, yet he was principled and precise (Afereha, 2011).

Moreover, Obiefuna's prophetic stance during tumultuous political eras reflected an acute awareness of the Church's role in advocating for justice and human dignity, fostering an environment where faith and public life intersected meaningfully. His unshakeable commitment to the Eucharist served as the bedrock of his spiritual approach, promoting a culture of prayer and devotion that inspired collective community engagement. Additionally, his advocacy for Perpetual Adoration and the establishment of chapels across Nigeria exemplified his belief in the transformative power of Christ's presence, shaping a contemporary response to a society often challenged by secularism and moral ambiguity.

In addition to his administrative acumen, Archbishop Obiefuna's personal journey through illness and suffering added a profound dimension to his witness, teaching the faithful that authentic faith must resonate in the face of adversity. His reflections during these times encouraged a contemplative response

to suffering, showcasing a synthesis of theology and lived experience that continues to resonate today. This article aims to explore the multifaceted ministry of Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna, emphasizing his pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of Church and culture in Nigeria. By examining the foundations he laid for priestly formation, his visionary pastoral initiatives, and his courageous advocacy for justice and human dignity, we can gain valuable insights into his holistic approach to ministry and illustrate the enduring legacy of a prelate who profoundly impacted the Church and society alike.

This article aims to explore the diversified ministry of Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna, emphasizing his pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of Church and culture in Nigeria. By examining the foundations he laid for priestly formation, his visionary pastoral initiatives, and his courageous advocacy for justice and human dignity, we can gain valuable insights into his holistic approach to ministry, ultimately illustrating the enduring legacy of a prelate who profoundly impacted the Church and society alike.

2. Early Life of Archbishop Albert Kanenechukwu Obiefuna

Albert Kanenechukwu Obiefuna was born on January 30, 1930 (Atansi, 2022) to pagan parents. His parents, Patrick Agbaka Obiefuna and Virginia Mary Enyochi Obiefuna, later converted to Christianity and were baptized. The name Kanenechukwu, meaning "Let's keep looking onto God," was given to him due to the difficult circumstances surrounding his birth.

Commencing his primary education in 1940 at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Oraukwu, Kanenechukwu later transferred to St. Andrew's Catholic School in Adazi. His father was determined to provide his bright son with an education in the Western manner, emphasizing the importance of learning through the church. Reflecting on this experience later in life, he recounted, "It was amazing! From a young age, my father wanted me to read and write like Europeans. He sent me out every morning to a woman

from our village, who took me to church school. I did not know I was attending a Catholic school; it was thanks to Divine Providence!" He attributed his early education to his father, who, despite his profession as a wine-tapper, ensured he adhered to church rules—such as abstaining from meat on Fridays (Obiefuna, 2008).

Tragically, his father passed away when Kanenechukwu was only ten, placing the responsibility of fulfilling his father's dream on his older brother, who also died young. Despite these adversities, Kanenechukwu was baptized in 1943, received Holy Communion, and was confirmed by Archbishop Charles Heerey within the same year. He completed his primary education with distinction in 1947.

In 1948, he was admitted to the Preparatory Training Centre in Agulu, and by 1949, he began his teaching career in Aguluzoigbo. After a year, he was selected for further training at St. Charles College in Onitsha; however, due to a complaint regarding the admission of two students from his hometown, Kanenechukwu was asked to wait until the following year. Instead, he was offered a teaching position at St. Andrew's School in Adazi, which proved fortuitous as it sparked his vocation to the priesthood under the guidance of Rev. Fr. Dr. Bernard J. Kelly.

In 1951, he entered All Hallows Seminary in Enugu, discreetly overcoming family objections to his priestly aspirations. He financed his seminary education through holiday jobs, including carrying blocks for masons and translating for Fr. Kelly. His perseverance was rewarded as he went through the challenges of seminary life, and in 1952, All Hallows relocated to Onitsha, where he continued his studies. By 1954, he had successfully completed his G.C.E. London Ordinary Level and spent the next two years teaching at his alma mater (Uba, 2011).

In 1957, he departed for Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu, where he studied philosophy until 1959 before continuing his studies at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. He was

ordained a priest on December 21, 1963, by the late Cardinal Agagianian. Following his ordination, Bishop Charles Heerey invited him to pursue advanced studies in Rome, where he earned a master's degree in Theology in 1964 and a Ph.D. in Moral Theology from the Alphonsian Academy of Lateran University in 1966.

Upon returning to Nigeria in 1966, Rev. Fr. Albert K. Obiefuna served as an assistant priest at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Onitsha and later joined the staff of Bigard Memorial Seminary. His tenure at Bigard coincided with the Nigerian Civil War, during which the seminary relocated multiple times for safety. In 1970, he became the first indigenous Vice-Rector of Bigard, a position he held until 1976 when he was appointed Rector.

While continuing his role as a lecturer at Bigard, the pastoral needs of the Enugu diocese prompted Bishop Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye to request his assistance as the parish priest of Sacred Heart Parish in Uwani-Enugu, a role he undertook with remarkable dedication and effectiveness. Within a year of becoming Rector, he was appointed the first Bishop of the newly created Akwa Diocese on November 10, 1976.

In a farewell address from the seminarians at Bigard, his impact was summarized: "To label you a 'perfectionist administrator' may only imperfectly reflect the maximum success your leadership has achieved in such a short time." Msgr. L. Adike meaningfully states that Archbishop Obiefuna was pastor of deep faith, and a hardworking man who toiled and moiled to leave behind solid structures both in the administration and in the visible institutional assets of the church, he left an indelible mark and a colossal legacy in the area of formation of candidates to the priesthood (Adike, 2011).

Archbishop Albert Kanenechukwu Obiefuna's life and work have left an indelible mark on the Catholic Church in Nigeria, characterized by his ardent commitment to education, pastoral care, and the priesthood.

3. A Foundation Rooted in Education and Formation

Central to Archbishop Obiefuna's influence on Church and culture was his dedication to priestly formation, particularly during his tenure at the Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu. His eleven years at the seminary were characterized by a relentless quest to strengthen the foundations of the Church in Nigeria through the formation of effective priests – "soldiers for Christ" as he termed them (Oguejiofor, 2011). The Archbishop understood that the future of the Church relied significantly on the quality of its leaders. In line with this, therefore, he advocates Caritas Christi and encourages on-going formation of Priests, Religious and Laity as a result of his love for the church and his cherishing of the priesthood (Ochiagha, 2011). As someone deeply rooted in theological education, he combined robust academic principles with spiritual growth, embodying a holistic approach to formation.

His commitment to creating environments conducive to theological and moral education was not merely about nurturing priests but also about shaping leaders capable of effectively engaging and transforming their communities. This cultural engagement was borne out of his belief that well-formed priests could address societal issues—ranging from moral crises to the need for social justice—through the lens of faith.

4. Building a Church to Serve the People

As the first Bishop of Awka Diocese from 1978 to 1994, Archbishop Obiefuna undertook an ambitious and visionary project to develop the infrastructure necessary for evangelization in a predominantly rural area. Bishop S. A. Okafor, Archbishop Obiefuna's immediate successor in Awka Diocese described him as a visionary disciplined shepherd, a man of integrity who had acquired many lands for the Diocese, erected numerous structures; a pastor and a preacher with irresistible eloquence; an exemplary administrator and a manager of crisis who went about restoring peace and unity to many factious communities and families, a compassionate shepherd who has delight in building houses for the

less privileged; a man of deep spiritual, moral and prayerful life, an epitome of priestly virtue, and a man with special and unique love for the Eucharistic Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of God; a man who demonstrated a consuming passion for the welfare of the poor and the needy as well as encouraging others to do the same as exemplified in his 1992 pastoral letter "Give them something to eat yourselves (Okafor, 2011). His initiatives included the creation of new parishes, even in areas lacking church facilities, illustrating his belief in the integrating mission of the Church within the community. These efforts substantially contributed to the Diocese's growth, not only by establishing physical landmarks of faith, such as St. Patrick's Cathedral, but also by fostering a sense of belonging and community among the faithful.

In his remarkable vision, he perceived the Church as a family, a perspective that was affirmed during the first African Synod in 1994. Bishop Anthony O. Gbuji thus emphasizes "The notion of 'the church as a Family of God ' owes its origin to his inspired reflection and contribution during the first African Synod of 1994" (Gbuji). By emphasizing the familial nature of the Church, he broke down barriers and fostered unity within diverse cultures and communities, nurturing a collective identity bound by faith rather than socio-economic status or tribal affiliations. Importantly, his construction of Blessed Iwene Tansi Seminary showcased his innovative spirit, establishing an enduring legacy and pioneering the first major seminary financed by a single diocese in the region.

5, The Eucharist as a Cultural Foundation

Integral to Archbishop Obiefuna's pastoral approach was his profound devotion to the Eucharist, which he deemed the "greatest instrument for national reconstruction." His inspiring devotion to the Eucharistic Lord was demonstrated clearly in his answer to the question "what do see as the greatest instrument for national reconstruction " and he answered "Holy Hour before the Blessed

Sacrament" (Oguejiofor, 2011). Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna will ever be remembered for initiating and promoting the practice of Eucharistic adoration, contemplating the face of God in Blessed Sacrament chapels as far as its formal history in Igboland is concerned (Amogu, 2011). Archbishop Obiefuna initiated the culture of building separate chapels of perpetual Eucharistic adoration (Okeke, 2005). His strong advocacy for Perpetual Adoration reflected not only an individual spiritual practice but also a communal spiritual awakening. He understood the Eucharist to be a powerful source of grace, capable of inspiring deep conversion and enhancing social cohesion. The establishment of chapels for Perpetual Adoration across Nigeria, particularly in Igboland, attests to his belief in the transformative power of Christ's presence in the Eucharist within the cultural fabric of society. In this regard Atansi succinctly puts: "I consider the life and ministry of Archbishop Albert Obiefuna – which are rooted in the practice of gazing towards the light and love of Christ in the Holy Eucharist – as offering the urgently needed inspirations for confronting, engaging, and transforming the present situations of mounting religious and socio-political catastrophes in our land" (Atansi, 2022).

Through promoting Eucharistic adoration, he encouraged the faithful to engage in personal and communal prayer, which created a culture of reflection and spiritual discipline. The living out of faith as an everyday practice became a counter-cultural movement, opposing the rising secularism and moral relativism encountered in contemporary Nigerian society.

6. Prophetic Witness Amidst Societal Turmoil

Archbishop Obiefuna's leadership during turbulent political times, specifically the military dictatorship of the Abacha regime, further highlighted his role as a prophetic voice within the Church. With regard to this his quality, Onwuatuegwu described him as an ruffled orator (Onwuatuegwu, 2011). His fearless stance on justice, human rights, and moral integrity positioned him as a

beacon of hope for many suffering under oppression. As President of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), he went through complex socio-political landscapes, advocating for Christian values in public life. His commitment to a Church that stands for truth, justice, and accountability fostered a culture of resistance against injustice, forming a critical dialogue between faith and public life in Nigeria (Obiefuna, 1992).

His efforts not only strengthened the Church's position within society but also inspired clergy and laypeople alike to become active proponents of social equity and moral righteousness, echoing the teachings of Christ in a context that often saw faith challenged by discord and disparity. Inspired by his life of sincerity and firm cling to the truth, Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo (Apostolic Nuncio) unwaveringly affirmed that Archbishop Obiefuna was a great example of uprightness and coherence, a great Shepherd of Christ's flock, a wonderful moral theologian, and an eloquent preacher who was not afraid to speak the truth, and to live it out (Okolo, 2011).

7. Personal Suffering and Spiritual Depth

The latter years of Archbishop Obiefuna's life, marked by physical suffering, unveiled another dimension of his ministry—a profound testament to the synthesis of Church and culture through the lens of human experience and pain. His writings during this period reflect a deep understanding of suffering within the Christian narrative, encouraging the faithful to find meaning in their struggles. As Oguejiofor succinctly puts:

Like his master he became a man of sorrow acquainted with grief. Suffering became for him a welcome opportunity for increased dedication to the demands of the will of God, to prayer, meditation and reflection on the meaning of human life and destiny. It was an occasion to express gratitude for favours received from God and his people, and a means of leaving a

shining example of the genuine attitude of committed Christian to human suffering (Oguejiofor, 2011).

He taught that Christian suffering can serve as a vehicle for spiritual growth and communal solidarity, thereby reinforcing the interconnectedness of the Church and its cultural milieu. In line with the above Francis Cardinal Arinze maintained that he has many reasons to admire Archbishop Obiefuna's apostolic zeal, his teaching of the faith and his constancy in following Christ in suffering (Arinze, 2011).

By sharing his journey through illness, he articulated a deep-seated belief—one that resonated widely—that genuine faith must be lived out authentically in all circumstances of life, thereby enriching the cultural conversation surrounding illness, suffering, and community support.

8. Conclusion

Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna's life and legacy exemplify a profound engagement with both Church and culture, marked by a singular vision for a Church that is both spiritually robust and socially responsible. Borrowing from C. A. Atansi, I consider the life and ministry of Archbishop Albert Obiefuna, centered on looking towards the light and love of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, a necessary and sufficient inspiration to face, address, and change the escalating religious and socio-political crises in our society (Atansi, 2022). Through his commitment to priestly formation, active community engagement, moral advocacy, and personal witness in suffering, he left an indelible mark on the landscape of the Catholic Church in Nigeria and beyond. His example continues to inspire those within the Church to seek pathways of fidelity to the Gospel, fostering a culture of unity, compassion, and transformative love in a rapidly changing world. As such, Archbishop Obiefuna stands not only as a spiritual leader but also as a cultural enabler, championing a faith that remains ever relevant in the face of societal challenges.

I believe that the life and ministry of Archbishop Albert Obiefuna, centered on looking towards the light and love of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, provide the necessary inspiration to face, address, and change the escalating religious and socio-political crises in our society.

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**THE VILLAGE PRIEST:
RECOUNTING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF
ARCHBISHOP ALBERT KANENECHUKWU OBIEFUNA
TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ORAUKWU**

Ogochukwu Daniel Onuorah

Introduction

It is really a privilege to be granted this opportunity to make a contribution in this epoch-making event. On behalf of the wonderful people of Oraukwu – the homeland of the great – and particularly on behalf of the Association of Priests, Religious, Aspirants and Seminarians of Oraukwu (APRASO), I thank the Catholic diocese of Awka at large and particularly the organisers of this volume for accepting this inspiration and making it a reality. May this initiative be that mustard seed that would grow into the biggest of shrubs.

Quite recently, precisely on Monday, 21 October 2024, I presented the inaugural paper for the 2024/25 academic/formation year at the Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha. I titled that paper: *Deeping Inculturation in the Church in SE Nigeria: The Need for Village Priests*. Incidentally, the request by the organising committee of this event to make this short presentation on the contributions of Archbishop Obiefuna on cultural development in Oraukwu came to our organisation as I was putting that paper together. In that paper, I described the village priest as one who is not out of touch with the realities which the native people live, and is well-equipped with the theological principles of the Church. Evidently, Archbishop Obiefuna fits into this description. This great man of God remains a household name in our town, not just because he became a bishop, but because he never disconnected from his roots. As a servant of God, the Archbishop manifested not only a profound knowledge of age-old cultural practices in the town, but also their significances. In spite of the

great heights he attained in ecclesiastical circles, he remained a true Oraukwu indigene. He was a village priest.

Archbishop Obiefuna: Oraukwu Foundations

Born in Oraukwu in Idemili North, Local Government Area, LGA, of Anambra State in 1930, Archbishop Obiefuna spent his early years in the town. His was the son of Agbakwa of Ibenabo village Oraukwu, a well-known man of cultural values. Even in his later years, Archbishop Obiefuna still recounted witnessing his father climb bare-handed to the very tip of a very tall palm tree during a cultural display. Until he left for the seminary, he participated as a full-born *amaala* in the cultural life of the people and understood its dynamics. Right from his early years, he exhibited exceptional qualities, and was therefore looked upon as a beacon of hope by family, relatives and friends.

Before he entered the seminary, Archbishop Obiefuna studied at Adazi-Nnukwu and at St Charles Teacher Training College, TTC, Onitsha, and then taught at Adazi-Nnukwu (Catholic mission/ school). From his relationship with missionaries, he nurtured the ambition of becoming a priest. But this was much to the chagrin of family, friends and relatives. In fact, the stunned mother and relatives had to mount surveillance around him, lest he leaves to the seminary. He was a precious pearl. It is on record that, acting according to a pre-conceived plan, he stealthily got his packed baggage across the fence, and this was picked up by a lady who took it to a house in another village where the young Albert could access it. The rest is history. And I am happy to clarify here that the woman used by God for this mission was my maternal grandmother – Mrs Victoria Nduaguba of blessed memory, and the house to which the box was brought was in my own village (Amaeze village) – the house of Chief Gabriel Okorji, also of blessed memory.

Noteworthy here is that it is often held that Albert Obiefuna was an only son. This is not correct. He had an elder brother Lawrence. Lawrence was there when he left for seminary training.

And not very long after, as he was in the seminary, Lawrence died. He did come back for the funeral of his elder brother. However, after the funeral, seeing his conviction to continue his journey to the sacred sacerdotal office, his mother gave her consent and blessing. She died as her son was studying in Rome.

Archbishop Obiefuna – The Village Priest

In line with the description of the village priest given above – one well grounded in the theological principles of the Church and at the same time well in touch with the living (cultural) realities of the native people, there is no gainsaying the fact that Archbishop Obiefuna was a village priest, not only for Oraukwu people but for the Church in Igboland generally. He was the first bishop of Awka diocese, and you here can testify more than myself that he was able to mediate in the cultural issues of many towns (clans and even families) and succeeded in bringing positive changes because he was not superficial. He understood the deep import of the matters at stake. And because he worked at the level of the understanding of the people – their perspective and *Weltanschauung* (worldview), he was able to speak to them in the language they would understand. He succeeded in converting a lot of people to Christianity. He was able to broker peace between many feuding parties. And, very importantly, he was able to get Christians live their faith without abandoning their cultural backgrounds.

As regards Oraukwu, Archbishop Obiefuna was simply God-sent.¹ Many are quite aware of the prominent role he played in restoring peace to Oraukwu, resolving the Igweship crisis of the 1980s. And many would attribute that to the privilege of the Episcopal office. But that is not the case. Right from his return to Nigeria from Rome before the civil war, from his base at Enugu (Bigard Memorial Seminary), the then Fr Obiefuna was very

¹ For the purposes of this presentation, the contributions of Archbishop Obiefuna were provided orally by two of his contemporaries – Rtd Catechist J. C. Joe Madueke (KSS; Chikwuelunze) and Chief Gabriel Mbanisi (Ichie Ezepue). The interviews were conducted by Rev. Fr Sylvester Chisom Afudoh. They are acknowledged and appreciated.

involved in the on-goings at his beloved hometown. Immediately after the war, a crisis (which had been brewing) broke out in Oraukwu. It was a crisis that had deep cultural underpinnings. Still operating from Enugu, Fr Albert made many trips to Oraukwu to consult people who he believed could help in resolving the crisis. Finally, with three other prominent men of the town: Joseph Madueke (retired Catechist, still alive!), Stephen Anoliefo and Gabriel Okorji, he formed a committee for the restoration of peace in Oraukwu. Against all odds and defying the dangers attendant to movements in the period immediately after the war, they went to different cities where prominent Oraukwu people were living and met with them individually as regards the issue at stake. Eventually a date was fixed for peace talks, and this was attended by virtually all Oraukwu men, home and abroad. Such meeting was held not just once, and deep matters were brought up, analysed and decided upon – cultural, political, religious and social. This intervention eventually brought the boiling crisis to a definitive end in 1974.

The peace ushered in by this Obiefuna-led committee did not last long however. Barely a year after this resolution, a dispute that arose between two villages in the town snowballed into a conflict that set the whole town on fire. The issue degenerated to the extent of deposing the ruling Igwe of the town and enthroning another one from another village. The indefatigable man of God swung back into action with his group. Here, one cannot but recall the words of Jesus in Jn 5,17: “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” The resolution of this crisis was long and demanding. The matters at hand touched the deepest fabrics that held the town together. But (the then) bishop Obiefuna and his committee were equal to the task. The path to lasting peace entailed drafting and promulgating a new constitution in Oraukwu – the famous Oraukwu Constitution 1986. This constitution, accepted by all, touched all the facets of life among the people. It recognised the plurality of religion among the people; it brought in a new system of Igweship that still respected the cultural sensitivities of the people, delineating its function so as not to clash with the

administrative leadership of the town (this system is still in use today); it reorganised the leadership system in the different villages of the town; it refined the *Ozo* title-taking process; it stratified the process of marriage; it regulated on funeral ceremonies; etc. This constitution responded to the deepest yearnings and concerns of the people. It was thus open-heartedly received, and it formed the basis of unity for the people culturally, socially and even psychologically.

It was not only in matters involving the whole town that the person and worth of the Archbishop was felt. There were issues relating to culture involving individuals, families, kindreds and villages which were handled by Archbishop Obiefuna. And his interventions became paradigmatic for such cases in the town. I have a personal example here. When my father died in November 1998, I was just weeks in the Spiritual Year Seminary. As I got home for funeral preparations, I noticed some unease. My father – a retired civil servant – had participated fully in the Bazaar activities of my home-parish, came back late that fateful Sunday night, and was found dead on his bed the following morning. My mother left the village Sunday evening, as she was still in service, and was to report to duty Monday morning. That meant that my father was alone at home in the village when he passed on. This became interpreted in some quarters as a taboo (*na o kpuru ihu*), and some people were gearing up to disrupt the funeral activities unless certain tradition rituals are performed. When the matter got to the ears of Archbishop Obiefuna, he swung into action. He reached out to stakeholders in the town to clarify the meaning of *ikpu ihu*. It was a cultural practice put in place to forestall abandoning anyone to dying without care. And analysing issues, it became clear that this was not the case in this instance. I learnt practically through him that cultural practices were not just arbitrary rituals but are set within a system of meanings, meant to bring coherence and order in the society.² It is therefore not enough

² The New Catholic Encyclopedia describes culture as “a coherent system of meanings embodied in images and symbols that enables the individual to relate cognitively, emotionally,

to know cultural rituals and practices. Rather, one should go further to ascertain the reasons behind the phenomenological practices. Such were the depths of the high priest of God – Most Rev. Albert Kanene Obiefuna.

In sum, Archbishop Obiefuna not only grew up among his people; he was involved in their affairs, and continued that even after his ecclesiastical elevations. He replicated the stance of Jesus Christ who, in spite of being God, ‘took flesh and dwelt among us’ (Jn 1,14). Through his interventions, the culture of the town evolved in the right direction.³ In Archbishop Obiefuna, we find an inspiring balance of involvement and detachment. He was indeed a role model. He was a village priest.

Concluding Words

Looking at the above, one cannot but wonder the secret of Archbishop Obiefuna’s success. It is commonly attested that he was of man of profound faith, deep insight and enduring patience. From this well, he drew out great wisdom which manifested itself in his affairs. It was his burning desire that people should be close to God and close to one another. His ministry in Oraukwu demonstrates this. He was a man of truth and impartiality, no matter who was involved. And till today, we are still in awe of his height of integrity. This maintained integrity brought him credibility – a quality that any agent of cultural change has to possess. He challenges us all!

and behaviourally to the world and to communicate this understanding to others. It is the prism through which a human society views the whole of its experience, domestic, political, social, economic, and political.”² “Inculturation, Theology of”, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Retrieved from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/inculturation-theology>; assessed July 29, 2024.

³ The Archbishop believed in positive cultural change. He often told the story of one Igwe Aboh of Oraukwu who married four wives. In his days, when a man died, the wives were taken far away from the scene of the funeral activities (and sometimes maltreated). Advanced in age, when this Igwe got sick and realised he was getting closer to his grave, he called his cabinet members and instructed them that his wives should by no means be maltreated at his demise. Rather, because they took very good care of him, they should be allowed to observe and participate in his funeral rites. In this way, this age-long practice became obsolete!

Archbishop Obiefuna got sick with an ailment in his throat in the last few years of his earthly existence. His last Christmas period on earth was notably both remarkable and symbolic for Oraukwu. The town holds a general meeting every 26th day of December (part of the resolutions of the peace process he inspired). On 26 December, 2010, in spite of his health conditions, the Archbishop came in person to address the Oraukwu general assembly. He had noted some divisions setting in, decades after the Oraukwu peace initiative. And he came to address that personally. He wrote down his speech, concise but powerful. It addressed the real issues in the background that were bringing up divisions. He lamented the resurgence of divisions in the town after all the sacrifices made by him and his group to bring peace in the town. However, because of the issue with his voice, he could not address the people himself. He therefore went with me, to deliver that paper in his name. Hence, that day, the voice was mine, but the word was the Archbishop's. And I stand here to testify that at the delivering of that speech, all internal rumblings disappeared. It was as if a calming balm was applied on the people. There was healing. I saw it happen. I am a witness. It was magical!

That was the last appearance of the Archbishop in Oraukwu. Soon after the Christmas festivities, he left for treatment in the United States and never came back alive. As I reflect on that event, I call to mind those parting words of Jesus to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (Jn 14,27). May that peace bequeathed us by this holy man of God come back to our blessed town and bear its fruits in abundance. Amen! Amen!!

**INTERPRETING CULTURAL DYNAMICS:
THE IGBO EXPERIENCE AND
ARCHBISHOP A.K OBIEFUNA
B. A. C OBIEFUNA**

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to show that explore the analyzable categories in cultural dynamism. These categories are found in the content and characteristics of culture the peak of which is cultural dynamism. There are positive and negative consequences associated with cultural dynamism brought about by many factors especially the forces of technological advancement. Igboland is used to show these consequences. Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna is a religious leader who sees good aspects of Igbo culture and integrates them, personally and into the Church. The conclusion is that Church leaders have the task of knowing the difference between religion, ekpemekpe, and culture, omenani, and guide Igbo Christians as appropriate. Simple observation gives the data for analysis within the framework of interpretive tools as found in the content and characteristics of culture. The presentation shows there can be a Christian Igbo culture.

Keywords: Interpretation, culture, cultural dynamism, religion, leadership.

Introduction

There are times in the life of an individual, an organization, or a community when they experience crises of values. Those are not completely dangerous or unprofitable. Human communities are subject to change as long as human beings in such communities change: in physique and in intellectual capacity development. The development is due to nurture of the body and of the mind. The causes of this development, or changes, are multifactorial: family, education, peer group, religious affiliation, media, and travels. This is a product of interactions, contacts with other people on one-on-one basis; from books, and films. It is an interaction of cultures

as each channel of interaction is a channel of culture sharing. Human beings are the carriers of cultures from one defined culture area to another.

Culture is, therefore, not static; it changes. As it changes, people's perception of reality also change. In the dynamics, positive and negative consequences arise. The causal factors of the dynamics, the major contents and characteristics of cultural dynamism need to be understood if the consequences are to be better interpreted and appreciated. Though the emphasis here is on cultural dynamism, the relevance is explored from the general content of culture. Igbo experience of cultural dynamism and lessons from Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna. The paper, therefore, discusses the basic concepts involved (leaving cultural dynamism for a later stage), the content of culture, the issue of cultural dynamism, the Igbo experience of cultural dynamism, lessons from Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna and the conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

There are some concepts that need be explained for better understanding of this write up even when they appear obvious. Such concepts for now are interpretation and culture. Space will not allow full discourse on the constituent elements and philosophical foundations of the concepts. Be that as it may, the explanations are not limited to their operational definitions.

Interpretation

Knowledge rests on understanding and giving meaning to every day experiences. It is the process of giving "meaning" for understanding that is called interpretation. Generally, it is texts that are interpreted to get the original meaning as intended by the author of the text and the appeal of the text to the reader. In this case, it is the text speaking to the reader, how the text appeals to "me," *relative, individualized*. But, the context within which the text is written has a lot to say about the text. This calls for a consideration of such factors as: cultural, historical, and personal experience;

audience, and “authorial intent”¹. In that case, the interpretation is holistic and objective.

Interpretation is not limited to texts. Peoples’ behaviour, community/group action, events, situations, and trends are equally subject to interpretation, to give them meaning for better understanding. Culture is a situation, but a situation that can change. Cultural dynamism is a trend, a trend that brings about change in culture. The trend needs be “interpreted” for the understanding of culture as it changes.

Culture

Culture is an every day concept. People talk of culture with regard to human communities, organizations, professional bodies, and individuals. It has reference to humans and not brutes, meaning that culture is measured within human rationality as manifested in acceptable or non-acceptable behaviour of individuals. Conformists to societal norms, customs, and traditions are, in the main, said to be cultured whereas deviants are not. Behaviour cannot be interpreted as conforming or deviating if there are no standards. Humans set the standards within their identifiable territorial environment. This separates and differentiates them from other humans in other territorial environments, societies. Culture makes humans unique. E. Adams Hoebel is, on this note, correct that “human beings are unique among the creatures of the animal kingdom in their capacity to create and sustain culture. Each society of men possesses its own distinctive culture, so that the members of one society behave differently in some significant respects from the members of every other society”²

Though there is no uniform definition of culture, every definition has the elements that show that culture is not a product of the preternatural world but of humans. Culture is not a product

¹ Paul Hedges, *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for studying Religiously Diverse Societies*. California: University of California Press, p.126.

² E. Adamson Hoebel, “The Nature of Culture.” In Harry L. Shapiro (Ed.). *Man, Culture and Society*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p.208

of systematic planning; it is a product of behaviour repetitions and historical and environmental experiences. That is why a community without culture is unthinkable; the same with religion. Most authors rely on the definition of the English anthropologist, Edward B. Tylor who, according to Au. Nnonyely, sees culture as “the complex whole of man’s acquisition of knowledge, morals, beliefs, art, custom, technology which are shared and transmitted from generation to generation.”³ This definition contains everything that humans are known for as rational beings living together in a definable social territory. T. R. Nanda says that “culture refers to collective term for socially acquired behaviour patterns of human groups including language, traditions, folkways, customs, and institutions. [It is] transmitted by process of teaching and learning, whether formal or informal.”⁴ Culture does not die. It strides through history: past, present, and the future. It therefore “comprises those artificial objects, institutions and modes of life or of thought and product of this thought, which also have been accumulated from the past, modified in the present and transmitted to posterity.”⁵

In Nigeria, there are many identifiable human societies with their specific cultures. Principal among them are the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba cultures. Each is a culture area. Each culture area can, and does, have many sub-culture areas. In Igboland, Nsukka culture is different from Awgu culture though in the same Enugu State, for example; Aguata culture is different from Orumba culture though within the same senatorial zone in Anambra State. Though many in Anambra think that the hoes of Ebony State farmers are the same but Izza hoe has more features of seriousness with farming. In spite of these differences, there are commonalities among these cultures that make a single culture of the Igbo such as

³ Au. Nkemdilim Nnonyelu, *Sociological Insights*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, p. 9

⁴ T. R. Nanda, *Anmol’s Dictionary of Political Science*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1989, p. 89.

⁵ S. C. Chuta, “The Religious Factor in the Promotion of African Culture.” In I. T. K Egonu (Ed.). *African Perspectives in World Culture*. Owerri: Vivian and Vivian Publishers, p. 383.

the culture of hard-work and perseverance. Cultural values form the content of culture.

The Content of Cultures

Any interpretation of cultural dynamism presupposes knowledge of the content of culture: the elements in culture that are analyzable facts, both tangibles and intangibles. This is made clearer with the two major dimensions of culture: material and no-material. The material culture includes everything that can be seen and touched: type of houses (architectural designs), work implements, paintings, artifacts, dance styles, music, hair styles, dressing, and so on. William C. Levin collaborates with Talcott Parsons that this dimension of culture is identified in “forms of symbolic expression” which are “certain objects . . . created to represent the feelings, experiences and tastes of the people who create them.”⁶ The symbols of expression represent an articulation of a whole culture area or a subculture area. For instance, in Igboland, *Ofo* is a symbolic expression of justice and authority.

Non-material dimensions of culture are the invisible sides of culture like ideas, beliefs, mores, customs, traditions, values, folkways, sanctions, and norms which are in the human intellect. This can be gleaned from the broad presentation of empirical and existential knowledge by Levin. *Empirical knowledge* indicates an accumulation of information on how a people view and understand the world around them. This knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation in the homes, schools, literature, religion, and simple observation. This knowledge is not static. It can change; it can increase. The trend of change and causal factors are beneficial to interrogating and interpreting cultures. Simple observation reveals that there are no known accumulated knowledge transmission evident in modern Igbo society. Children are taught one thing in the family, they learn another from the outer society and in the confusion they are culturally dislocated. Issues

⁶ William C. Levin, *Sociological Ideas: Concepts and Applications*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1988, p. 97.

of the source of humans, how and why they are where they are, are within the realm of *existential knowledge*⁷. In advanced societies, quest for such knowledge is the concern of scientific studies like philosophy and religion; in less advanced societies like the Igboland such questions are answered by myths, ancient stories believed to be true. As such, there are myths of creation, suffering/healing and of life/death/afterlife.

The other arm of the non-material culture deals with *values*. The sociologist, Harry M. Johnson presents a comprehensive explanation of value that has stood the test of time. According to him, value is “a conception or standard, cultural or merely personal, by which things are compared and approved or disapproved relative to one another – held to be relatively desirable or undesirable, more meritorious or less, more or less correct.”⁸ In other words, any and everything that has to do human behaviour has value and can be so measured: “feelings, ideas, actions, qualities, objects, persons, groups, goals, means.”⁹ In the case of cultural values, he says they are “cathected,” meaning that the group “is emotionally committed to the relevant standards- i.e., accepts them and uses them . . . in making choices and judging things.”¹⁰

In Igboland, cultural values include hard work, belongingness, hospitality, communitarianism, justice, respect, truth/honesty, titles, and so on. These values are seen in norms (which guide everyday behaviour) expressed in folkways and mores. Here, “folkways are everyday rules for behaviour (or customs), such as fashion and manners. Mores are rules for behaviour that must be obeyed to maintain the stability of the group.” Mores can be turned into law which breach attracts formal punishment. Standards for punishment or reward with regard to norms are called *sanctions*. The problem is how enforceable the

⁷ Ibid. pp. 95-96

⁸ Harry M Johnson, *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1971, p.49

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

sanctions still are in Igboland, where they exist; example, theft, murder, disrespect, laziness, dishonesty, incest, and so on. But, what is abominable in one culture could be approved and acceptable in another culture. This is seen from the characteristics of culture.

The Characteristics of Culture

There are identifiable characteristics of culture which call for attention in the process of interpreting culture and its changing phenomenon. It has been stated that cultures are built by humans; as such, cultures are for humans. The major characteristics of culture, therefore, are as humans understand and drive them. Au Nkemdilim Nnonyelu is clear that “cultures are man made, not God-given.” They are human “designs, prescriptions, responses which are deliberately fashioned to guide all aspects of a people’s life.”¹¹ The major characteristics of culture help in the understanding and interrogation/interpretation of culture.

Ancient and modern sociologists appear to agree on these characteristics of culture. The first is *cultural pattern* which is the generally identifiable manner of thought and behaviour of a people. The second is *culture trait* which is the smallest unit of a culture beyond which a culture cannot be further reduced. It is the basis of indestructibility of cultures. If societies are decimated, one day archeological discoveries will find fossils/artefacts of the people that lived there and the culture is revived by their forgotten remnants. The third is *cultural universal* meaning that there are shared common traits found in every culture though there are specific traits that identify specific cultures like Igbo culture. The fourth is *cultural relativity* which indicates that every culture is unique in itself, its values and behaviour are judged within the context of that culture. It equally connotes that no culture is superior to another in spite of education and technology. There are no inferiority – superiority lines in culture and in subcultures.

¹¹ Au. Nkemdilim Nnonyelu, *Sociological Insights*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 2009, p.10.

Another name for this is *cultural diversity*. The fifth is *cultural accumulation* which as the name goes is the way a culture adds up new traits at the contact with other cultures. The sixth is *culture contact*, a situation where a culture meets another culture through human efforts, technological advancement, media inundation, education, travels, colonialism, trade and religious expansionism. In a globalizing digital world, no culture is insulated from others. The role of artificial intelligence in building or destroying human culture is yet to be studied. The seventh is *culture shock*, an “embarrassment” one suffers when one is not properly prepared for possible contact with a cultural element in an alien culture which one’s culture abhors but accepted or accommodated in that alien culture. For example, a person from Igboland is likely to have a culture shock seeing women carrying a corpse in a procession for burial in some parts of Cross River State of Nigeria. A whole community can also suffer from culture shock as the Igbo on the Christian teaching of monogamy. The eighth is *cultural dynamics* which indicates the changing character of cultures in their material and non-material dimensions. It shows that culture is not static; it changes with time and by upheavals in the world¹². Material culture (philosophical accident) change faster the non-material culture (philosophical essence). The experience of this change is not limited to any particular human society or continent of the world; it is universal. Igboland is not insulated from the dynamics of culture.

The knowledge of these characteristics is important for any interpretation of any culture so that the investigation will have a direction that will lead to a framework for data collection and analysis so as to lead to acceptable conclusions. Cultural dynamism is the peak of these elements as it is the driver of every other element as societal forces – political, economic, religious, education, the media – propel dynamism. Without cultural

¹² Ibid. pp. 9 – 20; William C. Levin, op. cit. pp. 93 – 99; Harry M. Johnson, Op. cit. pp. 82 – 109; Onigu Otite and W. Ogionwo, An Introduction to Sociological Studies. Ibadn: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Ltd, pp. 41 – 48.

dynamism, too, the cultural value and conduct in these social institutions will be static. It is therefore important to give some lines to cultural dynamism.

The Issue of Cultural Dynamism

Cultural dynamism is often confused with cultural revolution. They appear the same but are not actually so. Cultural revolution has basis on the epochal work of Charles Darwin on the theory of evolution, a theory which has been applied in many ways in many disciplines to show the development of systems from one level to another; hierarchical in nature where every stage is deemed “better” than the previous one. Each stage contains the major elements of the original system but more refined. The disciplinary codification of the process is the theory of cultural revolution. This theory, according to William C. Levin, propagates that human societies can be arranged in order of advancement from the savages at the bottom to the barbarians, and, to the “civilized or cultured people.”¹³ Expectedly, European and American anthropologists place themselves at the top of the development and see themselves, in the mid of the 19th Century, as of the civilized, developed and advanced cultures. Their life became “the cultured.” A situation of “we – and – they.” This gives birth to the notion of “high” and “low” cultures. John S. Mbiti sees African cultural heritage in an evolutionary process: from hunting, fishing and gathering; to farming, agriculture and; to domestication of animals; to settlement in villages and towns; to complex societies.¹⁴

The problem with cultural revolution theory is the superiority” - “inferiority” divide of cultures in one specific human society (as in art and music) and between societies creating a situation of cultural dependency of the “less advanced” societies on the “advanced” ones; a weak – strong pendulum swing. In order to “meet up”, the dependent societies copy the cultural elements of

¹³ William C. Levin, *Sociological Ideas: Concepts and applications*. Belmont, California, 1988, p. 94.

¹⁴ J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. Illinois: Waveland, 2015, p. 2.

the so called advanced cultures and, many times, blindly. This could be seen in architectural designs, art, music, dressing, food and paintings.

In contemporary times, there is interdependence of human societies. This is not only in politics, trade, and education but also in religion. Culture is the carrier of these institutions as much as they, too, carry culture. As these institutions rapidly change because of hi-tech technological advancement and the media, culture equally changes. Culture dynamics is more challenging now than before as what happens in Nigeria this second has impact, negative or positive, all over the world the next second, if not at the same time. Also, people within cultures are getting more and more educated. Drama and music equally travel faster than some may think. The cell phone and the social media contribute to cultural dynamism, an ideological phenomenon, an unstoppable flood of cultural ideas shared simultaneously across the globe. Igboland is experiencing rapid cultural changes due to culture flux.

The Igbo Experience of Cultural Dynamism

The Igbo, like every other part of the world is not insulated from the crises of values brought about by cultural dynamism. The causes of cultural dynamism are multifactorial. The impact on native and homogenous societies are enormous, good and bad. The Igbo are very receptive to change. S. Ottenberg¹⁵ captures it well. As such, the winds of change easily impact the Igbo and the consequences on traditional culture are obvious.

Some of the positive experiences of the Igbo with regard to cultural dynamism include education and expertise in various life endeavours. There is no part of the world today that the Igbo do not excel in medicine, software and hardware development, aeronautics, music, film production (Nollywood), academic leadership (number of doctorate degree holders; headship of academic institutions within and outside the country); economic

¹⁵ S. Ottenberg, "Ibo Receptivity to Change." In W. J. Bascom & M. J. Herskovits (Eds.). *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*. Chicago, 1962

analysis and predictions at the micro and macro levels; ownership of transport systems (air, sea, and land), effective use of the social media (content creation), architectural designing and building, religious leadership, and so on. In many of these areas of life, they are prominent and most times firsts. One thinks of Francis Cardinal Arinze (Religion) Ngozi Okonjo – Iweala (Economics), Philip Emeagwali (Computer), Njideka Akunyili Crosby (Virtual art), Simon Ezevuo Onwu (Medicine), Peter Obi (modern politics) and so on. There are informed and free expressions of opinions for more coordination in developmental projects. Architectural designs for buildings are modern. There is upgrading of traditional herbal medicine in many pharmaceutical colleges. Agriculture is mechanized and made easier. With internet provisions, many learn skills through the You-tube; and they make fortunes from that.

There are also some negative consequences. The destruction of traditional values like hard work and respect, especially respect for human life, is the basis of all the negative consequences. The results are enormous. They include but not limited to¹⁶: low quality of social and moral values, inordinate and unprincipled lust for wealth, loss of social control, laziness, indiscipline, drug addiction, alcoholism, and crime of all sorts: cultism, armed robbery and kidnapping with assault rifles and other sophisticated weapons, cyber fraud; new paganism (*yahoo, okite, Ibubo*), indecency (in thoughts, talks, looks, reads, and dressing), shameless incestuous relationships (taboo for the Igbo), deceit, lack of trust (even of religious leaders), crass individualism (opposed to communitarianism), disvalue of traditional titles as they go for the highest bidder, more conflicts as resources accumulate in the hands of few. These notwithstanding, if cultural dynamism is properly diagnosed and interpreted, it is more of benefit than cost. There are lessons from Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna.

¹⁶ Cf. T. Uzodinma Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*. Lagos: Literamed Publications (Nig.) Limited, 1985, p. 256

Lessons from Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna

Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna¹⁷ understands full well the issues in cultural dynamism resulting from culture contact as explained. For his pastoral ministry to have roots, he needs an integration of Christian western culture with Christian Igbo culture since the contact is the basis for exchange of cultures and product of cultural dynamism. If this is not done, Igbo Christian culture will be a leaf but not the root. As an Igbo Christian trained primarily with western Igbo categories, he needs to personalize the integration first to have the balance to help other Igbo Christians be so integrated. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu captures this idea of integration in “contextual theology of evangelization.”¹⁸ The integration is not easy. It has to be, nonetheless, lest the Christian faith will remain superficial in spite Igbo openness to it. Dichotomy of Christian faith and Igbo culture will be disadvantageous to planting the Christian faith in Igboland.

This “integration is not easy. There must be a serious and high level cultural exchange in a milieu where one feels a stranger.”¹⁹ To date, the integration is ongoing. Because of wish-wash belief in “superiority” of European culture to Igbo indigenous culture. There is tension. Some people take the lazy way of handling problems associated with culture contact and culture dynamics, which is to destroy the culture than to adapt and integrate. Emefiena Ezeani praised the Christian Europe that integrated much of what was in Pagan Europe to enrich Christianity. Worried about the attacks on Igbo masquerade, *mmanwu*, institution and the attempts to “destroy” it by Igbo leaders of thought, he argues that “if Mmanwu institution has existed in “Pagan Europe,” “Christian Europe” would have

¹⁷ The pioneer Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Awka and then, the Archbishop of Onitsha and the Metropolitan of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province; a once President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, CBCN. He hails from Oraukwu, Anambra State of Nigeria.

¹⁸ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *Missiology Today: The African Situation*. In Elochukwu E. Uzukwu (Ed.), *Religion and African Culture: Inculturation – A Nigerian Perspective*, Enugu: Spiritan Publications, 1988, p. 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

enculturated or adopted it into Christianity to enliven, for example, Christmas and New Year celebrations.”²⁰

Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna understands the problems associated with culture dynamics and interprets them as appropriate. The interpretation is that there is something good in every culture; people should take what is good in each culture to enrich themselves, in their own culture. As a Christian leader, he believes that there is an abundant rich heritage in Igbo culture to enrich Christianity if properly harnessed. He does not advocate for the destruction of any aspect of Igbo culture knowing full well that there is difference between culture and religion, a differentiation that many are not able to make. They take religion, *ekpemekpe*, to be culture, *omenani*. Archbishop Obiefuna is antithetical to the view that “Christianity is said to have set its face against anything that is remotely traditional ‘so that it tends to destroy much of the indigenous way of life.’”²¹ He does not see Christianity as “a threat to . . . culture”²² as S. C. Chuta reports of Jomo Kenyetta who believes that Christian missionaries are set to take away from the African the body and soul of their old customs and beliefs, shattering tribal traditions and trampling upon traditional institutions.²³ He identifies the cultural benefit in Igbo forms of cultural symbolic expressions: in art, title, music, dance, praise names, masquerade, marriage, and death. Some examples will elucidate these assertions.

Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna uses Igbo art to make crucifixes in the St Patrick’s Cathedral Awka. Light minds in the faith see them as “Igbo” and as such not fit for the Church, inside the Cathedral. But he uses them to teach the need to enculturate and

²⁰ Emefiana Ezeani, *Mmanwu Masquerade in Igbo Society, To Be or Not to Be: The Auto-Victimization of Igbo Nation*. Onitsha: Mid-field Publishers, p. 12.

²¹ S. C. Chuta, *The Religious Factors in the Promotion of African Culture*. In I. T. K. Egonu (Ed.), *African Perspectives in World Culture*, Owerri: Vivians and Vivians Publishers, 1988, p.378. Cf also Jack Mendelshon, *God, Allah, and Juju: Religion in African Society Today*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1962.

²² *Ibid*, p. 379

²³ *Ibid*.

inculturate the Christian faith. The Archbishop does not see anything wrong with titles and title taking once the process is in line with Christian principles, for Christians that want to. The Ozo institution in Awka will not forget him easily. His friendship with Nwokoye Ida, the then Head of the Ozo Institution in Awka is infectious. Christian culture has truthfulness and respect as its non-material content. So they are in Igbo culture. The Ozo are the vanguards of such values in Igboland. That is the basis of the friendship of the Archbishop and the Ozo titled men through Nwolye Ida! In music, the Archbishop likes compositions with typical Igbo traditional lyrics and ensured a publication of an Igbo hymn book. He has two young men, Matthew Chiekezie (a.k.a Pastor) and Charles Anagor (a.k.a Tahil), who carry white elephant tusks and intermittently blow them in processions during diocesan events, during consecration and at highpoints during Mass at pastoral visits/dedication of churches. They go to the Vatican to do the same for the Pope at the instance of the Archbishop. He allows offertory dance, pouring of praise names to Jesus in the Eucharist especially during charismatic gatherings. He permitted masquerading and *Igba Mmanwu* (masquerade drumming) in the minor and major seminaries; understands and allows cultural elements in marriage. Here, the *okuko onyeuwa* traditional marriage rites in Awka comes to mind. To address cultural issues constituting problems at burials of Catholics, he directs that every parish constitutes a burial committee which will be able to allow Igbo cultural practices that do not impinge of the Christian faith in burials. It is to his credit that he interrogates the challenges of cultural dynamism, dissects them, sees the cultural benefits, and utilizes them to the growth of the Church and strengthening of the Christian faith. Igbo attachment to their deities and traditional shrines informs his institution of Perpetual Adoration and subsequent building of Chapels of Perpetual Adoration to help the religious sensibility of Igbo Catholic Christians; non-Catholics equally benefit from this. The testimonies of non-Catholics who

benefit from prayers in these Chapels of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration are heartblowing.

Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna maintains the culture of Igbo traditional communalism. He is active in both the material and non-material dimensions of culture. On the material dimension, he is an architect, a bricklayer, a carpenter, a painter, a sculptor, a farmer, a gardener, a florist. On the non-material dimension, he is highly creative and easily generates ideas (fruit of vast reading, meditation, and interacting with people. He reads a lot the works of the American Bishop, Fulton Sheen, and of the Fathers of the Church, “Fathers of our ancient faith” as he delightfully shares his reflections on them.) The fruit of this is that he does not preach the same sermon in neck-to-neck similar events like ordinations. His sermons are ever culture based, following the trends.

Archbishop Obiefuna, therefore, makes good use of the challenges of cultural dynamism to enrich the Igbo Christians to be both authentic Igbo and also authentic Christians. European culture is different from Christianity as Igbo culture is not coterminous with Igbo Indigenous Religion (IIR). He sees the necessity for the integration of Igbo cultural elements into Christianity for the sustenance of Christianity in Igboland. He is also convinced that that is the only way to reduce the tension that exists between Christian culture and Igbo culture at every stage of their encounter; cultural dynamism is an enduring process. It will also reduce the fear of some theologians that many Igbo converts to Christianity are not converted in heart; they still live with and in their traditional beliefs²⁴. The Archbishop’s response to the problems of the encounter of the two cultures is with an unshakable conviction that without his approach of integration, Christianity remains synthetic, without roots in Igboland. The numerical strength of Christianity in Igboland can be deceptive of strong faith. As cultures do not die

²⁴ Ibid. p. 380. Cf also John P. C. Nzomiwu, *The Igbo Church and Indigenization Question*. In Chukwudum B. Okolo (Ed.). *The Igbo Church and the Quest for God*. Obosi: Pacific College Press, 1985.

and core cultures die hard, the efforts to make Christianity the culture of the Igbo continues.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that a meaningful interpretation of culture and cultural dynamism takes the content and characteristics of culture into consideration. The categories within the content and characteristics of culture are the materials for interpretation. They contain the nature of culture, the material and non-material aspects of culture, the factors that impact culture, and the fact of the dynamic character of culture as culture is not static, being driven by humans. Igbo experience is used to indicate that cultural dynamism has consequences, positive and negative. It is the legacy of Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna that cultures are to be appreciated as every culture has something good for other cultures. No culture is to be condemned whole. Christian leaders in Igboland are to spare the Igbo their Igbonity by preserving elements in Igbo culture that are not antithetical to Christian beliefs and practices. Even when they are, effective interpretation for effective management maintains the balance, to make the Igbo both authentic Igbo and authentic Christians. For Christians in Igboland to think that Igbo culture will die is utopic. Cultures do not die. And because religion makes culture potent by appeal to the supernatural for sanctions, reward and punishment, religion does not equally die. The syncretism experienced among Igbo Christians is from the suspicion that Igbo Indigenous Religion is at the basis of Igbo culture. So, uninformed Igbo Christians take religion as culture, and Christianity as a garb. But, Christianity is *not* a visitor in Igboland. The PERSON of Jesus Christ, God – Man, makes Christianity a religion of God revealing Himself through **the** Man who is God. As such, as God is universal, so is Christianity universal and fits into any and every culture, including Igbo culture.

It is the responsibility of the Christian leaders to abreast themselves with the difference between religion, *ekpemekpe*, and culture, *omenala/omenani*; critically examine Igbo culture and adapt and integrate as appropriate. It is for them to Christianize Igboland that Igbo culture becomes, in the main, Christianized. That is the only way to reduce to an appreciable level the tension between Igbo culture and Christianity, without equating religion with culture. Christian Igbo culture is possible.

**THE CHURCH AND POLITICS AND ITS
SUSTAINABILITY TO THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
OF ANAMBRA STATE:
ARCHBISHOP ALBERT OBIEFUNA’S PERSPECTIVES.**

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Abstract

The Church and the State are institutions and as such both are structured towards attainment of certain aims and objectives. The functions and missions of the Church and government have serious consequential effects on the lives of the citizens. The failure of the Church and the State to carry out their responsibilities and functions places the citizens on the path of hopelessness as was the case in Anambra State. The Church in exercising her duties keeps the government on its toes in achieving developmental strides. Therefore the objective of this study is to present the contribution of the Church towards the political development of Anambra State through Archbishop Obiefuna’s perspectives. The study adopted the Structural-functional approach as a theoretical work of analysis. The study adopted descriptive design and data were collected using primary and secondary sources. Qualitative method was considered appropriate for this study because the method was well suited for contextual analysis. The study discovered that the development in Anambra State of today is the handwork of Archbishop Albert Obiefuna. The study recommends that Archbishop Obiefuna’s perspectives towards the political development of Anambra State should be sustained, developed and advanced for greater good of the state.

Keywords: Church, Politics, Development

Introduction/Background of the Study

The Church was born into a world ruled by Rome, but greatly influenced by Greek (Hellenistic) culture. The first world of the Church was the Greco-Roman world. A world in which the State through her leaderships the emperors tried to decimate the Church with several persecutions especially those that took place in 63 AD when Peter and Paul were put to death, 111-117AD that led to the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch, 116-117 during the reign of Marcus Aurelius when bishop Polycarp was burned to death till the fourth century when there were rival emperors with intense instability and breaking down of government structures. The State under the leadership of these emperors understood the institutionality of the Church and knows that to decimate the Church is to decimate her leadership, the Popes, bishops and priests.

However, the Church is an institution. It is an institution because it is hierarchically structured and ordered. In the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* 1 (LG 1:331) the Council Fathers noted that by her relationship with Christ, the Church being a sacrament has evolved over the years and a sign of intimate union with God and of unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. In other words, the Church is symbol of unity irrespective of tribe, race or geography.

Further, the State is also an institution. This is because what defines a State is its location within a geographically defined space populated and powered with authority. Both the State and the Church are instituted for certain purposes. Peschke (2001) notes that the state is the society instituted for the universal establishment of the secular common weal while the Church is instituted by Christ himself for the universal promotion of the spiritual and religious weal of mankind. The Church forms the citizens who will have the conscience that will use the public resources for the common good of all. Archbishop Obiefuna believes that Catholics,

who in his wisdom, will do better in public office because of the formation of their conscience. Anambra State since her creation has been governed by people whose minds were set on looting the public resources for their egoistic ends. Such persons have rendered and plundered the state such that the citizens became despondent about the development of the state. Such looters have taken the stronghold of the corridors of power in the state such that it seemed impossible for the righteous to come closer and to succeed. Archbishop Obiefuna who broke the jinx through his exhortation to the laity had set Anambra State on the path Sustainable Economic and political development.

Conceptualizations

1. The Church

The relational reality of the Church is evident from the etymology. The term “Church” (English), “Kirche” (German), and “Kerk” (Dutch) probably have their origin from the equivalent Greek term “Kyriake” which means “what belongs to the Lord”. Thus, Kyriake oikia would be Lord’s House. The Neo-Latin languages use the terms like “Eglise” (French), “Chiesa” (Italian), “Igreja” (Portuguese), “Iglesia” (Spanish), that are connected with the Latin word, *ekklesia* (ekkalem=to “call out of”). It derives its meaning from Old Testament term *qahal*, which is translated as “assembly of the people” gathered for the cultic purpose. Thus, the Latin term *ecclesia* is the modification and the transformation of the Old Testament notion of the people of God. Among the Greeks, only those who are called for a special purpose belonged to the *ekklisia*, the gathering of the city, which had political significance and only the males determined by their decisions what is to be done (Schmaus, 1980).

Beyond all semantics problems, the thing which is designated by the word ‘Church’ represents a mystery of self communication of God through Christ to the human community

and thereby to individual human beings, as well as the mystery of this society itself fashioned by God's self communication. The Church is an element of the mystery of Jesus Christ, indeed of the Trinitarian God himself. As a result of its character as mystery, the Church eludes definition in a rigorous sense. Besides, such a definition, to be complete, would have to include all elements prominent in the progress of the Church's historical life, including its future form, which we cannot yet know (Schmaus, 1980).

The theological reflection upon the nature of the Church begins after some preliminary attempts at the end of twelfth century. At that time the overriding concern was the relationship between papal power and the power of the king. However, it is only in our own time that the Church has offered a definitive interpretation of herself. This late development may perhaps be accounted for, if not justified, by the fact that like most human societies the Church begins to take stock of her only to the extent that its operation is not impeded to.

Again the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2003) explains that the word "Church" "designate the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose. *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the chosen people before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the law and was established by God as his holy people. By calling itself Church, the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is calling together his people from all the ends of the earth.

The Church can be defined as the faithful of the whole world. This broad definition can be understood in various senses all derived from the scripture, notably as the community of believers, the kingdom of God, the Mystical Body of Christ. As the community of believers, the Church is the assembly (*ekklesia*) of all who believe in Jesus Christ; or the fellowship (*koinonia*) of all who are bound together by their common love for the Saviour.

As the kingdom (*basileia*), it is the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies about the reign of the messiah. And as the mystical body, it is the communion of all those made holy by the Grace of Christ.

Again, since the Council of Trent, the Church has been defined as a union of human beings who are united by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by the participation of and in the same sacraments under the direction of their lawful pastors, especially of the one representative of Christ on earth, the Bishop of Rome. Each element in this definition is meant to exclude all others from actual and vital membership in the Catholic Church, namely apostates and heretics who do not profess the same Christian faith, non-Christians who do not receive the same sacraments and schismatics who are not submissive to the Church's lawful pastors under the Bishop of Rome. In the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* 1 (LG 1:331) the Council Fathers noted "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is kind of sacrament or a sign of intimate union with God and of unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity". In other words, the Church is symbol of unity irrespective of tribe, race or geography.

Again, at the Second Vatican Council this concept of the Church was recognized as the objective reality that identifies the fullness of the Roman Catholic Church. But it was qualified subjectively so as to somehow include all who are baptized and profess their faith in Jesus Christ. They are the people of God, whom he has chosen to be his own and on whom he bestows the special graces of his providence. Thus, the Second Vatican Council and the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pius XII described the Church as the body of Christ. The image of the body of Christ expresses the specific difference between the Old and New Testament people of God, while the concept of the Church as the

people of God accents the continuity between the old and new covenant.

Finally, in the scriptures according to Schmaus (1971:3) the word Church means a coming together not only of men but also of women and children, not for the purpose of decision-making, but for the obedient acceptance of a decision already made, a judgment handed down from God-for receiving the holy word of God. Bellarmine (2000) defined the Church as union of men who are bound together through the confession of the same faith and through participation in the same sacraments under the guidance of legitimate pastors, above all of the one Vicar of Christ on earth.

2. Politics

Politics exists everywhere. It is all-pervading and as old as human being (MahaJan, 2008:92). Politics can be found in every sphere of human life. Thus, no one can avoid completely this concept. This is why the citizens encounters politics in schools, government of a country, church, town, village, age group, political party, civic association, trade union and so on.

Politics is not created by angels but by human beings who gives birth to empires, Nations, wars, revolutions, institutions, symbols, constitutions and so on. Thus, the ubiquitous use of the concept impelled Aristotle to describe man as a political animal. In other words man is a political animal goes beyond the simplistic meaning of man's membership of the polis (Nwankwo, 2008:3). The word 'Politics' has different interpretations. From Plato to Aristotle to the present scholars, it has been interpreted in different ways. Scholars differ on the definition of the subject. Hoffmann (1965:3) an American and French political scientist noted "How could one agree once and for all upon the definition of a field whose scope is in constant flux." Politics cannot be defined in any generally accepted way. Thus, the classical conceptualization of

politics can be approached from the different perspectives, namely; the Liberal, communitarian and Marxist perspectives.

The Liberal View: The proponents of this view defined politics as a state or group activity. From this point of view, different individuals seek their interest as members of different groups. Gauba (2003:73) noted that the liberal view of politics upholds the pluralistic views of society. For him, there are a large number of groups in society. More or less organized, which seek the interest of their members against the conflicting interests of competing groups. He furthered that each of these groups is not only conscious of its particular interests but actively pursues them with a view to securing the authoritative allocation of values in its favour. Further, politics can be defined as a process of conciliating interests. One thing common in any society is conflict of interest and the intersection of these interests spills crises and sometimes deep-seated crises. According to Nwankwo (2013:5), these are typical political situation, typical situations which constitute the foci of problems for co-operation between individual and subgroups and which call politics into play. This means that politics is an instrument of conflict resolution. In other words, whenever there is a clear clash of interests either between persons, groups or several groups, there is always a way of settling these conflicting interests. The Liberal view therefore upholds that a common interest exists to reconcile the interests of the competing groups (Gamba, 2003). Conciliation becomes possible when there is a common interest that solves the interest of the groups which every competing group agrees on. That interest becomes the denomination which the competing parties agree on.

The Communitarian View: According to the supporters of his view, the essence of human nature lies in the spirit of cooperation, not conflict. Politics is therefore defined and seen as the area of mutual cooperation, not of conflict. Therefore, mutual cooperation

is the basis of political organization. Gauba (2003:75) quoting Aristotle had argued that the relation between individual and the state live similar to that between an organ and organism. What this means is that human beings or man cannot have good quality life without the intervention of the state. Therefore, man must cooperate with his fellow men in other to secure good quality life since no man is an island. The communitarians tend to argue that individual develop his identity, talents and pursuits in life only from his place in the community. In order to flourish in life an individual requires a place in a well-functioning community.

The Marxist View: The Marxist understood politics as the primary of economic interests. Since man cannot live by himself but must relate with others, the Marxists believe that his relationship weather social or political is shaped by the prevailing economic relations in the society. This means that economic interests are what define the motive of persons or groups of persons. Thus since persons or group of persons begins to protect economic interest which may run into conflict with one another, crises erupts, Therefore, what the Marxists believe is that economic interest are the motive force behind all politics (Gauba, 2003:24). The solution of economic conflicts becomes solution to any other conflicts. Gauba finally submitted that if the economic issue is evaded, settlement of all other issues will be a futile exercise. The Marxist finally believes that the class of economic interest is the fundamental of social conflict.

The Marxist furthered that politics is an instrument of class domination. Gauba (2003:74) noted that the believers of Marxist theory are that conflict and politics arise in society because its system of production is not organized in a rational basis. A rational system of production according to him, implies (a) highest advancement of technology so as to get maximum production and (b) social ownership of the means of production and distribution so

that all production caters to the needs of the Masses, not of the chosen few; it is undertaken solely for the social benefit, nor for private profit. But instead of rational system taking place a small group manages the major means of production and through the control, induce and compel the majority, to labour hard and this divides the society into two groups into masters and servants. When one recalls the mere definition of the state by noting that the state is the instrument in the hand of the ruling class. Instead of the state to remain neutral and intervene on behalf of weak, it takes sides with the haves. The state becomes an instrument used by the group of people to suppress the majority, the working class.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is situated within the structural-functional approach. Gabriel Almond is one of the chief proponents of this approach. He argues that every political system performs certain functions. Structure refers to human organization that can perform certain activities with effect on human beings and other organizations (family, legislature, church, etc). The function part relates to the activity of the agency and its external aspects, which are divided into latent and manifest, where the former is incidental and latter intentional. With this approach, emphasis has shifted from a physical, legal and historical description of institutions and agencies to an identification of function, which are services.

According to Almond, the functioning of any system may also be viewed in terms of its capabilities defined as the way it performs as a unit of its environment. The concept of regulative, extractive, distributive and responsive capability are used as criteria to assess how a system is performing within its environment, how it is shaping its environment and how is being shaped by it.

In its application, Archbishop Obiefuna (2005) believed that the Church by nature is theandrical. According to him, the theandrical nature of the Church means that there are Divine and

Human elements in the church. The human elements of the church shows that the church is a human organizations and what is noticeable in human organizations can also be found inside the Church and being a human organization that are hierarchically structured with clear intentions, functions and purposes. The clear intention and mission of the church is not only the salvation of the soul (*salus animalum*) but that church has always become a beacon of hope to the hopeless through her caring activities and evangelism. Such caring activities are what the government as a human organization sets out to do for the citizens. Hence, when the lives of the citizens are on a standard gauge, development is said to have taken place. Hence both the Church and government perform certain functions and activities that have direct impact on the people.

The Mission of the Church to the Society-Anambra State.

Church authorities are represented by the Pope, the Bishops, the Priests, and Deacons and ever more on various levels also Catholic Lay Faithful. The new code of canon law expressly states that lay members of Christ's faithful can cooperate in the exercise of the power of governance in the Church in accordance with law (CIC 129,\$ 2). They serve the Church as the mediators between God and Men.

Thus, *Gaudium et Spes* (40) of the Second Vatican Council noted that "Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church not only communicates divine life to men, but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth" (GS 40). The Church's function is to serve men in their religious and spiritual needs and to promote the values of faith and religion. She's called to imbue the everyday activity of men with a deeper meaning and to serve as a leaven and as a kind of soul to human society, with the goal to transform it into God's family (GS 40). The main functions of the Church are the mediation of the religious truths and care for the religious life on the one hand and the

building of Christian communities and the promotion of brotherhood among men on the other.

The foremost duty of the ministers of the Church is the preaching of the Word of God. *Optatam Totius* (OP, 4) of the Second Vatican Council also noted that Priests as well as all teachers and catechists of the Christian faith are required not to teach their own wisdom but God's word. The word must be preached impartially, without regard to the persons or human factions; not influenced by the wish to win men's favour, but only led by the will to transmit faithfully Christ's message and command (OP, 6). A sensitive area of the preacher is involvement in party politics. The new *Code of Canon Law* (CIC:747) stated that the Church has to speak out on the basic principles which are to shape the social and economic order of the nation. But as for the conversion of these principles into concrete political and social policies and institutions, the Church must show reserve. Priests and other authorities in the church must also know to distinguish whether they speak as representatives of the Church, example from the pulpit, or whether they speak as private citizens, example in an informal gathering. In order to be well prepared for their teaching office, the preachers and teachers of the faith must perfect their knowledge constantly. They must be well acquainted with the instructions of the Church and keep abreast of developments in Theological Science (Petschke, 2003). Based on the CIC: 747 as mentioned above, Archbishop Obiefuna decided to speak out and set his vision and mission to the development of Anambra State.

Archbishop Albert Obiefuna: His Vision and Mission to the Development of Anambra State.

Every society craves for leaders with vision and mission. Such leaders do not stand aloof when inadequacies, irregularities and shortcomings pervade the system. The vision and mission of Archbishop Albert Kanenechukwu Obiefuna was well captured by

Danladi (2009:29) who notes that “the church is expected to assist members of the Church to identify their gifts of leadership. Such people should be encouraged to go into politics to enable them use their gifts to serve people especially those that are marginalized and oppressed”. The main aim according to Archbishop Obiefuna, of having Christians get involved in politics is not just for them to represent the Church in the government, but more importantly to address the issues of injustices, corruption and bribery in the State. This intense position of Archbishop Albert Obiefuna reached the crescendo in 1998 when he encouraged the Catholics to go into politics to correct the ills in the society and to show that things can be done rightly. Hence, Ilozumba (2024) noted that Archbishop Obiefuna convened the meeting of all the Commandries and Sub-Councils of Knights of St John International and St Mulumba in Anambra state at the Shanahan hall of Most Holy Trinity in Onitsha. He addressed the Knights in collaboration with the Bishop Simon Okafor, the then Catholic Bishop of Awka who succeeded him. Archbishop Obiefuna in his address, was telling the Knights that the Catholic population in Anambra state was over 70% and as such that the Catholics would not stay aloof while things were going wrong in the state. His mission of pushing for the Catholics to go into politics was to correct the ills in the society through good governance that will change the lives of the citizens. Ilozumba (2024) noted that the admonition of Archbishop Obiefuna ignited the fire and a meeting of all the knights was convoked to fashion a new way forward in salvaging Anambra state. This led to the formation of Social Development Committee (SDC) of the Laity Council led by Sir Tony Uko Akpulu. Those whom constituted the SDC initially were the Knight of St John and Knight of St Mulumba. The duo came together and agreed that their population could not be enough for the evangelism of good governance in the state. The Laity Council was co-opted to be the foot soldier for the evangelical approach for good governance. It was the words of

encouragement given by Archbishop Obiefuna that led for the initial mobilization of the Catholic Faithful for the gubernatorial election in 1999 of which the election was rigged and the administration of Mr Chinwoke Mbadinuju that came into being became a disaster. Uko-Akpulu (2024) noted that despite the rigging of the election and mal administration of the time, Archbishop Obiefuna kept encouraging the SDC to continue to work hard and SDC was formed in all the three dioceses of Nnewi, Awka and Onitsha and SDC was also formed in all the zones and parishes such that when an information was sent from the diocesan level, it would have an immediate and easy dissemination effect to the grass root of the parishes. The Laity Council in Anambra State led also a protest to demand for the payment of teacher's salary and against the state government ineptitude in allowing the schools to be shut down for over a year. This action of the laity was fuelled by the refusal of the then bishop Simon Okafor to accept one million naira token from the governor during one of the public function at the Cathedral in Awka. This action of Bishop Okafor also deepened the quest by the laity for further search on the best means of salvaging Anambra State through a proper mobilization of Catholics and all lovers of good governance. The political evangelism became so intense in the State because Gov. Mbadinuju was no longer popular among the citizens of Anambra State and the refusal of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to file Gov Mbadinuju as their candidate in 2003 election.

However, Ejiofor (2022) believes that the emergence of Mr Peter Obi was as a result of this quest which Prof A.B.C. Nwosu put up a strong suggestion of character and personality that put Anambra State on the path of sustainable economic development. Ilozumba (2024) noted that Sir Tony Uko Apulu was drafted to move to Lagos to dialogue with Mr. Peter Obi. Upon conviction, Mr Peter Obi came down and met with Chief Victor Umeh, Arch Callistus Ilozumba and Mr Paul Odenigbo in Enugu (Ilozumba,

2024). Akpulu (2005) noted that after considerations of various political parties, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) was chosen as vehicle to run for the governorship election. Mr Ngige was chosen by the PDP to whittle down the huge influence of Mr. Peter Obi and to divide Catholic Population. Election took place and Mr Peter Obi was rigged out who later went to the tribunal and reclaimed his mandate as the Executive Governor of Anambra State.

Thus, the administration of Mr Peter Obi as the Executive Governor of Anambra State became a reference point and what many economic and political scholars will call a bench mark for good governance in Anambra State and Nigeria. The successive administrations in the State are being scrutinized and evaluated based on the recorded success of Obi's administration who developed all the sectors of the state economy simultaneously.

However, Ejimbeonwu (2024) noted that prior before the Archbishop Obiefuna's intervention and encouragement of laity in Anambra politics, religion was a big issue because Catholics seemed not to be interested in politics and our separated brethren played the game of politics to their own selfish end and not for the common good of the state. Obiefuna's effect brought a lot of positives to the development of Anambra State. The return of the entire mission owned secondary schools and over 1040 primary schools to their original owners gave credence to this effect. The State Government under the administration of Peter Obi did this with the hope of seeing quality of education improve and most importantly improvement in character formation. Governor Obi (2012:33) during the course of handing over the schools said that "the collapse of education in the state is directly connected with the takeover of schools owned by the Missionaries, Churches and Voluntary Organizations in 1970. That singular exercise signaled the disappearance of morality and building of character from our school system and that this can no longer be allowed". The

statements of the Governor Obi show that education is important to National Development. In fact one of the components of Human Development Index (HDI) is education. His educational policy moved Anambra from 26th position to 1st positions in West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) for years. The gift of one million naira to all Anambra first class students went too far in creating better future for Anambra students.

More so, Ejimbeonwu (2024) noted that Peter Obi has set Anambra State on a strong foundation of development through his Anambra Integrated Development Strategy (ANIDS) where all the sectors of the state economy were developed simultaneously. Hence the simultaneous development of all sectors brought drastic reduction to negative indices of development like the poverty rate, infant mortality rate, unemployment rate, misery index rate, corruption perception index as enshrined in National Bureau of Statistic (NBS) of 2013. The life expectancy and quality of life of Anambrarians became high such that the poverty rate was reduced to 11% placing Anambra State in 3rd position of the least state with poor people because the Gross Domestic Product of Anambra State grew to enviable position. The quality of life of the people became high because of huge investment in security of life and property which Willie's administrations' sustained and Anambra became the safest state in Nigeria. The successive administrations have built on the solid foundation laid by Governor Peter Obi. Ozigi (2018) noted that even though the Christian missionaries' objectives of establishing schools were the propagation of Christianity, their greatest legacy was their educational and health works which birthed the sustainable development of State. These development indices were the mission and vision of Archbishop Obiefuna when he was pushing and encouraging the Catholic lay faithful to join politics in order to improve the life of the people of the state. Archbishop Obiefuna's dreams became a reality with the

administration of Obi who took over from illegally but enviable administration of Dr. Chris Ngige down to the present administration of Prof Chukwuma Soludo despite the lacunas noticeable in these administrations. Peter Obi and successive administrations became the products of Archbishop Obiefuna's strategic engagement with the laity. Hence, the State has prospered today in area of good governance, respect for rule of law, job and wealth creation through the funding of SME'S, equity and fairness, rebranding of State battered image, improved free and affordable education and a united and prosperous State.

Archbishop Obiefuna's Expectation to the Church of Today in Anambra State

Archbishop Obiefuna did not engage in partisan politics. He did not advocate for a particular political party and neither did he abuse the power of the pulpit, rather he was very pretty concerned about the future of the State and how Anambra State could be placed on a clear path of sustainable economic development that will be beneficial for all. His conception of politics is that of authoritative allocation of values and how these values and dividends could be shared among the populace. He was so disciplined in managing the meagre resources of the Church in bringing development to the people in the State through construction of bridges to many communities in Anambra State, building of houses for widows in some communities, scholarships to indigent students in the state, empowerment and job creation through his policies.

However based on the increasing unemployment rate in the state and country which has snowballed into increase in crime rate especially among the teeming youth in the State, the Church in Anambra State is facing a major challenge of dealing with the various menace of the youths especially inordinate quest for money. This unquenchable appetite for wealth has led many of our youth in falling for ritual and various unconventional means of

making money at all costs. It is the view of this paper that if Archbishop Obiefuna is alive today, what will preoccupy his minds will be on contribution of the Church towards salvaging the unemployment rate especially among the youths. It is a well established fact among scholars across the world that unemployment leads to increase in crime.

Archbishop Obiefuna will expect the Church in Anambra State to embark into projects that will have quality impact on the life of the people like;

1. Building of technical and Vocational colleges and academies that will equip thousands of our youths with more advanced technical knowledge in dealing with the demands of the modern society thereby creating handworks for the youths.
2. Establishment of large scale agro-business where with modern equipments are used thereby encouraging our youths to freely move into commercial agricultural businesses like rice, cassava, palm oil, plantain, cucumber, potatoes through training and empowerment and establishing the food markets where these agricultural products can be sold at a cheaper price.. This will drastically reduce the hunger and misery index rate in the state.
3. Establishment of computer based laboratories and mega photography laboratory with 24hour internet facilities where related computer education courses and ICT are taught thereby equipping our youths with modern knowledge in ICT that can make them to become self employed
4. Establishing of oil and gas where petrol, gas and kerosene can be sold to the public at cheaper price to reduce the economic stress of the public.
5. Construction of manufacturing firms that can add value to the society where thousands of our youths can be employed and its products also sold at an affordable rate to the citizenry.

6. Establishment of the schools and colleges specifically for the poor and less privileged in the society irrespective of religion, tribe and language.

Conclusion

Conclusively, Archbishop Obiefuna will still expect the Church and her leaders; to remain the mouth piece of the people, to remain in their prophetic functions and duties especially in condemning the illegalities and unscrupulous actions of the government, to remain a beacon of hope to the hopeless especially the youths, to become the voice of the voiceless, to always seek out the best of all candidates in an election irrespective of the party affiliations, to become fearless in her preaching, not to allow the politicians to meddle in the affairs of the church, not to allow priests to become engrossed in party politics, not to allow the church to be egoistic in her dealings with government but to put the government in check of excesses and on its toes in providing the expected dividends of the democracy to the citizens and that the common good must be the primary mission of the church in dealing with the government and not gains.

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**CHRISTIAN BURIAL IN THE DYNAMICS OF IGBO
CULTURE: THE LEGACY OF
ARCHBISHOP A. K. OBIEFUNA**

Cosmas Okechukwu Ebebe

1. Introduction

The legacy of Archbishop Albert K. Obiefuna concerning befitting Christian burial can be viewed from the lenses of how he reacted to a classic value conflict between Christianity and a localized aspect of Igbo culture. The referent incident took place during his episcopate in Awka diocese as the pioneer bishop. In 1993, there was a tragedy in Nanka. The setting was the burial of late Mr. Reuben Ikeanibe of Agbiligba village, Nanka now in St Michael's parish, Nanka. At the time of the unfortunate incident, Nanka was a one-town parish of St. Anthony's Catholic Church. Mr. Ikeanibe and his wife, Marcelina Ikeanibe were devout Catholics and members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The Church at that stage was confronting the cultural hiccups of the time. In Nanka, one of the cultural concerns of the body of Christ was the aspect of burial that holds that wives were not to see the corpses of their husbands at death, spanning from the instance of death till burial. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement was championing the end of such cultural practice among the people of God. The topic was a recurring decimal during Sunday evening instruction but like all cultural practices the preaching against it fell on deaf ears of many Christians. It is not that the Christians did not cherish the teaching of the Church, but the average Christian feared the repercussions of the silent majority in the village.

Mr. and Mrs. Ikeanibe promised themselves that the spouse of whoever dies first should be at liberty to see the corpse of the other. It happened that Marcel died first, and the wife saw his corpse and expressed the disposition to see the corpse even in

public. It became an occasion to bear witness to the faith. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Awka diocese took up the challenge. The date of the burial was fixed, and preparations were loud and clear. The Neopagans planned the disruption of the burial. The opposition to the Church's stand on Christian burial hired thugs to join in obstructing the burial. On February 19, 1993, the unfortunate incident took place.

After the Exequial mass for Mr. Ikeanibe, there was a long procession from St Anthony's Church to Agbiligba village for the burial of Reuben Ikeanibe. It was in the context of the procession that Augustine Ezeh of Nsukka and Scholastica Nnolim of Oko were killed by the hoodlums opposed to Christian practice.¹

2. Archbishop Obiefuna's Response to the Tragedy

Archbishop Obiefuna was then the Bishop of Awka diocese. He instructed that Scholastica Nnolim be buried in the Church premises. As the Bishop of the diocese, the parish obeyed. The parish is land-stripped, they secured a place between the Church building and the Presbytery. Good aesthetic sense has transformed that otherwise depraved space where she was buried into a place of beauty. Mr. Augustine Ezeh a transporter living in Umunze hailed from Ohom Orba in Udenu Local Government Area, Enugu State. With the intervention of Most Rev. Albert K. Obiefuna and the kind permission of the Most Rev. Michael Eneja, then Bishop of Enugu Diocese, Augustine was buried in a marked grave on the premises of St Jacob's Church, Orba.

Following Igbo burial practice, Scholastica Nnolim would have been buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in the farmland of the Nnolim family. Such graves are rarely locatable after two farming seasons. Mr Augustine who was the third child of his parents was building a house at the time he was murdered. He was expecting his daughter who was delivered about two months after the referent incident. He would have been buried somewhere

around his uncompleted building. His burial place could be lost to generations as development leads to the modification of homes and new buildings.

This decision of the late Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna raises the question about the proper and more Christian place of Christian burial. As I argued in another paper, only the priests and religious get proper Christian burial in Igboland since their graves are marked and kept. In contrast, the average lay faithful is decently buried in a place where the mark of the grave would at best be temporal. Parents and significant people get buried within their compounds while the rest of the dead are buried in portions of lands belonging to the family. Most of the dead are buried in the farmlands of the family near their homes. There is no guarantee that those graves will be remembered in years to come.

3. Dynamics of Christian Burial

Human beings bury or assign a resting place for their dead in line with the dictates of their religion and culture. Generally, the dead are buried in the soil in many religions and cultures. Christianity thrives in all cultures and among all peoples and strives to retain the sacredness of the human body while adapting to the host cultures. Sometimes, there are skirmishes of conflicts between Christian religious demands and the dictates of the culture of the people especially concerning burial grounds and rituals. At other times, it is difficult to draw a dividing line between the religious and cultural practices of a people concerning burial. Most cultural practices are informed by religious convictions, so it becomes humanly difficult to say where culture ends and where religion takes over and vice versa. Thus, a lot of cultural but religiously tainted practices of host communities were discarded by the early missionaries during their pioneering enterprise in bringing Christianity to Igboland in Africa. Some of the practices were

termed 'pagan' because the culture seemed to be highly informed by the African Religious practices of the people.

A lingering issue is the place of burial in Igboland. The Igbo people of Southern Nigeria used to bury their dead in their compound or around it. The European missionaries introduced the use of cemeteries and generally acquired lands for that purpose alongside the acquisition of land for Church and Fathers' house buildings. All old parishes established burial grounds around the Parish center. When the European missionaries left, as in the case of Eastern Nigeria, the indigenous missionaries and home-grown evangelists questioned some aspects of their people's culture rejected by the European missionaries. One of the significant moves of the indigenous priests of Igboland at the exit of the white missionaries was the resort to burring their dead once more at home. We shall examine the issues around burying at a cemetery and burying the dead at home.

4. Christian Burial in the Early Church

With the birth of the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-13) the courageous speech of St Peter and the witnessing of the College of Apostles, over three thousand members were added to the followers of Jesus Christ on that day. They received Water baptism which signals incorporation into the risen Christ. (Acts 2:41). On that day of Pentecost, a large Christian community was born. They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread, and the prayers (Acts 2: 42). The degree of their common life was described thus:

Now all the believers lived together and shared all their belongings. They would sell their property and all they had and distribute the proceeds to others according to their needs. Each day they met together in the temple area; they broke bread in their homes; they shared their food with great joy and simplicity

of heart; they praised God and won the people's favour (Acts 2: 44-47)

They continued the Jewish cultural practice of burying the dead in designated places outside the homes of the individuals.

Abraham bought the first burial ground in the recorded Biblical history of the Jewish people (Gen 23:1-16). Notable in this history of the cemetery is the purchase of a burial place with the same amount of 'thirty pieces of silver' that the Jews paid to Judas for handing Jesus over to the Roman authorities through the Jewish officials. When Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned to death (perhaps, he expected something less), he returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, confessing that he had sinned by betraying an innocent man to death. They refused to accept the money back. He threw down the money, went away, and hanged himself (Matt 26: 3-5). Another story of the provision of a cemetery followed the return of the thirty pieces of silver by Judas. It was used to buy a cemetery for foreigners:

The priests picked up the money and said, "This money cannot be put into the treasury, for this is the price of blood." So, they met together and decided to buy Potter's Field with the money and make it a cemetery for foreigners. That is why, to this day, that place has been called Field of Blood (Matt 26: 6-8).

The early Christians who were mainly Jews, those resident in Jerusalem, and those who had visited Jerusalem for the Passover feast but stayed long enough for the Pentecost event, had their cemeteries in line with the cultural practice of the people. As D.I. Lanslots writes, "From the very beginning the Christians have their cemeteries, known under the name of their original owners, such as Lucina, Priscilla, Callixtus, etc. The oldest of the catacombs or cemeteries belong to the first century. The first was

probably that of Priscilla, the model of all.”ⁱⁱ Priscilla was mentioned in Acts of the Apostles as the wife of Aquila, a native of Pontus who had recently come back from Italy when a decree of Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul stayed in their house and from there held discussions in the synagogue trying to convince both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:1-4) to become followers of Jesus. In line with the common life of the early Christians, Priscilla must have been the donor of the referent cemetery cited as an example in the early Church. With the providential persecution that broke out in the early Church, the spread of the Church to many parts of the world and into many cultures has continued to this present day. The Church has always been adopting practices, adapting to cultures, accommodating whatever is good, and promoting the Christian faith. The Church has as it were, creative interaction with hosting cultures to make Christianity itself the culture of the people. As stated in *Nostra Aetate*, “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy, in these religions. She has high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

5. Christian Burial in Igboland in the Missionary Era

The setting is in Igbo land, mainly located in Nigeria, popularly referred to as the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria. The Igbo generally bury their dead at home. It is a cultural practice, and it is a mark of honour to be buried inside one’s compound. The missionaries came and established burial grounds in the parishes they established. The burial places served the parishes for a while. When the missionaries finally left, and the power of evangelization fell on the indigenous clergy, the culture of burying the dead at home came back to the center stage. One wonders how the missionaries were able to convince the Igbos to start burying their

dead at a common burial place and reverted to homes soon after the Western missionaries left. Celestine Obi reflected on how the Igbo people came to trust the white missionaries. Notable was the fact the missionaries arrived during the time of the slave trade but behaved differently. Concerning the missionary method of Fr. Joseph Lutz, Obi wrote:

During the era of Fr. Lutz, Christ's faithful redemption was brought to the unfortunate poor and downtrodden. The hungry were redeemed from hunger by being given food, shelter, and security in the Christian villages and the mission house. Kidnapped persons were brought back from their inhuman oppressors. Redeemed slaves lived in missions and later became some of the foundation members of early Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria. The sick received special attention.ⁱⁱⁱ

This practice has led to a lot of adjustments in the Christian practice of burial in Igboland. For instance, because a person's home must host a crowd during burial because the ceremonies are at home, lots of preparations follow Christian burial starting with giving the compound of the bereaved a facelift where necessary.

6. Cultural Pathway to Expensive Burial in Igboland

In a visit to a home, visitors are usually entertained so the bereaved are expected to play host to the sympathizers who also double as guests to the house. No one loves to be seen at their worst about their habitation and environment. A lot therefore goes into preparations for burying the dead because of entertainment and many ways of playing host to several guests. Over time, what should ordinarily be a period of mourning for the bereaved has become a period of extra anxiety about how to host the funeral guests. The thought of burying the dead in a family has eventually

become an uphill task. In some instances, family members sell their property to give their dead what society has conceived as a befitting burial. The Igbo nation is now crying out about their extravagance around funerals which does not exempt Christian funerals. A member of the Anambra State House Hon Pete Ibida, captured the main socio-cultural concerns of our people concerning burial and funeral ceremonies in these words:

The outrageous cost of conducting funeral ceremonies in Anambra state has attracted a wide spectrum of criticism and concern from various quarters. Conducting funeral ceremonies in Anambra State is now a form of social celebration for the dead with merry making, instead of a period of mourning and sober reflection, as obtained in other climes and cultures.^{iv}

This is a great analysis of the current concern of our people about which the Catholic Bishop of Awka, Most Rev. Paulinus Ezeokafor said that beneath the phenomena of lavish funerals and all forms of exhibitionism at burials are our attitude to God and the framework of relationships in our society. It concerns our understanding of the meaning of salvation in Christ and what happens in the afterlife. Perhaps, a more fundamental investigation could be understanding what is considered a “befitting funeral” in our society. We shall discuss these background stimuli of societal actions under the umbrella of a theology of Christian Burial and Funeral.

7. The Igbo Traditional Religion and Christianity

Before the coming of Christ, the Igbo people believed in God. It is not only true that Africans believe in God, but we believe in God whom we worship. Religion is part of Africa’s cultural heritage.^v From earliest times, burial though intrinsically a social responsibility has always had a strong tie to religion. No society

buries their dead without reference to their gods. The way and manner people bury and mourn their dead is closely tied to the people's understanding of their god.

The main purpose of giving the dead a befitting ritual burial in Igboland is to ensure their safe arrival in the spirit world and to guarantee their happy dwelling among the dead. According to Arinze, in African Traditional Religion, "very common is belief in spirit, both non-human spirits and human spirits who are ancestors. Some non-human spirits are believed to be wicked or at least unpredictable, while others are thought to be kind and benevolent. These good spirits and the ancestors receive most of the happy offerings. Because of the belief in the spirit world, prayer and sacrifice figure very much in African Traditional Religion."^{vi} Following this belief in spirits, prayers, and sacrifices constitute the main concern that should climax in a befitting burial for the glorious dead.

The Christian Religion is also steeped in offering prayers and sacrifices for the dead. Perhaps, the major difference between Igbo Traditional Religious and Christian prayer and sacrifice concerning the dead is what Okere points out as related to the concept of resurrection. Igbo Traditional Religion believes in life on earth after death through its doctrine on reincarnation. For Okere, the difference is in, "the (Igbo) *Eschaton* its nature and the belief in Re-incarnation."^{vii} Befitting burials in both religions are essentially in disagreement. On the one hand, the Igbo Traditional Religion mourns a person, who could reincarnate a few months or years later. The empirical nature of their funeral calculation may be more plausible as people generally do not know the time the dead person may come back to life and join the living. On the other hand, Christianity buries a person who has gone back to his or her creator. The emphasis should go in different directions. The present situation of the outrageous cost of conducting funeral ceremonies, especially in Anambra State may be indicative of some

degree of interference from Igbo Traditional Religion in Igbo Christian understanding of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

8. The Dignity of the Human Person

A human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen.1:27). Of course, male and female God created them. At creation, man was given such an exalted position that every other creature was not only placed under the authority of human beings but was placed at man's disposal (Gen 1: 28-30; 2: 19-20). And man created by God should know and love God the creator.^{viii} The Igbo as every other being share in the one creation by God. The high point of the dignity of the human person is around our salvation in Jesus Christ. Through baptism, believers are incorporated into Christ and the church. By baptism, Christians are made sharers in the mission of Christ and the Church.^{ix} St. Gregory of Nazianzus used many adjectives to highlight the dignity conferred to human beings by baptism:

We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, the garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called *gift* because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; *grace* since is given even to the guilty; *baptism* because sin is buried in the water; *anointing* for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed, *enlightenment* because it radiates light; *clothing* since it veils our shame; *bath* because it washes; and *seal* as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship.^x

The baptized person is a highly gifted individual who has responsibility both as a person and as a member of the Church. This fact will be better appreciated in the context of the Church's responsibility in the world created by God.

9. Belief in Reincarnation and Burial Place

Christian responsibility extends to every aspect of living in the world created by God and redeemed by Christ. It extends to the legislative arm of governance. Concerning other religions and cultures, the Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in them: “She has high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men.”^{xi} This message has been a great impetus in the efforts at inculturation of Christian religion in cultures. The Church has great respect for cultures in areas and on issues that are not contradictory to the message of salvation.

The traditional belief in reincarnation commands the practice of burying the dead in or near the compound of the deceased. The practice of burying at home is also reinforced by the libation and invocation at the breaking of kola in the home as the occasion always arises. The dead members of a family are in many ways present among their people. This is made concrete by the presence of the grave somewhere around the home where they lived. It is a sign of rejection to bury the dead in a land not owned by the family. Thus, it is a symbol of rejection to take the dead to a distant land as in the case of bodies deposited in evil forest. The ancestors operate like guardian angels of their descendants in many ways. So, the dead live among the living.

Christianity teaches relationship with the dead in the tripartite strata of membership of believers in Christ, namely the pilgrim Church on earth, the suffering Church in purgatory, and the triumphant Church in heaven. Our traditional respect/reverence for the dead resonated in the Church’s teaching to the extent that great respect is accorded to the dead. The Irish missionaries that brought the message of salvation in Christ to us, came with the Catholic ideal of burying the dead in a cemetery but did not see the contradiction in burying the dead at home as culturally preferred,

and so did not outlaw the practice. This is a matter to be reviewed in the present situation of grave concerns about Christian burials.

10. Need for the Cemetery or Burial Grounds

Burying the dead in a Cemetery is the ideal of Christian burial. Burial at the home of the deceased is only a third option in the Rite of Christian Burial as only the third option has no prayers at the cemetery: “The first envisions three actions, namely at the home of the deceased, at the Church, and the cemetery. The second covers only two stations, at the Church and in the cemetery. The third involves only one station, which is at the home of the deceased.”^{xiii} In other words, a befitting Christian funeral should be the one in which the deceased is laid to rest in a cemetery. Meanwhile, only the priests and religious enjoy it in our clime. The rest of the Christians are struggling for burial places in their various homes. Perhaps, we are yet giving befitting burial to our deceased in the yardstick of the African Traditional Religion wherein the dead must lie among his or her people. This overflow from Igbo or African Traditional religion rears its head significantly in the funeral of a lady where families under various guises go to ‘carry back to their ancestral home’ the remains of their departed sister married into another clime.

The introduction or reintroduction of the Christian ideal of burying the deceased in the cemetery will re-engineer the idea of giving a befitting burial in the right direction of cost-cutting and saving vital energies for greater love in the world. When the cemetery is to be used, there would be less urgency of the many extra expenses of packaging the home of the deceased or even erecting new structures. Funerals can be handled more directly by organizing little receptions in halls or eating at houses for convenience. Show-piece packages would shrink to size as shades of wear may no longer be necessary.

Added to the deep religious satisfaction of a proper Christian funeral, our homes would be saved by the several cavities, graves, made in compounds and dwellings. Some of the unsuspected cavities occasioned by graves have given rise to cracks in walls and ultimately to the collapse of some buildings. For lack of space, some families bury their dead along footpaths, passages, and sometimes inside rooms where they introduce beds as the need arises. Resort to burials in cemeteries would save such societal and economic heartaches. So, the first step in tackling the outrageous cost of conducting funeral ceremonies would be to sponsor a bill either integrally or separately for the state designation of places as cemeteries or burial grounds. On her own, the Church can create cemeteries as it did in the past. Yes, it will be business for the undertakers and cemetery managers, but the use of a cemetery would never aggregate to expenses at conducting funerals in the home.

11. Lessons from the Death and Burial of Jesus Christ

The burial of Jesus Christ gives us ample insight into the proper ingredients of a befitting burial. Jesus was buried in a burial place not in the compound of Joseph or any other. The tomb was an expensive one because it was hewn in rock. As Scott Hahns described it, the tomb “had been recently constructed by Joseph of Arimathea and had not yet been used (Matt 27:60, Luke 23: 53, John 19: 41). It was in a garden (John 19:41) near the city of Jerusalem (John 19: 42). The entryway was small (John 20: 5-11), and the tomb was closed with a large stone (Mark 16: 1-4).”^{xiii} The grave of Jesus was in a garden. Most cemeteries are cited in the form of a garden and tombs are not usually reused in cemeteries for years. But in our home burial ritual, some families are constrained to bury in old graves to safeguard family pride.

Also, the tomb of Jesus was near (outside) the city of Jerusalem. It was not constructed in the city just as most cemeteries are located outside the major cities for affordability, service, and convenience. Notable the pathway to the tomb of Jesus was narrow, indicating that it was not in the most expensive lane of the businesspeople. Everything about the tomb of Jesus suggests simplicity as a model for Christianity.

12. Model of Attitude to the Deceased Body

The human body is sacred, yet the sacredness of the human body is not a subject for orchestra. The majesty of the body is not enhanced by the quality of the coffin, the cost of the ambulance, the costume of the pallbearers, or their dancing steps with the coffin on their shoulders. The divine awe of the human body is not announced by the length of the motorcade conveying the body to the deceased home. These are empty shows that rather demean the sacredness of the human body. St Augustine shared with us what his mother said about the disposal of her human body. Augustine was in a rented apartment in Ostia on the Tiber with his mother and brother when their mother took seriously ill. In their presence, their mother took time to thank God for granting her heart's desire for Augustine's conversation. Augustine's brother was particularly worried about their mother dying in a foreign land and not in her own country. Monica said to Augustine and his brother: "Put this body away anywhere. Don't let the care about it disturb you. I ask only this of you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord, wherever you may be."^{xiv} She died and was buried at Ostia.

Burials in the home or even in one's town, state, or even country do no special good to the soul and are not a ticket to eternal life. This has been lived out for decades in the missionary enterprise. Living out this mandate of traveling light through life can be helped or fostered by healthy laws in the community of believers.

13. Conclusion

Christianity is a way of life. It is a certain way of doing all things and not a way of doing certain things. Christianity soaks into the blood and sinew of the true Christian. It orders and directs the reactions of a believer in acts and reactions. When Augustine says that our hearts are restless until they rest in God, he is referring to human continuous response to a pull that ends in our satisfaction in God. God created man out of nothing and put in human beings a yearning for God that cannot be satisfied in detail outside of God. When mortals continually yearn for something, it is not always that they know the name of what they want. Thus, the holy writ says that human beings pursuing the desires of their hearts have given themselves degrees of injury in running outside the track. Francis of Assisi tells us that action speaks louder than words in teaching that Christians should preach the gospel all the time and only use words when necessary.

Archbishop Albert Kanenechukwu Obiefuna gave a master stroke in practicalizing the dynamics of Christian culture in his response to the death of Mr. Augustine Ezeh and Miss Scholastica Nnolim. With his mind centered on the riches of Christian culture, he instructed that both Augustine and Scholastica be buried in the premises of their various home parishes. It is not the ideal of Christian culture to bury the dead on the Church premises, but it was at least a shift from the otherwise Igbo cultural practice of burying the dead in or around the compound of the deceased. Augustine who was newly married and Scholastica who was contemplating joining a religious congregation had no compounds of their own, so they would have been buried in farmlands outside of their parental compounds. If that had happened, their graves would have been forgotten and the memory of their earthly life would have faded. Generations would have lost count of their resting place forever. But in the present, people visit their graves and ask for God's blessings through their intercession. Scholastica

Nnolim is reputed to have obtained God's graces of healing for some who interceded through her. A grotto of our Blessed Mother has been built above the grave of Scholastica in the premises of St. Peter's Church, Oko.

¹ The memories of Augustine Ezeh and Scholastica Nnolim are immortalized in Austica Memorial College, Nanka, an Institution coined from their name as the fruit of their martyrdom. Cf: Cosmas Okechukwu Ebebe, *A Theology of Christian Education: Austica Experience*, Okpuno, Fides Media Ltd, 2021, 193 pages.

ⁱⁱ Lanslots, D. I, *The Primitive Church or The Church in the Days of the Apostles*, Missouri: TAN Books and Publishers, 1980, pp 270-271.

ⁱⁱⁱ Obi, C. A, "The French Pioneers, 1885-1905" in Obi C. A, (Ed) *A hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers, 1985, (pp 27-105), 29.

^{iv} Ibida, P., "The Scope, Relevance, and Challenges of the Proposed Bill for a Law to Control Burial/Funeral Ceremonial Activities in Anambra State and Related Matters." This is a commissioned paper presented at the 2018 First Theological Seminar of the Presbyterium of the Catholic Diocese of Awka, Nigeria at Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna Retreat, Pastoral and Conference Centre, Okpuno on May 30, 2018.

^v J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (2nd Ed.), Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2003, p. 10.

^{vi} Francis C. Arinze, "Christianity Meets Igbo Traditional Religion" in Akuma-Kalu Njoku and Elochukwu Uzukwu, (Eds) *Interface Between Igbo Theology and Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, (pp.10-19), p. 11.

^{vii} Theophilus Okere, "The Interface of Igbo Theology and Christianity" in Akuma-Kalu Njoku and Elochukwu Uzukwu, (Eds) *Interface Between Igbo Theology and Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, (pp.20-30), p. 27.

^{viii} Austin Flannery, OP (Ed) Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, (GS) no. 12.

^{ix} Geoffery Chapman, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 1994, no. 1213.

^x St. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40, 3-4; PG 36, 361C; cf CCC, no. 1216.

^{xi} Austin Flannery, OP (Ed) Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2

^{xii} International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, Vol. 1, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990, p. 1109

^{xiii} Scott Hahns (General Editor) *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 2008, pp. 130-131.

^{xiv} St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, Bk 9, chapter 11 (27). (Translated with an Introduction by John K. Ryan).

PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS

Ignatius Nnaemeka Onwuatuegwu

Abstract

This article explores the complex parts of relationship between philosophy and cultural dynamics, highlighting how these two domains shape human societies. Philosophy, defined as the pursuit of wisdom, serves as a framework for examining ethical values, social norms, and political beliefs. It has significantly influenced cultural practices throughout history, exemplified by Plato's impact on Western thought and the foundational role of Confucianism in East Asian cultures. Conversely, cultural dynamics—including social norms, religious beliefs, and historical contexts—also shape philosophical ideas, as seen in the development of African philosophical thought in response to colonialism and the influence of Buddhism on Eastern philosophies. The article further examines the interplay between these two forces, demonstrating how philosophical ideas can both challenge and reinforce dominant cultural norms, illustrated by figures such as Socrates and Martin Luther King Jr. Through these case studies, the article reveals the tensions that arise when philosophical ideals confront cultural realities. Invariably, a distinctive understanding of this interplay fosters deeper insights into the nature of human societies and the ideas that guide individual and collective behaviours. Through the acknowledgement of the dynamic exchange between philosophy and cultural dynamics, we can appreciate the complexities of human experience and the ongoing evolution of thought within diverse cultural frameworks.

Keywords: Philosophy, Cultural Dynamics, Ethics, Social Norms, Interplay.

I. Introduction

Philosophy has long served as a fundamental framework through which we interpret the world around us, our existence, and our place within society. The significance of philosophy in understanding human societies is immense; it lays the groundwork for the way we theorize about ethics, aesthetics, politics, and our very understanding of knowledge (Kant, 1781/1998). Cultural dynamics—encompassing the ever-changing patterns of behaviour, beliefs, values, and social structures within a society—are equally crucial in shaping human experience (Geertz, 1973). The interconnectedness between philosophy and cultural dynamics allows us to understand how human thought processes are influenced by the cultural milieu and how these processes can, in turn, reshape cultures (Taylor, 1985).

In this article, we shall find out how philosophy and cultural dynamics are entangled, influencing the way we think, live, and interact with one another. Going deep into the role of philosophy in shaping cultural values, examining how cultural contexts influence philosophical thought, and analyzing the interplay between the two, we can better understand this complex relationship.

2. Cultural Dynamism

Culture is a dynamic and many-sided phenomenon that encompasses the beliefs, values, traditions, rituals, art forms, languages, and social norms of a particular group of people. Its dynamism—the capacity for change and adaptation—reflects the complex interplay between human experiences, societal shifts, technological advancements, and interactions across diverse groups (Hannerz, 1992). This dynamism is essential for understanding how cultures evolve over time and how they respond to internal and external influences (Barber, 1992).

Culture is not static; it is inherently fluid. It is forged in the crucible of human interaction and is constantly shaped and reshaped by the context in which individuals and groups operate

(Appadurai, 1996). Culture can be seen as a living entity, where historical legacies merge with contemporary experiences to create continuously evolving varieties. This dynamism arises from various sources, including globalization, migration, technological advancements, societal shifts, and internal transformations within cultural groups.

2.1 Globalization and Cultural Exchange

Globalization has significantly accelerated the dynamism of culture. The interconnectedness of the world through trade, technology, and communication has facilitated the exchange of ideas, beliefs, and practices across traditional geographical and cultural boundaries (Williamson, 2002). This interaction can lead to several outcomes:

Cultural Blending: Syncretism occurs when two or more cultures interact, leading to the creation of new cultural expressions (Hobsbawm, 1990). For example, the fusion of musical styles can result in genres like Reggaeton, which merges Latin rhythms with hip-hop. Similarly, culinary traditions are often enriched through the incorporation of flavours and techniques from various cultures (Barrett & Mula, 2019)

Cultural Appropriation vs. Appreciation: The line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation has become a focal point in discussions about cultural exchange (Rogers, 2006) While appropriation can lead to the commodification of cultural symbols without understanding their significance, appreciation promotes mutual understanding and respect, allowing cultures to learn from one another (Young, 2010).

Global Culture vs. Local Identity: While globalization promotes a homogenization of culture, local identities often resist this trend, leading to a dynamic interplay where global culture is adapted to fit local contexts (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). This phenomenon is evident in the rise of local languages and traditions in the face of international trends, highlighting the resilience of cultural identity (Friedman, 2007).

2.2 Migration and Cultural Adaptation

Migration contributes significantly to the dynamism of culture. When individuals and communities migrate, they bring their cultural practices and beliefs with them, leading to hybrid cultural formations. This interplay between new and old cultural elements can transform both the migrant community and the host society.

Cultural Hybridity: Migrants often create hybrid identities that blend elements from their culture of origin with those of their new environment (Bhabha, 1994). For example, second-generation immigrants might traverse multiple cultural worlds, leading to unique expressions in fashion, music, and language (Ong, 1999).

Social Integration and Resistance: The process of assimilation can lead to tensions as migrant communities negotiate their cultural identity in relation to the dominant culture (Cohen, 2008). Some may embrace the new culture while others may resist, striving to maintain their cultural heritage. This dynamic can lead to the emergence of multicultural societies that celebrate diversity while grappling with the challenge of social cohesion (Castles & Miller, 2009).

2.3 Technological Advancements

The rapid pace of technological change has transformed the way culture is produced, consumed, and disseminated (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). The rise of the internet, social media, and digital platforms has facilitated unprecedented access to cultural expressions from around the globe.

Digital Culture: Online platforms enable individuals to share their cultural narratives, art, and music, bypassing traditional gatekeepers (Burgess & Green, 2009). This democratization of cultural production allows for diverse voices to be heard and for new subcultures to emerge, often evolving faster than in traditional contexts (Jenkins, 2006).

Cultural Preservation vs. Innovation: While technology facilitates the preservation and archiving of cultural heritage, it also opens up avenues for innovation. Traditional art forms may be

reinterpreted through multimedia, leading to new meanings and expressions that reverberate with contemporary audiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

2.4 Social Change and Cultural Dynamics

Cultural dynamism is intrinsically linked to social change (Tilly, 2004). Movements advocating for social justice, equity, and representation often reshape cultural narratives. The role of youth in pushing for change is particularly significant, as they challenge established norms and advocate for inclusivity (Sussman, 2009).

Cultural Movements: Social movements can lead to significant shifts in cultural values (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The feminist movement, for instance, has profoundly influenced cultural norms surrounding gender, challenging traditional roles and advocating for broader recognition of women's contributions to society.

The Impact of Activism: Activism can prompt cultural reevaluations of issues such as race, sexuality, and environmentalism (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). The rise of Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ rights movements, for example, has forced societies to confront ingrained prejudices and to seek more equitable representation and understanding of marginalized groups (McBride, 2020).

2.5 Crisis and Resilience

Cultural dynamism is often brought to the fore during times of crisis—whether caused by economic upheaval, environmental disasters, or pandemics (Gonzales, 2021). Such events can trigger a reassessment of cultural values and norms, prompting communities to adapt in order to survive. A clear example of this is the issue of Covid-19 pandemic which has brought about Zoom classes and Zoom Conferences that have come to stay.

Crisis-driven Adaptations: Cultural practices may evolve rapidly in response to existential threats (Cohen & Risen, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, led to the resurgence of

local communities, a renewed appreciation for traditional practices, and creative adaptations in the arts, food systems, and social interactions (Wong et al., 2020).

Resilience Through Culture: Culture provides a vital framework for communities to cope with crises (Friedman, 2021). Shared traditions, rituals, and cultural narratives can foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, helping individuals going through the challenges posed by change (Smith, 2019).

The dynamism of culture is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of human societies. It reflects the ongoing negotiation between continuity and change, highlighting the complex ways in which cultural identities are formed and transformed. Understanding cultural dynamism allows for a richer appreciation of human diversity and the shared experiences that connect us all. In an increasingly interconnected world, recognizing the fluid nature of culture is crucial for fostering dialogue, empathy, and collaboration across cultural divides. Embracing this dynamism not only enriches our understanding of the past and present but also shapes a more inclusive and understanding future.

3. The Role of Philosophy in Cultural Dynamics

Philosophy, at its core, is the love of wisdom. It involves critical thinking, inquiry, and questioning of fundamental concepts that govern human experience. Onwuatuegwu rightly observed that Philosophy as a discipline is a ceaseless endeavour to unravel the truth about various aspects of human life as well as examining or analysing varied concepts of different races in various epochs in order to evaluate and re-evaluate them (Onwuatuegwu, 2011). Philosophical ideas have historically acted as lenses through which cultural values and beliefs have been examined, refined, or transformed.

For instance, in the Western philosophical tradition, Plato's Theory of Forms introduced the idea of an objective reality, urging societies to aspire towards truths beyond mere sensory experience. Plato's Theory of Forms, also known as his Theory of Ideas, offers

a foundational perspective within Western philosophical thought that seeks to distinguish between the tangible, physical world and a higher realm of abstract concepts and ideals (Kahn, 2003). This theory which was developed during the 4th century BC, posits that beyond our sensory experiences lies a transcendent reality composed of "Forms" or "Ideas"—perfect and immutable templates of which the objects around us are mere imperfect copies (McPherran, 1998). For instance, while one might encounter various instances of beauty in nature or art, Plato would argue that these are reflections of an absolute Form of Beauty that exists independently of any individual example (Plato, 1992).

This distinction between the world of appearances and the world of Forms invites us to consider various dimensions of truth, morality, and knowledge. Plato's insistence that philosophical inquiry should aim at discovering these underlying Forms reflects a broader aspiration in Western thought toward understanding what constitutes objective reality. As a result, this concept has influenced the trajectory of various domains, notably education, art, and politics, throughout Western history (Fine, 1999).

In the realm of education, Plato's ideas have echoed through the ages, notably through his establishment of the Academy in Athens—the first institution of higher learning in the Western world (Kraut, 2015). His belief in education as a means to ascend from the shadows of ignorance to the light of understanding has set the groundwork for modern educational theories. The Socratic method, which prioritizes dialogue and critical questioning, encourages students to explore deeper truths beyond rote learning, fostering a culture that regards the pursuit of knowledge as a noble endeavour (Paul & Elder, 2006). Consequently, this philosophical foundation has become ingrained in contemporary curricula, emphasizing analytical thought and intellectual rigour over mere acquisition of facts.

In art, the Theory of Forms has inspired countless movements and techniques that strive to capture or express idealized versions of reality. The Renaissance, for example,

marked a revival of classical ideals, focusing on harmony, proportion, and beauty that echoed Plato's vision of the Forms (De la Croix & Tansey, 2007). Artists like Raphael and Michelangelo sought to mirror these ideals in their work, creating masterpieces that aimed to elevate human experience and inspire spiritual contemplation. This aspiration toward aesthetic perfection, deeply rooted in Platonic thought, continues to influence artistic practices and philosophies, leading artists to grapple with the tension between idealism and realism (Gioia, 1992).

In like manner, in the political sphere, Plato's allegory of the cave in "The Republic" serves as a profound metaphor for the philosopher-king's role in society—someone who has ascended from ignorance to knowledge and can thus lead others towards the good and just society (Plato, 2008). His ideal state is governed by those who understand the Forms, particularly the Form of the Good, which is essential for shaping laws and ethics that promote the welfare of the community (Honderich, 2005). This notion has permeated Western political thought, informing theories of governance and the moral responsibilities of leaders. The idea that true knowledge can lead to just leadership has persisted through the ages, impacting various democratic ideals and the role of philosophy in statecraft.

Furthermore, Plato's emphasis on rationality and the search for objective truths has seeded the intellectual climate that gave rise to the Enlightenment, spurring thinkers like Immanuel Kant to search into the nature of human understanding and morality (Allison, 2004). The rationalistic pursuit of knowledge and clarity—hallmarks of the Enlightenment—can be traced back to Plato's quest for truth, embodying a fundamental tension within Western thought: the struggle to balance subjective experiences with an aspiration for objective knowledge.

In contemporary society, the relevance of Plato's Theory of Forms persists, serving as a lens through which we critique modern issues such as relativism, consumerism, and the nature of truth in the digital age (Kirk, 2006). Debates surrounding what constitutes

objective reality, particularly in the context of post-truth politics and the proliferation of misinformation, echo the Platonic concern for distinguishing between mere appearances and deeper truths.

Undoubtedly, Plato's Theory of Forms not only advanced a philosophical framework that seeks to understand the nature of reality and knowledge but also has had a lasting impact on Western cultural practices. Its echoes can be found across education, art, and politics, demonstrating the enduring influence of Plato's thought as societies strive to traverse the complexities of existence while seeking higher ideals. This legacy invites ongoing exploration and discussion, encouraging a continued quest for truths that transcend the ephemeral nature of sensory experience.

Moreover, Confucianism has been a cornerstone for East Asian cultures, emphasizing virtues such as filial piety, respect for authority, and the importance of community (Yao, 2000). Confucius's teachings have not only shaped ethical systems but have also impacted social hierarchies and governance in countries such as China, Korea, and Japan.

However, there is often a dissonance between philosophical ideals and cultural realities. Despite advocating for virtues like justice and equality, many societies struggle with the practical implementation of these ideals due to entrenched cultural practices and structures (Bell, 2006). Such tensions reveal the complexities of integrating philosophical thought and cultural dynamics.

4. Cultural Dynamics and the Shaping of Philosophy

Cultural dynamics play a critical role in shaping philosophical ideas, as they provide the backdrop against which these ideas are articulated and developed. Specifically, elements such as social norms, religious beliefs, and historical contexts contribute significantly to the evolution of philosophical thought in various cultures. To illustrate this interplay, we can examine the development of African philosophical thought in response to colonialism and the influence of Buddhism on Eastern philosophies. This will serve as an example of how cultural

dynamics not only challenge established philosophical frameworks but also enrich them by introducing diverse perspectives and experiences.

4.1 African Philosophical Thought and Colonialism

The phenomenon of colonialism had profound implications for the philosophical landscape in Africa. Before colonial encounters, African societies had their own rich and diverse traditions of thought, encompassing various aspects such as ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology (Gyekye, 1997). These indigenous philosophies were often interconnected with local customs, rituals, and religious beliefs, reflecting the lived experiences of the communities.

However, the arrival of European colonizers introduced new ideologies that often demeaned and marginalized African ways of knowing. Colonial powers portrayed African traditional beliefs as "primitive," and in many cases, sought to replace indigenous knowledge systems with Western philosophies (Hountondji, 1997). This erasure of native identities and philosophies sparked a significant philosophical reaction among African thinkers.

In response to colonialism, a distinctive body of African philosophical thought began to develop, characterized by a critical engagement with both Western philosophies and the values of indigenous cultures (Nkrumah, 1970). Prominent philosophers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Chinua Achebe addressed themes of identity, decolonization, and the reclamation of traditional values. They emphasized the importance of cultural continuity and the necessity of situating contemporary ethical and political discourse within the African historical context.

Moreover, the struggle against oppression became a central theme in African philosophy during and after the colonial period. Concepts such as Ubuntu, which emphasizes human interconnectedness and collective identity, are prime examples of how indigenous philosophies have been invoked to resist colonial

ideologies and promote social cohesion in post-colonial societies (Tutu, 1999).

Contemporary African philosophers continue to explore the rich intellectual heritage of the continent, often blending traditional African thought with global philosophical currents. This has led to an emergence of hybrid philosophical frameworks that draw upon both indigenous wisdom and insights from Western philosophy, creating a broader dialogue about knowledge, ethics, and politics (Wiredu, 1996).

4.2 The Influence of Buddhism on Eastern Philosophies

In Eastern thought, the influence of Buddhism has been profound. Concepts such as impermanence and mindfulness permeate philosophical discourses in many Asian cultures, reshaping how individuals understand existence and suffering (Harvey, 2010). The dynamic interrelationship between culture and philosophy allows for a constant evolution of ideas, reflecting shifts in societal values, ethical considerations, and practical concerns.

Buddhism originated in the 5th to 4th century BC in ancient India, rooted in the socio-cultural context of the time. Its emergence can be seen as a response to prevailing religious practices, particularly the rigid hierarchy of Vedic traditions and the complexities of Jain asceticism (Mochizuki, 2008). The foundational teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) stressed individual experience and enlightenment, challenging the established norms of authority and caste.

Buddhism introduced critical philosophical concepts such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which provide frameworks for understanding suffering, impermanence, and the nature of self (Rahula, 1974). These ideas have shaped various Eastern philosophical traditions, including Zen Buddhism in Japan and Tibetan Buddhism. Each of these traditions adapted Buddhist teachings to their cultural and historical contexts, resulting in rich and diverse philosophical landscapes.

Buddhism's influence extends beyond its own tradition, intersecting with Confucianism and Taoism in China, where the cross-pollination of ideas facilitated the development of a distinctly Chinese philosophical ethos (Ch'en, 1981). For instance, the Buddhist concept of emptiness found resonance with Taoist notions of the ineffable, leading to unique metaphysical discussions on the nature of reality.

In the modern era, Buddhist philosophy has found new expressions, particularly within the global mindfulness movement, which emphasizes the relevance of Buddhist practices in addressing contemporary issues such as mental health, environmental sustainability, and global ethics (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The adaptation of Buddhist philosophy to new contexts underscores its dynamic nature and continues to shape philosophical discourse in the East and beyond.

This interplay poses questions about how philosophical ideals can either challenge or support existing cultural practices. For instance, the introduction of feminist philosophy has prompted critical reevaluations of gender roles within various cultures, leading to movements that confront patriarchal norms and advocate for equality (Tong, 2009).

Clearly, cultural dynamics—social norms, religious beliefs, and historical contexts—serve as pivotal forces in shaping philosophical ideas across the globe. The evolution of African philosophical thought in response to colonialism illustrates how marginalized voices can reclaim identity and agency through philosophy. Similarly, the influence of Buddhism on Eastern philosophies reveals a rich variety of ideas that adapt and transform across cultures. Both cases exemplify the complex interplay between philosophy and the cultural contexts from which they arise, emphasizing the importance of understanding philosophy as a living dialogue that evolves in response to changing social and historical landscapes.

5. The Interplay between Philosophy and Cultural Dynamics

The interplay between philosophy and cultural dynamics is a rich and complicated relationship that has evolved throughout history, shaping both individual thought and collective societal norms. This intricate connection can be understood as a dynamic negotiation where philosophical ideas can serve both as catalysts for cultural change and receive reinforcement and adaptation from prevailing cultural currents.

5.1 Philosophy as a Driving Force for Cultural Transformation

Historically, philosophy has often acted as a revolutionary force within societies. Philosophers like Socrates exemplify this role through their challenge to prevailing norms and values. Through dialectical questioning, Socrates encouraged his fellow Athenians to confront contradictions within their beliefs, urging them towards self-examination and critical thinking. His method illuminated the often-unseen complexities in human thought and societal values, ultimately pushing individuals to re-evaluate their understanding of concepts such as justice, virtue, and the good life (Benson, 2000). This Socratic method not only sparked intellectual discourse but also laid the groundwork for what would become the foundational tenets of Western philosophy. Socrates' approach illustrates how philosophical inquiry can destabilize established cultural narratives, prompting society to rethink its foundational beliefs and practices.

In more contemporary contexts, figures like Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrates the power of philosophy to confront and challenge deeply entrenched cultural norms. King drew upon philosophical traditions of nonviolence, ethical responsibility, and moral law to articulate a vision of justice that inspired collective action against racial segregation and injustice. His ability to weave philosophical argumentation into calls for civil rights not only highlighted the moral imperatives of his movement but also provided a framework that connected ethical theory to practical activism (King, 1963). This fusion of philosophy and cultural

dynamism illustrates how philosophical ideas can galvanize social movements, inspiring individuals to seek transformational change and challenge the status quo.

Philosophy has thus served as a tool for both reflection and action, enabling individuals and communities to confront injustices and envision a more equitable society. The varied dialogue between philosophical perspectives and cultural realities ultimately fosters an environment where individuals are encouraged to critically evaluate both personal beliefs and social structures.

5.2 Cultural Influences on Philosophy (Shaping Ideas and Ethical Frameworks)

In like manner, cultural dynamics have the power to shape and inform philosophical thought, leading to the adaptation and reinforcement of philosophical ideas in ways that resonate with societal values. This phenomenon can be observed in the adoption and normalization of specific philosophical frameworks, such as utilitarianism in Western democracies. Utilitarianism, with its emphasis on promoting the greatest good for the greatest number, aligns seamlessly with individualistic and democratic ideals prevalent in much of Western culture, thereby gaining traction as a preferred ethical theory (Mill, 1863/2001).

Similarly, in various cultures, communal philosophies—such as Ubuntu in Southern Africa or Confucianism in East Asia—reflect societal values that prioritize community, relationships, and social harmony over individualism. These philosophical systems are not merely abstract theories; they are deeply intertwined and intermingled with cultural narratives and social structures, often evolving in response to the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve (Tutu, 1999). As culture shapes the interpretation and application of these philosophies, they undergo adaptations that enhance their relevance and applicability within specific cultural contexts.

Moreover, the feedback curve between philosophy and culture can lead to the hybridization of philosophical traditions, as thinkers draw from multiple sources to address contemporary issues. This interplay can result in the creation of new philosophical frameworks that reflect the complexities of modern life—a blending of Eastern and Western thought, for example, or the integration of indigenous philosophies into global discourses on justice and ethics (Grosfoguel, 2016).

The relationship between philosophy and cultural dynamics is not a simple one-way street. Instead, it embodies a symbiotic relationship where each element influences and redefines the other. Philosophy can provoke cultural introspection and inspire movements for change, while cultural realities can influence philosophical thought and foster adaptations that maintain relevance within specific societies.

Understanding this interplay invites a deeper appreciation of how philosophical inquiry not only engages with but also challenges and supports cultural narratives. In a world that continues to grapple with disparities, conflicts, and changing norms, the dialogue between philosophy and cultural dynamics remains a critical area of exploration, offering insights that can pave the way for more thoughtful, reflective, and compassionate societies. The potential for philosophy to spark social change underscores its importance as a vital component of cultural evolution, fostering a culture of critical thought that can lead to a more just and equitable world.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the interconnectedness between philosophy and cultural dynamics is crucial for a variety in understanding of human societies. Philosophy molds cultural values and sets ethical benchmarks, while cultural dynamics provide the context in which philosophical ideas are formed, adapted, and deployed. This complex interplay shapes how we perceive our existence, govern our societies, and interact with each other.

Understanding this relationship allows us to better go through our contemporary world, characterized by globalization, cultural exchange, and philosophical pluralism. As we reflect on the significant impact of philosophy in shaping and challenging cultural realities, we come to appreciate the dynamic variety that defines human experience—one woven from the threads of thought and culture. Through the exploration of philosophy and cultural dynamics, we gain invaluable insights into the evolving nature of human society and the philosophies that guide it.

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PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY DIGITAL WORLD

Ezeanolue Aloysius Okwuchukwu

Abstract

The study investigated philosophy of education and cultural development in the 21st century digital world. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 79152 academic staff in public universities in Southeast State. The sample size was 750 academic staff, selected through simple random sampling technique. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, two in Philosophy of Education; one in Measurement and Evaluation, all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability was calculated using Cronbach Alpha for each of the subsections; 0.77, and 0.79 were the scores obtained for the subsections. Mean rating was used for data analysis. The findings of the study showed that philosophy of education positively influence cultural development in the 21st century digital world because it takes away the bad aspect of every culture, modernize and maintains the good aspect. The intersection of philosophy of education and cultural development in Nigeria's 21st century digital world presents a complex and dynamic landscape. As digital technologies continue to shape the educational terrain, it is imperative that Nigerian educators, policymakers, and community leaders prioritize a culturally responsive philosophy of education that acknowledges and respects the country's rich cultural diversity. Also government and community leaders should support the development of a culturally responsive philosophy of education that acknowledges and respects Nigeria's cultural diversity.

Keywords: Philosophy, Education, Culture, Development and Digital

Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of human development, a transformative process that empowers individuals to reach their full potential and fosters a more informed, enlightened, and compassionate society. It is the foundation upon which people build their understanding of the world, themselves, and places within the larger human experience. Through education, people acquire knowledge, skills, and values that enable them to navigate the complexities of life, make informed decisions, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. It broadens peoples perspectives, challenges their assumptions, and help them develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Education is therefore essential for personal growth, as it allows people to discover their passions, develop their talents, and cultivate their interests. It also plays a critical role in shaping people's character, instilling values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility, and helping them become active and engage citizens to enhance socioeconomic cum cultural development in the society. Perhaps this was why Offor and Offiah (2021), posited that when new babies are born into the society, they are taught their culture that is, the ways of life of their people; as these new babies are taught their culture, they are being socialized and educated.

Through education culture is transferred from one generation to another. Culture is central to the existence of human society. Culture is seen as the totality of peoples way of life: the tools, implement technology, skills norms, values, ideas and benefits prevalent in a place, which a people learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. Without culture human society would go extinct. It is through the continual transmission of the accumulated cultural heritage of people to their new and young members that a society is perpetuated. However, people are living in the era of globalization. Every year, there is an increase in the number of immigrants and emigrants to foreign countries with the purpose of living and studying. As a result cross culture communication takes place in many nations. Obviously no one can

learn everything about all cultures because people living in a particular environment have culture that is peculiar to them. Culture is the very fabric of any society, encompassing the values, beliefs, customs, and practices that define the country's diverse ethnic groups. According to Falola (2020), culture is the collective memory and experience of a people, shaping their identity and informing their interactions with the world. In Africa, culture plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion and national unity. As argued by Ogbalu (2019), culture serves as a bridge between the past and the present, linking generations and fostering a sense of shared identity. This shared identity is crucial in a country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with their unique cultural practices. Culture is essential for Nigeria's economic development. According to Hoffman (2020), cultural industries such as music, film, and art can contribute significantly to the country's GDP. The creative sector has the potential to create jobs, stimulate innovation, and promote cultural tourism. Culture plays a critical role in shaping Africa's global image because culture is a tool for diplomacy, enabling Nigeria to engage with the world and promote cross-cultural understanding. Cultural exchange programmes, festivals, and events fosters international collaborations and showcase rich cultural heritage of any society. Culture is the backbone of Nigerian society, promoting social cohesion, economic development, and global recognition. Culture is not just a source of pride, but a source of strength, shaping people's identities and informing their place in the world.

African culture is a rich and diverse tapestry, woven from the threads of tradition, history, and creativity. It encompasses a wide range of aspects, including music, art, literature, religion, and customs, each with its unique flavor and significance. One of the most striking aspects of African culture is its music. As noted by Agorsah (2019), African music is characterized by its polyrhythmic and percussive nature, which reflects the continent's cultural diversity. From the Afrobeat of Nigeria to the Highlife of Ghana, African music is a testament to the continent's creativity

and energy. African art is another significant aspect of the continent's culture. According to Okeke-Agulu (2020), African art is a reflection of the continent's history, mythology, and cultural values. From the intricate wood carvings of the Yoruba people to the vibrant paintings of the Ndebele people, African art is a celebration of the continent's creativity and beauty. African literature is also a vital aspect of the continent's culture. As argued by Thiong'o (2019), African literature is a powerful tool for storytelling, cultural preservation, and social commentary. From the works of Chinua Achebe to those of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, African literature is a testament to the continent's rich cultural heritage. Religion is another essential aspect of African culture. According to Olupona (2020), African traditional religions are characterized by their emphasis on community, ancestors, and the natural world. From the Yoruba Orishas to the Zulu Amadlozi, African traditional religions are a reflection of the continent's spiritual diversity. African customs and traditions are an integral part of the continent's culture. Also, Middleton (2019) affirmed that African customs and traditions are a reflection of the continent's history, cultural values, and social norms. From the Maasai jumping dance to the Zulu Reed Dance, African customs and traditions are a celebration of the continent's cultural diversity. African culture is a rich and diverse tapestry, woven from the threads of tradition, history, and creativity. Its various aspects, including music, art, literature, religion, and customs, are a testament to the continent's cultural significance and beauty. Thus, culture is a global phenomenon; education is a powerful tool for cultural enrichment and one dynamic and multidimensional field that critically examines the fundamental purposes, values, and practices of education is philosophy of education.

Philosophy of education is that aspect of education that seek to understand the complex relationships between education, culture, power, and identity, and explore the ways in which education can be used to promote social justice, equality, and human flourishing. According to Biesta (2019), philosophy of

education is concerned with the questions “what is education for?” and “what should education be for?” It involves a critical examination of the dominant ideologies and practices in education, and a consideration of alternative approaches that prioritize student agency, autonomy, and civic engagement. Zhao (2020) argue that education should focus on developing students' capacities for critical reflection, ethical decision-making, and social responsibility. Philosophy of education also explores the impact of technology on educational experiences and outcomes (Selwyn, 2019). It raises important questions about the role of digital technologies in shaping the purposes and practices of education, and about the potential risks and benefits of these technologies for students, teachers, and society as a whole. Philosophy of education seeks to promote a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of education, and to inspire new possibilities for educational theory, policy, and practice.

The history of philosophy of education is a rich and diverse narrative that spans centuries, continents, and cultures. According to Burbules (2019), the history of philosophy of education is a story of ongoing debates and conversations about the nature and purposes of education. In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle laid the foundations for Western philosophy of education. According to Laird (2020), Plato's theory of forms and Aristotle's concept of telos continue to influence contemporary debates about the nature of knowledge and the purposes of education. During the Enlightenment, philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized the importance of reason, individualism, and social contract theory in shaping educational thought. As argued by Siegel (2019), Locke's *tabula rasa* and Rousseau's *émile* continue to inform contemporary discussions about the role of experience and nature in education. In the 20th century, philosophers such as John Dewey and Paulo Freire revolutionized educational thought with their emphasis on pragmatism, democracy, and critical pedagogy. Garrison (2020), also affirmed that Dewey's concept of experiential learning and

Freire's theory of conscientization remain essential for understanding the relationship between education and social change. In recent years, philosophers of education have continued to push the boundaries of the field, exploring new ideas and perspectives on topics such as multiculturalism, feminism, and post-colonialism. Besides, Zeonardo (2019), stressed that philosophy of education is a constantly evolving field that reflects the changing needs and concerns of society.

Approaches to philosophy of education in encompass a diverse range of perspectives, each offering unique insights into the complex and multifaceted nature of education. The Afrocentric approach, as opined by Nwosu (2019), emphasizes the need for education to be rooted in African culture, values, and traditions. This perspective seeks to decolonize education and promote a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. According to Okecha (2018), the critical pedagogy approach stressed on the need for education to be a transformative and emancipatory force, challenging dominant ideologies and promoting social justice. This perspective shows the importance of critical thinking, reflection, and action in education. The existentialist emphasizes the individual's freedom and choice in education. This perspective sees education as a personal journey of self-discovery and growth, where learners take ownership of their learning process (Onyewuenyi, 2019). The social constructivist approach, according to Osokoya (2018), highlights the role of social and cultural factors in shaping educational experiences. This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding education as a complex web of social, cultural, and political forces. The holistic approach stresses the need for education to address the whole person - intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual (Adeyinka (2019). This perspective seeks to promote a more integrated and balanced approach to education. These diverse approaches to philosophy of education in Nigeria offer a rich tapestry of perspectives, each contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of education.

Philosophy of education and culture is deeply intertwined, as education is a cultural enterprise that reflects and shapes societal values, beliefs, and practices. According to Nwosu (2019), culture plays a significant role in shaping educational experiences, as it influences what is taught, how it is taught, and what is considered knowledge. Philosophers of education like Okecha (2018) and Onyewuenyi (2019) argue that education should be culturally responsive, taking into account the diverse backgrounds and experiences of learners. This approach recognizes that culture is not a static entity, but a dynamic and evolving force that shapes educational interactions. There is need to understand the cultural context of education, as it influences the way learners construct meaning and make sense of their experiences. This perspective emphasizes the need for educators to be culturally aware and sensitive, recognizing the cultural capital that learners bring to the educational setting.

Philosophy of education should critically examine the cultural assumptions and biases that underlie educational practices, promoting a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This approach recognizes that culture is a site of struggle and contestation, and that education can be a powerful tool for social change. Osokoya (2018) argues that culture and education are mutually constitutive, as education shapes cultural values and practices, and culture shapes educational experiences. This perspective highlights the need for a reciprocal relationship between education and culture, where each informs and enriches the other. Philosophy of education plays a pivotal role in strengthening culture by providing a framework for understanding and promoting cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Noddings (2020) opined that education is a critical site for cultural transmission and transformation. Through philosophy of education, cultural heritage is preserved, and cultural identity is shaped. According to cultural philosopher, Kwame Gyekye (2019), philosophy of education helps to reclaim and reinterpret cultural traditions, ensuring their relevance in contemporary

society. This reclaiming process involves critical examination and reflection on cultural values and practices, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage. Philosophy of education also fosters cultural diversity and inclusivity. As noted by Banks (2020), philosophy of education helps to promote cross-cultural understanding and empathy, essential for building inclusive communities. By embracing diverse cultural perspectives, philosophy of education encourage tolerance, respect, and social cohesion.

Philosophy of education empowers individuals to critically evaluate cultural norms and values. This was why Freire (2019), posited that education should enable individuals to read their world critically and transform their cultural reality. This critical thinking enables individuals to challenge dominant cultural narratives and promote social justice. Furthermore, philosophy of education promotes cultural preservation through the development of cultural literacy. Cultural literacy involves understanding the cultural narratives, symbols, and practices that shape our identities. Philosophy of education helps individuals develop this literacy, ensuring cultural continuity and heritage. Philosophy of education fosters cultural innovation and creativity. Greene (2019), stressed that education should enable individuals to imagine and create new cultural possibilities. By encouraging creativity and innovation, philosophy of education helps cultures evolve and adapt to changing contexts. Philosophy of education strengthens culture by preserving cultural heritage, promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity, empowering critical thinking, developing cultural literacy, and fostering cultural innovation. As philosopher of education, bell hooks (2020), aptly puts it, education is the practice of freedom, and philosophy of education is essential for cultivating cultural freedom. In essence, philosophy of education and culture shows that education is a cultural enterprise that reflects and shapes societal values, beliefs, and practices more particularly in the 21st century digital world.

The digital world, also known as the information world or the digital era, refers to the current period of human history characterized by the widespread use and reliance on digital technologies, such as: Computers, Internet, Mobile devices, Social media, Big data, Artificial intelligence and Internet of Things (IoT) (Adekunle, 2021). The researcher, however define digital world as the current era of human history characterized by the pervasive use of digital technologies, such as computers, smartphones, and the internet, which have transformed the way people live, work, and learn. This era has brought about significant changes on how people communicate, access information, work, learn, socialize, conduct business and govern. The digital world has transformed many aspects of people's lives, from simple tasks to complex systems, and has created new opportunities, challenges, and cultural shifts. Its impact is still evolving and shaping our world in profound ways.

The digital world has ushered in a plethora of transformative technologies, revolutionizing the way we live, work, and interact. According to Kellner (2020), people are living in an era characterized by the widespread use of the internet and digital media, which emphasizes access to information and knowledge. This information world has transformed the way people process and manworld information. The digital economy has also emerged as a dominant force, with e-commerce, digital payments, and online marketplaces creating new opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation (Florida, 2020). Social media platforms have become integral to modern life, enabling global connectivity and communication, and transforming the way we interact, share information, and form communities. The proliferation of data collection and analytics has led to the era of big data, where insights are gleaned from vast amounts of information, revolutionizing the way we understand human behavior and make decisions. Artificial intelligence technologies, such as machine learning and natural languworld processing, are increasingly integrated into daily life, with the potential to

transform industries and reshape the future of work (Bostrom, 2019). The interconnectedness of devices and objects has led to the Internet of Things (IoT) era, where physical and digital worlds converge, enabling a new level of efficiency, convenience, and automation. Immersive technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), are redefining entertainment, education, and communication, with the potential to revolutionize the way we experience and interact with information (Bailenson, 2019).

Digital world is not mutually exclusive, and some overlap or coexist, reflecting the complex and evolving nature of the digital landscape. A major component of the digital world is people's ability to employ technology to allow us to use materials correctly. To begin, the most obvious feature of the digital world is the internet. In the digital era, the internet is no more a supplementary tool, but rather a need (Rahmah, 2015). In this era, information is readily available, and communication is instant, global, and multifaceted. In the 21st century digital world, culture and philosophy of education are intricately intertwined. Culture shapes the way we perceive and use technology, and technology, in turn, shapes our culture. Philosophy of education plays a crucial role in examining the implications of digital technologies on learning, teaching, and the human experience. On one hand, digital technologies have enabled unprecedented access to information, resources, and networks, creating new opportunities for learning and cultural exchange. On the other hand, they also pose challenges to traditional notions of identity, community, and knowledge, requiring a re-examination of our cultural values and educational philosophies. Philosophers of education must consider how digital technologies influence our understanding of concepts like knowledge, truth, and reality. They must also explore the ethical implications of digital technologies on issues like privacy, equity, and social justice.

In the 21st century digital world, a philosophical approach to education plays a profound role in shaping cultural development.

As Nussbaum (2019) argues, education should focus on cultivating critical thinking, empathy, and global citizenship to prepare individuals for the complexities of the digital world. This approach acknowledges the impact of technology on human experience and cultural identity, and seeks to understand the implications of digital technology on education. Similarly, Papastephanou (2018) emphasizes the importance of philosophical inquiry in education, highlighting the need for critical examination of the cultural and social assumptions that underlie educational practices. In the digital world, this means critically evaluating the ways in which technology shapes cultural values and beliefs. Technology is not a neutral force, but rather a cultural and social construct that reflects and shapes societal values and beliefs. A philosophical approach to education acknowledges this, and seeks to understand the ways in which technology influences cultural development. Furthermore, Hogan (2019) affirmed that education should focus on fostering creativity, imagination, and innovation in the digital world. This approach recognizes the need for individuals to be adaptable, resilient, and creative in the face of rapid technological change. Critical pedagogy in the digital world shows the need for education to be responsive to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of learners. This approach recognizes the cultural capital that learners bring to the educational setting, and seeks to leverage this capital to promote deeper learning and understanding. It appears that philosophical approach to education in the 21st century digital world tends to influence cultural development by fostering critical thinking, empathy, and global citizenship, critically examining cultural and social assumptions, understanding technology as a cultural and social construct, fostering creativity and innovation, and emphasizing critical pedagogy.

In African online learning environment, philosophical approaches to education play a profound role in shaping cultural values and norms. As Okecha (2019) astutely observes, education in Africa should be deeply rooted in African cultural values and traditions, such as Ubuntu (humanity towards others) and

communalism. This means that educators must be mindful of the cultural values and norms that are embedded in digital platforms and tools, ensuring that they align with African cultural values. Online learning environments in Africa appears to reflect and reproduce dominant Western cultural values and norms, such as individualism and competition. However, philosophical approaches to education can help to challenge and subvert these norms, promoting more inclusive and equitable online learning environments that reflect African cultural values. By doing so, educators can create spaces that foster a sense of community and shared responsibility, rather than perpetuating harmful individualistic tendencies. Nwosu (2019) advocates for a critical pedagogy approach to online learning in Africa, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking, dialogue, and collaboration. This approach can help to empower learners to think critically about the cultural values and norms that shape their online learning experiences, and to challenge dominant narratives and power structures. By fostering critical thinking and dialogue, educators can create online learning environments that are truly inclusive and equitable. There is need to consider the cultural and social contexts of online learners in Africa, and designing online learning environments that are responsive to these contexts. This approach recognizes that cultural values and norms are not fixed or universal, but rather are shaped by particular social and historical contexts. Philosophical approaches to education in African online learning environments shape cultural values and norms by rooting education in African cultural values and traditions, challenging dominant Western cultural values and norms, fostering inclusive and equitable online learning environments, and considering the cultural and social contexts of online learners.

In the 21st century digital world, Nigeria faces a pressing challenge in reconciling its rich cultural heritage with the rapid pace of technological advancement, particularly in the realm of education. As digital technologies increasingly shape the learning landscape, there is a growing concern that the country's cultural

values and traditions may be eroded or marginalized. This raises fundamental questions about the role of education in preserving and promoting Nigerian culture, and the extent to which digital technologies can be harnessed to support this endeavor. Moreover, the digital divide and issues of access, equity, and inclusion further complicate the situation, as many Nigerian learners are denied the opportunities afforded by digital technologies, exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities. In this context, philosophers of education must grapple with the complexities of cultural development in the digital world, and explore ways to ensure that education serves as a force for cultural preservation, promotion, and transformation, rather than contributing to cultural homogenization or decline. Consequently, it becomes needful to investigate philosophy of education and cultural development in the 21st century digital world.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do philosophical approaches to education influence Nigeria's cultural development in the 21st century digital world
2. How does philosophy of education shape Nigeria's cultural values and norms in online learning environment?

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of lecturers in public universities in South East State. Hence, the study population comprised of 79172 academic staff in public universities in South East State. In composing the sample, Simple random sampling technique was used to select two universities which include Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and University of Nigeria Nsukka. Five faculties were sampled in each of the universities using simple random sampling technique, in each of faculty, three departments were also sampled using simple random sampling. In each of the

departments 50 lecturers were sampled amounting to 750 academic staff. A structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, two in the area of philosophy of education and the other in measurement and evaluation, all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. To establish the reliability of the instrument, trial testing method was used on 50 academic staff of University of Porthacourt which is outside the study area. The reliability was calculated using Cronbach Alpha for each of the subsections. At the end of the analysis, the scores obtained were 0.77, and 0.79 for each cluster in the questionnaire. The results showed high reliability of the instrument. The instrument has two parts, A, and B. Part A sought information on the respondents. Part B sought information required to answer the research questions. It has 1 & 2 and these were concerned with information regarding research questions one and two. Part A contains 11 items, while part B contains 10 items, making a total of 21 items. The four point response mode of strongly Agreed (SA = 4 points), Agree (A = 3 points), Disagree (D = 2 points) and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1 point) was adopted in the study. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of 10 research assistants, who were paired for each of the five faculties. All copies of the questionnaire distributed were collected back because of on the spot delivery method and collection technique applied. Mean was use to analyze the data. The four point response mode used, informed the use of mean 2.50 as the cut-off point for decision. The decision rule was that mean scores of items of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed while mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as disagreed.

Results

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on the influence of philosophical approaches to education to Nigeria's cultural development in the 21st century digital world

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{X}	DECISION
1.	Philosophical approaches inform the values that underpin Nigerian culture	2.81	Agreed
2.	Philosophical approaches inform the beliefs that influence how individuals interact with digital technologies.	2.93	Agreed
3.	Philosophical approaches guide the development of curricula that promote digital literacy	2.65	Agreed
4.	Philosophical approaches guide the development of curricula promote critical thinking in the digital world.	2.57	Agreed
5.	Philosophical approaches shape teaching methods that foster cultural expression in the digital world.	2.64	Agreed
6.	Philosophical approaches encourage critical thinking and media literacy, enabling Nigerians to navigate digital information and promote cultural awareness.	2.73	Agreed
7.	Philosophical approaches encourage the preservation of Nigerian culture	2.81	Agreed
8.	Philosophical approaches promote innovation and cultural expression in the digital world.	2.93	Agreed
9.	Philosophical approaches help address the impact of globalization on Nigerian culture,.	2.77	Agreed
10.	Philosophical approaches foster community participation in cultural development, ensuring that cultural expression is inclusive and representative.	3.41	Agreed
11.	Philosophical approaches help develop cultural identity and pride, empowering Nigerians to promote and celebrate their cultural heritage.	3.12	Agreed
Cluster mean		2.85	Agreed

In Table 1, all the items including the mean of means obtained mean rating (2.85) above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that all the respondents agreed that the items in Table 1 are the ways philosophical approaches to education influence Nigeria's cultural development in the 21st century digital world.

Table 2: Mean rating of respondents on philosophy of education shaping Nigeria’s cultural values and norms in online learning environment

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{X}	DECISION
12.	Philosophical of education inform the selection of course materials, activities, and assessments, promoting cultural values and norms.	2.91	Agreed
13.	Philosophical approaches guide teaching methods, fostering critical thinking.	2.87	Agreed
14.	Philosophical approaches encourage online interactions, promoting cultural norms like respect, empathy, and inclusivity.	2.75	Agreed
15.	Philosophical approaches promote creativity and collaboration	3.13	Agreed
16.	Philosophical approaches promote critical thinking, enabling learners to evaluate cultural information and norms online.	2.72	Agreed
17.	Philosophical approaches like Afrocentrism and Ubuntu promote cultural awareness, encouraging learners to appreciate diverse cultural perspectives.	2.84	Agreed
18.	Philosophical approaches like Existentialism and Pragmatism foster digital citizenship, promoting cultural norms like responsibility, respect, and online etiquette.	2.79	Agreed
19.	Philosophical approaches like Social Constructivism and Critical Pedagogy promote inclusive learning	2.71	Agreed
20.	Philosophical of education foster cultural values like diversity and social justice.	2.59	Agreed
21.	Philosophical of education promote equity in online learning environment.	2.82	Agreed
Cluster mean		2.81	Agreed

In Table 2, all the items including the mean of means obtained mean rating (2.83) above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that all the respondents agreed that the items in table 2 are the ways on philosophy of education shapes Nigeria’s cultural values and norms in online learning environment

Discussion

The findings of the study showed that philosophical approaches to education positively influences cultural development in Nigeria in this 21st century digital world. The findings of this study align with the views of contemporary scholars who argue that philosophical approaches to education significantly influence cultural development in the digital world. As noted by Oladele (2020), Afrocentrism promotes cultural revitalization, encouraging Nigerians to reclaim and celebrate their cultural heritage in the face of digital globalization. Similarly, Achebe (2019) posits that Existentialism and Postcolonialism inspire digital cultural expression, enabling Nigerians to create and share cultural content online, thereby promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity. Furthermore, the study's findings resonate with the ideas of Okeke (2022), who argues that Critical Pedagogy and Social Constructivism foster critical digital literacy, empowering Nigerians to navigate and critique digital cultural information. This is particularly important in the digital world, where cultural information is readily available, yet often requires critical evaluation to ensure cultural accuracy and sensitivity. The study's findings support the views of Nwosu (2021), who contends that Pragmatism and Existentialism encourage cultural innovation, enabling Nigerians to create new cultural forms and expressions in the digital world. This is evident in the proliferation of digital art, music, and literature in Nigeria, which reflects the country's rich cultural heritage. Hence, philosophical approaches to education play a vital role in shaping cultural development in Nigeria's 21st century digital world. By promoting cultural revitalization, innovation, and preservation, these approaches ensure that Nigerian culture remains vibrant and relevant in the face of digital globalization.

The findings of this study reveal that philosophy of education plays a profound role in shaping cultural values and norms in online learning environments. As argued by Benson (2020), philosophical approaches like Afrocentrism and Ubuntu

promote cultural awareness and inclusivity, encouraging learners to appreciate diverse cultural perspectives and values. This is particularly significant in online learning environments, where learners from diverse cultural backgrounds interact and engage with cultural content. Moreover, the study's findings align with the views of Adeyinka (2019), who posits that philosophical approaches like Existentialism and Pragmatism foster critical thinking and creativity, enabling learners to evaluate and create cultural content online. This not only promotes cultural expression but also encourage learners to think critically about cultural norms and values. The study's findings support the ideas of Oluwajodu (2022), who contends that philosophical approaches like Critical Pedagogy and Social Constructivism promote inclusive learning, fostering cultural values like diversity, equity, and social justice. This is particularly important in online learning environments, where cultural biases and stereotypes can perpetuate if left unchecked. The findings of the study resonate with the views of Nwachukwu (2021), who argues that philosophical approaches like Existentialism and Ubuntu encourage digital citizenship, promoting cultural norms like responsibility, respect, and online etiquette. This is crucial in online learning environments, where learners must navigate complex digital interactions and cultural exchanges. Philosophical of education therefore ensure that online learning environments foster cultural values and norms that are inclusive, diverse, and equitable.

Conclusion

It is clear that philosophy of education positively influence cultural development in the 21st century digital world because it takes away the bad aspect of every culture, modernize and maintain the good aspect of every culture. The intersection of philosophy of education and cultural development in Nigeria's 21st century digital world presents a complex and dynamic landscape. As digital technologies continue to shape the educational terrain, it is imperative that Nigerian educators, policymakers, and community leaders

prioritize a culturally responsive philosophy of education that acknowledges and respects the country's rich cultural diversity. By doing so, Nigeria can harness the potential of digital technologies to enhance cultural development, promote social justice, and empower future generations to navigate the complexities of the digital world. The time has come to re-imagine education in Nigeria, one that seamlessly integrates digital technologies with cultural values, traditions, and experiences. The future of Nigeria's cultural development in the digital world depends on the ability of its educators, leaders, and citizens to critically examine, creatively adapt, and courageously implement a philosophy of education that is authentic, inclusive, and forward-thinking. By embracing this challenge, Nigeria can forge a path towards a brighter future, where culture, education, and technology converge to create a vibrant tapestry of human flourishing.

Implications for the study

The implications of the findings of the study is very important to the society. If philosophy of education fails to positively enhance cultural development in Nigeria's 21st century digital world, the consequences will be far-reaching and devastating. Nigerian culture, already vulnerable to the homogenizing forces of globalization, will be further eroded, leading to a loss of cultural identity, heritage, and values. The digital landscape, instead of being a tool for cultural preservation and promotion, will become a conduit for cultural imperialism, perpetuating Western values and norms at the expense of Nigerian ones. The country's rich cultural diversity will be reduced to a mere shadow of its former self, threatening the very fabric of Nigerian society. Moreover, the failure of philosophy of education to address the cultural implications of digital technologies will result in a disconnection between education and the cultural needs of Nigerian learners. Education will become a mere transmission of Western knowledge, devoid of context, relevance, or cultural sensitivity, leading to a disenchanting and disempowered citizenry. The neglect of cultural

development in the digital world will exacerbate social and economic inequalities, as those with access to digital technologies and Western education will hold power and influence, while those without will be further marginalized. The failure of philosophy of education to positively enhance cultural development in Nigeria's digital world will lead to a cultural crisis, characterized by a loss of identity, heritage, and values, with far-reaching consequences for the country's social, economic, and political future.

Recommendations

Based on the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and community leaders should support the development of a culturally responsive philosophy of education that acknowledges and respects Nigeria's cultural diversity.
2. Educational policy makers in Nigeria should integrate of cultural studies into the educational curriculum to promote cultural awareness and understanding.
3. Government and educational stakeholders should harness digital technologies to support cultural preservation and promotion, such as digital museums, cultural archives, and online platforms for cultural expression.
4. Government through its educational policy makers should Critical pedagogy training for educators to develop strategies for promoting critical thinking, cultural awareness, and social responsibility in the digital world.
5. Government should establish community-based digital learning centers that provide access to digital technologies and cultural education for marginalized communities.
6. There should be collaboration between educators, policymakers, and community leaders to develop culturally sensitive educational policies and programmes.
7. Government should encourage interdisciplinary research in philosophy of education, cultural studies, and digital technologies to inform educational practice and policy.

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ON NO OTHER FOUNDATION

Innocent Nwafor

Clearing the Ground

You are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph 2: 20–22).

This is a biblical passage I have read many times for several years. Yet it never had any extra-ordinary significance to me in any form. For sure, I read, with enthusiasm, the first Pastoral Letter – *On No Other Foundation But On That Of Living Faith* (8 February, 1978) – of late Archbishop Albert K. Obiefuna, the then pioneer Bishop of Awka Diocese. However, there wasn't any special association or attachment to it until something happened around 2009, twenty-one years after that publication. To say the least, it was *something* that made me feel ashamed of myself.

I mean, to realize that it took a foreigner to draw my attention to that first Pastoral Letter as a profound spiritual so closely intertwined with another great spiritual edifice, namely, Pastoral/Conference Centre, Okpuno as it was called then. Today, the Centre has been renamed, Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna Retreat/Conference Centre Okpuno. Here I begin to better appreciate the saying that we do not usually understand that “often the Professor we seek in Rome is found at home”, very close to our nose and our feet. That I had been coming to, and going away from the Centre without deeply understanding the spiritual insight embedded there was the source of my shame. Today I can look back and say to that foreigner, a Benedictan Monk “thank you” for awakening my consciousness by a simple question that made me re-look with keener interest on that First Pastoral Letter and the Pastoral Centre the pioneer Bishop built almost around the same time and to associate the two. Now, I am seeing beyond the two. I

could now with hindsight see the relationship between the two and the whole life and Pastoral ministry of late Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna in Awka Diocese as its pioneer bishop, from 5th of February 1978 before his sudden transfer to become the Archbishop of Onitsha Archdiocese on 6th May 1995. This write-up is meant to be a reflection on that event.

How did it happen?

In the year 2009, if I remember vividly, I visited Nigeria on holidays along with a friend of mine, Fr. Nikolaus Johann Zacherl, a Benedictan Monk from Kremsmünster in Opper Austria. At that time, Fr. Nikolaus was about 70 years old. Because of his age, and because of the security challenges in Nigeria, many people wondered why the monk could take that risk of choosing Nigeria as his holiday destination taking into consideration the many bad news, especially of insecurity being filtered into European countries. Some were questioning his choice of Nigeria whereas there were opportunities for visiting countries like India, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and others. These were countries that were more associated with clement weather, peace, political stability and tourist attractions. Initially, he was not sure if he really wanted to make the trip for reason given above and, perhaps, because of the many dissuading voices he was getting from people who had been following the happenstances in Nigeria. At last, he made up his mind to risk it, after all, “love is strong as death” (Song of Songs 8:6).

The quest for Nigerian Visa took us twice to the Nigerian Embassy in Vienna. Because his parents had lived in Vienna, it became an opportunity for him to take me round the beautiful and famous city of Vienna, the capital of Austria. On visiting a relation of his in Vienna, I can still remember, he was questioned why he made the choice to visit Nigeria. In spite of all, the family treated us very warmly and generously and wished us well. The fruits of that risky decision are still unfolding and I am immensely grateful to God he came with me.

Our trip to Nigeria, first in Lagos, then to Enugu was a smooth one. It was in the rainy period within the months of July-August. As expected, the mammoth crowd we experienced in Lagos and the usual chaotic way the lorry and private car drivers plied the road heightened his fear. However, the mammoth crowd of women, all elegantly dressed in their C.W.O. Uniform: blueish uniformed headscarf-necklace-skate and wrapper attire became an unforgettable first positive fascination for my visitor. Every day as we took a walk or visit sites like Igbo Ukwu Art Museum and Nri Cultural Museum he saw large number of women, all clothed in Uniform going and coming to and from their “August General Meeting”. He never stopped telling the story.

Impression of A.K Obiefuna Retreat Pastoral Centre.

We had just finished breakfast one morning, and was taking a walk along the central aisle toward the chapel when an unexpected question was put to me by my friend Fr. Nikolaus:

“Who conceived this Pastoral Centre?”

I simply responded, “Our pioneer Bishop, A. K. Obiefuna.” Following my response was another comment from him:

“That bishop must have been a man of great spiritual insight.”

I felt really taken aback. Or better still, like someone who was awoken from a deep sleep. Emotionally, I cleared my eyes to see what he was talking about. It was as if someone was relating to me from a deep mystical world while I was still cogitating on the fried plantain, bread and stew that we ate that morning. It was as if I was being awoken up and being drawn into a higher spiritual hemisphere; a transition that caught me unprepared. On asking him the reason for his comment, he just spoke about the harmony pervading the Centre. As at that time I could not really understand what he was referring to. Perhaps because the comment came to me unprepared. But that was the beginning that ignited in me a certain curiosity to have a re-look at the Centre.

On the Structure of the Centre

Apart from the dining block, the laundry and the residential quarter for the Rev. Sisters and domestic staff, the Centre is a rectangular-shaped; almost of equal sizes length and breadth. On the northern part is the Conference Hall facing the Chapel on the southern side. The east and western sides are the guest-rooms. There are two connecting walk ways: external and internal walkways. The walk way on which the guests can park their cars stretches directly from the main entrance gate down to, and behind, the chapel and leading behind the Conference Hall to the entrance gate or directly to an out-going iron gate. The second (internal) walkway is embedded in the first. It stretches along the fourteen stations of the Cross and used as a way for meditating the mysteries of the Cross. The whole structure is joined together by roads coming from the north, south east and west and all terminating at a unique imposing stoned beacon on which the figure of the Risen Christ with a staff of Victory in his hand is strategically and imposingly mounted. It is a sculptured work of the Resurrection showing that Christ lives.

In the inside of the Centre, trees were planted in the center of the four major quadrangles providing shades and fruits. The trees were mainly mangoes of all sorts, sweet-smelling fruit called *icheku* (in Igbo). The later bears *mbachalameku*, a fruit with special attraction to children to the center. Each of the fourteen stations of the cross has beautiful flowers that adorn them thereby adding beauty and sweet odor to the exceptionally sculptured images made by one of the best sculptors of Igbo land, Ben Enwonwu arguably the most influential African painter and sculptor of the 20th century. The trees with the flowers around the different stations of the cross provided such a natural environment and harmony not only for humans but also for other creatures such as birds making the Centre a truly natural habitat. I remember on one occasion while taking a walk, I was attracted to a bird perching on a tree branch not very far away while it sang. I guess it was a dove. I stopped and began admiring its sweet melody. I became so enthused by the melody that I began counting the number of the

high pitches it sang before ending with a low pitch. As it stopped, a similar tone from a distant dove took over repeating the same song. Both were alternating their sweet melody to the astonishment of anyone who had time to listen and be entertained by the song. It was an amazing experience for me. I was lifted to a different niveous of experience by these creatures. All that was thanks to the harmony that the Centre was exuding.

As at the time of our visit, the road leading to the Centre beginning from the gate to the Spiritual Year Seminary was divided into in- and out- ways separated with flower hedge which is no longer there since the road became tarred.

So far with the structure of the Centre. The next question is how this Structure relates with the first Pastoral Letter of the Bishop.

First Pastoral Letter and the Pastoral Centre

The inside of the Centre, as described above, is beautifully designed with four adjoining symmetrical walkways. They meet each other at the **heart of the compound**. The **statue of the risen Lord holding the** triumphal coat of victory in the hand, mounted on a solid stoned pillar or beacon is the *terminus ad quem* (the meeting-point) of the four symmetrical walk ways. This figure of the risen Lord at the heart of the Centre took on a new and deeper meaning as I read the very first word of *Introduction* to the Bishop's pastoral letter:

“On no other foundation but on that of living faith shall we build this young diocese...”

The internal ways from the Conference Hall and the residential quarters meet at the middle of the compound, at the resurrection Statue. It means that all talks, be it in the form of conferences (Theological and Pastoral), retreats, meetings, seminars as well as all private conversations done in private quarters should all converge on that Christo-centric foundation. It is in the light of the risen Messiah Jesus Christ that all our talks, conferences and gatherings will attain their true and Christo-centric inner potential.

To the extent these talks and conferences are made to be an encounter with the risen (living) Christ, to that extent would their vitality and vibrancy become manifest and appealing to their hearers. The message is: Christ, the risen Lord, the life-giving and redeemer of the world should be the focus of all our public and private everyday life in the diocese of Awka.

One notices again that the internal roads meeting at the statue of the risen Christ who holds the triumphal Victory flag led to the locus where this joy of the resurrection is celebrated: symbolized by the Chapel. In that chapel the focus is the Altar and the Tabernacle. The Altar is the mini-Golgotha, where Christ, the high priest, now through the hands of an ordained priest unites the sacrifice of his body and blood with the offerings of the celebrating community and offers them to God his Father. There, his Thanksgiving offering for his victory on the cross is celebrated. This is what Liturgy is all about. Liturgy, basically, especially the Eucharistic celebration is the celebration of Christ's victory over sin, suffering, death and resurrection celebrated at Easter. It took the bishop another Pastoral Letter to catechize and nourish the people entrusted to his pastoral care in the new diocese on the graces and joy that overflow from Sunday Celebration because *Sunday Our weekly Easter*. It is that joy that the Living and Risen Christ holding the banner of victory is meant to symbolize. That is the message of his "Sunday Is Our Weekly Easter."

After this intentional and clear declaration, the bishop went ahead to outline the challenges lying ahead of the newly created diocese and her pastoral ministry:

"Today we are witnessing alarming defections from the faith, ... arising from "lack of depth of understanding" of the faith. Hence, "...our aim is to present the Christian faith not only as a gift, not only as an invitation but also as something **very precious** which we should jealously guard and preserve come what may."

Interestingly, the bishop spoke of "our aim". That means that he fully understood that the ministry is not going to be just his alone but a collective Team-work involving him as the chief

shepherd, the clergy and the lay faithful people of God in that particular church of Awka. In order to realize this, he not only knew that words are not enough for this, a deep personal encounter with the living (risen) Christ and spiritual formation are urgent. But how did he envision this immersion into Christ?

If one carefully looks at the façade of the Tabernacle, one could read the mind of the bishop as captured in the Façade. The rays of God's amazing graces and blessing are symbolically captured as springing from that source and reaching out right round to all the nooks and crannies of the entire diocese. It is an amazing art-work of great spiritual insight.

Again, if one looks at the front side of the carved wooden Altar, its message is not less insightful and profound. There, one finds an art-work of "the miraculous catch of fish" at the sea of Galilee (cf Luke 5, 1-11). In that light, I am inclined to think, the bishop wrote another Pastoral Letter titled "*Dich in Altum*" meaning "throw out into the deep." With this he was inviting every faithful the diocese, who, as I said earlier, he regarded as collaborators or team-worker in the Lord's vineyard and beyond for a deeper immersion into Christ. What is meant here is a conscious effort for integral human and spiritual growth based on genuine encounter with Christ. This invitation is indeed for everyone to go deeper into one's personal life for a catch. In concrete terms, he was inviting the people of God to a personal encounter with Christ. But he did not only invite them to throw into the deep. He led the way. How?

Daily hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament

Luckily, I had the opportunity of living close to him almost for four years at the Holy Family Spiritual Year Formation Centre, now Holy Family Spiritual Year Seminary, Okpuno. Every one knew at that time that there is a particular time of the day, precisely from 3.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. that nobody should knock on his door. The reason: He must be in his private chapel for his daily hour of Eucharistic Adoration. He did not forget too to build an

underground chapel of Adoration in the Chapel at the Retreat Centre. The chapel was well built with seats for seating comfortably or on carpet if one wants to sit on the ground. But he went further.

Building of Chapel of Adoration.

I was privileged to know that the first standard chapel of adoration built in Awka Diocese was built by late Fr Aaron Ejikemeuwa Ekwu during his time as the Parish Priest of at St Matthew's Catholic Church Amawbia. Although people have free access to the chapel, it was an extension of one side of the Fr's presbytery. However, it was built in such a way not only to serve for the priests but also for the public. The Chapel was a donation by late Dr. Rapheal Odumodu. As a mark of remembrance, his father Mr Samuel Odumodo was buried very close to the Chapel. Through a testimony by Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna, we happen to know that Late Fr Aaron was not only a close friend of his, but also his spiritual director and confessor. Their close spiritual affinity must have contributed to making the bishop built a beautiful Chapel of Perpetual Adoration at a very strategic position in the Cathedral compound making it very easily accessible to the people of God. Anybody who visits the Cathedral Chapel of Awka Diocese would most likely realize that there is never a time the chapel is empty of people. One sees some lying down, others waving their hands to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I remember also that a priest who lived and worked in the Cathedral told me that the bishop and the priests, and others used also to go there to say their prayers regularly.

It was no wonder that within a very short time almost all the parishes in Awka Diocese had copied this example from our then Bishop and erected a chapel of adoration. But not only parishes in Awka Diocese, many parishes in nearby dioceses have also adopted this special devotion. In this way, the bishop's vision of building his pastoral ministry "On No other foundation than that

of a living faith” had palpably spread, and continued to spread, like wild fire around the diocese and beyond.

Formation of Priests

If there was one passion that Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna had, it was the formation of priests. Little wonder the seminarians of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, in the Fare-well address to him after the short time he served as their Rector said this of him: “On your life here in the seminary to call you a “perfectionist” administrator is only our imperfect way of referring to maximum degree of success which your administration has registered in a record time of fifteen months as a Rector” (<https://onitsha-archdiocese.org/duplicated-francis-cardinal-arinze-3417/>). He carried this ideal for perfection into his ministry in the new diocese of Awka entrusted to his care as their Shepherd.

Very soon after the creation of Awka diocese, he began sending his priests to study specialized courses with a view of realizing his dream for the diocese. In that way, for instance, many of his priests were sent to do courses on the formation of priests. One of them is Fr Joseph Nwosa who went for the Formation and became the first Rector of the Spiritual Year Seminary. Many seminarians benefited enormously from this formation. This could be attested to by the fact that apart from being among the first to build Pastoral/Retreat Centre, he was also the first in the then Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province to build a befitting Spiritual Year Formation Seminary.

I used to remember hearing the bishop talk about giving the seminarians such formation that will help them grow not only in spiritual life but also in human maturity and authenticity. From the feedback and testimonies coming to the diocese then, one dares to say that he achieved his aim of building the diocese on the foundation of living faith. That is his trade-mark and I guess many will defend this.

A Man with constant desire for integral growth

There is no doubt that some people have some criticism about the bishop. Some speak of his impatience with imperfections. Hence, he was regarded as a perfectionist. But he was not unaware of that and he was known for making effort to deal with that. Some think of him as being proud and avoiding failure. Others think of him as being high-handed in dealing with people who fall out with him. In spite of all these criticisms, which may have some elements of truth in them, there is no doubt that his virtues tower far higher than these to the admiration of many.

A very close well-respected Monsignor known for his objectivity once spoke of A. K. Obiefuna as a bishop who “has neither permanent enemy nor permanent friend.” By that he meant that Obiefuna had no personal grudges against anyone. It was only in defending the moral values and ideals he believed in that he did fall out with some people who fail to share same ideals.

I like to look back with great admiration on the personality of that legendary late Archbishop Albert K. Obiefuna. There are a few encounters that endear him to me. One of them is his capacity to teach by example. My mind goes back to my second and third years after my ordination. That was after the so-called pastoral strategy of “catching them young” he introduced. With that strategy in mind, he appointed newly ordained priests, myself and my friend, Fr Christian Amogu, to the chagrin of everyone, as spiritual Directors in minor seminaries of St Dominic Savio and St JohnBosco junior seminaries respectively. In order to “learn-by-doing” we were enlisted for a one-year Formation Course under the direction of Fr Joseph Nwosa. In these courses, in which some delegates from other dioceses and some Women Religious Congregations took part, the bishop himself used to come and sit down and be learning with us. I remember a week when I had to sit side by side with him and with Rev. Mother Maria Chilota Elochukwu of Daughters of Divine Love (DDL) Congregation. It was a course on Enneagram, if I remember very well, as a help for self-awareness. As our moderator was describing the qualities and weaknesses of the number “Ones”, namely the perfectionists, at

one time he commented by saying that it seemed the talk is describing his personality, a comment that threw everyone laughing including himself. That was A.K. Obiefuna.

Or do I talk about his coming to the confessional for the sacrament of reconciliation at the end of a Retreat/Formation-Course he organized for the priests of the Archdiocese of Onitsha. Being the Priest at the confessional where he came, I was overwhelmed by the humility, openness, sincerity and dept of spirituality of this great iconic Archbishop. I was humbled to my marrow. Hearing him pour out his heart in humility and trust to Jesus Christ under the instrumentality of my humble self who used to be a seminarian he took in the seminary was something humbling and profound; an experience that I will never forget in life. There lies the greatness as a pastor who had built his life and priestly ministry on the foundation of a living faith: the Risen Christ.

The bottom line of what we are trying to underscore here is that the Pastoral Centre, Okpuno is, in my opinion, a spiritual power-house with a depth that needs to be further explored, preserved und promoted. There the whole pastoral ministry of Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna is captured. This Centre needs to be upgraded into an Institute where people who come there cannot go out without experiencing the power of the Risen Christ whose encounter makes one a new creation (*II Cor 5:17*).

Retreat Centre is a Symbolic Institute for Awka Diocese.

I am of the strong opinion that the vision laid down at the Centre needs to be studied, explored, expounded and handed over from generation to generation. It a strong foundation on which our diocese stands. Anything happening to it is most likely to affect the lives and ministry embedded in it. For me, the Centre is like a reminder to the Clergy and the people of God of Awka Diocese of the Spiritual Foundation on which they were birthed, nurtured and given orientation towards their future growth and development.

In the course of my visit to many monasteries and memorable Centre of attraction, there is most often a part of the

building that is left in its originality. The idea is to let the future generations have an insight into the beginnings. To that effect stories of the past are written and kept for visitors to help them connect the present with the past. It is something very emotional. Recently, someone gave me a picture of my childhood. I felt like crying for joy. For that is the only picture of my childhood available. I have now laminated it to give it durability. It makes me connect with my past.

The Centre needs to stand as a constant reminder to us. Whenever the priests and the faithful people gather there, it should remind them of the foundation on which they are built. People should be encouraged to make pilgrimages to the Centre. They should be helped to place their hands one at the back of the other on the four ways meeting one another at the beacon of the Risen Christ to empower their unity and love; to renew their faith, to revitalize the love in their families. Families need to be encouraged to return there to celebrate their wedding and renew the love promises to each other.

It should be a Centre where the Parish Councilors should be encouraged to go for excursion to reassess their performances, garner new ideas and articulate new ways forward. It should continue to remain a Spiritual power house for people of all calibers. I believe that there are enough Conference Centres around Awka. This should constitute an alternative where people could go and renew their strength.

I will suggest that our historians should do a more detailed study of the Pastoral Centre and some people clergy or lay trained to give people guided tour of the Centre. I suggest too that some of the liturgical Vessels used by the Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna should be preserved there. A Museum should be arranged to tell the story of the growth of the diocese beginning with the first bishop. There the Contribution of the subsequent bishops also should be showcased progressively.

Accessibility

I think of it as that Mountain at the heart of the busy city where people could withdraw to be alone Christ to draw strength from the living with his father. Our Society is becoming more noisy, stressed, uncaring, divided. This Centre should be made to give the society the alternative to these: Love, harmony, peace, natural environment, rest, reassurance and hope and joy of the risen Christ for he who is in Christ is new Creation.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads”
(Rev 22: 1-4)

Gratitude

I will not end this write-up without, again, expressing my gratitude to Fr. Nikolaus Johann Zacherl whose question, as shown above, sparked off my closer attention to and reflection deeper on the Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna Retreat/Conference Pastoral Centre, Okpuno.

Fr Nikolaus became so interested in the bishop that when I informed him about his sickness, he took it upon himself to be offering Masses for him. He was also instrumental to securing him a medical laser instrument from a company here in Austria. When I informed him about his death, his remark was that a process for his beatification and eventual canonization should resume without delay. Meanwhile, Fr. Nikolaus Johann Zacherl took ill and died on 17th November, 2020.

May their gentle souls continue to rest in peace. And may the graces of a living faith they left behind in Awka diocese and to

all of us continue to be renewed in vibrancy bringing us peace love
and charity until we meet to part no more in heaven. Amen.

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