

Igbo Traditional Communal Life and Mission Crisis: Lessons for Contemporary Missions

Rev. Dr. Egbule, Emmanuel Metu

Department of History and Strategic Studies/Philosophy/ Religion and Culture, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Abstract: *Challenges faced by and facing mission globally, especially in Africa are obvious and enormous. These challenges include ecology, health, poverty, security, and governance. Unfortunately, the church's endeavors have not been able to fully surmount these challenges. These, therefore, call for a creative collaboration of mission agencies and the church in various cultures of the world to proffer solutions that can be replicated elsewhere. Key to community building and fostering mission are in the Igbo values of cord of unity (umunne), collaborative effort (ibu anyi ndanda). Furthermore, a crucial precedent in the Igbo traditional communal life that contributes to solving the problem of mission crisis is Onye aghala nwanne ya (do not abandon your kinsman). The spirit of onye aghala nwanne ya was pivot to the survival of the Church during the Nigeria- Biafra war (1967-1970). It is missiological. It is ecumenical. It is embedded on biblical love when contextualized. This work, therefore, draws especially on a methodology of African Biblical Hermeneutics, which I have presented elsewhere as an African biblical communal approach. Whereas this approach is anchored on the African experience, it recognizes the value and need for a global interpretative perspective to studying the Christian experience. Using the case of the experience of the church in Igbo land, this study submits that Igbo communal life enhances biblical love and care, collaborative effort in tackling the menace of mission crisis, genuine unity and bridges denominational barriers while fostering ecumenism.*

Keywords: Igbo, Tradition, Communal life, Missions, Crisis

1. Introduction

Writing this paper knifes my heart for two reasons: One, I am an African of the Igbo extraction and two, I am an evangelical of the Anglican tradition. Being an African gives me a better understanding of global crisis from the familial and domestic perspectives. I was born into a very poor family; grew and experienced poverty, diseases, sickness, death, insecurity within my immediate environment. Myself, my father and grand father with my children and no improved space for my unborn grandchildren, have all had unfair share of the familial and domestic crisis that culminate to what we may and call global crisis. Worse still is the fact that some people among Ndi Igbo would not want to forgive Britain, the mother of the Anglican communion, for her unhealthy role during the 1967-70 Nigerian- Biafra war. For instance, Akanu Ibiam Francis (1968) in a protest letter addressed to Her majesty Queen Elizabeth II writes:

“your Majesty, the British officials in Nigeria are fully aware of all these. The know that we are injured and deeply grieved people and had been cruelly treated by our erstwhile fellow citizens of Federal Republic of Nigeria. The British officials not only knew the crux of the matter, but they also encouraged Northern Nigeria to carry out and execute their nefarious plan against us....

It is simply staggering for a Christian Country like Biafra... Christian Britain has shamelessly let down Christian Biafra (Ezeani, E 2014:245).

Ndi Igbo following their war-time experience would want to push aside as exemplified by the letter above the immense contributions of the Anglican mission to the development of Igbo land. What a situation. But, nostalgically, one calls to mind McCartney's song's lyrics (1973) "when you were

young and your heart was an open book you used to say live and let's live....But if this ever changing world in which we live in makes you give in and cry say live and let die. So what would then be the possible solution to this?"

However, to what looks like a response to McCartney, Ralph Winter (1999:706) writes "There will only be away if there is a will. But we will find there is no will. So long as anyone thinks that the problem of the world are hopeless or that, conversely, they can be solved merely by political or technology". Most Christians seem not to comprehend God's transformational plans for mankind. No matter how dark crisis appear, certainly "darkness cannot comprehend the light" (John 1:5).

Winter does not intend to undermine the efforts of others like president of the UN General Assemble (2008) who underscores a solidarity that transcends our differences in our effort to tackle global crisis when he alludes:

Half the world's people knew no splendor. They knew only squalor and levels of poverty that contradicted their inherent human dignity.... Everyday tens of thousands of people died from hunger, entire populations watched as their cultures disappeared and with trillions being spent on wars of terror, the world desperately needed to move away from the "logic of death"... "we must reorder our priorities if we are to fulfill the promises of security and well-being that billions of people have entrusted to us. It was clear that such man-made problem called for human solution.

Volume 8 Issue 4, April 2019

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

Winter, to me, rather than condemn such a clarion call from the UN, is saying

- 1) God has solution to every earthly problem
- 2) God has always played a laudable role in every human crisis
- 3) The Church is God agent on earth
- 4) The Church should be encouraged to discover God's plan for every generation
- 5) Biblical solution is more lasting than another.

It is at this instance that truth is emphatic: challenges faced by and facing mission globally, especially in Africa are obvious and enormous. Unfortunately, the Church's endeavors have not been able to fully surmount these challenges. These challenges include demographic explosions, ecology, health, poverty, security and governance. They carry huge implication for cotemporary mission enterprises.

Mission involves evangelizing people. It is reaching people. Missionary endeavor is intercession, an intervention, and interestingly pointing people to God through our actions. Increased multiple crisis, as evidenced in today's world, demands multiple approaches and methodologies. These, therefore, calls for a creative collaboration of mission agencies and the Church in various cultures of the world to proffer solutions that can be replicated elsewhere. Thus "Igbo traditional communal life and mission crisis lessons for contemporary missions" is an effort to study the Igbo axiom "*onye aghala nwanne ya*" (do not abandon ones kinsman) which is embedded in Igbo communal life and how it became the pivot for the struggle and survival of Ndi Igbo during the crisis of 1967-70 (civil war) in Nigeria. Its lessons remain viable for global missions.

This work, therefore, draws especially on a methodology of African Biblical hermeneutics. It is a methodology that draws from African experience to interpret the Christian experience. Although regional, its communal approach is its leverage to recognizing the value and need for a global interpretative perspective to studying the Christian experience. Thus this work considers African Biblical Hermeneutics, Igbo traditional communal life, The experience of the war and *onye aghala nwanne ya*, draws lessons for the contemporary missions and gives recommendations.. It submits that Igbo communal life enhances biblical love and care, collaborative effort in tackling the menace of mission crisis, genuine unity and bridges denominational barriers while fostering ecumenism.

2. Challenges Faced by Missions in Africa

From various indications, the condition of life currently experienced in most parts of Africa is appalling. On Sunday the 27th of January, 2013 the South African Broadcasting Cooperation posted on the net a caption "Ban concerned by poverty in Africa". It reported that the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, said he was concerned about million of Africans still living in poverty (sabcnews.com). Moreover, the Department for International Development a department of the British Government quoting the World Bank's World Development Indicator posted the following statistics: Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people living in

poverty in the world. 388 million people (51%) live below the international poverty line (World Development Indicator, 2012). 'Human Development' report 2006 confirms this situation. The report which profiles several countries of the world according to the Human Development Index (HDI), lumped the vast majority of sub-Sahara African countries, including Nigeria, into the low category.

The Human Development Index (HDI), developed in 1990 by Mahbud UL Haq, a Pakistan economist, is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living from the countries of the world as developed, developing and under-developed. Human Development Index also measures the impact of economic policies on the quality of life of people of different countries. According to this standard of measurement, the bulk of African countries are under developed, unable to feed and educate their population (hdr.undp.org). These indicate that one, majority of the African people are wallowing in abject poverty; two, that the economy of Africa remains in doldrums.

McFerson H.O (2010:50) captures it:

Poverty was there before I was born and it has become part of life like the blood through my veins... poverty is watching your own children and grand children die in your arms but there is nothing you can do... I know poverty just like I know my father's name. Poverty never sleeps. Poverty never takes a holiday.

The question in the minds of many an African is why development has eluded the continent of Africa for so long a time. This question becomes complex when one considers that Christianity is enjoying a season of boom in Africa at present. Christianity is one of the most widely practised religions in Africa. There has been tremendous growth of Christians in Africa. In 1900 an estimated one million Africans were Christians but this figure sky-rocketed to 380 million by the year 2000. According to a 2006 Pew Forum (www.pewforum.org/data/) on Religion and Public life study, "147 million of African Christians were renewalists (Pentecostals and Charismatics)" David Barret observes that in 1995 there were about 552,000 congregations in 11,500 denominations throughout Africa; "Much of this growth in Africa is now due to African evangelism rather than European Missionaries".

David Barret (statistic from the World Christian Encyclopedia) illustrates the emerging trend of dramatic Christian growth on the continent and supposes that in 2015 there will be 633 million Christians in Africa. Philip Jenkins (2002:59) puts the population of baptized Anglicans in Nigeria alone at 20 million. He continues that "Catholic growth has been particularly dramatic in Africa, usually in former French and Belgium territories as a mere 16 million Catholics in the whole of Africa". He also notes that by 2000 Catholic population had risen to 130 million representing a gross increase of 6708 percent. Considering the rate at which Catholic Church is growing daily, he projected that there could be 230 million by 2025 which would represent one sixth of all Catholics worldwide (2002:58).

It is paradoxical that with the upsurge of church growth in Africa, there appears to be no commensurate change in the

living standard of the people. Okanlawon S.O. (2012:467) opines that “there is increased religiosity as can be seen in the multiplication of churches and the use of the name of God by even corrupt leaders”. This he says is a practice of religion stripped of its ethics. Even within the church, the rich are becoming richer while the poor are becoming poorer. Okendu V.C (2004:20-21) quoting Maggy submits that “unjust society structures require more than the presence of changed individuals”. Buttressing his argument, he states that although there is the liberative power of authentic Christianity, however, from experience, having more Christians does not guarantee a just society. Okanlawon therefore raises two vital questions. The first borders on how the church sets about transforming the society. The second is on the measure of the churches’ involvement in the transformation process. There have been stories of oppression, extortion, exploitation and negligence of the poor in the Church. Although, one may not necessarily generalize this, it is the case of *pomum compunctum corruptisibi junctum* “one rotten apple in the basket spoils all the others” or *otu aka ruta nmanu, ya zue ibe ya* – “when one finger touches (red) oil, it spreads to the others”.

However, Ndi Igbo say *Onye riwe ya nyetu nwanne ya*, “one who eats should give to his brother or kinsmen”. Sharing is an integral part of the African society. The Hausa say *Hana wani, Hanakai*, “to refuse another is to refuse yourself”. The traditional African communal life provided for the needs of the poor. It is this community or communal relationship that assures the African that “the poor are not us” (oxford journal.org).

Of course, Africa as a continent is suffused with copious natural resources. Nebo C. (2010:30) describes it this way:

...Nigeria is the best country in this world; it is the most richly overall, endowed country in the world with abundant natural human, mineral, climatic and aquatic resources with a diversity unequalled among other nation states in the world.

This mouth wetting description notwithstanding, much of these resources are not being harnessed and translated into finished economically beneficial forms to enhance the living standard of the people. The nations of African continent seem to be satisfied with providing raw materials for the more technologically advanced parts of the world, which have the requisite infrastructure for converting them to usable products. This inability of majority of African nations to process their abundant raw materials into finished goods when juxtaposed with failed political leadership and unbridled corruption account for the preponderance of poverty on the African continent.

Scholars have advanced various reasons to explain this apparent backwardness in most of Africa. Otoni Nduka (2006:34) blames the problem of underdevelopment in Africa on the African traditional system of thought, which to his mind is dangerously couched in religion. He argues “African traditional society... operates a system of thoughts whose epistemological underpinning is largely religious and mystical... the poverty of such knowledge ... is as evident as the technological difference between a traditional and highly industrialized one”.

Otoni’s submission points to the fact that the prevailing belief system and, or theology of a people seem to influence their system of thought and their epistemological foundation. One could, going by this argument say that Africa is in need of a new way of doing theology. This will empower the people to question prevailing prescriptive sanctities of its customs and cultures and enable the people grapple with the myriad of debilitating socio-political and economic challenges that have impoverished the continent. A theology is needed that will unleash a new comprehension of both the interpretation of the Bible for the majority of people who are Christians and the rich heritage of the African culture. This could go against Otoni’s idea. Although there is an element of truth in his argument, he refused to see the socio-political and economic networking in traditional Africa that kept the society not in lack. This traditional networking can be portrayed in these Igbo proverbs and sayings: *Oha bu ike* “The people/community” is strength. *Agbako aka nyoo nmaniri ogba ufufu*, “when many urinate together, it produces foam”. *Ibu anyi ndanda*, “Ants don’t feel weight”. Simply put, joining hands accomplishes more. It is more efficient and advantageous to work as a team. No man is an island. Individualism is a taboo. *Ala otu onye ji ihe odighi onye ji ihe*, “A land where an individual is rich, none is rich”. “We” not “I” is paramount. Africans exist in the “we” social setting.

It is, therefore, this rich heritage of the African who is religious from cradle to grave that the African Biblical studies harness to make the Word of God relevant in the Africans’ *sitz-im-leben* (setting in life). This prevailing theology of the people can affect their governing mentality and thus their overall attitude to life in general. Obviously, its transforming possibility can never be neglected. Bryant L.M. (2002:3) reinforcing this assumption advances that “every believer believes in something and what we believe in shapes what we do and how we do it”. He contends that the core values and beliefs of a people are the sources of their self-understanding of who they are and what they are for.

3. African Biblical Hermeneutics

African Biblical hermeneutics is recent when compared with the western biblical methodologies. It all started in the 1960s in Ibadan Western Nigeria with a conference to forge a way forward for Africans theologians and scholars. Many African scholars (Gwamna 2008, Ukpong 2005) argue that the early western missionaries did not study the African culture. They did not allow the Gospel to romance African culture; they rather super imposed the Christian Bible, culture and thought on Africa; “as dynamic and open ended as the African culture is, it only encountered the imposition of the transcending and transforming character of the Gospel of Christ” (Amole Hope and Egbule Emmanuel 2014:18).

African Biblical Scholars in their effort to chart a course on how to make the Christian experience, the Gospel and the Bible meaningful to Africa raise critical questions. These questions and the various efforts to answer them gave rise to various methodologies (liberation, enculturation, contextualization, indigenization etc). These no doubt are “African contextual thematic engagements (West Gerould

2018:242) which show efforts of various African scholars and their conceptual frames and reflection on African Biblical studies, theology and interpretation. The purpose of each is not far from the missiological praxis of the Gospel (Ottah John:n.d:32) Adamo. T (1995:145-158) adds “The purpose is not only to understand the Bible and God in our African experience and culture, but also to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideology stranglehold that Eurocentric Biblical scholars have enjoyed.”

Therefore Adamo defines African Biblical study as “a methodology that reappraises ancient Biblical tradition and African world view, culture, and life experience with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural ideological. Conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected.”

Adamo however, underscores its communal feature and Ukpong(2005) agrees that it has a “sense of community”. It is a reading that accommodates both the schooled and schooled, skilled and unskilled; the specialist and amateur together. It gives room for the stranger who lives and learns the African culture to use the resources and context of Africa to interpret the Christian experience. Thus, whereas this approach is anchored on the African experience, it recognizes the value and need for a global interpretative perspective to studying the Christian experience.

4. Igbo Traditional Communal Life

Igbo traditional communal life is that spiritual and physical ontological world view of Ndi Igbo found in their traditional (pre-colonial) society which permits their lives from cradle to grave, connects the living and the dead and propels traditional Igbo value system. It is the fabric of Igbo (African) indigenous culture. My usage of “traditional Igbo” presupposes its indigenous perspective. But it also challenges us to consider contemporary concept and periodization of Igbo culture. Indigenous culture, which is referred to as traditional in this work, existed before the coming of the Whiteman. It was the culture that welcomed and greeted both the Colonial Masters and early Christian missionaries in Igbo land. It existed in the period of Igbo purity.

However, the coming of the Whiteman introduced another era in Igbo history. An era of rape and misinformation. An era when we were persuaded to dis-countenance our world view. The era we were bought although we never presented ourselves for sale. It was the Colonial era. That era could however be called the era of discovery. Africa discovered through the missionaries the light of the Gospel and dawn of civilization. Using the word “discovery” reminds me of what we read and were taught in our primary school days that “Mongu Park discovered River Niger”. How would he have discovered our river, our source of water and life. The river that sustains our people and our agriculture. It was the period that witnessed the rise of nationalism in Africa and the struggle for independence. An era of mix culture – colonial African culture.

However, the exit of the colonial masters introduced the post-colonial Igbo culture. The essence of trying to periodize

Igbo culture is to enable us find the crux of the culture that has survived not withstanding alterations, modifications, metamorphosis and transformation. Analytically one that has survived against its criticisms is the Igbo traditional communal life. Amolo and Egbule (2014:106) submit:

Modernism and Western influences have their own place today in Igbo society. It is based on the aforementioned that individualism has crept into the society and

has eaten deep in the cultural heritage of the people. To understand the structure and political affiliation in Igbo land, the fact of communal life becomes very essential. For instance, in the second republic election of 1979 in Nigeria, most of Ndi Igbo followed their kinsmen (Dr.) Nnamdi Azikwe in the Nigerian peoples party (NPP). Again, it has to do with living as one family. I am naturally moved because we are. We hear expressions like a man calling another man’s wife *nwunyem (my wife)* or referring to the other people’s children *umum(my children)* or ancestors as *nnanna anyi ha (our grand fathers)*. Everybody is knit together by a cord symbolizing by *uha umunne “ptero carpus soyauxii”* (an edible covenant tree of blood relation).

Some Characteristics of Igbo Traditions Communal Life People Oriented (family pattern “Umunna”)

Igbo traditional communal life gather its transformational leverage from the traditional Igbo family pattern. It connects Igbo philosophy *Oha* “people” which is the true concept of democracy. People are valued. People are cherished. People are who they are. People have voice. People can carry out mass action. People decide on what they want and live for. People are themselves. People are not molested, oppressed, dehumanized, and disregarded. People make people; and the people make the community. *Oha buike* “people are the strength”. *Umunna bu ike* “kinsmen are the strength”. Man’s kinsmen are the closest blood affinity he has. He depends on and contributes so much to *Umunna*. *Umunna* can be translated literarily as ‘children of my father’. All is seen as coming from the same lineage. It is a taboo not to belong to *Umunna*. The most punitive measure against a man is to ostracize him from *Umunna*. *Umunna* is the strongest force in the community. *Umunna* played very vital roles during the colonial area. It was *umunna* who trained the first educated Igbo scholars.

Umunna play major roles in the homes. *Umunna* are involved in dispute settling from marriage to land disputes. *Umunna*’s decision is final. The Igbo translation of the Bible uses “*Umunna*” for brethren, fellowship and the like. Christians refer to themselves as *Umunna nime Onye nwanyi* “kinsmen in the Lord.” What concerns one person concerns the other. The poor are not left alone to gnash their teeth and die. There are provisions made possible by *Umunna* to help the poor. For example, one would not harvest his yam farms after harvest to look for left overs. One could pluck another’s fruits to eat and not for sale. Eating together is cherished. *Umunna* could empower somebody economically too. There is room to borrow including seedlings for

planting. *Umunna* affords security and safety. Amidst of *Umunna* one could pickup and grow to the zenith of one's life.

Religious Orientation: *Umunne* (sacred cord of unity)

The traditional Igbo communal life has not only physical implications but also spiritual. It is beyond man and his visible environment. It is a communion of both the living and the dead. One must not offend the departed elders. One must invite them during meals. They must be greeted each morning. Their participation is most obvious among the people. The living traces their roots to them.

The spiritual connection of Igbo traditional communal life can be a source of transformation. This spiritual connection is marked by *Umunne* the sacred cord of unity or oneness. This is different from *Umu-nne* "my mother's children". *Umunne* is adjudged and held sacred because, as earlier mentioned, it goes beyond the visible and connects one to the invisible world of the spirits and ancestors. Sacred trees and or any object, in most cases, the *osisi Uha* "pterocarpus soyauxii" (its leaves are edible) or *ogirishi* tree "newbouldia laevis" is used. It is often planted at the village square. It signifies unity and blood lineage. It stands as a witness that none would harm the other. If anyone trespasses by any severe offence against one's kinsman *Ometale ihe Umunne* "such person has offended the deity of blood oneness." Such individuals must seek peace and reconciliation. To re-establish *Umunne* covenant, a covenant meal is taken. *Umunne* is never a god and never a deity. No sacrifices are made to it. But it exists and wards fear on the people. Nobody would say, he or she has seen *umunne*. *Umunne* is a "truth" that is bond in the blood and existence of the people. It is existential in its understanding and operation but it is fundamentally a covenant and links the spiritual. To avoid offending *umunne* everybody seeks for everybody's welfare. No one would deny his neighbour (a stranger inclusive) and kinsman of what he has. Sharing is paramount and an eminent virtue

Collaborative Effort (*Ibu anyi ndanda* - literally: no weight over powers the ants- "the strength of the ants")

There are two principles that make for Igbo traditional collaborative effort or self-help. These are the community felt need and corporate survival of the community. In communities the roads that lead to the farm lands, stream or river and bridges, market, play grounds and village squares are indispensable and top the priority list. These are part of the community felt needs. No individual would isolate himself from the community in respect to these felt needs. Wangbu (2008:58) in quoting Ruch and Anyanwe confirms that:

In the African communal world, the important elements of individual consciousness are widely shared in the community. These shared elements (beliefs, ideas, feelings, sentiments and fear) constitute the consciousness of the epoch. The community is a self world and it demand an undivided union with others. Existences apart from the community or the universe of the life force is

unthinkable. From the common effort to master the environment arise cultural creativities.

These felt needs are surmounted through collaborative efforts or self help of the community. The fact that every individual wants to survive but would not without the network of the community calls for collaboration to achieve certain commonly felt needs. The philosophy of *Nanim abula madu* "let me not be the only human being" seeks the welfare of all. Everybody exists alongside everybody. *Otu osisi anaghi eme oke ohia* "a tree cannot make a forest". Every individual is needful including men and women; the sick and the aged.

The Igbo idea of *ibu anyi ndanda* (literally: no weight over powers the ants) "the strength of the ants" is important in this discourse. Experientially Ndi Igbo have observed the ants. Ants would carry the carcass of an elephant. And never would they complain of the elephant's weight. It is a case of collaborative effort. It is a case of carry as much as you are able to; it is a matter of slow and steady bussiness. Time is what the ants need and the carcass would disappear. Ndi Igbo are able to achieve a lot by this philosophy.

The Bible also in Proverbs 6:6 records, "go to the ants, you sluggard consider its ways and be wise" (N.I.V). This admonitory discourse has an ethical connection with the preceding Igbo idea of the ants. Ndi Igbo abhor slothfulness. The sluggard is an impediment to the efforts of any community. However, in the Igbo maxim of the ants, the sluggard and collaboration are vital variables. Collaboration is the point of divergence, however. While slothfulness is the prolific parents of want, lack of self-help is misfortune and ruin to the traditional Igbo society. The habit of the ants, its industry and patience, collaboration and providence are a lesson for all generation.

Akpomurie (2010:93) records:

Before the onset of colonial administration, communities across Nigeria had employed communal efforts as the mechanism for mobilizing community resources to provide physical improvement and functional facilities in the social, political and economic aspects of their lives. Communal labour was employed in constructing homesteads, clearing farm lands, roads path way, construction of bridges and for the provision of other social infrastructural facilities required by the people. Some of the relevant institutions were the age-grades and village councils.

When the Christian mission came evangelizing Africa and Igbo land in particular, the people though showed early resistance, however, they embraced Christianity. When the church was being planted "self-help" was a key to its success. The make-shift stands for the churches were built by those who had joined the Whiteman's religion. The vigour, enthusiasm and joy were beyond bounds. These early Igbo Christians cleared the "bad bush" which eventually became the premises of most Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in Igboland today. Most church buildings constructed then were done on voluntary labour. Again "self-help" or collaborative spirit played a major role. The people donated their farm lands not counting the cost.

Many would work for hours and days sacrificially for the enactment of “*chochi ayi*” “our church.” Conversely, it must be noted that the taxation of the colonial government dampened the idea of collaborative efforts of the Ndi Igbo and other people groups in Africa. Akpomnrie captures it this way

During the colonial period, community development efforts took a compulsive and coercive term. The alien governmental apparatus with its clientele (warrant chief) arrangement, exploited taxes and compulsory labour from the people. Taxation by itself questioned the rationality of further labour conscription for road and other infrastructural development at the instance of the District Commissioner.

Admittedly, self help was not extinguished in Igbo land. For instance, schools had existed in Western Nigeria years before Christianity was brought to Igboland. So naturally Ndi Igbo were late in attending the Whiteman’s school. But when Ndi Igbo realized the proficiency and profit therein, it became not an individual affair to train excellent pupils and students but the community. Collaborative efforts played a major role in the training of most first and second generations of scholars and students in Igbo land. These educated Igbo who got white collar jobs in the growing urban areas within Nigeria formed various development unions with the sole aim of developing their various communities through self help projects. This accounts for the many civic centres, community halls, community schools, pipe borne water and even cottage hospitals scattered all over Igbo land. Unfortunately those are mostly dilapidated today.

Onye Aghala Nwanne Ya (Let none abandon his/her kinsmen)

Nigeria has just conducted one of her most controversial presidential elections in her history. Ndi Igbo of the south eastern Nigeria who feel belated and marginalized by the ruling party and her leadership, stood in opposition to the incumbent president (Mohamadu Buhari). The *Ohan’eze* Ndi Igbo a pan Igbo cultural organization were in fore front of asking Ndi Igbo not to vote the incumbent president. The president of *Ohan’eze* Ndi Igbo, Nnia Nwodo (2019) in a communiqué issued writes “ All pan-Igbo organizations and stakeholders ... Commit to work together in the spirit of *onye-aghana-nwanne ya* even in the face of existential threat confronting us as a people.”

Onye aghala nwanne ya is an axiom. It is embedded in the the Igbo traditional communal life. It is pre-colonial and has survived in the Igbo culture. It is pre-Christianity but does not go against the Christian precepts and the bible.

It is gender friendly. Etymologically *nwanne* is “child mother” that is child of my mother. Another word Ndi Igbo use to show brother hood is *nwanne* (child of my father). But *nwanne* has greater affinity than *nwanne*. In the traditional Igbo culture the father is understood sociologically rather than biologically. The father is the head of the family. He is the priest of the family. He is the protector and chief security but does not often share familial

love with his children. He lives in his *obi* (hut) which is at the entrance of the compound surrounded by the huts of his various wives. Children live with their mothers, make demands to their mothers who may relate same to their father. Children perceive father as removed and remote. So every need of the child emotionally, psychologically, health, economically, domestically is directed to his/her mother. The father may provide but often not directly. Everybody knows the names of “*nwanne*” but may not know that of “*nwanne*”. This is one of the contexts Ndi Igbo elevate motherhood/ womanhood in the society. Using the word “*nwanne*” makes *onye aghala nwanne ya*” gender friendly and connect blood covenant. In fact, it is a feminine axiom.

The Experience of the Biafran War and *onye aghala nwanne ya*

The Experience of the Biafran Civil War

The unwholesome experience of the civil war for Ndi Igbo is unimaginable. The war devastated the land and ravaged the culture of Ndi Igbo. The Igbo land that went to the civil war was not the one that came out of it. The civil war was not only a problem but it created a new avalanche of problems. Nebo (2010:62) captures it this way:

It appears that the loss of the civil war and some unwholesome condition during the civil war had mortally wounded the Igbo psyche and distorted our worldview. Those sterling qualities that identified us as a people of divine providence and favour are now being sacrificed on the altar of selfishness and self aggrandizement.

Nwajiuba (2001:27) advances and points out the necessity of considering the civil war when he writes “it is also necessary to recognize the destabilizing effects of colonialism and the civil war on recent Igbo history, society and culture”. Stating the obvious he submits:

The crises of leadership in Igboland arises therefore from the disruptive influence of colonialism, and particularly the civil war. The later sharpened a survivalist instinct. That is some kind of brute Darwinian survival of the fittest (*Ike kete orie*). Morals and values were eroded. Wealth is sought recklessly, and because the greatest dispenser of economic benefits in Nigeria is the government the business class bamboozled society with wealth to acquire political position. Very often naming themselves leaders of a people too poor, hungry and confused, to offer resistance (28).

Moreover, hunger was a major consequence of the war that reproduced others. One war strategy used against Ndi Igbo was the imposition of systematic starvation. Achebe (2012:210) says:

Some estimates are that over a thousand Biafrans a day were perishing by this time, and at the height of Gowon’s economic blockade and “starve them into submission” policy, upward of fifty thousand Biafran civilians, most of them babies, children and women, were dying every single month.

Achebe has earlier described the condition of the people and situation of the land the following way:

The afflictions miasmas and kwashiorkor began to spread farther, with the absence of protein in the diet, and they were compounded by outbreaks of other disease epidemics and diarrhea. The landscape was filled by an increasing number of those avian prognosticators of death as the famine worsened and the death toll mounted.

Achebe (305) captures a *Time* journalist who toured the children's hospitals at Okporo and Emekuku as saying:

In villages that are nearly deserted, old men and women, along with sickly children, die quietly in their huts. At the missionary hospital in Emekuku, a mob of starving children gathers at the door. The hospital has room for only 100 of them: the strongest-looking children are taken in, and the least hopeful cases turned away. "This started out as an epidemic in March" says a London-trained Biafran doctor, Aaron Ifekwunigwe. "Now it is a catastrophe."

This hunger or starve situation touched and cut dip into the fabrics of Ndi Igbo. It touched the Igbo traditional psychic of the people. It let loose the cherished sanctity of the home and marriage. It was the beginning of the philosophy of *ike keta orie* "survival of the fittest" it affected the value of the people. It introduced some vices that were strange to the land and experience of Ndi Igbo. Rape for instance became the other of the day. Paul Tabori in Achebe (p. 306) confirms this abomination (*Nso ala*):

A young British doctor who worked in the pediatric hospital told the reporter: "The soldiers on duty in the area of the pediatric hospital at Okporo were such monsters that I never let the nurses go anywhere without an escort. Especially the white ones Two Biafran nurses who would only give their names as Theresa and Caroline said they were raped several times."

The connection between the rape and the impending starvation during the civil war was the relief materials especially the salted stock fish. The relief materials were dearly sought for survival. Soldiers were in charge of securing the environment and sometimes distributions of relief materials. The soldiers took advantage of those innocent girls. Ndi Igbo lost their cherished value system. Vice became virtue. The war crisis and its aftermath challenges are still evidenced in the contemporary society.

The role of *onye aghala nwanne ya* during the crisis in Igbo land

The spirit of *onye aghala nwanne ya* is that of doggedness and tenacity. It makes for self determination. It propels the will to overcome and catalyses action. It was this spirit that moved a people to go to war without machinery, weapons and animation. It was the spirit that moved Ndi Igbo to producing weapon of warfare.

The spirit of *onye aghala nwanne ya* is that of care and hospitality. Most Igbo refugees did not literally leave the enclave of Igbo land. Many returned home instead. As the war graduated, Ndi Igbo moved towards the hinter land.

Everybody's home became 's home. Achebe (2012:200) notes:

At another stop, in the town of *okporo*, we met a very pleasant gentle man who took my entire family in. He offered Christie and me the only finished room in the mud house he was still building. The rest of the floors were yet to be plastered. He moved out his belongings from the finished room and moved our thing into it. We argued with him, but he would not do it, but insisted that we stay in his most comfortable room. We move or settled in. One was not sure where the war was headed, so we decided to stay in *okporo* for as long as our hosts would have us.

The spirit of *onye aghala nwanne ya* is that of love and unit. Such as the love of a mother and child. This love that transcended the cast system that was so prominent then in Igbo land. This love that abridged internecine wars in Igbo land; love that accommodated enemies under one roof. Love that knew no bounds, love that united Christians and none Christians. Love that could cause one nursing mother to breast feed the child of another dying mother. This love bred the desired unity needed to execute the war. It was behind the survival of many a family. *Onye aghala nwanne ya* made for collaborative effort during the war. People farmed together, went to stream together, fetch crickets and grasshopper for food together. The education and the technicians and less educated worked together for the achievement of one goal: winning the war. Although they did not win the war but the various achievements scientifically and technologically till speaks today.

Onye aghala nwanne ya was a tool for evangelism and mission for the Churches during the war. Nwankiti Benjamin (2004: 34-35) writes

With the assistance of social welfare officers the refugees organized themselves in group for their domestic welfare. Many them attached themselves to Churches.

On the other hand the Nigerian civil war created new problems for idol worshippers. They could neither carry their idols as they moved out of their home areas nor could they maintain contact with them physically. Many who had lost faith in their god switched over to Christianity....

Onye aghala nwanne ya bridge the denominational barrier that was so pronounced in Igbo land before the war. It could be said, it was the only time that ecumenism was witnessed in its full capacity in Igbo land. Every denomination or centre of worship found was for everybody. In some cases, people worshipped even in the bush and forest without a priest leading them. The relief supply was meant for everybody and non segregated against another. Some of the groups that featured in supplying food and other relief materials are; The World Council Of Churches, Holy Ghost

Fathers Of Ireland, The Red Cross, CARITAS International; U.S Catholic Relief Service and Markprers Geneva.

5. Lessons for Contemporary Mission and Conclusion

5.1 Lessons

- 1) *Onyeaghala nwanne* is learnt. It is passed down from generation to generation, from parents to child etc. thus mission agencies and Churches should teach and indoctrinate Christians on those values that will aid tackle crisis globally.
- 2) Igbo traditional hospitality welcomes even ones enemies. Global crisis will be minimized if the Church will imbibe the Biblical hospitality and welcome refugees even if they are of other religions.
- 3) Mission agencies should learn from Igbo traditional collaborative efforts. No one agency can achieve meeting all the needs of those in crisis. But joint effort can go a long way to making significant progress.
- 4) Christians worldwide should learn to open their homes to those who are in crisis situation without discriminating.
- 5) Mission agencies should increase their efforts in studying indigenous cultures and traditions in other to obtain possible practices that can help in tackling crisis at worse regionally.
- 6) The lesson from the ant is universal. Global Collaboration should be sought if crisis would be tackled wholesomely. If each contributes each's quota in the effort to curbing and solving global crisis much would be achieved.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, I submit the following recommendations:

- 1) The Church should awaken the Christian love that moves her to seek for lost souls.
- 2) The Church should work towards being one and united in her mission endeavour to be able to surmount global crisis.
- 3) There should be a conscious creative collaborative effort between the Church and mission agencies in every region and culture. This will give them the impetus to carrying out joint project against regional crisis.
- 4) Every missionary effort is directed towards enlarging the kingdom. The Church cannot compromise her evangelistic tendency. Men must be pointed to the cross of Calvary for salvation.
- 5) The Church must discover new ways of fighting poverty globally, regionally and culturally.
- 6) The Church must seek to overcome denominationalism. This can be achieved through teachings and collaboration.
- 7) Igbo communal life enhances biblical love and care, collaborative effort in tackling the menace of mission crisis, genuine unity and bridges denominational barriers while fostering ecumenism. These can be learnt and applied.
- 8) Christians in every regions should learn to welcome refugees especial from other faiths and traditions.
- 9) Welcoming and caring for non Christians would open the door to their being converted especial during crisis.

References

- [1] afraf.oxfordjournal.org/content/10. Retrieved on 24/9/2012
- [2] Adamu, David T (2005). What is African Biblical Studies? In S.O. Abogunria (G.ed) Decolonization of Biblical interpretation in Africa, Ibadan,Nigeria; M.Alofe Nig. Enterprises,
- [3] Amolo, Hope and Egbule Emmanuel (2014). An Hermeneutical understanding of Act 2:44; A Solution to the socio political and economical crisis in Igbo land” in Iheanyi J. Obilo (Ed.in-chief) Journal of Religion and society in Africa Vol 1 and 2, Owerri Nigeria Matts Printers.
- [4] Bryant, L.M. www.orbisbooks-com.../978-1-57075-9...
- [5] Brockman, Miguel d’Escoto (2008). Busy Dynamic and construction work period. <https://www.un.org.ga/10806.doc.htm>(Retrieved Feb.,23,2019.)
- [6] David Barret. “Christianity in Africa.” En.m.wikipedia.org/.../Christianity.in-... retrieved 24/9/2012.
- [7] Ezeani, Emefiena (2014). In Biafra, Africa died; The Diplomatic plot, UK, Veritas Lumen Publishers.
- [8] Gwamma, Jeadayibe Dofara (2008). Perspectives in Africa Theology, Bukuru, Nigeria, African Christian Textbooks.
- [9] Ibiam, Akam Francis (1968). “For the love of a New Nation; Latter”In Emefiena Ezeami, In Biafra Africa Died, 3rd Edition 2014. (See above)
- [10] Mc Cartney, Paul (1973). <https://www.songfacts.com>facts>live> Retrieved Feb., 24,2019.
- [11]Nebo, Chinedu Ositadinma (2010). “Nigerian Sectorial Underdevelopment and Leadership Challenges – The Igbo perspective” (Ka obodo were ga n’iru), 2010 Ahiajoku Lecture. Ministry of Information Imo State.
- [12]Nnai, Nwodo (2019). Communiqué Issues today, Thursday February 21st 2019 at an Emergency meeting of Igbo stakeholders at Enugu. (Circulated in Social media).
- [13]Okanlawon Samuel Olawatosin (2012). “The Church in the Apostolic Period as an Agent of Socio-Religious Transformation: Implication for the Church in Nigeria.” In Abogunrin S.O. (G.Ed). *Biblical Studies and Social Transformation in Africa*. Ibadan: M. Alofe Nig. Enterprises.
- [14]Okendu V.C(2004). *The Just in the Society*. Enugu: Dickson press.
- [15]Otoni, N. (2006). *The Roots of African Underdevelopment and Other Essays*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- [16]Ottuh John (n.d) Contextualization OF Biblical interpretation in Africa academicexcellencesociety.com>... Retrieved Feb., 28,2019.
- [17]Pew Forum (2006). Religion and Public Life Study. Pewforum.org/data/12/Feb/2015.
- [18]Ukpong J.S (2005) enculturation is Decolonisation of Biblical studies in Africa in S.O Abogunria (G.ed) Decolonisation of Biblical interpretation in Africa, Nigeria, M.Alofe Nig. Enterprises.
- [19]West, Gerald (2018). African Biblical scholarship Post-Colonial, Tri-Polar ,and a site-of- Struggle.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328125201> Retrieved
12/5/2018

[20] Winter, Ralph (1999) "Reconsecration to a Wartime, Not a Peacetime, Lifestyle" In Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Eds) *Perspective on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. California, William Carey Library.

[21] World Development Indicator 2012. Retrieved from data.org/.../wdi-2012=ebook. On 27/1/2014. www.hdr.undp.org/hdr2006. Retrieved on 24/9/2012