

# Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo Example

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## Abstract

Conflict is a universal phenomenon that is inevitable in human interaction. Hence, it cannot be avoided in the interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Since Christianity came in contact with the traditional religion, there has always been a sharp conflict between traditionalists and Christians. This bitter conflict has led to wanton destruction of lives and property, and this has become a source of great worry to the writers. This work investigates the conflicts existing between the two religions since the introduction of Christianity in Igbo land. It examines the nature, pattern, rationale for the conflicts. The method adopted by this study is qualitative and comparative. Both oral interviews and library materials were used. The study validates the following: There is occasional destruction of lives and property and demolition of the people's artifacts and groves by Christians, and this has led to reduction in the sources of income of the people, and in the tourist sites available in most Igbo towns. It also led to syncretism in the people's culture. Finally, it helped in refining some obnoxious beliefs and practices of the Igbo race.

## Keywords

Igbo, conflict, criminology, social sciences, ATR, Christianity, culture

## Introduction

When two different religious systems exist in one community, the tendencies of conflicts of socioreligious, ideological, physical, and even political characters will arise between them. Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity was constantly opposed by the religious leaders of the Jews. The Jews had no room for compromise with any new ideology, which tended to deviate from the Law of Moses or the traditions of the elders. The conflicts continued from the beginning of Jesus ministry until it reached a climax and ultimately led to the crucifixion of Jesus. Immediately after his death, his disciples started to speak against the attitude of the Jews toward the new religion and Stephen was stoned to death. In the ancient Roman Empire, this also happened between Christianity and pagan religion of the Romans. The Igbo society is not an exception. The wanton destruction of lives and property triggered by these conflicts has resulted in the topic under review. The aim of the study is to investigate the conflicts existing between the two religions since the introduction of Christianity in Igbo land, the nature, the pattern, and the rationale of the conflicts.

The historical origin of the Igbo is not yet certain because of the different views by historians and archeologists. Isichei (1976) observes that

the first human inhabitants of Igbo land must have come from areas further north, possibly from the Niger confluence. But men have been living in Igbo nation for at least 5,000 years since the dawn of human history. One of the most notable facts of the Igbo history is its length and continuity. (p. 3)

She notes further that “Igbo began to diverge from other related languages, such as Edo and Yoruba 4,600 years ago” (Isichei, 1976, p. 3).

The Igbo language of course is the language spoken in Nigeria by people who are located predominantly in the southeastern part of Nigeria. The southeastern part of Nigeria consists of five states that are known as the core Igbo-speaking states. They are Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, and Abia. Igbo people can be seen in some parts of other states. The states are Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom. According to the 2006 Census of Nigeria, the Igbo population is estimated to be

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around 21 million, whereas the land area is about 15,800 square miles. They occupy the area between 5.8° north and 6.8° east.

Linguistically, they belong to the new Benue–Congo of the Niger–Congo Language family. Their occupations include trading, farming, craft making among others. In the Igbo language, there are so many dialects, which are mutually intelligible. Nwozuzu (2008) groups the Igbo dialect into eight major dialect groups:

- (i) West Niger group of dialects
- (ii) East Niger group of dialects
- (iii) East Central group of dialects
- (iv) Cross River group of dialects
- (v) Southeastern group of dialects
- (vi) Northeastern group of dialects
- (vii) Southwestern group of dialects
- (viii) Northern group of dialects.

### ***Igbo Religion***

Igbo religion is traditional according to Mbiti (1970), in the sense that it is rooted in their culture. It is received by oral authority by one generation and transmitted by the same process to subsequent generations and, thus, has effect of being widely diffused among its adherents and of deeply coloring their consciousness. It exhibits for this very traditional peculiarity highly ontological phenomena, pertaining to the question of existence and being. Furthermore, within the traditional life, the individual is immersed in a religious participation, which starts before birth and continues after death, for the life of an Igbo man is like a religious drama, which vitally links the living with the ancestors and those yet to be born in a mystic continuum.

Ugwu (2014) says that the Igbo who belong of course to the West African subregion,

... are a truly religious people of whom it can be said as it has been said about the Hindus that they eat religiously, dress religiously, sin religiously ... religion of these natives is their existence and existence is their religion.

Religion in Igbo traditional society partakes fully of all the features of world traditional religion, including its beliefs, sacred myths, oral qualities, strong appeal to the hearts of adherents, high degree of ritualization, and possession of numerous participatory personages such as officiating elders, kings, priests, and diviners. Everyone is in fact a religious carrier. There are no missionary elders to propagate the religion, and one individual does not preach his religion to another as is the case with nontraditional proselytizing religions. The objects of Igbo religion and worship in the strict sense according to Ejizu (2010) in <http://www.culturalnorm-sofIgboS.religion.acare> are threefold: God, nonhuman spirits, and the ancestors. The Igbo believe in the Supreme Being, who is the controller of the world and all that are in the world.

Their firm belief in the Supreme Being is manifest in the names they give their children as Chukwuemeka (God has done much), Chukwuka (God is greater), Chukwuma (God knows), and so forth. It is worthy of note to observe that the High God is not represented in any carved or molded form, is not assigned a shrine. He is said to have his abode above the sky (see Phil-Eze, 2009, and <http://www.culturalnormsofIgboS.religion.ac>).

In more generalized sense, this deity is believed to be ubiquitous and invisible. He is looked upon as the fountain of justice. The Igbo, apart from their belief in the great God conceived as transcendental and incomprehensible, also believe in a pantheon of lesser deities, such as Ala (earth goddess), Ufieiokū (god of agriculture), Idemili (god of water), Agwū (god of medicine, divination, and possession), and so forth. The activities of these lesser deities are closely associated and interwoven with the daily life of the Igbo people. These deities, they believe, protect them, control their behavior and worldview. Conversely, human beings have some influences over these deities. In addition to the above-mentioned gods are some personalized gods such as *Chi* and the *Ikenga*. The Igbo believe also in the cult of the ancestors. Every Igbo man has his own personal image or figure of *Chi* and the *Ikenga* (Isichei, 1976), and everyone reveres the ancestral spirits (referred to as *Ndị nna anyị* ["Our fathers"]). The personal god, *chi*, is what they call the guardian deity deputizing for Chukwu. Arinze (1974), in the same vein sees this concept of *Chi* as a genius or spiritual double. The essential role of *Chi* concept is seen in the Igbo proverb, which says *Onye kwe, chi ya ekwe* (when one says yes, his personal god says yes). This assertion of the Igbo proverb is also emphasized by Madam Nwaku Anwaegbu (oral interview, 2013; see the appendix for the list of interviewees and the dates interviewed), who says that *Chi* is a force in Igbo social behavior, which is characterized by an attitude of man; every being is the architect of his own fortune. In spite of the fact that the Igbo believe that the individual is the maker of his own fortune, they also believe in predestination, for they also agree that one's *Chi* refers to one's luck, which is associated with his destiny. In other words, what the person is going to be has already been preordained before he came into the world. This destiny can be written on his palm and palmists can interpret this destiny (Ikenga-Metuh, 1972). Again, *akara aka ojoo*, that is, "hard luck," is a common explanation for one's ill-luck in this world.

In addition, Igbo religion makes use of *Ikenga*. *Ikenga* is usually owned by every adult male who has attained manhood. Chief Obiora, Stephen (oral interview, 2013) notes that the possession of *Ikenga* comes at a time when the individual has obtained a measure of independence from his father and is able to build his own family. This *Ikenga* has to be celebrated, vitalized, and consecrated before it becomes effective. In some parts of Igbo, for instance, in Nkpor in Idemili-North Local Government Area (LGA) of Anambra

state, the Ikenga is spilt during the funeral celebrations of the owner. Commenting generally on the traditional customs of Onitsha people, Onyeidu (2001) says,

... as could be expected, associated with the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the people of Onitsha were time honoured customs handed down from their ancestors. Some of these customs include: the cleansing of the town of pollution and desecration, the institution of slavery, human sacrifice, killing of twins, taking of oath and trial by ordeal, first and second burial for the dead, long mourning period for widows, and of course the practice of polygamy. (Onyeidu, 2001, p. 6)

**Ancestor worship.** The Igbo society believes in character and has very strong belief in life after death. Mbiti (1970) posits that when a person dies, his soul or spirit wanders around the bush, until his relations perform the necessary and befitting burial rites. The waiting stage before the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead is called *transitional period of the deceased*. The ancestors, the Igbo believe, wield tremendous powers of blessings and power of curse. After the interment of a fulfilled elder, and after the obsequies must have been completed, the family usually the *okpala* (the first male child in the family), erects a shrine and creates an *okposi* (*ofọ* like sticks) for venerating the spirit of the dead through prayers and sacrifices. The Igbo, according to Ilogu (1974), believe that sometimes the dead ancestor may reincarnate into their agnatic families. They believe that the dead ancestors do not come back in their original forms; rather, they become especially interested in the newborn child, who they say may inherit some of the ancestors' characteristics. The ancestor becomes the tutelary spirit of the child and sees to the well-being of the child. The Igbo regard these ancestors as the special guardians of morality and create shrines in their honor, as well as creating symbolic references to their existence.

**Ofọ.** The Igbo believe so much in the concept of *ofọ*. An Igbo man uses the *ofọ* as a symbol of justice, righteousness, and truth. Not only that, *ofọ* to him symbolizes fair play, innocence, trust, good luck, peace, equity, sacredness, good moral conduct, good leadership, accountability, and honesty. Parrinder (1975) avers that *ofọ* performs three functions in Igbo land, that is, social, political, and religious but the political and religious functions are most important in that no serious rite or ceremony is performed without making use of *ofọ*. What the Bible is to the Christians, *ofọ* is also to the traditional Igbo people. The poor and the widow take consolation in *ofọ*, especially in land cases, for without the fear of the *ofọ*, they will be maltreated by the rich and powerful and from the name such as *Ofọbuike* (*ofọ* is strength), you see that the Igbo regard *ofọ* very highly. *Ofọ* has various types, namely, *ofọ ala* (*ofọ* for mother Earth), *ofọ umunna* (*ofọ* for the kinsmen), *ofọ ozọ* (*ofọ* for titled men), *ofọ dibia* (*ofọ* for diviners), and so forth.

**Ogu.** In most parts of Igbo land, *ogu* is closely connected with *ofọ*. It is also a measure of justice and fair play. Many Igbo clans always use *ofọ* and *ogu* together, for example, “*ejim ofọ na ugu—I have ofọ (justice) and ugu (innocence).*” *Ogu* is more of a concept than of a physical object. It symbolizes innocence (Uwalaka, 1996). *Ogu* also serves as a peaceful gadget. In Igbo land, if one is quarreling with somebody, one can give the stalk of *ogirisi* leaf (*uboldia*; a sacred plant that is used as *ogu*) to an elder relation of that person and warn him or her to keep away from him or her or to show that he or she does not want his or her association. In most Igbo societies, you do not take action against someone who offends you without first of all sending him *ogu* at least three times. This is called (*imanye ugu*), that is, sending him a note of warning through his relation or a close friend. *Ogu* creates an atmosphere for peaceful settlement. The ordinary *ogu* and *ofọ* have psychological effect and work on the conscience of every Igbo man and woman.

**Ala.** Igbo people hold most sacred, the Earth (*Ala*) on which they tread and from which they draw means of sustenance and vital resources such as food, crops, water, and so forth. *Ala*, according to Iwe (1985), is the sustainer of all lives and fertility. It is on land that we build our houses. It is also to this land that the dead go when they die and are buried. *Ala* is so sacred that anyone who commits an abomination against it does not hope to survive. This explains why *nsọ ala* (abomination against *Ala*) is dreaded because it has severe repercussions. A typical example is found in Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart*, where Okonkwo, the protagonist, had to flee from *Umuofia* for 7 years for committing homicide, a crime particularly abhorrent to the earth (*Ala*). Okonkwo's homicide was not premeditated, and because of that, it is a female *ochu* (manslaughter) for which its penalty is relatively mild. Mr. Nwaazuru Okoronkwo (oral interview, 2013), a retired civil servant whom we interviewed, on describing the great position of *Ala* (earth deity) says that *Ala* is the owner of all men, living and dead. She is responsible for public morality and offenses against the law are against *Ala*. They also give their children names connected with *Ala*, for example, *Ala emeka*—the earth has done a lot, and so forth. From the above, we can see that the indigenous Igbo man still holds tenaciously to the cult of *Ala*, and the entire spirit world is believed to have its abode under the physical earth on which the people live and derive their sustenance.

## The Igbo Worldview

Ikenga-Metuh (1972) says, “... people's world view is defined as the complex of their beliefs and attitudes concerning the nature, structure and interaction of beings in the universe with particular reference to man” (p. 52). According to Agwaraonye (2014), “Man is at the centre of African worldview and that every ontological and material activity revolves around man and is geared towards his welfare and happiness.” Among the

Igbo, the universe is conceived as two worlds, the visible and invisible. All beings belong to either of these two worlds. Lying at the core of this worldview is the conception of hierarchy of beings, which comprises five classes according to Ikenga-Metuh, A Supreme Being—*Chi ukwu* (gods, earth goddess), human beings (*Ndiche*), totem animals such as *Eke Idemili* (the sacred python), tree gods such as Akpu, Oji, and so forth and physical features such as river gods and gods of evil forest. Parrinder (1975), in his book *West African Religion*, discusses the beings under four headings: The Supreme God, the Sky gods, the Mother earth, and other divinities.

Igbo traditional worldview reveals that the journey that man makes in a lifetime and after his death is cyclical. This is known as life cycle. In contrast with Christian religion, there is no idea of eschatology, when all will go to eternal God for judgment as Christians have it. There are only death and reincarnation in a cyclical manner. Igbo people believe in reincarnation but it is only those who lived good lives who are believed to be capable of coming back to human form. Those who lived sinful and unprofitable or purposeless lives, by departing from the moral code of the clan, cannot find human bodies through which they can reincarnate but instead are forced to live as unenviable and formless “spirit lives,” in which forms of existence, according to Isichei (1976), their delight is mainly to harm their more fortunate members who led good lives.

## Christianity in Igbo Land

Christians believe in the life on earth now and then the eschatological kingdom that is yet to come. Christianity was successfully planted on September 24, 1842, in Nigeria by Rev. Thomas Birth Freeman of Methodist missionary (Ukaoha, 2014). Nwankiti (1975) argues that the origins of Christian missionary work in Nigeria antedated the Egba (Abeokuta enterprise). It arrived in Igbo land in 1857. So, with the advent of Christianity in 1857, the traditional religion had a serious rival. At first, the problem which Christianity presented to the traditional religion was not regarded as a serious matter by the people because conversion to Christianity at the initial stage was not an easy task because Christianity was a new religion and something brought to Igbo nation by European missionaries: Rev. Schon and his associates at the shores of the River Niger.

The Igbo feared that if they become Christians, their gods would bring disaster to them. Diviners and medicine men reported that the divinities were angry because of the new religion and warned that nobody should join the missionaries. Others refused to embrace the new religion because they thought that the missionaries wanted to destroy their culture. Despite these reasons and threats, Christianity began to win converts in Igbo land. They had village church-school teachers called church agents. These agents were very active in molding the attitude of the converts, especially the young, toward the traditional society. Most of them, half educated

and in many cases utterly misguided, contributed significantly to open disrespect for and disregard of the society's time-honored customs and religious practices.

Churches and schools were built and youths and children were made to attend schools. These children were adolescents and they were campaigners for converts. This method of conversion conforms to Ifemesia's (1972) assertion, which runs thus: “The Christian missionaries were the object of education and religious instruction; and converting the younger people into Christianity was easier, since the young were believed not to be rooted in the ancestral ideas and practices as their fathers” (p. 70). At different times and places, there were face-to-face encounter with Christians and traditionalists, because the early Christian missionaries behaved like social revolutionaries. They plunged into the condemnation and eradication of traditional religion. Traditional music and song, drama, and dance were totally denounced as bad and immoral. Statues, images, and emblems of remarkable artistic work and aesthetic merit were wantonly destroyed by some of the overzealous converts as idols and works of the devil. The missionaries were not prepared to face traditional religion. These acts set the stage for conflicts, which soon ensued between the Christians and the traditionalists.

## Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include oral interviews that were collected through face-to-face interaction with the interviewees, which were aimed at eliciting first-hand information on their knowledge of the subject matter. The interview schedule specifically targeted people with rich knowledge of the issue under investigation. Such people included traditionalists, missionaries, scholars of church history, and so forth. The secondary sources included, among others, materials such as textbooks, journal articles, encyclopedia, and Internet materials. These secondary materials helped the researchers to know the state of the art and make a qualitative analysis of the issues involved in the topic.

The study further adopted the qualitative descriptive and comparative methods in the analysis of data so collected. The qualitative method enabled the researchers to make valid deductions from the secondary data, whereas the comparative method helped to make counterfactual analysis of both the secondary and primary data sources as they relate to the traditional and Christian ethos. Concretely, the values and the ritual rites of the traditional religion of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria were analyzed side by side with the Christian values and ritual rites. Consequently, the areas of conflicts between the traditional religion of the Igbo and those of Christianity were identified. At the end, suggestions that will make for healthier relationship and coexistence between the two religions were made.



## Conflict Areas

Just as in the recent times, the early Christian church had conflicts with religions and cultures that do not share same doctrines with it. In line with this view, Boer (1976) says that the early Christian had bitter conflicts with the authorities that arose over how precisely to confess what the church believes about the person of Jesus Christ. It is necessary to have the perception of the basic concept of the word “conflict” before exploring the extensive area of conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. Conflict is a reality. It does not exist in a vacuum or up there in the blues but among humans. It is unavoidable in human interaction. Conflict has been defined variously by different scholars under different ideological, historical, and cultural influences. However, Francis (2007) defines conflict as the, “pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups.” Yet, a more elaborate definition was given by Phil-Eze (2009). He posits, “Conflict is the expression of disagreement over something important to two individuals, groups, states or nations when they have different views, different goals, different needs and different values and they fight over limited resources to address them” (p. 393). This study adopts the above two definitions of conflict.

## Totem and Sacred Animals

After the advent of Christianity in Igbo nation, there was no town-wide conflict between traditional religion and Christianity. But conflicts later started creeping in from some converted Christians who felt that because they had been converted to Christianity, that they were no longer bound by the norms of the traditional religion. They thought that they could violate with impunity, the sanctions of the traditional religion. These first overzealous converts started to ignore and to violate what the people regarded as taboos and abominations. In some parts of Igbo nation, there are certain animals regarded under the traditional religion as sacred and are, therefore, not hunted or killed for food. Such animals are respected and treated kindly by the adherents of traditional religion and to harm them is a serious taboo, the violation of which is regarded as *nsq-ala* (abomination). But in Christianity, according to the book of Galatians, everything created by God is pure and clean. Man has dominion over them, and as such, can kill and eat them. In Anambra state (one of the major Igbo states in Nigeria), *eke* (the royal python) is regarded as a totem and nobody can deliberately kill it without incurring the ostracism of the people. If an *eke* killer is not killed by the mob, he definitely faces social ostracism, and when he eventually dies, he will not be given an honorable burial under the traditional religion. What most early Christians in Anambra area did was to kill the *eke Idemili* (the sacred python belonging to Idemili deity) *deliberately and use them as food*. Not only that, they killed and ate this totem animal, they put its head inside match boxes

which when picked up and opened by the traditional religionists, they had to offer special sacrifices to cleanse themselves from the abomination because they had seen the head of *eke* (Royal python). This brought the first physical conflict between the traditional religionists and the Christians in that part of Igbo nation. Chinua Achebe in his novel, *Things Fall Apart* also recorded the situation when Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, was converted. He hunted and locked up the royal python in his missionary box. That action of his worsened his already sour relationship with his father and the people of Umuofia.

## Eating Fishes From Sacred Streams

Also in some parts of Igbo land such as Njaba LGA of Imo state, Udi and Nsukka areas of Enugu state, Awka, Nkpor, Ogidi, Aguleri, and so forth, all in Anambra state, the early Christian converts not only went out regularly to convert their heathen neighbors to Christianity but also showed their contempt for the traditional taboos: for example, eating the forbidden fish from certain streams in the towns. Tradition had it that the fishes were not allowed to be touched or killed, for they were dedicated to the god of the stream, but the Christian converts caught and ate them just to show that the gods of the stream had no powers to harm them, because God created all things for man's use. The action pained and annoyed the traditional worshippers. They left the converts to the vengeance of the gods but the gods seemed to have taken no notice. The natives started to fight for the gods by ostracizing the Christian converts.

## Osu/Ohu (Outcasts/Slaves)

The Igbo *osu* caste system is a practice of traditional religion and culture. Caste system also exists in Egypt, among the Hebrews, in China, in Japan, among the Germans, and in Russia, Spain, and Portugal (Ndulor, 2014). It is a taboo in most Igbo communities and in fact, an abomination for a free born to get married an *Osu/Ohu*. It is also a taboo for a free born (*nwa afo*), to sleep under the same roof with an *osu*. When Christianity came, the missionaries condemned human sacrifice and outcast system. Both *Osu* and *Ohu* and other converts started to worship God together in the same church, for in the sight of God, all men are equal. The traditionalists frowned at it but the new Christian converts did not mind having Christian fellowship with the outcasts.

It is important to note that the *Osu* caste system officially, has been abolished by the Eastern House of Assembly. It is no longer an abomination for a free born to marry an *osu/ohu* because an enterprising *ohu* could buy back his freedom and could marry into the household of his master. King Jaja of Opobo was a typical example. He not only bought his freedom but also went ahead to found the Opobo Kingdom where he became the king. But in the present-day Igbo nation, *ohu*, in some Igbo states have their freedom but for *osu*, it is not

yet fully practiced. No wonder Mamah, Ujumadu, Okoli, Nkwopara, and Okutu (2016) state, "Eastern House of Assembly on May 10, 1956 abrogated the obnoxious practice through an Act of Parliament, but 60 years after, this has not done the required magic . . ." According to Sir Ogbonna Emmanuel (oral interview, 2016), the issue of free born and *osu* led to a bloody communal clash in Alor-Uno in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State in 2016. Many lives and property were lost. "The propagators of the crisis are all Christians," said Sir Ogbonna. Members of Alor-Uno community socially and politically marginalized their brothers in the name of *osu* caste system. Even to date, most Christian converts are not courageous enough to put their Christian belief into practice in the equality of human beings, by marrying an *Osu* or *Ohu*, for they know that the person and his family will be ostracized by all his kindred, who ironically are more of Christians.

### Health Care

The health condition of the natives before the arrival of the missionaries was so deplorable. And, the mortality rate in Nigeria was appalling. There was no known cure for some deadly diseases, which went wild rapidly and caused a heavy death toll among the people. Besides, there was total lack of knowledge concerning many of these diseases (Asadu, 2014). In Igbo nation, methods of dealing with diseases, misfortune, and suffering were marked as areas of conflict between traditional religion and Christianity. Christians were opposed to almost all the methods, which the traditionalists used when they were ill, or when they got misfortune and suffering. Before the advent of Christianity, the medicine men in Igbo nation acted as counselors. Some of them acted not only as doctors but as listeners to people's multifarious problems. They also acted as priests and prayed for their communities. But Christian doctors are unlike medicine men of the traditional religion of the Igbo. The villagers of the different Igbo communities think that diseases were cured by these doctors with drugs and not by any ritual ceremony as they believed.

### Sorcery, Magic Charms, and Witchcraft

In the traditional society, when something goes wrong in the welfare of the individual or his family, he immediately wondered who had caused it to happen. In most cases, the individual would suspect that someone had used evil magic, sorcery, or witchcraft against him or his household, animals, or fields. Whereas the traditional religionists hate and fear these forces, Christians do not believe that sorcerers, witches, and charms have any effect on people or their property. Christians condemned magic; they use prayers and sacrament to drive away dangers and difficulties. So, according to Nze Ugwoshie Madu (oral interview, 2015), in situations where a diviner or *dibia* (native doctor) was consulted for solutions to family problem to appease the gods, Christian

converts in the family insisted that prayer through their priests would be the solution.

### Modes of Worship

Hastings (1911) has defined worship as comprising all modes of giving expression to the various feelings toward the divine power, feelings of awe, reverence, obligation, depreciation, gratitude, hope, and others. The Igbo people, who profess traditional religion, worship the Supreme Being through many minor gods or divinities. Those who profess Christianity, worship God directly through church services, prayers, songs, meditation, and through other various services. There are shrines erected for the worship of the lesser gods by the traditionalists. There is no shrine for the worship of the Supreme God for they believe that the Supreme God is invisible and that his domain is the sky and that He is also a transcendent God. For this reason, they make use of the minor gods and ancestors called intermediaries. For Christians, the worship of God is effectively performed by the ordained priests and their agents, the catechist, and lay readers. They regard the holy saints and angels as Gods messengers. "This also shows that Christianity believes in intermediaries but what and who serves as the intermediary is the problem," says Chief Raphael Ojike (oral interview, 2016).

Christians also oppose certain aspects of traditional worship such as human sacrifice, blood sacrifice, twin killing, and other *fetish* items used in sacrifice. Based on this Christian belief, new converts no longer partake in traditional family festivals and thanksgiving. And, their traditional parents and or guardians see this as rebellion that deserves punishment because they believe that the sin of one member of the family affects the whole family.

### Massive Destruction/Demolition of Shrines and Sacred Grooves

The massive destruction/demolition of shrines and sacred groves is another conflict area. Perhaps, this explains why Wotogbe-Weneka (2013) opines, "The huge resource that would otherwise be generated through tourism industry which is encouraged by government nowadays is lost through reckless destruction of sacred groves" (p. 10). Most of these groves house costly masks that were traded by barter for a piece of singlet, sugar, or mirror to the missionaries, which today are displayed for tourist attraction in many European museums. Christianity believes that God is worshipped in the church not in groves, and as such, wasting the groves for *idol* worship was not acceptable to them.

### Prayers and Libations

No worship in traditional religion is complete without prayer and pouring of libation to ancestors. The father, who is the head of the home, prays very early in the morning before he could

even greet anybody. It takes the form of saying “Good morning” to the divinities and of reaffirming his acknowledgments of them to be the controllers of destiny. Conflict arises in the worship of ancestors. Christianity preaches that there is only one God, the creator of everything and that no worship could be given to any other false god. But Dr. Ekweremadu Boniface (oral interview, 2015) draws our attention to the fact that traditional religionists pray and pour libation to worthy ancestors believed to have lived righteously during their lifetime on earth. And, one begins to wonder the difference between this traditional practice and Christian’s ceremony on November 1 and 2 (All Saints’ and All Souls’ Days), the days set aside for remembering the Christian brethren whom they believed lived righteously and died in Christ. Christians refused to partake in annual festivals of the ancestors, which have ceremonial rituals. This eventually results in great discrimination and brings estrangement in their relationship with the traditionalist.

### Birth and Naming

In Igbo nation, the birth of a child is accompanied by various rites, which involve presentation to ancestors and the cleansing of the mother from the “pollution” at childbirth. The “pollution” of childbirth may be performed after three native days depending on the part of Igbo nation. This practice is also the same in Christianity, where a woman after childbirth offers live animals and special cleansing prayer to God, for readmittance into the Christian folk (see Leviticus 12:1-8 and Luke 2:22-24). After that, the naming of the child and its presentation to the people follows. Some factors determine the name given to a child, and this is where conflict arises with the Christian belief. According to Ilogu (1974), three factors usually determine the name given to a child. They are as follows:

1. The day of the native week on which the child is born (and Christianity believes that the days of the Igbo native week: *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo*, and *Nkwọ* are named after deities. But they forgot that apart from August, named after Caesar Augustus, that January to December are all names of Jewish deities, see Ozioko, 2016, for details).
2. The historical incident peculiar to the child’s birth or to the circumstances of the parents.
3. The philosophical or socioreligious faith, which the child stimulates in the parents.

After the naming ceremony, there is *Igba afa agu* (as it is called by the Obosi, Abattete, Umuoji, and Nkpor people of Idemili-North LGA of Anambra state). This is the ceremony of finding out the ancestral relationship of the newborn child through divination. Agbaogwugwu people of Enugu state call such reincarnated child *agu m* (my rib), whereas it is called *ogbo m* (myself) in Ngwo and most towns in Eziagu and Udi LGAs of Enugu State, including many other towns (Okposi, Abankeleke, Uburu, etc.) in Ebonyi State. In

opposition, Christians do not accept the traditional beliefs of naming ceremonies. Christians believe that as God is the creator of every human being, names should relate to him. Often coercion is used to force Christians to perform the naming rites. Of course, some Christians do resist.

### Initiation Rites

Christians have no puberty ceremonial rites. Children are baptized sometimes as infants, in the early youth, and sometimes in later years as the case may be. Christians in Igbo communities vehemently oppose the traditional rites of puberty, which they regard as heathenish and ungodly. In some Igbo towns today, the initiation into the masquerade cult is still causing a lot of conflicts between fanatical Christians and the traditionalists.

### Marriage Customs

Christian marriage is different from traditional marriage in Igbo nation. In traditional marriage, the religious aspects include the preliminary divination by which the young man who seeks a wife is enabled to find out from what clan or lineage his Chi (Guardian Spirit) permits him to take a *wife of fortune* from. When the diviner pronounces the clan or lineage and the girl is found, all the preliminaries are finished and the bride price is paid, the girl is ready to go and settle in her new husband’s home (there may be little modification depending on the area in question)

Christians are opposed to this aspect of traditional marriage. They contend that their own way of marriage is the ideal as revealed by God. But how far is the ideal Christian marriage as revealed by God separable from the traditional marriage? This is the question often asked by some traditionalists. They argue that the Christian marriage and many Christian families are failures in traditional marriage life, going by the number of Christian divorces prevalent now.

Another area of conflict is polygamy. The traditionalists believe that the number of wives a man has shows his opulence. The number of wives often determines the number of children. And, one of the major reasons of having many children according to Mr. Enem Ignatius (oral interview, 2015) is to have enough labor for farming, which is their major occupation. But the idea of polygamy runs contrary to the Christian doctrine of monogamy, which believes in one man, one wife. Many Christians are in dilemma when they have marital problems such as childlessness or problem of gender mix in the children. If ever the man defies the church order and marries more than one wife, he is made a backslider. He is denied the Holy Communion and other church rights.

### Burial Ceremonies

One of the other areas of conflict between the traditional religion and Christianity in Igbo nation is in burial ceremonies.

The traditional religious view in Igbo concept of death is that a man is dead when his soul leaves the body for the land of the dead (Eke, 2014). The traditionalist performs some ritualistic ceremonies before burying a dead person. Christians oppose such ceremonies. In most part of Igbo traditional society, there are rituals concerning the preparation of the corpse for burial. Diviners are consulted to find out the cause of death. In the olden days, the traditionalists buried important personalities, chiefs, and titled men with people who were alive. The aim is to give the deceased company to the land of the spirits. Other material wealth such as gold, money, and many other ornaments were buried with dead bodies. The early missionaries highly frowned at the practice. After sometime, a year or more, the second burial would take place with a lot more elaborate ceremonies than the first. If the second burial was not performed, according to Mr. Enem, Ignatius (oral interview, 2015), the proper inheritance of the late father's property could not be finally settled (the above practice according to him is still in existence in some Igbo communities such as Iwolo, Nenwe and Nkanu in Enugu State, Ohaozaro, and Abiriba in Abia State). Christians challenged many traditional burial ceremonies. They opposed the traditional second burial rites. And, the traditional religionists believe that this burial rite helps the spirit of the dead person reach the spirit world, join his ancestors, and enable him or her to reincarnate.

Also, in some parts of Igbo land, some towns such as Ngor-Okpala in Imo state, Umuahia in Abia State, and many towns in Anambra State, when someone's wife dies, her corpse must be carried to her father's people before the first burial or a symbol of such corpse at the second burial ceremony will be carried to the husband's family. Presently, the ambulance may stop over at the dead wife's paternal compound and the corpse saluted with many canon guns shots. This is done in most Igbo communities to certify that the dead wife has been brought to her own people. This practice persists till today in all Igbo communities. Christians are opposed to this kind of ceremony. Presently, according to Rev. Canon Onuorah Nnamdi (oral interview, 2016), in the Niger Diocese of the Anglican Communion, Anambra State, a brief stopover in the dead wife's paternal home is an offense punishable by the absence of the priests and church members in the funeral service of the deceased. They frown at the practice of carrying the corpse of a dead wife back to her father's compound or even stopping over as we have seen. Instead, they bury the dead wives in the church cemeteries of their husbands' town or in their husbands' compounds. There are cases of kinsmen and the Christians struggling for the corpses of Christian relations.

In some cases, the relatives of the dead wife would spark off trouble with their in-laws because they are opposed to Christian marriage, stating that Christians deprived them of their traditional rites and customs. According to Mr. Sunday Iweobi (oral interview, 2013), there are cases where the *Igba Nkwu* ceremony (traditional wedding ceremony) has to be

performed before the burial of the deceased wife. This situation arises, especially when the husband did not finish the marriage rites because of his Christian faith or due to negligence of traditional marriage customs or because of other reasons, before the wife died. Sometimes, according to Mr. Iweobi, Sunday (oral interview, 2013), it might be that the deceased was maltreated, and his in-laws would not let go. They would insist on the completion of such traditional marriage rites as a sort of punishment to the husband, which ordinarily they would have overlooked.

Again, Mr. Iweobi, Sunday (oral interview, 2013) says that sometimes, the funeral ceremonies of dead relatives that were not done in the past (due to one reason or the other) are organized before that of a relative who died recently. In the same vein, Oreh (2014) identifies the principal dehumanizing widowhood rites and practices to include the following: drinking water used in washing husband's corpse, crawling over husband's corpse, long mourning and restriction period, loss of right of inheritance (if she has no male child), sitting on bare floor during the period of mourning, a widow not having bath until eight market days (28 days), and so forth. Christianity frowns at such practices and warns its members never to partake in them. These are some of the areas where the two religions conflict. From the above conflicts, we can see that although Christianity has made some impact on Igbo people, it has not totally changed their worldview.

## Suggestions

The findings of this study show vividly that the two religions have their strengths and weaknesses. The writers, therefore, suggest that Christians in Igbo communities should leave their opposition to traditional religion because they have given rise to disintegration and lack of unity. The Christians should rather brace themselves for inculcating the revelation contents of Christianity, namely, existence of one God for all men, reconciliation to the source of reality and brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.

Because every family in Igbo land is made up of Christians and traditionalists, they should not shun one another but should discuss their differences, especially the Christians who are in the majority. The Christians should take it as their duty to teach and explain to the traditionalists the objective definition of religion. They should try to review/modify the traditional method of worship, especially during family meetings. The two should realize that both of them are virtually doing the same thing. For instance, the traditionalist would argue that *shrine* and *church* are the same, where God meets His people and communes with them (Madam Nwaku Anwaegbu, oral interview, 2013), or the issue of All Saints' and All Souls' Days (see section "Prayers and Libations"). Christians should also know that the traditionalists have implicit faith in their ancestors and minor deities because in reality, as the traditionalists look to their religion for answers to those profound mysteries of human conditions that stir the



human hearts today as it did in years gone by, so also do Christians look to their own religion. The church authorities should sermonize and try as much as possible to encourage the adherents of traditional religion to drop those obnoxious practices that make their religion look evil. Only when these are done, will the conflict between traditional religion and Christianity in Igbo land be reduced.

## Summary and Conclusion

From this explanation, one can easily see that the problems of Igbo Christians are those of a man practicing a new religious system, amid a traditional order that has not yet disappeared. The conflicts that exist between traditional religion and Christianity in Igbo land are moral, ideological, and physical, though more moral than physical in the sense that the moral conflict did not develop into a serious civil struggle between the traditionalists and Christians. Moreover, the moral conflict (which, in some cases, had been the result of clash in conscience experienced by individual Christians between the tenets of Christianity and those of the traditional religion) was not the official support given by Christian authorities against the traditional religion and its followers, but was purely the effect of a clash in religious beliefs, which naturally existed between the adherents of the traditional religion and those of the Christian faith in Igbo nation. The study validates the facts that there is occasional destruction of lives and property and demolition of the people's artifacts and groves by Christians, and this has led to a reduction in the sources of economic generation of traditional religionists. Second, the number of tourist sites available in many Igbo towns has reduced by 80% because of the activities of Christians. It has also led to syncretism in the people's culture and has given rise to disintegration and lack of unity among the people. Sometimes, to avoid conflict, many families now combine the tenets of the two religions. For instance, after performing the full traditional marriage rites, the church wedding will follow. The same goes for burial and other social ceremonies. Finally, it has helped in refining some obnoxious beliefs and practices of the Igbo race.

## Appendix

### Interviewers' List

Name	Occupation	Age	Date interviewed
1. Madam Nwaku Anwaegbu	Retired farmer	98	09/23/2013
2. Chief Obiora, Stephen	Retired trader	86	09/25/2013
3. Mr. Nwaazuru Okoronkwo	Retired civil servant	80	10/12/2013
4. Mr. Iweobi, Sunday	Land agency	67	12/15/2013
5. Nze Ugwoshie, Madu	Teaching	65	04/03/2015
6. Dr. Ekwereamadu, Boniface	Lecturing	69	04/14/2015
7. Mr. Enem, Ignatius	Tailoring	62	05/10/2015
8. Sir Ogbonna, Emmanuel	Trader	58	12/14/2016
9. Rev. Can. Onuorah, Nnamdi	Priest	71	12/18/2016
10. Chief Raphael Ojike	Native doctor	80	12/21/2016

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