



THE RE-AWAKENING OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN IGBO LAND

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Abstract

This study explores the reawakening of African Traditional Religion (ATR) among the Igbo people, analyzing the remote and proximate causes of this phenomenon in light of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. The arrival of Christianity, intertwined with colonialism and Western cultural imposition, initially marginalized traditional practices as many converts adopted a dualistic religious identity characterized by syncretism. However, recent trends indicate a resurgence of ATR, particularly among the youth, driven by disillusionment with contemporary Christianity, economic hardship, and a search for authentic cultural identity. The proliferation of churches and perceived inauthenticity among religious leaders has contributed to a growing skepticism towards organized religion, prompting a return to ancestral beliefs and practices as individuals seek immediate solutions to existential concerns. This revival poses significant implications for the Igbo Church, which must address its shift towards a materialistic focus and re-emphasize spiritual fellowship to retain its youth. Recommendations for the Church include embracing inculturation to reconcile Igbo cultural heritage within the Christian faith and enhancing theological education to promote a deeper understanding of Christianity among Igbo people. This study concludes that the path forward for the Igbo Church lies in fostering genuine dialogue between ATR and Christianity, ensuring that the spiritual needs of the community are met in a culturally relevant manner.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, Igbo, Re-Awakening

Introduction

The encounter between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) has been a complex and transformative process, particularly in the context of the Igbo culture in Nigeria. The introduction of Christianity, often perceived as a vessel of Western culture and colonial ideology, led to a gradual decline of traditional religious practices as many Igbo people embraced the new



faith brought by European missionaries. This transition was facilitated by the establishment of social and humanitarian services, such as schools and hospitals, which further entrenched Christianity in the local context. Despite significant conversion rates to Christianity, the practice of traditional religion persisted, manifesting as a form of religious syncretism among converts who continued to integrate elements of their ancestral beliefs with the newly adopted faith.

In recent years, however, there has been a notable resurgence of interest in Igbo Traditional Religion, particularly among the youth. This revival presents a significant challenge to the established church, as many young people increasingly view Christianity as an imposition of foreign values that has undermined their indigenous cultural identity. Factors contributing to this trend include disillusionment with organized religion, economic hardship, and a lack of meaningful engagement from the church regarding the spiritual and existential needs of its members. Additionally, the proliferation of religious denominations has led to confusion and a perception of inauthenticity among church leaders, prompting some individuals to seek solace in traditional practices that they believe offer more immediate solutions to their spiritual and material challenges.

This study aims to investigate the causes and implications of the reawakening of ATR in Igbo land, examining the sociocultural dynamics that influence young people's religious choices. It will explore the shifting emphasis within the church, economic conditions, and the impact of modern technology on religious beliefs. Furthermore, the research will highlight the need for inculturation within the Christian faith to better resonate with the values and traditions of the Igbo people, ultimately seeking to foster a harmonious coexistence between indigenous practices and Christianity. By addressing these critical issues, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving religious landscape in Igbo land and its implications for contemporary Christian practice.

Conceptual Clarification

Igbo Traditional Religious Renaissance

Igbo traditional religious renaissance is here conceptualized as the regeneration, reawakening and revival of Igbo traditional religious heritage, values and practices which are being phased out or relegated to the background by colonization and Christianization (Eze,2020). The quest for Igbo Traditional Religious Renaissance has become imperative in order to rediscover Igbo traditional values. According to Mbeki in Asiegbu (2010), it aims at reclaiming the pride of the Igbo. This does not imply a return to the glorious and primordial past. Rather, it depicts an attempt to restore the cultural heritage of the Igbo, setting him at par with the western and Asian cultures in a world of globalization. This was brought about by the Igbo predicament between adopting the values of western advanced technological society and lifestyle and maintaining Igbo traditional values.

With the arrival of the missionaries, it was somewhat evident that the method of evangelization of the Igbo failed to respect the cultural contexts of the Igbo people (Asiegbu (2010). Nevertheless,



the mixture of colonization with evangelization confused the message of Christ with other material and personal agenda. Ezech (2016) put it this way, as salvation from evil and sin were preached on one hand by one set of Europeans, the exploitation of human and material resources to the peoples' disadvantage was carried on by another set. As a result, Jesus Christ, the central theme in the salvation message came to be admired and suspected.

In addition, the mixture of colonization with evangelization also introduced the idea of supremacy of both European religion and culture over Igbo Indigenous Religion and culture. Ekwunife (2011) describes this relationship between the colonial evangelizers and the slave nations with regards to culture and religion as superiority/inferiority in terms of human relationship and partly in terms of superior versus inferior cultures (p.67). In terms of race, it could be described as superior versus inferior race; in terms of religion and religious practices, the god of slave masters will consistently be regarded in thinking, feeling and action as the supreme God versus the 'nothing god' of Igbo traditional religion and culture (Ekwunife, 2011). As a result of this, Igbo gods retreated. However, while the gods were on retreat, they left behind their artifacts in form of the Igbo Indigenous Religion in preparation for a more radical re-emergence.

Furthermore, there were anti-witchcraft cults and the spirit world among various tribes in Igbo land and Nigeria at large. These cults which were often anti-colonial in origin were suppressed by the colonial authorities and strongly discouraged by Christian missionary activity (Ekwunife 2011). More recently, they have demonstrated a dynamic return not only in Igbo land but across Nigeria. The cults are not so much a revival of indigenous religious beliefs but that the old gods never went away. Also, many years after the communication of the Christian message by the European evangelizers, there is a return of the gods from their retreat in a more subtle and different manner (Ekwunife, 2011). Christians in Igbo land transposed the paradigm from Igbo Indigenous Religion into Christianity such that one wonders about the real identity of Christianity in Igbo land.

As Oguejiofor (2001) notes, while the gods of African religion were said to be in retreat, a careful interpreter will notice that while the artifacts of the gods have largely been wiped out, the credal structure that underlines their relevance has been very largely left intact and has in more recent years been strengthened by a type of Christianity that has now gained overwhelming support in Nigeria. The major effect of the return of the Gods in the form of transposition of categories from Igbo Indigenous Religion to Christianity is that these categories while remaining African Indigenous Religious paradigms have been clothed with the garments of Christianity (Oguejiofor 2001). The negative influence of this is evident in the practice of Christianity in Igbo land today. From the foregoing, it can be seen that the return of the Gods is the basis for the revival of Igbo traditional religion.

This concept is in alignment with African Renaissance which Uhuru (2014, p.54) describes as a vision and mission for change and development that is premised on the understanding that the future of Africa and the diaspora lies in the fundamental process of renewal, re-invention and



rebirth. These required changes, according to him, need to occur in peoples mindset and world outlook which in turn requires changes in material conditions as well as in the institutions and processes of intellectual, political, economic and religio-cultural governance.

Methodology

This work employs both the primary and secondary sources of data collection. Primary sources of information were drawn from group discussions, interviews and personal observation of events by the researcher. Secondary sources of information were taken from text books, journals and other unpublished but related materials. The primary sources were used to ascertain why the renewed interest in the traditional religious practice by the Christian faithful as observed in the present time. It is necessary then to interview people, especially the adherents of African Traditional Religion and some members of the Christian faith. It has been observed that there is a decline in the participation of the youth in the church while they record massive turnout in traditional festivals and participation in masquerades. The secondary sources which are journals, textbooks and other unpublished works are used because there have been researches done in the past which relate to the topic in question. It is pertinent to consult such materials to know the opinion of other researchers on the topic in question.

Theoretical Framework

Identity Theory, notably articulated by psychologist Erik Erikson in the mid-20th century, provides a foundational framework for understanding the complexities of identity formation and transformation throughout the human lifecycle. Erikson proposed that identity develops through a series of psychosocial stages, each characterized by a central conflict that individuals must resolve to achieve a coherent sense of self. This framework can be particularly illuminating when applied to the context of the re awakening African Traditional Religion in Igboland, as it allows for an exploration of how cultural and religious identities are shaped by historical, social, and personal factors.

Cultural identity, as part of Erikson's theory, suggests that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from the communities to which they belong. In the context of the Igbo people, the renaissance of traditional religious practices can serve as a catalyst for reaffirming cultural identity among individuals and groups. The revival of these ancient practices provides a means for the Igbo to reconnect with their heritage, facilitating a collective sense of belonging and purpose that can counterbalance the influences of globalization and the dominant narratives brought by colonial history and missionary activity.

Moreover, the transformation of identity in the wake of this renaissance can reflect broader societal dynamics, including shifts in community cohesion and individual beliefs. As traditional religious practices gain prominence, they may foster unity among the Igbo, reinforcing communal ties and shared values that have been increasingly challenged by modernity. This revitalization can create



an environment in which individuals feel empowered to embrace their cultural roots, leading to a stronger group identity that celebrates Igbo history and spirituality.

Additionally, the renaissance may influence individual beliefs by providing space for personal exploration within a framework of traditional values. This means that as individuals engage with these revitalized practices, they can negotiate their identities in relation to contemporary social realities, thus blending traditional beliefs with modern experiences. The interplay between personal belief systems and communal identity can lead to a rich tapestry of cultural expression, further enhancing the resilience of the Igbo in an ever-changing world.

By employing Erikson's Identity Theory, we can analyze the implications of the Igbo Traditional Religious Renaissance more deeply, considering how these dynamics of identity formation and transformation contribute to a renewed sense of self for individuals and a revitalized sense of community among the Igbo people. This exploration not only underscores the significance of cultural heritage in shaping identity but also highlights the adaptive capabilities of indigenous belief systems in the face of contemporary societal challenges.

Remote and the Proximate Causes of the Re-awakening in Igbo land

Christianity came to Africa in the vessel of western culture. With the advent of European missionaries in our land, and the consequent evangelization of our people and their culture, Igbo Traditional Religion gradually began to recede to the background. This was because many Africans who hitherto practiced the ancestral cult and shared its beliefs embraced the new found Christian faith. The establishment of institutions for social and humanitarian services to the people such as schools and hospitals was a critical factor that promoted the receptivity of our people to Christianity and its message. Although, many were converted to the Christian faith, the practice of traditional religion did not entirely disappear from our land. Even many of the converts to Christianity who usually attended Church services still combined the practice of the Christian faith with traditional practices often described as religious syncretism. However, today a new development is emerging in the religious horizon. This new phenomenon is the relapse by many of our young people into full scale traditional religion and practices. Presently a great number of Igbo people see Christianity as an imposition.

Christianity was introduced in Africa because Europe was interested in planting the seed of faith in Africa. The European Christians believed in the power of the Gospel to change any society; but there were many things that the missionaries did, which should be considered inappropriate. For instance, whatever way of life or customs the missionaries did not understand they often condemned as 'fetish' or 'pagan'. Be that as it may, Christianity, Islam, westernization, colonialism and globalization marked the loss of African independence and also inaugurated the large scale destruction of lives, property, and works of arts, monuments and artifacts. Nevertheless, Africans hold the key to the future of the African continent.



It is worthy to note that Christianity among the Africans was started and nurtured in the era of colonialism. As a result of colonial factor, many of the converts to Christianity adopted a new personality based upon the colonial Christian order. Western Christianity was transplanted, root and branch in terms of doctrine and worship.

Iwe (1985) demonstrates that the origin of Christianity beheld African culture battling with cannibalism, nudity, infanticide, destruction of twins, and mass illiteracy among others which Christianity frowned at. It was these negative and transitory phases of African culture that struck the early missionaries and prompted them to adopt in general, a negative attitude towards African culture. This negative reaction sparked off a culture clash between Africans and Christianity. Christianity considered the customs and traditions of the people as primitive and “pagan.” The idea of European cultural superiority was manifested in the actions of the missionaries. Western civilization was equated with Christianity. As these events unfold, Africans seem to have allowed other cultures to dominate their personality basically due to the net-effects of the so-called modern civilization with the invasion of alien cultures and values. Contemporary Africans were then becoming more and more Europeans and fewer Africans in their values, mentality and general outlook. In this regard, numerous core values and cultural patterns unique to Africans have been covered with ignorance. African Traditional Religion was therefore frequently devalued and only the authorities of imported religions seem to have significance.

The church today in Igbo land is increasingly facing turbulent times. She is confronted with a number of issues that threaten her progress and membership base. One of such issues is the resurgence of the ancestral tradition and religion which is gradually coming up like wild fire particularly among the youthful population. Many have left and are still leaving the Church to return to the religion of their ancestors.

Those who patronize this “new” religion or their practitioners do so for various reasons. These reasons range from the search for security, spiritual powers, right relationship with the transcendental world and material benefits to existential problems, and above all the inability of the Church in her mission and worship to provide enough meaning and motivation for strong religious commitment.

Factors Responsible for the Revival of Igbo Traditional Religion Today

Information gathered from field work indicates that the following factors are responsible for the revival of Igbo Traditional Religion and the influx of people especially the youth to the ancestral religion and tradition.

Shift of Emphasis

Nnamani A.C. (personal communication August 20th 2025) pointed out that one of the major factors that led to the revival of Traditional Religion in Igbo land today is the apparent inability of the Church to provide enough meaning and motivation for strong Christian religious commitment.



He observed that a shift of emphasis from evangelization and spiritual fellowship to the physical development of the Church. An honest and balanced evaluation of the development of the mission of the Church in Igbo land from the earliest times of the foreign missionaries to this present dispensation of indigenous clergy would notice an apparent but gradual shift in focus. The European missionaries focused totally on evangelization or the conversion of our people to the Christian faith even at great risk to their lives health-wise. Apart from the proclamation of the Gospel, they focused also on social developmental work and sharing of clothing and other material gifts as a means of winning and retaining converts to the Christian religion. Nnamani A.C who was also a retired catechist of St John's parish Attakwu highlighted this aspect of the work of the Irish missionaries in Igbo land when he noted that under the leadership of Fr. Joseph Lutz, there was the introduction of "the use of schools (for boys and for girls), charitable work (dispensaries, hospitals, orphanage and asylum), trade and industrial institutions (for carpentry, masonry, tailoring, shoe-making etc.), farming and gardening as means of attracting and retaining converts to the Catholic faith.

Mr Nnamani further pointed out that in 1970, after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, the baton for the evangelization of Igbo Land fell on the local clergy as the foreign missionaries were expelled from the area by the then Nigerian military government. The indigenous clergy that inherited this mission of the Church continued the work of evangelization. They also deepened the faith since they were better placed to understand and steer the dialogue between faith and culture, which is very necessary for the inculturation of the Christian message. The result was that the Church, especially in the South- eastern Nigeria, continued to grow in numerical strength from 1970's up to the 1989.

But as from about the year 2000 onwards, a new dimension to the mission of the Church began to surface gradually. It is the era of the prioritization of the physical development of the Church. Although the work of evangelization continued to be accomplished, the craze for the erection of physical structures and financial contribution through fund-raising took the upper hand in many parishes and dioceses. He noted that "a parish priest that excels in the erection of physical structures and in fundraising or financial contribution is conventionally considered to be successful." This contemporary phenomenon of priority being given to the physical development of the Church and material values over issues that have to do directly with evangelization and catechesis, is no doubt, more worrisome when it comes to the context of Eucharistic celebration. During public gatherings for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist especially on Sundays, new and changing strategies for fund-raising are unearthed and deployed by many parishes. For instance, in some parishes, during the monthly "project Sunday," the worshipers are sometimes encouraged to come forward not only with money, but also with other items which will be auctioned to raise money during the Mass. Furthermore, new ways of organizing annual harvest thanksgiving and bazaars to fund Church projects and activities, which undermines the richness, beauty and formative character of the Eucharistic worship is now firmly in place in many of our parishes.



Originally, bazaars were held as a single day event. But nowadays, they begin three months ahead of time in an anticipatory way, through various forms of frequent collections and solicitations for funds during the Sunday Eucharistic celebrations. All these new and changing strategies for fund-raising often make our Sunday Eucharist cumbersome – losing some sense and meaning for the worshippers. The implication is that those who may be looking for a deeper religious meaning or facing different challenges in life and in search of sense of mystery in life, but has difficulty in experiencing them in the Church through her worships tend to recede into traditional religion with its promises of immediate solution to their problems and encounter with transcendental reality. However, the local Church authority tends to attribute the shift to lack of grants and support that use to come from foreign countries during the Irish missionary's era.

Economic Hardship:

The royal father of Attakwu ancient kingdom Igwe Dr Greg Ugwu during a personal interview in August 2025 opined that the present economic hardship in Nigeria is also contributing to influx of the youth into the traditional religion. He observed that a great number of our youths are unemployed and have no means of lively hood. Poverty and unemployment are the major drivers of traditional religious renaissance; many towns witness individuals struggling to feed their families resorting to becoming priests of their local deities to secure sacrificial victuals. They also charge fees to help people recover debts, and stolen items revealing how dire economic conditions drive some to embrace traditional religion for material gain. The researcher also corroborates this during his visit to a traditional practitioner. He saw a good number of young men waiting to partake in sharing and eating of fowls and goats used for sacrifice. On the other hand, the female counterparts, due to failed marriages, frustrations and lack of skills become “*Eze Nwanyi*.” The royal father called on the government at the State and Federal level to provide job opportunities by building industries and encouraging hard work so that our young people will not be taken away by the lure of riches. Again, politicians should show a good example. They should reduce the extravagant lifestyles which attract the younger generation making them desire riches no matter the circumstances.

Ignorance

Ugwu G. (personal communication, august 20th 2025) pointed out that many young people join the traditional religious movement without a proper understanding of its history and practices. For example, some of the deities they wish to resurrect were once worshipped with human sacrifices which they will not be able to meet up with the demands thus contributing to rising social issues such as cases of madness, kidnapping, ritual killings etc. Ugwu further opined that in any particular village or kindred there are some families known as the custodians who serve as chief priests of local deities not what youths of the present time are doing. Some go as far as Ijebu Ode in Yoruba land and Calabar in Cross River State to bring all kinds of deities into various families and kindred



thereby causing confusion and trouble in the community. This practice is trending among the youth a good number of them are now native doctors.

Proliferation of churches:

Ugwu G. (personal communication August 20th 2025) a traditional ruler noted that when they were growing up what they saw was Irish Catholic missionaries. They gave them the evil forest in their community hoping that evil spirit *ajommuo* will strike them but nothing happened to them. The community welcomed them and began to follow them and their teaching based on their way of life which appealed to them. As time goes on the Anglican came followed by the Methodists. But today at every corner of their community there is a church and confusion everywhere. They now see church pastors, male and female and clergy men, who now marry as they do, drag farm land with them, live with them and quarrel with them as well. They seem not to see any difference anymore. This confusion made many people to turn back to the traditional practices and religion of their ancestors. He challenged the church in his community to ring their church bell while the traditionalists ring *ogene mmanwu* (masquered gong) and let's see who will have the larger number.

Inauthenticity

This is a significant issue among the youth as observed by Paschal Ude the youth president of our lady of Fatima Parish Onitsha. He opined that it is disheartening to see trends such as sagging trousers, which many young men adopt without understanding why, simply because it is fashionable. Similarly, some youths embrace worship of deities not out of genuine belief but because some people are trying to make it seem trendy. This highlights the need for young people to make choices based on conviction rather than following trends. This led them to seek dubious practices like *Oke Ite* because it is trendy and many young men want to make it by all means 'Ibute ike'

Disillusionment with Organised Religion:

Rev.Fr. Anthony Nwachukwu (personal communication September 15th 2025) observed that Sometimes, the actions of religious leaders can undermine faith. They create the perception that the Church is materialistic. Especially when they observe that some clergy men build mansions and hostels thereby competing with business men in the society. Such discrepancies lead some young people to believe that church is becoming too worldly as against genuine spirituality. Some church leaders are also lacking in charity especially towards the poor members of their church. Some young ones do say 'who church help' for some 'church na scam' others will say 'oyibo deceived us' such thoughts are driving ignorant ones towards alternative beliefs including traditional religious practices.



Social Media Influence:

Okafor O.(personal communication September 20th 2025) a diviner from Amigbo Akegbe Ugwu observed that the rise of digital "*dibias*" on social media represents a new form of traditional worship that appears lucrative, enticing many youths to explore these practices for financial gain. He maintained that you can't find any authentic *dibia* on social media and requested that the picture I took with him must not be found on social media. Okafor further states that these digital *dibias* make bogus claims of what they do and throw money during occasions involving members of their association through such acts; they create an illusion of happiness and flamboyance ensnaring the minds of young people. Okafor describes such actions as dubious or '*wayo*'

Fraudulent Pastors:

Okafor O.(personal communication September 20th 2025) asserts without hesitation that many who claim to be pastors do not genuinely believe in God. They use Christianity as an avenue to wealth by resorting to fraudulent practices like staged miracles. He maintained that the pastors are the ones spoiling the church that some pastors come to him for powers and he works for them. The researcher was surprised at this and inquired how, he went further to say that they bring pictures of those who come to them for spiritual help and as a diviner he will consult his *agwu* and whatever he finds out he will tell the pastors and what the individuals are expected to do for solution to their problems. Okafor also asserts that some pastors when they want to organize crusade, they do bring posters and fliers which he keeps in his shrine to attract large number of people and after the crusades the pastors will bring his own share of the proceed. The sight of such deceitful behaviour leads many to question the authenticity of Christianity and in some cases, turn towards other belief systems, including traditional religion. The behavior of such fraudulent pastors elicits reactions such as *Ka ma udia, Uka gbakwa Oku*.

Signs of the Re- awakening

Recently there has arisen amongst the young people of the South East the desire to return to idol worship camouflaging as an African Traditional Religion or the observance of *omenani* because according to them the white missionaries purportedly saw nothing good in African culture and tradition. They view Christianity through the prism of a destructive religion that came and overwhelmed our forefathers destroying their shrines, taking away their *ofo* and *ikenga* and replacing them with the Christian Bible. Whenever young people gather you can hear vituperations like *ndi eriri eri* or *mugus!*

Many young people have long stopped going to church and have resorted to playing football, drinking, and smoking on Sundays. Many of them who happen to venture into marriage stop at traditional weddings insisting that sacramental weddings are signs of stupidity or an example of *ndi eriri eri*.



Many of them have also resorted to ancestor worship where they pose as diviners, *Eze Nwoke* and *Eze Nwanyi* even when they are ignorant of the rituals involved in these practices. Some of them have also revived some of the idols hitherto worshiped during the pre-Christian era. Many of these idols have long histories. Some of them were imported to the towns and those who knew how to worship and consult them renounced them before joining Christianity. The result is that some of those who revived them cannot continue with the animal and human sacrifices involved. No wonder young men and women in their prime die without any warning while some of them roam the streets as mad people.

There is an ocean of difference between *omenani* and idol worship. *Omenani* Igbo does not segregate anyone. Every Igbo person including indigenous pastors, priests, and bishops are observers of *omenani*. As Igbo people, we still identify with our culture and tradition. This is seen in our cultural dances, food, family ties, dressing, and way of behavior, observance of festivals and feasts, and a host of other activities that identify us as Igbo. It is preposterous for anyone to exclude the priests, religious, and so on, from the discussion of *omenani* when we are all *omenani* people.

Worship is deities then is different and that is what our young people are going back to in the name of *omenani*. The Igbo people abhor the shedding of blood and are not involved in *igwo ajo ogwu*, consultation of the dead, sorcery, and divination. These are aspects of idol worship and our young people must do well to avoid them since they do not form part of our *omenani*.

Renaissance and the Igbo Youths

Igbo Traditional Religious Renaissance is a gradual shift from the wide dominance of the Christian religion. It is a search for alternative in a Christian-dominated environment. It is a silent revolution against Christianity in Igbo land. A resurgence, revival, or return to ancient African traditional religion in a christianized community. This resurgence reflects a certain perceived failure on the part of Christianity to satisfy the yearnings of the modern age.

The resurgence of traditional religion among the youths of Igbo extraction could be an indictment of the pedagogy of evangelization employed in the evangelization of the area by the missionaries. It could also be termed the shift of focus from the proper ideals that Christianity espouses. Our forebears were attracted to a Christianity that saw to the holistic development of the human person. Evangelization was done to save both the soul and the body of the Igbo man. This is reflected in the establishment of schools, hospitals, and so on while carrying out the work of evangelization. Those who were not attracted by the gospel were attracted by the free education and hospital treatment that was provided by the missionaries.

With time, the missionaries also became administrators offering leadership, security, and economic relevance to host communities. Gradually, our forebears were taught with the Bible and introduced



to the mystery of the Godhead. While some of them got converted and abandoned the worship of idols while embracing Christianity, some held on to their belief systems.

Catholic Method of Evangelization in Igbo Land

Christianity did not invent an idea of God for the cultures and traditions it encounters, rather God was already present in our cultures before the interface with the Christian religion. This mutual exchange brings about transformation in both Christianity and the Igbo Traditional Religion. God is at work in the hearts of man to elicit in the heart of man a divine connection with God and this makes him restless until he finds rest in God borrowing the words of St. Augustine. The researcher could surmise that the religion of our forefathers and all cultures and religions are not bereft of the concept of God including those described as the most insignificant of cultures/religions.

While there could be some elements of truth in the perceived poor method of evangelization by the white missionaries, we must consider how the Catholic Church employed its pedagogy of evangelization in South East Nigeria during the era of evangelization of Igbo land. Igbo traditional religion which was the religion of our forebears was not intrinsically evil. During interaction with such cultures, Christianity does not speak to the culture to convert it but to dialogue with the culture, resulting in what the Second Vatican Council described as a marvelous exchange. Real dialogue is horizontal and not vertical. For St. Pope John Paul II, inculturation is the incarnation of the gospel in native cultures and the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church. Both the Christian faith and the meeting culture/tradition need each other for a fruitful and truthful encounter.

Need For Inculturation

There is need for inculturation. The Christian message ought to be contextualized in the lens of African culture and belief which was not properly addressed by the early missionaries. There exists the problem of relating Christianity to the life of an African today because Igbo has his own life driven by his cosmology. In the Igbo church, inculturation is needed to make Christianity more relevant and authentic by integrating Igbo culture, traditions, and values into the Christian faith and worship, fostering a deeper understanding and connection for Igbo people. The Igbo cannot afford to practice Christianity that is foreign, European and British.

Mbon (1993) states that inculturation is the process of practicing Christian faith within the cultural context. It occurs when a Christian practices his or her Christian faith as an African Christian. Inculturation utilizes culture as a vehicle of proclaiming and explaining the gospel

Inculturation has become a necessity in harnessing the experience of the Igbo people in making the Christian message real and more authentic. Uzuoku (1996) avers that inculturation is the incarnation of Christian message in cultures. It is the interpretation of Christian message to reflect the cultural context of the audience or congregation. Gener (2008) opines that inculturation means the process of proclaiming and explaining the gospel in a language of a given group of people in



a way they can understand. In inculturation, the gospel is proclaimed and preached in such a way that it will take cognizance of the people's way of life.

The early Christian missionaries that evangelized Igbo land did not take cognizance of the necessity of inculturation. Even when it was obvious that the gospel should be preached through the people's culture, prejudice, bias, superiority complex, pride, language barrier became great obstacles to inculturation. The Church today should strive to overcome the pitfalls of the early Christian Missionaries in order to present the gospel through the Igbo cultural lens that will not only make the gospel clearer and more meaningful but will also make Igbo people feel at home in the church that is tolerant to the Igbo culture.

However, to a great extent Christianity especially, Catholicism encouraged and continues to encourage the Igbo culture. We find this in the second Vatican Councils on inculturation thus

facilitating the encounter between Christianity and Igbo culture with none suffocating each other. With inculturation, elements of Igbo culture are encouraged in Igbo Catholicism. To this effect, we have vernacular songs, the use of local instruments in worship, the breaking of kola-nuts, cultural dances, *Ozo* title-taking, cultural festivals, *Iwa-ji*, etc. These are aspects of Igbo culture that have found their way into the activities of the Catholic Church in Igbo land. The Catholic Church also gives opportunity for the expression of the Igbo culture in many varying ways including the sewing of vestments with traditional/cultural ethics reflecting the Igbo culture.

Shallow Knowledge of the Christian Faith

Nwachukwu C.(personal communication,September 25th 2025) A priest of Onitsha archdiocese highlighted that many Christians lack a deep understanding of their faith, either due to inadequate teaching or a lack of interest in being taught. This gap in knowledge is a challenge for Church authorities to address by intensifying efforts in moral and spiritual instructions. Attending institutions like the Fides School of Theology can help deepen one's understanding of Christianity, it can be through Sunday instruction (*nkuzi nke okwukwe*) such catechesis can help in understanding the Christian faith thereby making worship of deities increasingly irrelevant.

Poor Parenting

Inadequate parental guidance also drives children towards neo-paganism. Some parents are indifferent to their children's religious activities, and cases like a parent not questioning a child's source of wealth despite their student status highlight a broader issue. Such parents may be more concerned with financial success than with the religious or moral development of their children. What about parents who have one foot in the Church and another elsewhere? What about those who have rooms in their houses that only they can access? What about those who, to the knowledge



of their children, belong to societies that the Church considers secret and abhorrent? Like parents like children. Their children are learning from them and will be nonchalant to the Christian faith.

The Impact of Technology

The Church recognizes the present age of the internet and the critical mindset that has been developed over the years. We are living in a world where every institution is subjected to rational inquiry; an age where young people want to know the why of everything. This question of why? is not only found in the Church but in other establishments like education, governance, health, etc.

The church must be prepared to go back to the drawing board to ascertain where she got it wrong. The church must reflect on the mistakes they have made that elicited the massive exodus of young people from Christianity to the traditional religion.

If our young people continue to say that Church is a scam and that the white man deceived us, why are they not rejecting the other developments like education and technology that they brought to us? What about a better life through technologically driven health care, fashion, industrialization, leadership, economy, and so on? Why is religion the only thing being targeted? A rejection of the white man should include a rejection of everything that comes from him. Christianity is not the religion of the white man as purported by critics. Christianity is a way of life. It is a life modeled after Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church has always supported and encouraged respect for the cultures and traditions of the people. The Church through inculturation has always dialogued with different cultures and through this dialogue has seen a lot of the traditional people converting to Catholicism.

The Gospel of Prosperity and Get Rich Quick Syndrome

There is a heightened desire to get rich quickly which has made our young people disregard any institution like the Catholic Church that insists on suffering before success and poverty following the pattern of Jesus Christ. What we find today is a rejection of the version of Christianity that was being paraded by the new generation churches where prosperity gospel and a cross-less Christianity are cheaply stuffed down the throat of our people. In the face of a failed promise from the new generation churches and their gospel of prosperity in providing riches, our young people now disregard any talk concerning God and church. They prefer rather to get back to animal and human sacrifices that have the potential of assuaging their thirst for the attainment of quick material wealth, in this way they hold the Christian faith as inconsequential.

The resurgence of traditional religion makes a special appeal to young people as some of them are deceived into some ritual practices that provide money quickly and have the potential to raise their status. Some virtues like patience in the Christian faith are now regarded as outmoded. The Catholic faith is regarded as being slow to accepting the changing situations thus becoming unyielding to the yearnings of the young people.



To address properly this new trend which has become a subtle revolt against Christianity, there is a need for the Church and state to work together to bring back the ideals of hard work. Society must re-prioritize her priorities so that young people do not think that wealth is bigger than virtues and good names. The attack on Christianity is also an attack on the educational and political institutions hence the concerted efforts of both the Church and the state to change the narrative and heal a deviant and faithless generation. The Church must also remain as an institution that will guide society in its morality.

The Church to Slow Down Emphasis on Structures and Money

The Church emphasizes money and her physical development over evangelization and salvation of souls; she would lack the strength to provide meaning and intelligibility in what she does. She would thus lack the moral and spiritual power to motivate and inspire people to strong religious commitment. This is a major factor behind the revival of traditional religion especially among our youths today. The Church in Igbo land needs to develop herself more deeply in terms of spiritual fellowship and communion of grace which would hold the faithful firmly united in faith and love as a bulwark against worship of idols. The church should not focus primarily on the structural development of the Church. She should realize that far from being simply an association established for the preservation of the Christian faith, she is first and foremost, an offspring of this faith, an action of love that lives in believers through the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, a typical African person is a religious being. Religion is part and parcel of the African way of life. Thus, the African person naturally seeks for transcendence or for intimacy with the supernatural. The failure to experience this life-giving spiritual fellowship or communion with God within the Christian religion has contributed significantly to the resurgence of traditional religion in Igbo land. Many young people are leaving the Church, principally driven by search for solution to their problems in the African Traditional Religion. To counter this growing ugly trend, the Church needs to build herself essentially as “a divinizing communion with God,” This would mean that the presence of God and His grace must be concrete and palpable in the lives of the faithful through the evangelizing ministry of the Church. They must be able to feel it and experience it. In this way, they would experience the fulfillment of the natural human quest for divine communion which is imminent in the African soul.

Conclusion

This research which is centered on the reawakening of the Igbo traditional religion which is making wave among the youths and its implications on the church exposes how authentic Igbo Christians are in practicing Christianity in Igbo land nowadays. And the extent Christians in Igbo land are committed to the faith they received and profess, amidst the renewed influence of traditional religious practices. Concerted efforts were made to unravel the cause of going back to religion of



the ancestors by those who earlier professed the Christian faith. Much is said about Christian missionary method, which some people believe is inadequate and failed to transpose and transform the basic and indispensable elements of the traditional religious belief system and practice into corresponding elements of the Christian faith hence, the presence of religious syncretism and the task before the church to address this nascent development. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The solution to religious syncretism or double allegiance is to root Christianity in the cultural aspirations and religious responsiveness of the Igbo people. This would require an urgent intensification of theological education of Igbo Christians, to enhance a proper understanding of the nature of Christianity and its interactive modality with elements of culture and tradition. Such a theological enlightenment must begin with church leaders, religious educators and all other Christians in Igbo land. The church in Igbo land must teach members about a type of Christianity where God is known to them through Christ as their only saviour. In this instance, Christ is the centre of our lives.

Igbo Christians should understand that we live in a world of problems; yet we are not expected to be of the world. The message of Christ embodies love, joy, peace, and gentleness. There is, therefore, no room for hate, war, and oppression. For this to happen, faith is necessary. It is also important that the church itself periodically undergoes revitalization to check and renew its commitment to living according to the light and gospel of Jesus Christ as well as to avoid syncretism, irrespective of the belief in spirit and nature. Traditional institutions and ceremonies should be explained to Igbo Christians, in order to clearly differentiate between acceptable methods of Christian initiation and to avoid the prevailing religious syncretism in Igbo land.

It is discovered that some Christians practice both Christianity and Igbo traditional religion at the same time. There is no clear cut demarcation between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion as practiced by the adherents. However there may be some mistakes the missionaries made in the way and manner they handled indigenous culture, they were not ill motivated. And their strictness with regards to the lifestyle of the people was all geared towards producing an excellent man in our people for the benefit of our nation. The Church has to embrace inculturation approach aimed at passing the Christian message in line with Igbo cultural modes.

There should be order and regulations in Igbo traditional religion to checkmate the activities of fraudsters and the rise of digital "*dibias*" on social media which represents a new form of traditional worship that appears lucrative, (*ibute ike*) enticing many youths to explore these practices for quick money and other criminal activities involving *odeshi*, and *oke ite*.



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