

Igwebuikology as an Igbo-African Philosophy for Catholic-Pentecostal Relations

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Introduction

Pentecostalism began in the earliest part of the 20th century in the United States of America as the last fruit of the reformation. It emerged out of the Wesleyan Holiness Movement between 1901 and 1906 in Topeka, Kan and Los Angeles. They were in fact said to have been expelled from the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles because of their constant insistence on the need for revival. From these areas, it gradually spread to other places in the United States of America, Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, in Nigeria, Pentecostalism emanated from the political and religious scenario of the decades between 1950 and 1970. It was a time when the goal of self-affirmation was glaringly evident in the projects of nationalists. Thus Mbefo (2001) avers that Pentecostalism emanated as a parallel search for liberation from the churches of the European imperialism.

By 1950, and even before the advent of Pentecostalism to Nigeria, Catholicism and Protestantism were already in existence. While the emergence of Pentecostalism was accepted by many who yearned for something different, many kept their distance, fearing that the Pentecostal experience which is at the heart of Pentecostalism could not have solid spiritual and doctrinal foundation. There was a struggle for supremacy, which was supported by enough antagonism. These struggle and antagonism were based on the differences in cosmological perspectives, which generated different interpretations of the Holy Scripture and thus the Christian life. A cursory glance at the recent happenings in Nigeria precisely, reveals that there still exist clashes in the area of mission between Catholic and Pentecostal missions. Aggression and diffidence have frequently been at the root of their relations. While Pentecostals identify Rome with Babylon and have difficulty recognizing the saving value of the Catholic Church, many Catholics

view with suspicion the proliferation of divine interventions as forms of proselytism. While acknowledging this aggression and diffidence, this piece has the burden of proffering a solution to the differences between African Catholics and Pentecostals. It argues that the differences can be bridged through Igwebuikology, an Igbo-African philosophy which can enhance Catholic-Pentecostal relations.

The Scandal of Divided Christendom

Mutual intolerance and unchristian forms of competition, which define the relationship between many denominations, is a scandal of Christendom and runs counter to the gospel message. Particular denominations claim to be the true church and in possession of the truth. Opponents are referred to as heretics, and each group now give much energy to the refutation of their opponents point by point rather than on a point by point explanation of the gospel of Christ. This has led to a hardening of positions, and thus, a narrower or one-sided view of reality.

Very recently, on Sunday, 1st December 2013, Pastor Chris Okotie, the General Overseer of the *House Hold of God's Church* and former Presidential Candidate, allegedly made a statement in his Church in Ikeja, Lagos against the Catholic Church. He described the Catholic Church thus:

- “A counterfeit church set up by Satan, bows to Idols”;
- “They are not Christians and have never been”;
- “They don’t know Jesus. They believe that when they eat bread on Sundays, they are eating the body of Jesus. It is ritual”;
- “The Pope is an Anti-Christ and the Catholic Church will soon declare for Satan. This is the end of times”;
- “Catholics will go to hell”;
- “They don’t believe in heaven. They believe in purgatory. The purgatory that they invented”;
- “The church has been there for Satan and at the right time they will declare for Satan”.

Such statements have become increasingly very common among church leaders who are scouting for members or struggling to retain their members. There are questions of mixed marriages and denominational schools which have not been properly solved. There is a disorganized collaboration in theology. There are different translations of the Bible which could have been done in common as encouraged by Pope Paul VI. There is an unfair exploitation of conversions for propaganda purposes by denominations, which can well be avoided. Unless different churches come together, the Catholic and Pentecostal principally, they cannot serve as the conscience of secular society. Only as a united Church can Christians intervene in society on favour of peace, the abolition of racial discrimination, the pursuit of social justice, the eradication of nationalist prejudices and the protection of the poor and weak.

Divided Christendom as an Imported Schism

A cursory glance at the origins of schisms in the history of Christianity reveals that these schisms were ready-made in Europe and imported to Africa. The first division of Christianity took place in 1054, between the east and the west. It had deep cultural undertone, the east was Greek, with its base in Constantinople and the west Latin, with its base in Rome. When Pope Leo IX excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople, it was misinterpreted as the excommunication of the entire Greek Church. Thus, the church of Constantinople broke away from the Church of Rome, with the churches in Bulgaria, Serbia and Russia doing likewise. In 1517, Martin Luther launched an attack on the doctrine of the church through his 95 theses. When the Pope announced his position as heretical, Luther reacted by denying the infallibility of the Pope. This dispute, according to Gbenda (2001) led to Anglicanism in England, Lutheranism in Germany, Zwinglianism in Switzerland, Presbyterianism in Scotland, Congregationalism in England, Baptist and Methodist in Holland. In the early part of the 20th century emerged Pentecostalism in the United States of America, which emphasized the Pentecost

experience. None of these breakages or schisms occurred in Africa, neither were people of African descent who were involved.

When missionaries came into Africa, they imported them as European grown products, and Africans started becoming schismatics without even knowing how it began. When the Methodists came, they converted some Africans into their schism group, the Lutherians, the Anglicans etc., did the same. Like the colonial masters who divided Africa into patchworks for their own personal interest, these missionaries tore Africa into pieces for the extension of their schismatic groups. African communities that were bound by culture and tradition were divided into groups and even fought one another on the basis of faith differences. Most times, a faith that many Africans did not and have not yet understood.

Towards an Indigenous Philosophical and Theological Approach

The Catholic and Pentecostal divide is simply a clash of worldviews: the Catholic and Pentecostal worldviews, which as I have indicated are both foreign to Africa. Africans originally had their traditional religion and cosmology, which united them, and which were conquered by the exclusivist Euro-Christian cosmology. Achebe (1958) in his celebrated classic and epoch-making piece, *Things Fall Apart*, describes the hostility of Christianity over the Traditional Igbo Religion. This is located in Obierika's accusation of the white man:

Does the white man understand our custom about land?, asked Okonkwo, "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?" responded Obierika, and then he continued, "But he says our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart". (pp. 124-125).

These missionaries according to Madu (1999) have bulkanized our people into denominational units that are antagonistic to one another. If this problem of division and antagonism must be solved, Africans may need to consider returning to their traditional culture that united them before the denominationalization of Christian missionaries in order to seek a common ground for dialogue. There is an Igbo adage that says: *oso chuwa nwata ogbana ikwu nneya*, which means *If a child is hunted, he runs to his maternal home*. Denominationalism has created a divide among many African Christians, and there is need for a return to our traditional culture, not in search for religion or a return to African Traditional Religion, but a common ground for dialogue.

Igwebuikology as an Igbo-African Philosophy for Catholic-Pentecostal Relations

Igwebuikology is the study of the modality of being for the realization of the being. It is from the word *Igwebuike*, an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. Thus, it can be understood as a word and as a sentence: as a word, it is written thus *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it could be written thus *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. Let us try to understand the three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus put together, it means number is strength or number is power.

As an ideology, Igwebuikology rests on the principles of solidarity and complementarity; thus, to be is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. To be is to be with the other, in a community of beings. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle in African philosophy and religion, and as such, the unity of African philosophy. In this case, to be with the other becomes the modality of being in African ontology. This is anchored on the African cosmology which Iroegbu (1994) describes as being characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language,

shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. The communal-individuality of the African is expressed in the Igbo proverb: *Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya* (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught by man). Mbiti (1970) has classically proverbialized the community determining role of the individual when he wrote, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 108). This would mean that the confidence of being is because others are in being. The existence of others assures me of their solidarity and complementarity without which I cannot be. Achebe (1958) brings the essential nature of the Igbo-African communal relationship to a higher and more fundamental focus when he wrote:

We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him (p. 132).

With the style of existential expression, he wrote further:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so (p. 133).

The community is therefore at the centre of the life and survival of the individual. From this background, igwebuikology argues that existence is not only meaningful, but also possible only in a community. In relation to the Catholic and Pentecostal divide among Africans, African Catholics and Pentecostals must understand themselves as kinsmen and women, for that is what they are. Their Catholic and Pentecostal affiliations are only secondary to their kinship bond. They both constitute a community of enquiry that are searching for the full realization of their being. And if Africans are not able to understand and appreciate their kinship bond, it is very difficult for them to appreciate their Christian bond.

Igwebuikology is not a philosophy of the 'mob', as 'igwe' which means large number of people may suggest. It is an ordered relationship. It is a relationship guided by the Igbo-African principle: *egbe bere ugo bere* (Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch). Ireogbu (1994), wrote, "Isiokwu bu EBUB (*egbe bere ugo bere*). Nihi na o weghi onye e kere kan nani ya biri n'uwa (the central thing is live and let live. For none is created to live alone in this world)" (p. 378). The idea of Egbe (kite) and Ugo (eagle) speaks of a variety of positions, personality, creed, culture, etc, and in fact, differences in life, which is found in world, and yet must coexist together. When the Egbe settles in the uwa (the world) and imagines that the Ugo has no right of existence and then begins to castigate Ugo and to push it out of being, at that point, the Egbe alienates the being of the Ugo. When Egbe castigates and condemns the Ugo, it thinks that it is making progress; it is rather alienating itself because the being of the Ugo has an existential and fundamental contribution to the being of the Egbe. It is such that when Egbe kills the Ugo, the Egbe also kills itself.

Being in the world, the Egbe and the Ugo must dialogue. It says *Egbe beru Ugo beru*. This means they live face to face with each other, and therefore must have a relationship. They have the options of either relating and being happy or being in perpetual discord which alienates their being in the Uwa. When the Egbe and Ugo harness their energies towards a common project, need and desire, they can constitute an insurmountable force in pursuing their collective vision. Only then can they overcome their collective difficulties. In the same way, only when Catholics and Pentecostals come together in existential solidarity, which is a correlative and complementary solidarity, a 'we' relationship, can they fulfil the divine mandate of Christ. Both faiths have something to learn from each other, and to avoid or alienate the other is to deny oneself of knowledge and growth, and thus expanding the capacity of ignorance. When both faiths slight each other, look down on each other, segregate each other and reject the contribution of each other, in the contention of Ireogbu (1994), is to commit the ontological evil of alienation, and thus become a *homo hipus homini*, which is a scandal to the world.

The Ontological-Existential Foundation of Igwebuikology

Igwebuikology is based on the nature of Igbo-African cosmology. Cosmology, etymologically, is from two Greek words: *cosmos* and *Logos*, meaning 'universe' and 'science' respectively. Put together, it is the 'science of the universe'. Scholars like Wambutda (1986), Ejizu (1986), Achebe (1986), Onuoha (1987), Metuh (1987), Quarcoopome (1987), Arinze (1970), Madu (2004) and Kanu (2012). The Igbo-African cosmology is simply the way Igbo-Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations. It is the Igbo-African's search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning often viewed as *terminus a quo* (origin), and as *terminus ad quem* (end). Igbo-African cosmology is essentially the underlying thought link that holds together the Igbo-African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies.

The Igbo-African cosmos has the physical and spiritual dimensions (Edeh 1983, Abanuka, 1994, Ijiomah 2005, Unah 2009). At the spirit realm, God represents the Chief Being, and seats at the apex of power. In the physical world, man dominates, occupying the central position in the scheme of God's creation. These physical and spiritual dimensions, according to Ijiomah (2005) consists of three levels: they are the sky, the earth and the underworld: "the sky is where God *Chukwu* or *Chineke* and angels reside; the earth where man, animals, natural resources, some devils and some physical observable realities abide; and the underworld where ancestors and some bad spirits live" (p. 84). Ekwealor (1990), corroborated Ijiomah's perspective when he categorized the African universe into three spheres: *Elu-Igwe* or sky, *Alammadu* or the world of the living and *Alammuo* or the land of the spirits.

These divisions into spheres and levels does not in any way mean that the Igbo-African cosmology is composed of irreconcilable realms. The spiritual and physical

realms overlap and harmoniously interact. There is a corporate existence of reality in the African universe and this corporate existence is not brought to an end by the death of the human person but extends into the hereafter. It is in this regard that the African speaks of his death as a return to the world of the ancestors. Thus Ekwealor (1990) avers that,

It is important to note that although the Igbo universe is divided into these three broad structures, there is the possibility of certain elements to move from one structure to another to commune with other elements (p. 30).

In this interaction, man communes with God, the angels, the ancestors and vice versa. The beauty of their being together is found in the diversity of their being. While the ancestors do for human beings what they cannot do for themselves, human beings do for the ancestors what they cannot achieve by themselves. The African world is thus an interactive universe. Unified view of reality: the profane and the sacred cannot be separated, as they interact through divination, sacrifices, libations, etc. The interactive character of the Igbo-African universe has instilled a strong sense of community Consciousness, with an intricate web of relationship between the living, the dead and the yet to be born. This intricate web of relationship is the ontological foundation of Igwebuikology.

The Theological Foundation for Igwebuikology

The current investigation which takes cognizance of the possibility of African culture contributing to the relations between Catholics and the Pentecostals is founded on the recommendations of *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus*. In *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II exhorted the church to discover the values of African culture, which in the contention of Nkemnkia (2010) includes the profound sense of religion, sense of community, the sacred, the existence of the spiritual world, of an eternal and Supreme Being. While encouraging this dialogue, he wrote,

At all levels: between bishops, Episcopal conferences or hierarchical assemblies and the Apostolic See, between conferences or Episcopal assemblies of the different nations of the same continent and those of other

continents, and within each particular church, between the bishop, the presbyterate, consecrated persons, pastoral workers, within the same church... and other Christian denominations-ecumenism. (No. 65-66).

He strongly believes that a serene and prudent dialogue, especially with African Traditional Religion, will protect Christians from negative influences, on the one hand, and foster the assimilation of positive values which are readily harmonized with the content of the Christian faith, on the other hand. During the numerous apostolic journeys of John Paul II to Africa, he always included in his agenda a meeting with the followers of African Traditional Religion and has often addressed them with due respect. It is thus not surprising that he wrote, "... the adherents of African Traditional Religion should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided. For this purpose, suitable courses in African traditional religion should be given in houses of formation for priests and religious" (No. 67).

While *Ecclesia in Africa* emphasized the need for evangelization and interreligious dialogue, *Africae Munus* puts emphasis on the evangelization of culture and emphasized interculturality and inculturation as instruments for the evangelization of culture. Benedict XVI in *Africae Munus* recommended a profound study of African Traditional Religion and culture in the light of the word of God. He wrote, "in her (the church) concern for relevance and credibility, the church needs to carry out a thorough discernment in order to identify those aspects of the culture which represent an obstacle to the incarnation of gospel values, as well as those aspects which promote them" (No. 36). Writing further, the Roman Pontiff maintained,

... in this way, the Pentecost-event continuous in history, in the unity of one and the same faith, enriched by the diversity of languages and cultures. The Holy Spirit enables the gospel to permeate all cultures, without becoming subservient to any. Bishops should be vigilant over this need for inculturation, respecting the norms established by the Church. By

discerning which cultural elements and traditions are contrary to the gospel, they will be able to separate the good seeds from the weeds. While remaining true to itself, in total fidelity to the gospel message and the Church's tradition, Christianity will thus adopt the face of the countless cultures and peoples among whom it has found a welcome and taken root. The church will then become an icon of the future which the Spirit of God is preparing for us, an icon which the church of Africa has a contribution of her own to make. (No. 37).

Through this, the positive elements of African culture are emphasized for the fashioning of society for harmony, since these values embody traditional formulae for peaceful coexistence. It is from this background that an Igbo-African concept of Igwebuikology is developed for the fostering of Catholic-Protestant relations.

Summary and Conclusion

This piece has studied the origins of schisms in the history of Christianity, and observed that they were ready-made in Europe and imported to Africa. If this problem of division and antagonism must be solved, Africans may need to consider returning to their traditional culture that united them before the denominationalization of Christian missionaries, Catholics and Pentecostals alike, in order to seek a common ground for dialogue. It is only when they come together in existential solidarity, which is a correlative and complementary solidarity that they can fulfil the divine mandate of Christ. Igwebuikology is therefore proposed in this piece as an Igbo-African philosophy that could enhance the unity of Catholics and Pentecostals for a better pursuance of the mission of Christ.

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