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AFRICAN COMMUNALISM: TOWARD A GENUINE INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper argues that applying the value of African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help to achieve a genuine interreligious dialogue in this part of the world. For the spirit of oneness which African communalism embodies prohibits domination and imposition. Such spirit of oneness is indispensable for genuine interreligious dialogue. To flesh out this paper, I will first explore the concept of African communalism. Second, I will analyze its implications. Finally, I will show how its application in interreligious groups in Africa will help to achieve a genuine interreligious dialogue.

1. *The Concept of African Communalism.* This will be done using some insights from some great African scholars like Laurenti Magesa, John Mbiti, Chukwuemeka Nze, Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, Heinz Kimmerle, and Bede Ukwuije.

2. *The Implications of African Communalism.* Here an analysis of African communalism is done and some of the implications this great value holds for those who adopt it are specified. As far as the implications are concerned I will limit myself only to what is relevant to this paper.

3. *Applying African Communalism in Interreligious Groups in sub-Saharan Africa for a Genuine Interreligious Dialogue.* Based on the implications of African communalism gathered from the previous section I will demonstrate here that applying African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help to achieve a genuine interreligious dialogue in the region.

Keywords: African communalism, genuine interreligious dialogue, sub-Saharan Africa, interconnectedness.

Introduction

The present-day emphasis on religious pluralism has made more pressing than ever, the call and the need for a genuine interreligious dialogue. In response to this call many interreligious groups have been formed in sub-Saharan Africa. Members of these groups work tirelessly to ensure that a genuine interreligious dialogue among different religions in sub-Saharan Africa is attainable. However, experience has shown that the more they labor the more a genuine interreligious dialogue seems to be elusive. The reason for this is not farfetched. The most notable reason among others is the claim of superiority by some religions over others. This claim suffocates any efforts toward any interreligious dialogue supposedly based on mutual and equal footing. Whether this claim will ever cease to be made is difficult to ascertain. Yet, different religions in sub-Saharan Africa as well as in other parts of the world need a platform for generating and sustaining a genuine interreligious dialogue. This paper argues that applying the value of African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help to achieve a genuine interreligious dialogue in this part of the world. According to Chukwuemeka Nze "The spirit of oneness predominant in African communalism precludes domination and imposition…,"[1] Such spirit of oneness is indispensable for genuine interreligious dialogue. To flesh out this paper, I will first explore the concept and implications of African communalism. Then, I will argue for its application in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa for a genuine interreligious dialogue.

The Concept of African Communalism

Communalism is one of Africa's greatest values, which emphasizes communal existence or living over and above individualistic mode of existence. It is an African cultural value or worldview where "the individual is a part of the community which is an organism."[2] It is a concept that portrays the African community spirit.

In fact, members of the community to which an individual belongs comprise not just the living but also the living-dead or the ancestors, and the unborn or the "yet-to-be-born." [3] In this community, the guiding principle is the spirit of African communalism rooted in the realization of the fact that one needs the other members of the community for one to exist and have meaning in life.

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[1]. Chukwuemeka Nze, *Aspects of African Communalism* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Veritas Publishers, 1989), 23.

[2]. Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 16.

[3]. Laurenti Magesa, 65.

For Simeon Eboh, "the traditional African communalism considers the individual and the community as a whole. One lives from birth to the grave, in an unbroken inter-dependence. Life is essentially cooperation and mutual co-existence. Every member of the community feels secure and fulfilled."[4] Nze defines it as "the social life of the African which is founded on the African belief that all human beings are members of one family of mankind."[5] Trying to portray this concept of African communalism, Bede Ukwuije argues for the importance of community and the place of individuals in sub-Saharan African traditions. He says: "The community is very important in African traditions. Africans live in community. The individual person is a network of relationships."[6]

The concept of African communalism can be seen in its Zulu expression *ubuntu*, which basic norm "is that human existence is interconnected and communal."[7] Like *ubuntu*, African communalism is expressed in this Setswana proverb, "*Motho ke motho ka batho*," which means: "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on this basis, establish respectful human relations with them."[8] This is to say that the human interconnectedness that is expressed in African communalism necessitates an interrelationship that is based on "mutual recognition and respect."[9] The concept of African communalism can also be deduced from Innocent Asouzu's complementary ontology of *ibuanyindanda*, which "seeks to grasp the idea of being as being from the preceding conditions of its complementary comprehensive interrelatedness."[10] It is an ontology that creates "conditions that make for understanding among diverse peoples," the lack of which makes any "meaningful discourse" or dialogue very difficult to come by.[11] This kind of worldview is not without its implications.

The Implications of African Communalism

[4]. Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, *African Communalism: The Way to Social Harmony and Peaceful Co-Existence Onuganotu Lectures* (London: IKO, 2004), 163.
[5]. Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, 14.
[6]. Bede Ukwuije, "The Role of Forgiveness in the Process of Reconciliation: An African Christian Perspective," *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol. 14, (2002): 60.
[7]. Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Walk with Us and Listen*: *Political Reconciliation in Africa* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 114.
[8]. Heinz Kimmerle, "Ubuntu and Communalism in African Philosophy and Art," http://rozenbergquarterly.com/?p=1811 (Accessed April 8, 2013).
[9]. Heinz Kimmerle, http://rozenbergquarterly.com/?p=1811 (Accessed April 8, 2013).
[10]. Innocent I. Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda*: *New Complementary Ontology beyond World-immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Impositions* (Zweigniederlassung Zürich: LIT   VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2007), 21.
[11]. Innocent Asouzu I, 22.

African Traditional Religion is inseparable from the culture of African people. Every individual is characteristically distinct from the other. The distinctiveness in character implies that there abound differences among persons and communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Hence, African communalism implies the existence of different groups in Traditional Africa that make use of dialogue to attain mutual understanding in settling communal or interethnic conflicts and create room for peaceful co-existence.[12]

Another implication is that a person can only be a person because he or she lives and acts in a community.[13] In other words, it is the community that gives a person his or her identity. The "complementary" interrelatedness that is characteristic of African communalism makes it obvious that one is seen in others and others in one. Based on this interrelatedness, John Mbiti describes the relationship between an individual and his or her community. He says:

> Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives, whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does his wife 'belong' to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's name. whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.[14]

  Worthy of note is the fact that as far as African communalism is concerned, no individual suffers or rejoices alone, but with the entire community. This is important because it will necessarily play out well when I will be arguing for the application of African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa for a genuine interreligious dialogue. Still following this outlook of African communalism and the human interconnectedness it characterizes, Stan Chukwube says, "One's action is considered moral or immoral depending on how that very action enhances or impedes the welfare of others and the smooth functioning of the community. The concern of Ndigbo

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[12]. See for example, Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, *African Communalism: The Way to Social Harmony and Peaceful Co-Existence Onuganotu Lectures* (London: IKO, 2004); Stan O.   Chukwube, "Renewing the Community and Fashioning the Individual: A Study of   Traditional Communal Reconciliation among the Igbo" (PhD diss., Fordham University,   2008).

[13]. See Chukwuemeka Nze, 7.

[14]. John S Mbiti, *African religions & philosophy* (Oxford; Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1990), 106.

(and by extension Africa) is not how good or bad an act appears to the individual but how the community evaluates it."[15] This could be seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where Okonkwo violated the "Week of Peace" by beating Ojiugo his wife; an act that was seen as an abomination that "can ruin the whole clan." He was made to pay a fine that was used to pacify *Ani* the "earth goddess" consequently reconciling him with his wife, with the whole community, with *Ani*,[16] the spirits, and ancestors.

The interconnectedness that is seen in African communalism implies that no individual person can make it or survive all alone. His or her survival depends on the survival of the community from which he or she draws his or her vital force. Kofi Asare Opoku seems to agree with this because for him African communalism is best understood as far as the good of the individual is determined by the well-being of all.[17] He illustrates this with the Akan art of a crocodile with two heads and two tails but with a common stomach. Though the crocodiles are inseparable from each other, the heads remain distinct. What each of the heads eats, enters into the common stomach, for the personal and collective good of the crocodiles.[18] Consequently, the preservation of the community is an onus of every member of the community. Vincent Mulago, commenting on "the relationship between the individual and the community" and the responsibility of the individual members of the community in sub-Saharan African communities says:

> the family, clan or tribe is a whole, of which each member is only a part. The same blood, the same life which is shared by all, which all receive from the first ancestor, the founder of the clan, runs through the [veins] of all. Every effort must be directed to the preservation, maintenance, growth and perpetuation of this common treasure. The pitiless elimination of everything which hinders this end, and the encouragement at all costs of everything which furthers it: this is the last word in [African] Bantu customs and institutions, wisdom and philosophy.[19]

Owing to the interrelatedness, which is the underpinning principle of African communalism, every member of the community has the obligation to share with the others. Unwillingness or total refusal to share "destroys the 'communitarian' purpose of

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[15]. Stan O. Chukwube, "Renewing the Community and Fashioning the Individual: A Study of Traditional Communal Reconciliation among the Igbo" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2008), 48.

[16]. Chinua, Achebe, *Things Fall Apart,* 50th Anniversary ed. (New York: Anchor Books, a Division of Random House Inc. 1994), 29-31.

[17]. Kofi A. Opoku, "Communalism and Community in the African Heritage," *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 316 (1990): 490.

[18]. Kofi A. Opoku, 490.

[19]. Vincent Mulago, "Vital Participation," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1969), 139-40.

the universe and is immoral"[20] according to Laurenti Magesa. Just as a fish cannot live outside water, an individual in sub-Saharan African worldview knows that he or she has no meaning and no existence, once he or she is alienated from the community. His or her life can only be "grasped as it is shared."[21] Harvey Sindima puts it this way: "We cannot understand persons, indeed we cannot have personal identity without reference to other persons…. The notion of being-together is intended to emphasize that life is the actuality of living in the present together with people, other creatures, and the earth."[22] The understanding that everything that exists, is in mutual harmonizing relationship with other beings in existence and can be so understood as aiding each other[23] shows that an individual does not live solely for himself or herself. His or her existence must complement the existence of others in the community just as theirs complements his or her own. In fact, "in the spirit of live and let live," African communalism entails that the individual's dues and rights are respected; that he or she is mutually supported and encouraged to fully, develop himself or herself.[24] Since no individual is considered superior to the other, everybody is carried along in communal decision-making.[25] The fact that the individual in sub-Saharan African communal life is mutually encouraged and supported to fully develop himself or herself shows that African communalism encourages and supports, not uniformity, but unity in diversity. One could rightly say then, that in African communalism, the joy of living can only be realized when living denotes a life that is lived in mutual relationship. Asouzu articulates it this way:

> The joy of being that is characteristic of being, in its deepest complementary ramifications, is not complete unless this joy is a shared act in the mutual transcendent experience of complementary unity of consciousness, which turns out to be the highest form of communal experience *(onye aghala nwanneya)* in its universal dimension.[26]

The complementary interrelatedness that is seen in African communalism infers that no individual member of the community is complete all by himself or herself. He or she is lacking something that needs to be supplied by the other. Asouzu refers to this lack in an individual as a "missing link" that requires "other missing links" for the realization of its being. He says, referring to the implications of the complementary ontology in African communalism:

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[20]. Laurenti Magesa, 63.
[21]. Vincent Mulago, 139.
[22]. Harvey Sindima, "Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, ed.
Charles Birch (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 144, 146.
[23]. Innocent I. Asouzu, 273.
[24]. Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, 89.
[25]. Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, 131.
[26]. Innocent I. Asouzu, 261.

> The implications of this are that no missing link can uphold its being solely on its own. It can do this only with reference to the whole and in complementary harmony with other missing links whose legitimacy and determination are necessarily dependent on the type of union that guarantees their being. *It is for this reason that one can say that to be is not to be alone (ka so mu adina).*[27]

He goes on to add that "all missing links attain full authentication and meaning when considered within the framework of complementing units that serve each other mutually and necessarily."[28] Indeed, in the spirit of African communalism, no individual would like to be alone, knowing that he or she would not succeed. The importance of complementary interconnectedness in African communalism is commonly expressed in many folk tales, adages, and proverbs in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the Igbos commonly say that when a thing stands, another thing will stand beside it (*Ihe kwuru ihe akwudebe ya*). If a person buries himself or herself, one of his or her hands will be out[29] (*onye lie onwe ya otu aka ya aputa n'elu ala*). That is to say, a corpse cannot bury itself. Magesa, quoting Kofi A. Opoku says: "Life is when you are together, alone you are an animal."[30] Within the context of African communalism,

> the relationship between the subject and the centre of its harmony turns out to be one that is complementary and not one that is fragmented, polarised and exclusivist. It is a framework where units do not relate to each other as discrete quantities oblivious of others. Here, to be is not to be alone *(ka so mu di)* but to be in mutual relationship of service in complementarity.[31]

The above citation suggests that an individual can hold a different view or idea contrary to another member of the community, but he or she does not for that matter stop being in mutual relationship with the other. He or she knows that there is something lacking in him or her, "a missing link" in the words of Asouzu, which can only be supplemented in a complementary relationship with the other. This is why the ontology of *ibuanyindanda* or the complementary interrelatedness which is embedded in African communalism, "has the capacity to reach out to all possible relations most especially when the interests of stakeholders seem to vary because of their idea about the world and reality in general."[32] Thus, African communalism rules out claims of any possession of absolute truth or

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[27]. Innocent I. Asouzu, 268.

[28]. Innocent I. Asouzu, 269-70.

[29]. Frederick Chidozie Ogbalu, *Ilu Igbo: The Book of Igbo Proverbs* (Onitsha: University Publishing Co., 1965), 8. This means that the person in question climbs down his or her grave and uses a hoe to draw sand on himself or herself.

[30]. Laurenti Magesa, 65.

[31]. Innocent. I. Asouzu, 274.

[32]. Innocent I. Asouzu, 275.

knowledge of any type by an individual. In other words, no individual has an absolute possession of anything as to be independent of the other. This can be seen in an Igbo African adage which says: "If the right hand washes the left hand, the left hand will wash the right in turn" (*Aka nri kwoo aka ikpa, aka ikpa akwoo aka nri*).

The philosophy of African communalism implies that African religion is communal in nature. It is a religion that is human-centered, rather than Theo-centric. It is overtly utilitarian not in the individualistic, but communal sense.[33] In this sense, no individual would like to be guaranteed life beyond where he or she would not be in complementary relationship with others. A guarantee of life beyond depends of course on how well an individual lives here on earth in relationship with the other. In which case, life beyond is guaranteed not just to the individual alone, but the individual and the community.[34] For though, the individual is distinct, he or she is inseparable from the community. In African communalism and by extension African religion, therefore, one could rightly affirm that to be is to be in relationship with the other. "This mode of mutual complementary relationship" according to Asouzu, "becomes most actual in day to day encounter with the opposite other. It is a form of relationship carried out in mutual dependence and inter-dependence, as service in complementarity, outside of which no human existence in its insufficiency is thinkable."[35]

For Aylward Shorter different African religious systems interact and influence one another to various degrees, while maintaining their distinctiveness.[36] Just as the individual in African communalism is distinct but inseparable from the community, so are these various African Traditional Religions or religious systems as Shorter would call them distinct but inseparable from the one and only African Traditional Religion of the African ancestor. The way the individual in African communalism lives in a mutual relationship with the other, although, he or she maintains his or her distinctiveness, so does each of these distinct African religions live in a complementary relationship with one another.

Therefore, the philosophy of African communalism, which is an underpinning theology in sub-Saharan African Traditional Religion, neither advocates nor promotes exclusivism. For none of the distinct African Traditional Religions can exist exclusively of the others. In the spirit of African communalism and for the fact that African Traditional Religion is communal in nature, all the various African Traditional Religions enrich and complement one another while maintaining their distinctiveness. Based on this, one can rightly argue that in the spirit of African communalism, African Traditional Religion is as well,

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[33]. Laurenti Magesa, 69.
[34]. Laurenti Magesa, 69.
[35]. Innocent I. Asouzu, 307.
[36]. Aylward Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapmans, 1977), 1.

pluralistic in nature. When the above claims are tied together, one comes up with the affirmation that African Traditional Religion, because of the African communalistic worldview, is inclusively pluralistic.[37]

The fact that in African communalism, the individual is identical with the community does not mean that the individual does not have his or her freedom. Harmony is the bedrock of African communalism. The same harmony according to Magesa, "is [the] agent of freedom and is meant to enhance it."[38] Within the context of African communalism, good acts resulting from individual choices are rewarded just as bad acts are punished.[39] This shows that the individual, in spite of the emphasis on communal life, has his or her freedom. However, freedom, as far as African worldview and by extension, African Religion is concerned, is not a license or liberty for one to do whatever one wants. Rather, it is "what enables a person to be fully who he or she is."[40] It is a freedom or autonomy that is exercised within a communal context.

Because African communalism is rooted in complementary interrelationships and mutual harmony, it provides a basis for true interreligious dialogue.

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[37]. See Marinus Iwuchukwu, *Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria: The Challenges of Inclusive Cultural and Religious Pluralism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 167-170.

[38]. Laurenti Magesa, 74.

[39]. Chukwuemeka Nze, 21.

[40]. Laurenti Magesa, 74.

Applying African Communalism in Interreligious Groups in sub-Saharan Africa for a Genuine Interreligious Dialogue

The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language defines dialogue as "a frank exchange of ideas or views on a specific issue, in an effort to attain mutual understanding."[41] This definition presupposes, there abound differences that necessitate dialogue to attain mutual understanding. The fact of life is that there are differences between people, groups, nations, and religions. Even identical twins have their differences. Therefore, to attain mutual understanding, which will in turn make way for peaceful co-existence, dialogue is a sine qua non.

Judging from the population of Africans who are adherents of one religion or another, one could rightly claim that Africa is a religious pluralistic society. As at 2010 the three major religions in sub-Saharan Africa, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion were said to have an estimated population of 488,880,000; 421,938,820; and 100,000,000 respectively.[42]Each of these religions has its own religious doctrines different from others. These doctrinal differences make interreligious dialogue imperative if there should be peaceful religious co-existence. Unfortunately, religious violence is no longer news in sub-Saharan Africa. On the 8th of February 2014, clashes between Muslims and Christians in Bangui, Central African Republic left at least 10 people dead and injured many. Several houses were burnt down.[43] In Nigeria, the clashes between Muslims and Christians are almost on daily bases especially since the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgents; an Islamic extremists group that abhors Western education and vows to establish Islamic state in Nigeria.[44] Religious violence in sub-Saharan Africa is not between Muslims and Christians only. It exists between other religions; Christianity and African Traditional Religion for example. For Obiefuna "[t]he case involving the murder of Augustine Eze and Scholastica Nnolim in Nanka (Nigeria) on 23rd February, 1993, is a classical example."[45] According to him "[t]here are many cases like that in

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[41] Mario Pei, *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*. Eng Lang Institute of America, (Illustrated edition). (1975).

[42] http://afkinsider.com/34091/popular-religions-africa/2/ (Accessed October 26, 2015).

[43]. Vanguard, "Clashes in Bangui leave at least 10 dead," http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/02/clashes-bangui-leave-least-10-dead/#sthash.3bungiuz.dpuf (accessed, February 10, 2014).

[44]. Farouk Chothia, "Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists?" http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13809501 (accessed, February 10, 2014).

[45]. Obiefuna, http://www.ajol.info/index.php/jrhr/article/download/87322/77038 (accessed November 23, 2013). The case is about some group of Catholics who

nearly every Catholic diocese in Igboland: there are enough cases for study in Abakaliki and Nsukka."[46] What is said here of Nigeria and Central African Republic is true of most African countries. Hence, the importance of interreligious dialogue in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be over emphasized if peaceful co-existence must be achieved among the adherents of these religions.

One of the greatest problems hindering interreligious dialogue in sub-Saharan Africa and indeed worldwide is the claim of absolutism and exclusivism, which some religions are making with regard to their religious beliefs and their efficacy in leading to salvation respectively.[47] For example, Pope Boniface VIII reaffirmed the claim of the Catholic Church of no salvation outside the church when he says: "We are required by faith to believe and hold that there is one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; we firmly believe it and unreservedly profess it; outside it there is neither salvation nor remission of sins."[48] The Protestant church through Martin Luther claims that "those who remain outside Christianity, be they heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians (Catholics) although they believe in only one true God, yet remain in eternal wrath and perdition."[49] Some Muslims on their own side, based on some Qur'anic verses, claim that Islam is the only true religion of God and refuse to tolerate anyone who professes other faith than Islam.[50] Fortunately, some leaders of some of these religions have today come to rethink some of their problematic positions that have been obstacles to interreligious dialogue. For example, the teaching authority of the Catholic Church has come to recognize the truth in other religions especially since the Second Vatican Council. Many documents of this Council and other Church's documents after it encourage dialogue and collaboration with

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took it upon themselves when one of their members died to fight against Nanka traditional custom that forbids a woman to see the corps of her husband. Probably, the disaster would have been averted if they had resorted to dialogue to get their member see the corpse of her husband.

[46]. Obiefuna, http://www.ajol.info/index.php/jrhr/article/download/87322/77038 (accessed November 23, 2013).

[47]. Muhammad Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-Reductive Religious Pluralism," in *Islam and global dialogue: religious pluralism and the pursuit of peace*, ed. Roger Boase (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 57.

[48]. Boniface VIII, "The Bull *Unam Sanctam*, 1302," in *The Church Teaches*, ed. Clarkson J.F (St Louis MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1955), 73-5.

[49]. Quoted by Diana L. Eck, "Is Our God Listening?" in *Islam and global dialogue: religious pluralism and the pursuit of peace*, ed. Roger Boase (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 26.

[50]. Cf. Qur'an 3: 19, 85.

other religions.[51] In N*ostra Aetate* for example, the Council fathers state referring to other religions:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. With sincere respect she looks on those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing on many points from what she herself holds and teaches, yet not rarely reflect a ray of the Truth which enlightens all men. But she proclaims and must ever proclaim Christ, "the way, the truth and the life" in whom men find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.[52]

The Council fathers then urged all Christians "to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. (And)... while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, (they should) acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture."[53]

 Some Muslim clerics and scholars have come to realize the same. The document, "A Common Word"[54] sent by 138 Muslim scholars to the Pope and some other Christian leaders is an example. In this document they reminded them of what Muslims and Christians have in common and challenged them to search for what will promote mutual understanding and peace.[55] This change in attitude has given rise to the emergence of many interreligious dialogue groups or associations in the continent. For example, South Africa has the National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF) and the National Interfaith Leadership Council (NILC) among others. These two have recently merged to give rise to National Interfaith Council of South Africa (NICSA).[56] Nigeria has Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)[57] and Inter-Faith Action for Peace (IFAP)[58] among others. These groups no doubt have recorded some positive achievements in bringing people of different faiths together. For instance, the National Interfaith Council of South Africa has

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[51]. See for example *Nostra Aetate* no. 2; *Ad Gentes* no. 9; *Redemptoris Missio* no. 28; see also the 1984 Document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on "The   Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions" (no. 29).

[52] *Nostra Aetate* no. 2

[53]. *Nostra Aetate* no. 2

[54]. David Burrell, "Dialogue between Muslims and Christians as Mutually Transformative Speech" in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*: *Interreligious Dialogue Series1*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Oregon: Cascade Books 2009), 87-98.

[55]. David Burrell, 88 -98.

[56]. http://ewn.co.za/2011/09/02/National-Interfaith-Council-launched (accessed February 10, 2014).

[57]. http://www.nirecng.org/ (accessed February 10, 2014).

[58]. http://interfaithnigeria.org/inaugural%20meeting.html (accessed February 10, 2014).

succeeded in bring people of different faiths who among others embrace the principle of inclusivity, religious tolerance and co-operation.[59] In the same vein Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) "is becoming increasingly relevant in championing the course of peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance between and among adherents of the two principal religions, that is, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria".[60] Thanks to this Council adherents of these religions in Nigeria can today dialogue for peaceful co-existence and resolution of conflicts among others.[61] In spite of the success recorded so far by these groups, a lot still has to be done for the result has not been great. Andrew Zziwa testifies to this when referring to ecumenism in sub-Saharan Africa he says: "When one listen[s] to the contemptuous labels that several Catholic priests (let alone laity[!]) still use about their counterparts in Protestant Churches (and it's probably mutual!), and when one sees the general indifference about ecumenism, then an ecumenist of feeble courage would easily give up his struggle."[62]

These obstacles to true interreligious dialogue, which interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa encounter, will give way if the principle of African communalism is applied into these groups. In the first place, each of these interreligious groups should be seen as the community where the individual religions and denominations belong. Just as in African communalism, the individual is distinct but inseparable from the community, so are these religions and denominations, distinct but inseparable from the interreligious groups they belong to.

The philosophy of African communalism teaches the individual that there is a missing link, something lacking in him or her, which the other will complement. In the same way, applying African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa, will teach each individual religions or denominations that there is indeed a missing link, something lacking in her, which can only be complemented by others. This realization will eliminate pride and set the platform for a genuine interreligious dialogue on equal and mutual relationship.

 African communalism makes it obvious that one is seen in others and others in one; and that what affects the individual affects the community and vice versa. In other words, African communalism makes it clear that no individual suffers or rejoices alone but with the community. Applying this in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa entails that each individual religion or denomination is seen in other religions or denominations; and that what affects each religion or denomination affects others. Salvation, therefore, is not and cannot be a prerogative of any particular religion while excluding others. What this

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[59]. http://www.nicsa.org.za/ (accessed November 18, 2015).

[60]. http://www.nirecng.org/achieve.html (accessed November 18, 2015).

  [61]. http://www.nirecng.org/achieve.html (accessed November 18, 2015).

[62]. Andrew Zziwa, "Ecumenism in Africa," *African Ecclesial Review AFER* 18, no. 4 (August –September 1976): 211.

means is that Catholics, for example, cannot see members of other Christian denominations or the adherents of African Traditional Religion, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and so on, as people who are condemned to damnation. Neither, can these, see Catholics as condemned people. To do this, would mean to see oneself, as doomed because the "self" is seen in the others and the others in the "self." More importantly, doing this would be a theological misrepresentation of the merciful and loving God who cares for all His creatures. In fact, no true and good parent would condemn his or her eleven children just to save one. On the contrary, he or she would be content to sacrifice one to save the others if need be. This is what Christians believe God did in giving up His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ to save the world. When members of each religion or denomination that constitutes the interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa begin to see things in this way, then, the foundation for true interreligious dialogue is laid and Africans can gladly welcome the dawn of peaceful religious co-existence.

The philosophy of African communalism as we saw earlier, teaches that the moral rightness or wrongness of the action of an individual, does not depend on how good or bad that very action appears to the individual, but on how far it "enhances or impedes the welfare of others and the smooth functioning of the community."[63] In which case, it is the community that determines whether an action of an individual is moral or immoral. Applying this in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa implies that the rightness or wrongness of a doctrinal belief of a particular religion or denomination does not depend on how good or bad that doctrinal belief appears to the particular religion or denomination, but on how far it "enhances or impedes" the well-being "of others and the smooth functioning of the community." In other words, the destruction of lives and properties of Christians and members of other religions, by Islamic fundamentalists, is wrong, as long as it impedes the welfare of these people and the smooth functioning of the society or community. In the same vein, the destruction of shrines and traditional customs of African Traditional Religionists by Christian fundamentalists is, wrong as far as it impedes the well-being of these African Traditional Religionists and disrupts the smooth running of the community. On the contrary, the participation of Christians and Muslims for example, in the traditional festivals of African Traditional Religionists is right, in so far as it enhances the welfare of these African Traditional Religionists and promotes the smooth functioning of their community. If this kind of mindset that is embedded in African communalism is inculcated into the members of interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa, it will definitely enhance genuine interreligious dialogue in this part of the world.

The exploration of African communalism and its implications done above revealed that every member of the community is obliged to share with the other members of the community. His or her life is meaningful and understood in so far as it is shared. The refusal to share, not only disrupts the smooth running of the community, but also

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[63]. Stan O. Chukwube, 48.

impoverishes both the individual members and the community, which is considered to be wrong. The application of this perspective in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa implies that every individual religion or denomination has the obligation to share with the other religions. Its existence can only be meaningful and understood as it is shared. The refusal to share, not only upsets the smooth running of these interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa, but also impoverishes that particular religion as well as others. If members of the interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa imbibe this spirit that flows from African communalism, it will give room for mutual interreligious dialogue in sub-Saharan Africa because, it will create awareness on members of each individual religion, of its interdependence with others.

From the analysis of African communalism and its implications done earlier, one discovers that the freedom and rights of the individual in sub-Saharan African community are respected. He or she is mutually encouraged and supported to fully develop himself or herself; and is carried along in decision-making for no one is considered superior to others. Integrating this in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa implies that the freedom and rights of every individual religion should be respected by other religions. No religion should be considered to be superior to others. Each religion should be mutually supported and encouraged by other religions to fully develop itself; and should be carried along in communal decision-making. There is no doubt, doing this, will encourage interreligious dialogue that is based on equal footing in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, applying this great value provided by African communalism, in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa, is already a "dialogue of life"[64], which Michael Fitzgerald and John Borelli talked about.

  The reader may have noticed that African communalism encourages and supports unity in diversity instead of uniformity. This is deduced from the fact that the individual in sub-Saharan African communal life is mutually encouraged and supported, to fully develop himself or herself. Applying this to interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa means that members of these groups should encourage and support unity in diversity among religions and denominations in sub-Saharan Africa rather than division or uniformity. The recognition of the value and need of unity in diversity by the members of interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help to promote genuine and mutual interreligious dialogue in this part of the world.

Going through the concept of African communalism and its implications, one's attention is drawn to the fact that African communalism rules out any form of relationship where any member of the community is insensitive to the feelings of others. African communalism and its implications also draw attention to the fact that in sub-Saharan African communal life, an individual, may have a view different from the other members of the community, he or she does not and cannot for that matter stop being a member of

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[64]. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli. *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 29-30.

the community. Aligning this with interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa means that no individual religion or denomination should be indifferent to the feelings of other religions. Again, any individual religion is free to hold its doctrinal views different from the other religions, but it cannot for that matter isolate itself from the other members of the interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa especially as it needs the others and the others need it in a complementary relationship. Cultivating such knowledge and understanding among the members of interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will ensure genuine interreligious dialogue in this part of the world.

 African communalism, as noted above, rules out any claim of absolute knowledge and possession of truth by an individual. Africans believe that the world is too big that it cannot be absolutely known by an individual. The truth known and possessed by him or her is limited and incomplete. It can only be complemented by the truths known and possessed by the other members of the community. Applying this understanding in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa entails that no one religion can make any claim of absolute knowledge or possession of religious truth about God. In fact, God is too big to be absolutely understood by any individual religion. Whatever truth about God that is known and possessed by any particular religion is therefore, fundamentally limited and incomplete; and can only be complemented by the religious truths known and possessed by the other religions. Taking into consideration the fact that the boat of genuine interreligious dialogue has often hit the rock because of the claim of the possession of absolute truth about God by some religions, one feels confident enough that the integration of this view rooted in African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will give room for a true interreligious dialogue.

The various African Traditional Religions, which I compare to various denominations in Christianity and different Sects in other religions like Islam and Judaism, are communal in nature owing to the spirit of African communalism as noted earlier. The adherents of these different African Traditional Religions know that in spite of their religious differences, they belong first and foremost to human African community, hence, cannot and should not be alienated from one another. This knowledge creates the ambience for peaceful co-existence among them. The document of Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, in trying to establish the foundation for the "relations between the church and non-Christian religions" and indeed for interreligious dialogue,[65] alludes to the same understanding when it says: "Humanity forms but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all humankind" (no. 1). Opoku's advice falls in line here too. He advises that human beings should realize their common existence on earth and the need for mutual complementary relationship for survival; a realization that will humble one to see truth as

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[65]. Jacques, Dupuis. *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*,   trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 222.

a prospect towards which, one is moving rather than as something already possessed in hand.[66] Inculcating this idea, which is promoted by African communalism, into the minds of the members of the interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help to enhance genuine interreligious dialogue and consequently create the ambient for peaceful religious co-existence in the zone.

One of the noted effects of African communalism is that members of the various African Traditional Religions, because they are intrinsically non missionary religions do not canvas for converts neither do they stop one, who freely and willingly decides to convert to another Religion. Adopting African communalism for interreligious dialogue in sub-Saharan Africa, therefore, entails a reassessment of the application and understanding of mission in the light of the need for enduring dialogue. This is important owing to the fact that the two dominant religions in sub-Saharan Africa today – Christianity and Islam – are intrinsically missionary religions. In this case, mission is not necessarily to be seen as an exercise in conscription but a genuine act of evangelization, which understands the eventual individual decision to convert (if it is genuine), as an act made possible by the spirit of God rather than the conscriptive force of the evangelizers. That means, no members of one religion should coerce members of another religion to convert to their own and no religion should ever prevent any member, who, with volition decides to join another religion. This will be a huge success for genuine interreligious dialogue if it is appropriated by members of interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa, considering the fact that one of the greatest obstacles to true interreligious dialogue everywhere, is the fear that some members do come to dialogue with the intention of making converts.[67]

Based on the implications of African communalism as shown above, various African Traditional Religions are inclusively pluralistic in nature. This is so because, while being distinct religions they maintain complementary interrelationships with one another. Applying African communalism then, in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa means that all the religions that form members of these groups are inclusively pluralistic, since retaining their distinctiveness, they maintain complementary relationships with one another. This understanding will enrich unpretentious interreligious dialogue in sub-Saharan Africa.

   African communalism as observed earlier does not in any way diminish the freedom of the individual. Rather, it enhances it, since freedom that is exercised within a communal context is that, which enables one to be fully who one is and not the liberty to do whatever one wants. Taking this to the forum of interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa denotes that there is no fear that any particular religion belonging to these groups will ever lose its religious freedom as long as this, is what enables it to be fully what it is and not the liberty to do whatever it wants. If this understanding is promoted among the

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[66]. Kofi A Opoku, 492.

[67]. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli. 142-43.

members of interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa, it will encourage mutual interreligious dialogue.

In fact, applying African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help these groups to surmount the obstacles interreligious dialogue has been facing. I know some scholars may bring up a criticism that Christianity and Islam which are currently the predominant religions in sub-Saharan Africa are not essentially of African origin and do not share the type of African communalism. Hence, they may argue that applying African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will not make much difference in achieving a genuine interreligious dialogue in this part of the world. I sincerely understand the concern of such scholars. However, I would quickly add that though Christianity and Islam are not of African origin and may not share the type of African communalism, but the adherents of these religions today in sub-Saharan Africa are essentially Africans and share the type of African communalism. They are first and foremost Africans with African cultures and values before being Christians and Muslims. Hence, I maintain that applying African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help to achieve a genuine interreligious dialogue in the zone.

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the concept of African communalism, a value that emphasizes communal living, rather than individualism. This is rooted in the realization that all individual being or thing has a "missing link" that can only be supplied in a complementary interrelationship with the other. The implications of this were also explored in which it was noted that the individual, though, distinct, cannot be separated from the community. He or she cannot exist without being in mutual relationship with the other members of the community. I then, argued that applying African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa will help to enhance genuine interreligious dialogue in the area.

Let me conclude by reemphasizing that true interreligious dialogue that is based on equal footing has been marred worldwide, by the claim of superiority, exclusivism, and possession of absolute truth by some religions. Applying African communalism in interreligious groups in sub-Saharan Africa, due to its exclusion of these claims and more, will provide a basis for genuine interreligious dialogue in this part of the world. Finally, I encourage African theologians to undertake more research and rearticulate African values that will enhance mutual interreligious dialogue in Africa.

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VIOLENCE IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: AN OFFENCE AGAINST EQUALITY

MATTHEW IKECHUKWU NWAFOR

Abstract

The spirit of violence that is engulfing our world today stems clearly from the inability of the perpetrators of these violent acts to understand the dignity of all human persons irrespective of gender, religious or political affiliations as the case might be. As soon as this is done, mercy, compassion and love will begin to rule the relationship of people(s). This paper discusses or explores the high manifestation of this spirit in Christian marriage which often leads to divorce. It argues that the chief cause of this anomaly in Christian marriage is the ignorance of the true meaning of Christian teaching on equality even in marriage. One aspect of this is exhibited among many Christian men in Africa who still hold firm to their cultural practices that place women as inferior beings to men and take them to be subserviently under their control at all times. The second phase is common among the Western people who uphold a culture that has the tendency of closing the gap between gender differences in roles and appearance. The paper exposes why the Church rejects these two extremities maintaining that Christian marriage as a sign of Christ's love and unbreakable union with the Church accepts only the equality that demands respect for each other and not the one that closes the differences in roles and nature of the individuals that are involved in the relationship. It holds that violence of any kind offends this kind of equality and distorts the true understanding of Christian marriage.

INTRODUCTION

One of the areas of life that has received widest attention, discussion and study in both sacred and secular literature is marriage. This shows the essential nature and position of this phenomenon and union in human life and society. Even in the Catholic Church where the Eucharist is taken as the source and summit of other Sacraments, the Sacrament of Matrimony is recognized and described as a "primordial sacrament" because of its link with the beginning of the human person. J. Elliot (1990:200) expresses how this union is blessed by God even when it takes place between two unbaptized persons. He distinguishes it from its elevated state as a sacrament, when he calls a "created reality" and explains: "Even if we start with the "created reality" of natural marriage, we recognize that in itself this is blessed by God, "at the beginning," in creation. As God's work with the goodness of creation, natural Marriage is potentially sacramental, blessed by God to signify and effect his fruitfulness and fidelity." Pope Leo XIII was much clearer and succinct in exposing this fact when he said: "Wherefore marriage being by its own nature and meaning sacred, it is consistent that it should be regulated and governed, not by the command of rulers, but by the divine authority of the Church, which alone possesses authority in sacred things."

Again, marriage is the only medium through which human life is propagated in the world. This is because it is only within it that sexual union between a man and a woman gains its legitimate, moral and human approval. The nature and function of marriage is such that it should be respected even when it has not been sacramentalized or

made a Christian marriage. The truth is that every union (including the one among the unbaptized) which aims at bringing new life into the world bears the mark of God even when it has not been raised to sacramental dignity. The reason for this position is made clearer in the distinction often made among Canonists between *matrimonium in fieri* and *matrimonium in facto esse* which speaks of marriage as sacramentalized and marriage as existing before it is sacramentalized.

If marriage as a natural institution that is, as a union between a man and a woman with free consent (even that of non-Christian) is revered by God, how much more would He regard this union when it is made a Sacrament? It is only as a sacrament that it becomes a Christian marriage because it will now symbolize that union between God and his Israel; between Christ and his Church. This is why no valid matrimonial contract can exist between two baptized persons without the contract being a sacrament. Cf. Can.1055 paragraph 2.

The point is that if the position and grade of marriage has this link with the union between Christ and his Church; to conceive, let alone speak of violence in Christian marriage is the most unfortunate and despicable thing that can occur in that union. This situation should therefore be given an invaluable attention. The worst is that violence disrupts one of the essential features of marriage, that of communion which is derived from Christian equality. One therefore wonders if the people who enter this union in the Church actually know its true meaning. Substantiated evidence has shown the most outstanding cause of this is the gross misunderstanding that is given to the state of women who are the common victims of this violence in Christian marriage. It is to clarify this nuance and minimize its accruing menace that research is undertaken.

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND CHRISTIAN EQUALITY

Christian Marriage

I once tried to distinguish between marriage and matrimony maintaining that marriage is any lasting union between a man and a woman while matrimony is an indissoluble union between a man and a woman. In that attempted distinction, I also argued that while matrimony is always marriage because of the union between the two partners, marriage is not always matrimony because of the indissolubility that is very intrinsic to its nature. The reason for the condition of the latter is because it has become a Sacrament. Hughes' view (1965:132) resonates with this when he states:

> Now marriage is a much older thing than the
> sacrament of matrimony, and even today,
> there are certainly more married people in the
> world who have not received the sacrament
> than there are married people who have; and
> these married people who have not received
> the sacrament are no less truly married than
> those who have.

What makes the difference *Virtue's Catholic Encyclopedia* (Vol. II, 1966:654) indicates: is that beyond the sacredness of marriage in general as a natural institution, "marriage is raised to the dignity of a sacrament so that Christian marriage is not merely a holy and sacred thing- for that is true of any valid marriage- but it confers divine grace on those who receive it worthily." Ott (1974:460) gives us a more comprehensive and embracing meaning of Christian marriage which is a synthesis from Canons 1055-57 when he defines it as:

> That sacrament in which two marriageable
> people of different sexes associate in an
> undivided life-communion by mutual
> agreement or the generation and education of
> offspring, and in which they receive grace for
> the fulfillment of the special duties of their
> state.

The meaning of Christian marriage since the Second Vatican Council has been understood in terms of covenant than contract. Despite this quantum leap which according to Bruns (1984: 64), "suggests an evolution of our theological understanding of marriage", there is still a persistent use of contractual language in the definition of Christian marriage- a situation which according to scholars, is as a result of the long influence of the Roman law on the Church's law of marriage since the Medieval era. Many reasons have been given for the choice of covenantal term in the definition. According to Harring (1976:195), Christian marriage is a covenant because it is "not only a right to certain acts but mutual gift of two persons, an intimate union." He gives two reasons why covenant describes this union much better than contract. (i) "A contract is reversible by those who have freely agreed to it; at any time they come to a new agreement or stipulate other conditions or dissolve the contract wholly. (ii) "Contracts are about concrete rights and duties; they are, above all, about things and works." Lending support to this sublime distinction, Bruns notes that while "contract deals with things: a man and the right over his wife's body…a woman and the right over her husband's body… for acts of procreation, covenant deals with persons: a man gives himself to his wife and woman gives herself to her husband…". Very importantly, he adds that this "signifies an equality of rights and duties, an equality in dignity as shearers in unity." (p.49) Moreso, he notes that "covenant adds a "faith" dimension to the reality [of

marriage]." Thus, McBrien (1994:857) states: "Marriage is not just a ceremony by which two people are legally bound together. As a sacrament, it is an act of worship, an expression of faith, a sign of the Church's unity, a mode of Christ's presence." Nwabekee (2005:197) then crowns it by pointing that "whenever we say that the marriage of two Christians is a sacrament, we are implying that God does something, and gives us tangible proof of his divine action."

Another very important factor or feature that is closely connected to Christian marriage as a covenant is love. Pazhayampallil (2006:774-75) describes marriage as a covenant of love and declares candidly that "love is the basis of marriage". This type of love he strongly opines must be a freely chosen one where both persons give themselves to each other. It is a type of love that involves but transcends erotic attraction which in more cases than not, is selfish and fades away very quickly. The type of love which forms the foundation of marriage necessarily involves commitment. Hence, he notes that "one does not get married just to settle down or to obtain social or economic status or to legitimize the practice of sex in the eyes of society." Marriage as a covenant of love gives a chance for the recognition of the equality between a husband and his wife which is rooted in the fact of their sharing in the image and likeness of God.

Christian Equality

The idea of Christian equality will at face value appear as a utopian phrase because of that controversial word "equality". However, we can very logically talk about this phrase with regard to Christian essence: that is, that which makes one a Christian and nothing else. The notion of Christian equality is built on two strong foundations. The first

is found in the priestly tradition of the creation account in Genesis chapter one concentrating on the 27ᵗʰ verse where man is described as made in the image and likeness of God. The interpretation of this sacred verse has gained a general view that the meaning of man in that verse is collective and that "according to this tradition, the two sexes were created at the same time" which implies their equality. The point is that all Christians are equal because they are made in the image and likeness of God which has no grading of "lowness" or "highness" in quality. The second is that through baptism we are all born equally to share in the family name of God through Jesus Christ who is God's only begotten Son with whom we are co-heirs as adopted children of God. It is in this context that St Paul spoke of the equality of the believers in Gal. 3:28. Our faith in Jesus Christ through baptism abolishes the inimical inequality and division that exist among us which make us to distinguish between Jew and Greek, between slaves and free and between male and female. Cf. Gal 3:26-28.

With the influence of Christian tradition on most of the laws of the Western world, these two bases of the Christian equality also formed the foothold of most of the remarkable and epoch-making western laws. For instance, the famous *Magna Charta Liberatum* of 1215 which was a war against the marginalizing feudalism of the Medieval era, the *Habeas Corpus* Act of 1679, the Virginia Declaration of Rights in 1779 and even the American Declaration of Independence in the same year were all influenced by this Christian doctrine. This was clear in that expression by the U.S Thomas Jefferson on the day of their Independence which many have described as an immortal declaration. He said: "All men are created equal." He described this statement as "sacred and undeniable" while Benjamin Franklin described it as "self-evident truth." The same influence also has

hand in French Revolution and can be read in the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Finally, we must not fail to understand that the notion of Christian equality does not deny the distinction between the sexes which attracts differences in the physiological, anatomical, and psychological make ups of the two genders as we notice in the culture of the modern Western people. It rather emphasizes and points to the complementarity of the two sexes which connotes equal dignity and irreplaceable features possessed by each in its different nature. It is the poor understanding of this fundamental truth on the equality between man and woman rooted in the Christian notion of equality of all human persons and all believers that led Foley (1981:6) to assert very truly that "although this trend has led to a greater sense of justice in society, it represents one more pressure on modern marriage." There is constant violence of all forms in Christian marriage of the present age which violate the equality of Christians because the basic meaning of this latter phrase is often bastardized.

VIOLENCE IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: NATURE, COMMON VICTIMS, CAUSES AND ITS DANGEROUS EFFECTS TO CHRISTIAN EQUALITY

We have understood that Christian marriage is an elevation of that natural union which two people of opposite sex enter into, on the basis of free consent and in the recognition of the larger society and family. The existence of this union between two baptized people becomes a sacrament because of the involvement of their faith in Jesus Christ and the Church which makes the union a symbol of the eternal love relationship between Jesus the Christ and the Church his bride. Therefore, any action in Christian

marriage which distorts, disrupts or threatens its nature as an indissoluble union of love covenant is a violent act.

The nature of violence in Christian marriage manifests itself in diverse forms like: constant quarrels and fights between couples, forceful sexual intercourse and maltreatment of childless wives or wives without male children which is a common experience among many African countries. Other manifestations are: neglect or total abandonment of a partner because of ill health or old age, disrespect to the partner in most cases the husband because of his loss of job or change in his financial status and then the subtle but more detrimental one which is infidelity and transfer of conjugal love (a right meant for the partner alone) to an external person. This particular act of violence to Christian marriage neglects and violates the stark truth that "married love is faithful and exclusive of all other" (Humane Vitae, n.9). Then owing to the nature of marriage as a union that is not only unitive but also procreative through openness to new life, violence in Christian marriage also includes neglect to the duty of a good and a Christian upbringing of children by their parents.

However, it is good to note that most, if not all of these negative manifestations which we have described as violence in Christian marriage do not arise suddenly and immediately. They gradually develop into these visible acts after emerging like a small plant growing from its bud. Its nursery bed is always the lack of interest in the person of the partner leading to strained hugs, the forcing of the lips to form a smile when laughter is needed and then culminating in a communication with empty language that is devoid of sincere love. From these arise bickering and antagonisms which open wounds that none between the two might notice or be interested to clean or bandage. Because of this

dangerous neglect, the wounds exacerbate and form a sore. The same carefree attitude

and neglect also make the sore to become odoriferious following its decay which will in

more cases than not, result into a total cut off from the main union of the body. At this

stage of the mess we hear of divorce when either one of the partners or even both crave

for, with passion, to dissolve the union which in normal circumstance is the prerogative

of death. They do this because they now see their situation as that which defies human

repair and solution yet they were the people that laid the foundation themselves.

A careful study has proven that apart from the children especially the underage or

minors whose vulnerability is undoubted in most cases and then few men who, like meek

lambs are married to "lionesses" who view them as 'vegetables and slice them for soup,'

the commonest victims of most of these enumerated violent acts in Christian marriage are

the women. St John Paul II repeated the same fact in the second part of his encyclical on

"The Christian Family in the Modern World" when he said:

> Unfortunately the Christian message about the
> dignity of women is contradicted by that
> persistent mentality which considers the
> human being not as a person but as a thing, as
> an object of trade, at the service of selfish
> interest and mere pleasure: the first victims of
> this mentality are women. *(Familiaris
> Consortio, F.C. n.24.)*

It is easy to see that the primary cause of this pitiable situation is the misinterpretation

given to the position of women in marriage which is often triggered by the amateur or

incorrect exegesis of some parts of the Bible especially Genesis and some of the epistles

and pastoral letters of St Paul. For instance, many of these inept exegetes assume that the

implication of the creation of woman from the ribs of the man in Gen.2:21 is that the

nature of the woman is inferior to that of the man. Another portion of the book of Genesis which is also widely misconstrued to the detriment of the women folks in marriage is Gen.3:16b "… yet your urge shall be for your husband and he shall be your master." This verse is commonly used to defend most of the appalling subjugations done to women in marriages. The truth is that some of these false meanings to the passage are products of the subcutaneous influence of the people's culture which they serve together on the table meal of Christian doctrines. People from patriarchal culture like Africa are often victims of this error. However, St Pope John Paul II gave the true Christian interpretations of these passages in his Apostolic Letter: "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women" (*Mulieris Dignitatem)* where he took those perjured minds and utilitarianists who read the Bible for some self-aggrandizing goals to the response of Adam in verses 22 and 23 of Gen.2. According to the Pope, that passage not only shows that the woman is a companion and a suitable helper to the man but also indicates that "the woman is another "I" in a common humanity" (n.6). Hence, the Bible recognized that essential equality exists between man and woman "from the point of view of their humanity." Then, commenting on Gen.3:16, the Letter acknowledged that this passage is a threat and a disturbance to the disadvantage of the woman because it signals "the loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the unity of the two…" (n.10). The usual unnoticed danger imbedded in this passage is that that which violates this equality to the disadvantage of the woman "also diminishes the dignity of the man" at the same time. Clarifying this, the Pope notes that "the personal resources of femininity are certainly not less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different." He described what led to the evolvement of Gen.3:16 as an "evil inheritance"

which came as a result of man's inheritance of sin. In other words, the statement is never an injunction from the perfect will of God. Hence the ideal and standard still remain unaffected that is: that man and woman were made equal in the image and likeness of God.

The other parts of the Bible which have been grossly misunderstood and applied as tools for defending the marginalization and violence against women in Christian marriages are those portions in St Paul's epistles beginning with 1Cor. 10:1-15 to the other passages like: Col.3:18, 1 Tim. 2:11-14, and the famous Eph. 5:21-32 which some scholars have rather taken to be Paul's theological correction to his controversial and heated "partisan" doctrines that gave birth to the notion of inequality between man and woman as husband and wife. Edward Schillebeeckx (2001: 145-158) gave us a more detailed and enlightening explanation on the conditions that led St Paul to most of his statements. He began by establishing through some historico-experiential deductions how Paul was influenced by the "household codes" which were the ethical and social values that were in existence in the society of his time. These codes were "modeled on the secular household codes of the Hellenists, and especially of the Judaeo-Hellenistic world." Paul only christianized these secular ethics by emphasizing that they must be experienced in the Lord and from Christian motives hence reviving and affirming the old time fact of the existence of the human tradition alongside the divine tradition in the Old and New Testaments. In the interpretation of Schillebeeckx, Paul's emphasis and instruction on the issue of women's covering of hair and their other attitudes in the worship assembly for instance, is "a reaction against the kind of behavior that was threatening the normal domestic order and harmony" of his society. Paul saw in the

action of these women who do not live in accordance with the ethics of their society, "a basic lack of seriousness towards religious and moral values". The reason is that these domestic codes had at the same time, "a profound religious and symbolic value." Again, Schillebeeckx defends Paul's statement in 1Tim 2:12 which discouraged women from teaching to be as a result of the culture of the time that disallowed women from being educated like the men thus making them susceptible and vulnerable to the teachings of heretics most of whom were great rhetoricians and subtle deceivers with plausible logic and philosophy. This erudite theologian therefore warns that to construct a theology of marriage on these texts and to refer to them as containing "the primary significance" of the married woman and therefore conclude that Christianity cannot as it is sometimes hold allow married women to work outside homes "would be to violate the first principle of biblical exegesis" which maintains that God created man and woman equally in his image and likeness.

The cause of violence in marriage can effectively be summarized into two:

(i) Misconceptions of the true and holistic meaning of Christian marriage by those who enter the union.

(ii) A mixture of incompatible marital values of particular cultures with Christian marital values.

Many of those who enter the bond of marriage in the Catholic Church have no deep knowledge of what it entails and the conditions that constitute its nature. For instance, what does an average Catholic youth and even the married ones know about divorce? Evidence has it that a good percentage of them see it from the Protestant and Pentecostal

theology of divorcing a partner at any slightest case of adultery. What they pitiably forget

is that our separated brethren do not regard marriage as a sacrament. The view of Luther

the reformer clearly attests to this: "marriage is nothing else than the institution destined

to satisfy concupiscence" (De Haro, 1993:?). The implication of this notion is that

marriage has no strong tie to God and can therefore be handled at the discretion of the

partners. This should indeed be a challenge and a lesson to pastors who joke with

catechesis and proper preparation before marriage in their parishes thus exposing their

flocks to the danger of any wind of doctrines. No few are the harms of this misconception

on the true meaning of marriage. Many husbands still see their wives as slaves or maids

whom they "bought" with their money to bear children for them. These men see nothing

deeper than sexual satisfaction and at best a medium for producing children in their

sexual union with their wives. Husbands of this kind see no personhood in their wives

and are ready to subjugate them to any level of nonentity by beatings and other

degradations. Following this aberration, one would be clear why Van Der Meer

(1966:419) lamented that "marriage has fallen into decay on account of the hardness of

men's hearts." The pivot of this painful situation stems from their view of marriage as a

mere juridical union without any interpersonal categorization. Thus D.M. Thomas

(2003:627) states clearly:

> Now Christian marriage is thought of as existing
> when there is established an adequate consciousness
> and awareness of the full range of relational
> requirements in marriage along with a serious
> willingness and the actual capacity to create a
> relationship of faithful love.

It must be clear in the minds of married people that sexual intercourse in marriage is not a

mere physical act but an act of giving oneself to the other whom one has accepted as

one's alter ego (another I) since consummation without love McBrien rightly said, is meaningless. The implication is that both partners must see and take each other as a person and nothing less than that.

Another cause of violence in Christian marriage which dangerously offends Christian equality is the indiscriminate importation of inimical and destructive cultural values into Christian notion of marriage. For instance, there is an admixture of patriarchal culture with Christian marriage. Christ himself opposed this culture because of its incompatibility with what His Father intended from the beginning of creation (Cf. Matt. 19:8). He repeated to his tempters, part of that sacred text in Gen. 1:27 reiterating the fact of the equality of the two sexes and the indissolubility of their union by any human agent (Matt. 19:3-6). These cultural values oppose the mutuality that is at the foundation of Christian marriage and vest unlimited power and authority on the husband in marriage. The painful aspect of this condition is that many of those who hold this view have concluded against the mind of the Church's Magisterium that that is the true Christian doctrine. Noorman (2002:20) acknowledged this fact when he raised alarm that "people who identify themselves as believers have actually devised a menu of ideas and claim the result as Christianity."

There is also the culture of secularism which is fast creeping into the church. This culture opposes most of the traditional teachings of the Church working surreptitiously to turn the Church into a mere humanist institution without the Holy Spirit who keeps it alive and functional. The presence of this secular culture is felt in marriage when we hear of gay culture and gay marriage which seek to redefine marriage and change its traditional meaning. It also emphasizes the notion of co-habitation and single parenthood

as equal in rank with Christian marriage. The most imminent danger with regard to this situation is the cooperation of the government to these values on the bid to protect human rights. Onwuli (1994:353) described this as "social atomism" whereby "the law favours individual rights against the rights of that coherent natural unit which is the family." In these three influences of secularism on marriage, Christian marriage as we traditionally know it, becomes totally non-existent and its foundation on Christian equality finds no ground. This fact is clear especially when we examine the notion of gay marriage and single parenthood. In both unions, the two sexes who form the basis of Christian marriage and equality are absent. The result is the destruction of the foundation of two important doctrines of the Christian religion. On what then do we build?

THE WAYS OUT OF THE MENACE

Given the depth of the divine connection involved in Christian marriage, unquantifiable efforts must be made to rescue it from this mess of violence which threatens its existence and its foundation on Christian equality.

First, pastors in their various parish apostolates must never compromise in whatever aspect with regard to this sacrament. This so much concerns the preparations given to those who wish to enter marriage bond. A judicious application of the dictates of Can. 1063 must be ensured. They must never allow themselves to fall victim of the common problem which Bruns (p.74) narrated as their major challenge when he stated that many of them usually "felt constrained to witness marriages in which failure was almost predictable." Sacraments must not be compromised on the bid to make friends and please comrades. It is Jesus' business with the Church. The pastor is only a minister

(servant) and as it is expected of every worthy servant, he should carry out the duty according to his master's specifications. That which took a full part to deliberate on, in a Pope's encyclical (*Familiaris Consortio nn.65-86)* must not be trivialized. What is more? The recent complication ensuing from various misinterpretations of the pastoral zeal and concerns of Pope Francis in his speeches and writings should be redressed. Great enough, the latest post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amor Laetitia* has clarified a lot of issues and made clear the real position of this servant of Christ. In this document, he reiterated the age long truth and teaching of the Church on marriage stating that it is:

> A reflection of the union between Christ and his Church, [and] it is realized in the union between a man and a woman who gave them themselves to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other until death and are open to the transmission on life, and are consecrated by the sacrament, which grants them the grace to become a domestic church and a leaven of new life for society.(AL. 292).

He also described as "a lack of fidelity to the Gospel and also of love on the part of the Church for young people if as it implies, its ministers give in to any form of "lukewarm attitude, any kind of relativism, or an undue reticence in proposing" the ideal of marriage to them. However, "understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal, or proposing less than what Jesus offers to the human being"(AL. 307). The challenging question here is how much the ministers of this sacrament would understand with Baldwin of Canterbury that "discretion is the mother of all virtues and is essential to each of them."

Second, the maturity of the people entering into marriage bond must not be presumed. It is a truism that in most situations, conflict and violence in marriage occur

because of the immaturity of either or both partners. Little wonder why Canon law

allowed the conference of bishops the freedom to establish a higher age for a licit (not

valid) celebration of marriage in their countries regardless of the dictate of Can. 1083. A

situation for instance where a girl is entering into marriage union without the necessary

family drill from her parents leaves no doubt about her incompetence. Christian

marriages must be ready to train their children in a way that will prepare them for their

future life in their families. The "role of parents as educators is so decisive that scarcely

anything can compensate for their failure in it." The family they must know is the first

school of those social virtues which every society needs." (F.C. n.36).

Third, those who enter into marital bond must be tutored and should be docile to

learn from the Church as their teacher and mother, the right interpretation of marriage

and the position of each of the sexes in a marriage union. In the contemporary world,

what is in vogue is the topic on the emancipation of women and their equality with men.

There is no doubt that this supposed good fight has been taken too far beyond its correct

representation. We have devoted ample time in this work to the defense of the equality of

women with men in the Christian union. There is cogent fear that this emphasis is

obliterating another very important fact about marriage union and the right form of

relationship between husbands and their wives in the family. Pope Pius XI was not

oblivious of this confusion when he made a remark on the equality of man and woman in

his encyclical of Dec 31, 1930 on Christian marriage. He said:

> This equality or rights which is so much
> exaggerated and distorted, must indeed be
> recognized in those rights which belong to the
> dignity of the human soul and which are proper to
> the marriage contract and inseparably bound up

> with wedlock. In such things undoubtedly both
> parties enjoy the same rights and are bound by the
> same obligations; in other things there must be a
> certain inequality and due accommodation, which is
> demanded by the good of the family and the right
> ordering and unity and stability of home life.

Fulton Sheen (2010: 150-153) was more apt and vivid in driving this important point home. He distinguished between mathematical and proportional equality and declared that the latter is what the Church has in mind whenever it emphasizes equality of sexes in marriage. According to him, "mathematical equality implies exactness of remuneration… {while} proportional equality means that each should receive his pay according to his function." He notes again that Christianity opposes mathematical equality because "it reduces the woman to poor imitation of a man." Sequel to this persistent confusion that arises in the application of the true meaning of equality in Christian marriage, he chose a different term: "equity" to replace equality in the Christian understanding. The reason for this replacement he says is that "equity goes beyond equality by claiming superiority in certain aspects of life." Not only this, equity "has the advantages of recognizing the specific difference between man and woman, which equality does not have." Re-emphasizing the principle of complementarity between a man and his wife in Christian marriage, he stressed that factually speaking, men and women are not equal in sex, "they are quite unequal, and it is only because they are unequal that they, complement each other." Their equality is as far as they have the same rights and liberties, the same final goal of life, and the same redemption by the blood of Our Divine Saviour- but they are different in function, like the lock and the key."

Finally, a good knowledge of the responsibility of husband and wife to the upbringing of their children and its incomparable value to the Church and the entire

society must motivate married couples to guard their marriage against any form of violence especially its deadliest beast that is, divorce. While it must be said without mincing words that true motherhood is depicted stronger in the care of the children, it must be clear to the husband also that "love for his wife as mother of their children and love for the children themselves are {for him} the natural way of understanding and fulfilling his own fatherhood." (*F.C. n.25*). If both of them are aware of the implication of this responsibility to their personhood in their marriage, they would work together as "friends" in that union, rather than living like cat and don in bitter quarrel that might end in separation.

CONCLUSION

What makes marriage of all forms and especially Christian marriage; that is, what makes it to come into being and constitutes its essence is the consent exchanged by the parties and not cohabitation. The first paragraph of Can. 1057 expresses in strong terms how indispensable this element is while the second paragraph tells us how human free will is an essential feature in this consent which, following "the social significance of marriage requires" that it must be expressed publicly. Again, it should be noted that in Christian marriage, the husband and the wife confer the sacrament upon each other and express their consent before the church.

With this important exposition, one sees how contradictory and questionable violence is to Christian marriage. One would not fail to wonder how an act freely chosen and publicly declared would be allowed to be inundated and infested with detrimental acts of all kinds that threaten to break it. Christian marriage should rather be a total and

"very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything…" (Humanae Vitae. n.9). It should be a union that requires a mutual submission of each to the other as Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus. In this union, the couple and especially the man should understand that the true message of Paul in Eph 5: 25 is that husbands should love their wives to the point of giving up their lives for them just like Christ did. It is therefore, both an illogical and experiential *non-sequitor* for one who is expected to make sacrifice to the point of giving up life to take to lording it over the other. The implication of this is that the kind of submission required of husbands to their wives is even more demanding. The reason for this is not far. In Christ's weighing balance so to say, headship means ministry and service to the peak. It is in this context that the words of Paul in Eph 5:22-24 can make sense. What is more? Spouses in marriage bond ought to know *ab-initio* that the nature of marriage as a love covenant requires that love must be at the centre of the union. This love is the kind that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things" (1 Cor. 13: 4-7). It is a type of love that is intrinsically agape and Christian; as such, an inevitable antidote to violence in Christian marriage.

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ASSESSING THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE INDIGENOUS SACRED DAY OF REST IN ZIMBABWE

Collis Garikai Machoko

Abstract

Observation of the Indigenous sacred day of rest (*chisi*) was a major natural environmental conservation management strategy in Zimbabwe. This article argues that the forcing by chiefs and sub-chiefs of rural peasants (RPs) to observe the ritual taboos associated with *chisi* was a violation of their constitutional and human rights of choice in as far as freedom of choosing a religion they liked was concerned. Compelling RPs to observe *chisi*, was tantamount to coercing them to be devotees of the Zimbabwean African Indigenous Religion (AIR), for *chisi* was part of AIR ritual. I also assert that the taboos and ethical roles of *chisi* were a result of political, social and economic factors. Research findings, using the oral interview methodology, indicated that *chisi* was created for the material and financial benefits of chiefs and sub-chiefs and also that the *chisi* was not observed by urban peasants (UPs) and commercial farmers (CFs), for they were not under the jurisdiction of chiefs and sub-chiefs. The conclusion was that RPs were of the opinion that forcing them to observe *chisi* violated their right of freedom of worship. Any natural environmental conservation management strategy that violates people's human rights and freedoms is not worth pursuing.

Introduction

In this article, I am not dissuading Zimbabwean African Indigenous Religion (AIR) devotees and chiefs from observing their traditions like the religious sacred day of rest (*chisi*), but rather I am arguing that they not force everybody in rural areas to observe

it, for Zimbabweans have constitutional rights and freedoms to choose a religion of their

own liking. I argue that Indigenous natural environmental conservation management

approaches, which include forcing rural peasants (RPs) to observe rituals of the

Zimbabwean indigenous sacred day of rest (*chisi*), must be discarded because they

violate the constitutional and human rights of religious choice and freedom of worship of

rural peasants (RPs). Zimbabwean chiefs (*madzishe*) and sub-chiefs

(*masadunhu/masabhuku*) force RPs to observe the ritual taboos associated with *chisi*,

which are linked to Indigenous natural environmental conservation management

practices. Compelling RPs to observe *chisi* is tantamount to forcing them to be members

of the Zimbabwean African Indigenous Religion (AIR), for *chisi* is a significant rite of

AIR. I also assert that the taboos and ethical roles of *chisi* are a result of political, social

and economic factors.

Zimbabwe has two types of peasants: rural peasants (RPs) and urban peasants

(UPs). The RPs own small pieces of land that given to them by a sub-chief. A sub-chief

could take back the piece of land from the peasant if the peasant failed to respect the

chisi. In essence, the peasant has no piece of land for she/he has no title deeds to it. The

land still belongs to the government, which requires chiefs and sub-chiefs to administer

the land on its behalf. The UPs do not own any piece of land but illegally grow their

crops on a small piece of land belonging to the city or town council. The city or town

council would destroy the crops at any time they wanted as a way of preventing urban

crop cultivation. Chiefs and sub-chiefs have no authority in urban areas (UAs).

The 2016 Zimbabwean Constitution Chapter 4 (39): Declaration of Rights Part 2:

Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms says:,

> Every person has the right to freedom of conscience, which includes — (a) freedom of thought, opinion, religion or belief; and (b) freedom to practise and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion or belief, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others. (2) No person may be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to their religion or belief or to take an oath in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief (Zimbabwe Constitution, 2016).

The 2016 Zimbabwean Constitution Chapter 15 (128): Functions of traditional leaders says:,

> A traditional leader (chief and sub-chief) is to perform cultural, customary and traditional functions and do: (a) Act in accordance to the constitution and laws of Zimbabwe. (b) treat all persons within their areas equally and fairly. (c).must not violate the fundamental rights and freedoms of any person (Zimbabwe Constitution, 2016).

The United Nation's Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), under Article 18 states:, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." (Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/)

The chiefs and sub-chiefs are charged by water spirits to uphold *chisi* in their territories. That secures the good will of the ancestors, which was essential for soil fertility, abundant rains and good crops. Forcing RPs to observe *chisi* was done under the belief that the chiefs were following the instructions of the rain-making spirits so as to conserve the natural environment. While water spirit mediums can act as a kind of wandering punitive emissary by demonstrating ancestral disapprobation of *chisi* misdemeanor, chiefs and sub-chiefs ritually mollify the custodian ancestors on behalf of

those peasants who, in an agricultural exigency, sought to "buy the rest-day" (*kutenga chisi*) with a pot of beer in order to work on the lands on that day.[68] The chiefs are to enforce the observance of the *chisi* day so as to avoid natural environmental degradation, or natural calamities like eclipses of the sun and moon, earth-quakes, droughts, the unexplained diseases and deaths of human beings, animals and crops, and the infertility of human beings, animals and crops. If anyone works on a *chisi*, he/she will have his/her ploughs (*magejo*), hoes (*mapadza*) and yokes (*majoko*) confiscated by the chief and sub-chief and will also be asked to pay a fine in cash or in kind. African Indigenous Religion have one day per week that was designated the sacred day of rest (*chisi*) and that is only observed in summer. On a *chisi,* no person is to work on the fields for it is believed that it is a sacred day in honour of the rain-making spirits (*majukwa*) who are believed to be the rain-makers, guardians of the land and natural environmental conservationists.

The problem is that, notwithstanding the Zimbabwean Constitution and the Article 18 of the UDHR, which clearly states that RPs had the right to choose their own religion and nobody should force them to observe the rituals and taboos of any religion, the chiefs and sub-chiefs coerce them to observe c*hisi* — an AIR ritual and a crucial natural environmental conservation management strategy. Forcing RP to observe the *chisi* was a violation of the peasants' constitutional and human rights and freedom to select a religion of their choice. Forced to observe the *chisi* is distasteful to an overwhelming number of RPs and they only do so for fear of the chiefs and sub-chiefs.

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[68] Marthinus Daneel,. *Old and New in Shona Independent Churches.Vol.1: Background and the Rise of the Major Movements*. The Hague: Mouton,1971, pp. 83, 90.

Methodology

The methodology employed was an extensive literary search and analysis of available and current readings on *chisi*. In literature, not much was written on *chisi* except that it was observed by RPs as a sacred day of rest. I also used the participant observation approach for I am a RP who owns a piece of land on which I grow crops. On the two occasions I worked on a *chisi,* I was fined by the chief, although I am an Anglican Priest who observes Sunday as my sacred day of rest.

My primary research method was personal interviews. I used structured, qualitative face-to-face interviews with a total of twenty-five people, including: five chiefs, five sub-chiefs, five commercial farmers (CFs), five RPs and five UPs. I selected the chiefs and sub-chiefs for they were the people who were involved in enforcing the observance of *chisi*. I selected the CFs, RPs and UPs because they were involved in farming and depended on rain for their livelihood. I interviewed the chiefs, sub-chiefs, CFs and RPs in the districts of Hurungwe, Hwedza, Mutoko, Nyanga, Sanyati and Zaka, and UPs in the cities of Chinhoyi, Gweru, Harare, Marondera, Masvingo and Mutare. I conducted the interviews over the period between December 2011 and September 2014.

Table of Results Number of Interviewees versus Observance of the Traditional Sacred Day of Rest (*Chisi*)

N	FPOC	DNFPOC	FOC	VOC	CFUPCF
C	5=100%	0=0%	0=0%	5=100%	5=100%
SC	5=100%	0=0%	0=0%	5=100%	5=100%
RP	0=0%	5=100%	4= 80%	1=20%	1=20%
UP	0=%	5=100%	0=0%	0=0%	0=0%
CF	0=0%	5=100%	0=0%	0=0%	0=0%
Total=25=100%	10= 40%	15=60%	4= 80%	11=44%	11=44%

Key:
N: Number of interviewees
C: Chiefs
FPOC: Forced people to observe *chisi*
SC: Sub-chiefs
DNFPOC: Do not forced people to observe *chisi*
RP: Rural peasants
FOC: Forced to observe *chisi*
UP: Urban peasants
VOC: Voluntarily observe *chisi*
CF: Commercial farmers
CFUPCF: *Chisi* to be forced also on urban peasants and commercial farmers

The interview results show that 100% of chiefs and sub-chiefs forced RPs to observe *chisi*. Forty percent of the total interviewees were chiefs and sub-chiefs who all forced RPs to observe *chisi,* the reason being that chiefs and sub-chiefs materially, socially and financially benefited from the *chisi* by fining the rural peasants who violated *chisi*. The 20% of RPs who voluntarily observed *chisi* were the rain-makers who also

materially and financially benefitted from *chisi.* The *chisi* was linked to the rain-making

ceremony (*mukweverera/mutoro*) at which rain-makers presided. One hundred percent of

the chiefs and sub-chiefs and the 20% of RPs wanted *chisi* to be forced on UPs and CFs.

Eighty percent of RPs felt that chiefs and sub-chiefs violated their right to

freedom of worship. That 80% included Christians who objected that, despite the chiefs

and sub-chiefs knowing that they observed Fridays — in the case of Johane Masowe we

Chichanu Apostolic Church (JMCAC) — Saturdays — in the case of the Seventh Day

Adventist (SDA) and Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC), and Sundays — in the

case of most Zimbabwean Christian churches like the Roman Catholic church (RCC) —

as their sacred days of rest, they were still forced to observe *chisi*. None of the UPs and

CFs were forced to observe *chisi* and did not voluntarily observe *chisi* because cities,

towns and commercial farms had no *chisi* for they were not under the administration of

chiefs and sub-chiefs.

Adjusting the *Chisi* Day and its Political, Social and Economic Ramifications

Interviewee Chief Muzondo Tsveru from Mutoko district argued:

> The local water spirit mediums have the authority to decide a *chisi* day for the
> sub-chiefdom. It is not the responsibility of a chief to decide which day of the
> week becomes a *chisi* for the whole chiefdom because there are many sub-chiefs
> each with his/her own independent water spirit mediums who look after the local
> spiritual needs and general welfare of RPs under one chief. The spirit mediums
> choose a day when a great sub-chief of that area died. The spirit mediums in my
> area chose Thursday as a *chisi* day because that was the day my great-grandfather
> died and soon after his death there were eclipses of the moon and sun. When the
> eclipse of the sun or of the moon comes soon after the death of a sub-chief, it
> means that the sub-chief had power to control the natural environment and to
> bring rain. During pre-colonial period, my grandparents used phases of the moon
> to determine times of *chisi*, which were the first day of the new moon, the first

day of the full moon and the last day of the waning moon because on these particular moon phases, water spirits (moon goddesses) and mermaids (*njuzu*) move around in all fields blessing the fields and crops.

Mermaids do not want people to work in the fields on these three *chisi* days of each of the summer months because they need to do their work in silence and do not want to be disturbed by the noise of the ploughs, hoes and people in the fields. Mermaids are always clean and do not want to be made dirty by the dust from the fields. On *chisi* day, water spirits do very powerful rituals under the moon. *Chisi* was not observed on a weekly basis as is the case today. The use of days of the week as *chisi* was done after the coming of colonialism to fight Christianity. I force people in my area to observe *chisi* because it is part of our AIR for my grandparents forced people to observe *chisi*. Christianity came when *chisi* was already there. I will not allow Christianity to destroy *chisi* which is part of our tradition, history and culture.

Interviewee Nunurayi Zengwete attested:

Female water spirits (*majukwa*) are associated with the moon and its phases and to certain stars and constellations. The female water spirits change with the phases of the moon. The new moon is the maiden, the full moon is the ripened woman, and the waning moon is the wise woman. The stars connect the water spirits, oceans, seas, pools of water, rivers and dams to the depths of the universe where other realms exist. In respect of maiden, ripened woman and wise woman, the *chisi* days were fixed to be on the first days of the new moon, full moon and last day of waning moon.

Interviewees Tsveru and Zengwete argued that the first day of the new moon marks the beginning of a new cycle and a fresh start in the moon's cycle of waxing and waning in which the moon is empty, receptive and full of potential. That is an optimum time for water spirit mediums to bless the community and the natural environment. The first day of the new moon adds much power to the rituals performed by the water spirit mediums on that day.

Tsveru and Zengwete went further and maintained that on the first day of the full moon, the moon is biggest, and brightest and the water spirits are most active for the

powers of nature, creativity and abundance are at their peak. The moon's roundness

brings economic abundance, fulfilment and good health to the community and, animals

and plants are made very fertile and healthy. The entire Earth has tremendous amount of

energy on the first full moon day and hence it is taboo for people to work in the fields on

that day for water deities move around the community blessing people, animals and

plants. On the first day of the full moon, water spirits are very active preserving the

natural environment, bringing rain, making seeds to germinate and encouraging plants

and animals to grow faster.

Tsveru and Zengwete asserted that rituals done by water spirits mediums on the

last day of the waning moon destroy all evil spirits that cause disasters and illnesses in the

community during that month. The rituals done during this day destroy human, animal

and crop diseases. They concluded that moon phases such as *chisi* days were lost when

colonialism and Christianity came, for then *chisi* started being based on days of the week

instead of moon phases.

Changing the sacred day of rest from one day to another was not only unique to

Indigenous Zimbabweans for the early Christian church also practiced this. The origin of

the Christian sacred day of rest — the Sabbath — lies in biblical creation story when God

rested from work on the seventh day (Gen. 1–3). In the Decalogue, the Israelites were

asked by God to remember the Sabbath (Exodus 20: 8–10). Originally, the early church

observed the Sabbath on a Saturday but later on put more emphasis on the resurrection of

Jesus Christ on Easter Day, which is a Sunday, the first day of the week (Mt. 28:1).

Constantine in 321 A.D and the council of Laodicea in 364 A.D changed the Sabbath day

of worship to Sunday in the fourth century.

Tsveru's argument that before colonialism and Christianity, the *chisi* days were determined by specific phases of the moon concurred with the research of Michael Gelfand,[69] who attested, "The *chisi* was a ritual day of rest and was formerly determined by the phase of the moon". During the pre-colonial times, the whole of Zimbabwe had *chisi* on the same day for it was always on the first day of the new moon, full moon and the last day of the waning moon."

All my interviewees told me that they observed *chisi* on a Tuesday,Wednesday or Thursday. As to why Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays were not chosen as *chisi*, Chief Wanikwai Chikomo in Hwedza district asserted:

> Before the advent of Christianity and colonialism, any one of the seven days of the week from Sunday to Saturday could be a *chisi* day for any one of the phases of the moon could fall on any day of the week. When Christianity and colonialism were imposed on us, chiefs, sub-chiefs and spirit cults refrained from choosing Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays as *chisi* days because they were associated with Christianity, a religion of the oppressor. Making Saturdays and Sundays as *chisi* days was going to be misconstrued by missionaries as a sign that AIR was destroyed by Christianity. This is because when each of the three phases of the moon fell on Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, chiefs and sub-chiefs forced their subjects to observe them as *chisi*. That was misinterpreted by missionaries as forcing their subjects to observe the Christian sacred days of rest. It was going to be seen as the capitulation of AIR to Christianity. The chiefs and sub-chiefs did not want to be seen as clandestinely helping the missionaries in forcing Zimbabweans to observe Christian sacred days of rest. By not choosing Saturdays and Sundays as *chisi,* the spirit mediums and sub-chiefs were telling the missionaries that their religion, AIR, was independent and different from Christianity. Friday, like Saturday and Sunday is not chosen as *chisi* because it is the day the JMCAC regard as their sacred day of rest and has very great connection with the Christian Good Friday of Easter and hence AIR regards Friday as a Christian day.

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[69] Michael Gelfand., *Shona Religion:With Special Reference to the Makorekore.* Cape Town: Juta & Co., Ltd, 1962, p. 38.

Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays were not chosen as *chisi* as a protest against Christianity. Despite Gelfand[70] arguing that, currently, a precise day of each week, intermittently Friday or Thursday, was agreed as *chisi*, none of my interviewees told me that Friday was observed as *chisi* in their area. Chiefs, sub-chiefs and spirit mediums did not want to subscribe to Christianity because they were unable fully to reconcile their traditional religious and cultural beliefs with the teachings of Christianity, especially on polygamy and ancestor worship. Christianity was foisted on Zimbabweans and, in an attempt to fight and reject both Christianity and colonialism, the spirit mediums who led Zimbabweans in the war altered the *chisi* days from the phases of the moon to week days that had no association to Christian days of rest.[71] The reasons for not choosing Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays were usually political — an effort to escape white control.

One interviewee attested:

> The chiefs, sub-chiefs and spirit mediums viewed Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays as reflecting white might and as a ritual which the missionaries and colonialists wanted Zimbabweans to know and perform. The spirits mediums and sub-chiefs did not make Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays *chisi* for they were a tainted sign. In colonial Zimbabwe, the observance of Saturdays and Sundays as days of rest was vital in creating and maintaining the symbolic power of mission and state and was a key source of that power and it bore "the indelible essence of white might.

According to my interviewees, for the chiefs and sub-chiefs, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays produce trepidation because they are a sign of colonial authority and administration that forced Zimbabweans to be Christians. That horror was experienced

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[70] Ibid., p. 38.

[71] Terrence Ranger,. *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–97: A Study in African Resistance*. London: Heinemann, 1967, p. 202.

politically, socially and economically, and it threatens what Zimbabweans understand as their Indigenous religion: AIR. David Maxwell argues, "The JMCAC was founded in 1932 by an Anglican, Shoniwa Masedza, who took the name Johane Masowe in 1932."[72] As a student at an Anglican school, he was forced to observe Sundays as sacred days of rest and was punished when he failed to attend church services on Sunday. When he inaugurated his church, Masowe announced a message of withdrawal from European things — no celebration of Sunday as a holy day of rest.[73] Masowe told his followers to observe Friday as a sacred day of rest instead of Sunday and that made chiefs, sub-chiefs and water spirit mediums regard Friday as a Christian day of rest and hence was not made a *chisi*.

The JMAC was established by Muchabaya Momberume, who was a devotee of the United Methodist church[74] and who changed his name to Johane Marange in 1932 when he founded his church. As a student at a Methodist school, Marange, like Masowe, was forced to attend church services every Sunday, failure of which attracted punishment from the school principal. When Marange founded his church, he told his followers to observe Saturday as their sacred day of rest. Interviewee Munyachiona Zimbudzi said:,

> The seventh-day Sabbath, which was observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, was an important part of the beliefs and practices of the SDA church and JMAC. Friday from sunset was regarded as part of the SDA church and JMAC day of rest. Like in the case of Masowe, the chiefs, sub-chiefs and water spirit mediums did not to select Friday and Saturday as *chisi* for they were associated with Christianity.

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[72] David Maxwell., *African Gift of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movements*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006, p. 54.
[73] Andrian Hastings., *The Church in Africa 1450–1950*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 533.
[74] Michael Bourdillon., *The Shona Peoples*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987, p. 298.

The JMAC and the SDA also believed the creation story of Genesis (1:5), which stated that an "evening and morning" established a day. The evening and morning together made one natural day, which prophet Daniel called an "evening morning" (Dan. 8:26) and St. Paul a "night day" (2 Cor. 11:25). The evening was the beginning of the day and night came before day. For Old Testament Jews, the fact that evening was listed first in Genesis 1:5 led to the idea that the day began at sunset and also ended at sunset: "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (Gen 1:5). From the Genesis creation story, the first three days passed without the sun (Gen 1:4–13), since it was created on the fourth day (Gen 1:19). That raised the question of how evening and morning were possible in the absence of the yet-to-be-created sun. An Indigenous Zimbabwean would not talk of evening and morning in the non-existence of the sun. The existence of the sun gave Zimbabweans the concept of time.

Chief Paidamwoyo Mazimbe in Nyanga district asserts, "Our day starts in the morning from between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. when the first crows of the roosters are heard." For Indigenous Zimbabweans, day has four distinct segments, including morning (*mangwanani*), from 2:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., afternoon (*masikati*), from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., evening (*manheru*), from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and night (*usiku*), from 8:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. These four segments, are not divided equally because the duration of the segments depended on the seasons. During winter the daytime is shorter, so evening starts at 3:00 p.m.

The interviewees debated that, unlike the JMAC and the SDA, other Christian churches in Zimbabwe like the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) followed the Roman day,

which started from the middle of the night (12:00 a.m.) to the middle of the night following (12:00 a.m.). As stated earlier, the Indigenous Zimbabwean day starts between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. and ends twenty-four hours later, which makes a two- to three-hour difference between the beginning of the Roman day and the Indigenous day. The first two to three hours of Roman Mondays (from 12:00 a.m. to between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m.) were regarded as part of Sunday by AIR devotees, hence Monday was not chosen as *chisi*. For chiefs, sub-chiefs and spirit mediums, it was certainly a repulsion to keep anything that was related to Christianity.

Forcing Peasants to Observe *Chisi*

Chief Tsikidzi Mbeva in Zaka district said:,

> I am a devotee of the JMAC and a chief at the same time. I wobble between Christianity and AIR. I observe Saturday as my church's sacred day of rest. As a chief, I am an adherent of AIR and I do not go to the fields on Wednesdays because it is a *chisi*. I was made a chief not through Christian rituals but through AIR rituals. Chieftainship is rooted in AIR rituals and not in Christian rituals. By accepting to be a chief, I agreed to to be a custodian of all AIR rituals, including *chisi*. I compel all my subjects to observe *chisi*.

Observing Fridays, Saturdays and Sunday as sacred days of rest was used by missionaries and colonialists to colonize, oppress and exploit Zimbabweans. Missionaries forced Zimbabwean converts to Christianity and to observe sacred days, however, the chiefs, sub-chiefs and spirit mediums had political, social and economic objections to observing Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays as *chisi*. Many Zimbabweans were flocking to the churches because of the material, economic and social benefits they recieved from Christian villages like schools, hospitals and farms but that undermined the powers of chiefs and sub-chiefs. Observance of Saturdays and Sundays were the best symbol of colonial enterprise by missionaries. Chief Tsikidzi agreed with Thomas O. Beidelman,

who maintained that missionaries may be regarded as the most enterprising and culturally

compelling of all colonialists, successfully creating social substitutions and maintaining

supremacy in its most comprehensive form.[75] The greater number of colonial church

leaders saw themselves as reciprocal collaborators with colonialists in the so-called

enlightening undertaking among the heathen inhabitants of colonial lands, as if to

propose that Africans had no religion, history, culture and destiny.[76]

Sub-chief Mukambirwa Matsakanure in Sanyati district noted:,

I am a deacon in the Methodist church and a sub-chief. I observe both Sunday
and Thursday as my sacred days of rest. I force my subjects to observe *chisi* and if
they violate it, I fine them one hundred dollars or three goats and two chickens.
Forcing people to observe *chisi* is part of my duties. Missionaries forced us to
attend church services on Saturday at SDA schools were I did my elementary and
primary education. Students who did not attend church services were punished by
the school authorities. Teachers who did not attend church services were
dismissed from teaching. Before the coming of Christianity, my ancestors forced
everybody to observe *chisi* and those who violated the *chisi* had their hoes
confiscated from them and were fined.

Chiefs and sub-chiefs were both religious and political leaders who, like

missionaries, forced rural Zimbabweans to observe *chisi* as a strategy of fighting against

colonialism. The omission of Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays from being made

chisi was an effort to fight back against Christianity and colonialism; it was, in part, a

political judgment of colonialism.[77] The missionaries highlighted the celebration of

Saturday or Sunday as an indispensable facet to the "richness" that Christianity would

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[75] Matthew Eric Engelke,. *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2007, p.77.

[76] Michael Lapsley,. *Neutrality or Co-Option?: Anglican Church and State from 1964 until the Independence of Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986, p. 6.

[77] Terrence Ranger,. "Taking on the Missionary's Task: African Spituality in the Mission Churches of Manicaland in the 1930s." *Journal of Religion in Africa 29* (2) 175–205, 1999, p. 198.

usher to destitute Zimbabweans.[78] That impoverishment was understood as both spiritual

and material. Observance of Saturdays and Sundays was presented to Zimbabweans as

the answer to both spiritual and material poverty.

Rungano Mutanhaurwa, an Anglican priest in Hurungwe district asserted:,

I am an Anglican priest of a rural parish and my church teaches me to observe
Sunday as a sacred day of rest. On February 6, 1991, I deliberately violated
observing Thursday as *chisi* for I know that it is unconstitutional and a violation
of my human rights of choice to force me to observe *chisi*. My intention was to
take the sub-chief to court if he had confiscated my hoes, ploughs and yokes or
fined me. On February 28, 1991, it rained all day and night and on March 1, 1991,
I went to my field only to see that all my crops were up-rooted and some of them
were thrown into the flooding Makande River. No footprints could be seen
because of the rain. I went and reported to the sub-chief that some people under
cover of darkness took advantage of the incessant rains and uprooted my crops.
The sub-chief told me that nobody uprooted my crops but angry water spirits had
carried out the act and threw them into the river because I worked on a *chisi*. I had
nowhere to report my case. I knew that the chief and the sub-chief organized
some people to uproot my crops so as to force me to observe *chisi*. Because of
that nasty incident, I never [again] violated the *chisi*.

Chiefs and sub-chiefs used many methods to force peasants to observe *chisi*. They

might, for example, refuse to hear the *chisi* violator's case when they take issue with

another peasant for letting cattle stray into their field and destroying crops. Chiefs can

deliberately find a person guilty or excessively fine a person if one violated the *chisi* and

was brought to the chief's court by another person for disputes like field boundaries.

Chiefs, sub-chiefs and spirit mediums regard the observance of Saturdays, and Sundays

as an imposition on foreign rituals by colonialists to subjugate Zimbabweans. They

discouraged Zimbabweans from observing Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays as

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[78] Ibid., p. 198.

*chisi "*as a way of decolonizing their minds and that was also a way of sabotaging the

British colonial system."[79]

Christianity condemns and rejects the worship of water spirits and views them as

the embodiment of the devil.[80] Before 1896–97, Christianity did not grow much in

Zimbabwe because Zimbabweans resisted it. From 1890, when both Christianity and

colonialism came to Zimbabwe, until their vanquishment in the 1896–97 war against

British colonialism, Zimbabweans repudiated Christianity.[81] Zimbabweans had great faith

and trust in their *Mwari*, lion (*mhondoro*) and Dzivaguru cults. Terrence Ranger, as cited

by Schoffeleers,[82] attested that after their conquest in 1897, Zimbabweans lost confidence

in their gods and ancestral spirits and increasingly turned to Christianity. A wave of

disappointment swept the whole population. More and more Zimbabweans publicly

proselytised to the Christian religion because it offered schools, hospitals, and farms,

which supplied them with education, health care, skills in various trades, and

employment that water spirits could not provide.[83] Christian organizations like the

Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Zimbabwe Council of Churches

(ZCC), Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA), Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe

(EFZ) and Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe (PAZ), together with their bishops,

priests and pastors, "eclipsed water spirit mediums in articulating the political, social and

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[79] Ibid., p. 198.
[80] Matthew Schoffeleers,."Introduction." in Schoffeleers, Matthew (Ed.). *Guardians of the Land*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1979, p. 1–49.
[81] Terrence Ranger,. *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia,1896-97: A Study in African Resistance*. London: Heinemann, 1967, p. 148.
[82] Matthew Schoffeleers,. "Introduction." in Schoffeleers, Matthew (Ed.). *Guardians of the Land*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1979, p. 1–49.
[83] Terrence Ranger,. "Taking on the Missionary's Task: African Spituality in the Mission Churches of Manicaland in the 1930s." *Journal of Religion in Africa 29* (2) 175–205, 1999, p. 198.

economic needs of Zimbabweans."[84] The spirit mediums were also faced with

Zimbabweans who were very different culturally from Zimbabweans who lived during

the pre-colonial period and soon after colonialism, in 1890.

Later, Zimbabweans included people who were well educated, some with

university degrees. Some educated Zimbabweans, like teachers, priests and nurses,

worked in the rural areas that were under the jurisdiction of chiefs and sub-chiefs. They

did not like to be forced to observe *chisi*. Some Zimbabweans lived in cities and towns;

they did not rely on agriculture as their only means of sustenance — they wanted jobs in

commerce and industry — and they were questioned authority and tradition, seeking

heuristic confirmation.[85] It was not easy then for water spirit mediums to instruct

Zimbabweans to observe specific prohibitions in order for rain to come.[86] Zimbabweans

would question and criticize that spirit medium until she/he produced tangible results. In

an endeavour to recoup past reverence, the spirit mediums accused Christianity, science

and technology of bringing about droughts.[87] They mislead Zimbabweans, arguing that

science and technology were not there before colonialism and that Zimbabweans should

disregard them in order to receive abundant rain. In all their declarations, spirit mediums

did not focus on topics of democracy, human rights, unemployment and the oppression of

women by men, themes which were very important and were faced by most

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[84] Matthew Schoffeleers,. "Introduction." in Schoffeleers, Matthew (Ed.). *Guardians of the Land*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1979, p. 1–49.
[85] Terrence Ranger,. "Taking on the Missionary's Task:African Spituality in the Mission Churches of Manicaland in the 1930s." *Journal of Religion in Africa 29* (2) 175–205, 1999, p. 198.
[86] Matthew Schoffeleers,. "Introduction." in Schoffeleers, Matthew (Ed.). *Guardians of the Land*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1979, p. 1–49.
[87] Ibid., p. 40.

Zimbabweans.[88] In all that incomprehension, attesting that science and technology were manifestations of colonialism, the spirit mediums were supported by chiefs who wanted to repossess their political power after losing it to elected politicians, urban, and rural councils.[89] Colonial and post- colonial governments interfered in the religious duties of the traditional spirit mediums. Their anti-school, anti-science and anti-technology approach stood in direct conflict with the interests of colonial and post-colonial governments and Christianity.

> Virimai Bhegedhe, a rural peasant in Zaka district declared:,

> I am a devotee of AIR, which is a religion of my grandparents. I do support the forcing of every peasant to observe the *chisi* because it is part of our Indigenous religion, tradition, culture and identity. It brings us closer to our deceased grandparents and parents. It is a way of appeasing water spirits, who are the guardians of the *chisi* and hence the natural environment. There were no individual human rights and freedoms before colonialism and Christianity. There were community rights and freedoms, which included everybody to observe *chisi* for the good of the whole community. Individual human rights and freedoms are a creation of colonialism and Christianity and as Zimbabweans we should not respect them.

By saying that chiefs and sub-chiefs should force every Zimbabwean to observe *chisi,* Bhegedhe agrees with Terrence Ranger [90] who maintained that "water spirits are not dead and buried in Zimbabwe; they are present and active because they still possess people like Juliana who was a water spirit medium who focused on the causes of the 1986 and 1992 droughts, and challenged the state, business, church, and chiefs to observe *chisi* and respect water spirits." Juliana instituted a complete array of proscriptions that were to be

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[88] Terrence Ranger,. "Taking on the Missionary's Task: African Spituality in the Mission Churches of Manicaland in the 1930s." *Journal of Religion in Africa 29* (2) 175–205, 1999, p. 198.
[89] Matthew Schoffeleers,. "Introduction." in Schoffeleers, Matthew (Ed.). *Guardians of the Land*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1979, p. 1–49.
[90] Terrence Ranger,. "Women and Environment in African Religion." in Beinart, William and McGregor, JoAnn (Eds.). *Social History and African Environments*. Oxford: James Curry, 2003, p.86.

imposed by the chiefs on their subjects, for example, holding rainmaking rituals and

banning work on *chisi* days.[91] Jennifer Dude notes, "Gokwe town continues to face

serious water challenges despite the completion of the construction of Gwehava Dam

amid revelations that authorities were failing to draw water from the dam owing to angry

water spirits which existed in the form of a mermaid and a large snake that dwelt near the

dam."[92] She goes on, "Water started flowing soon after chiefs performed *chisi* rituals to

appease mermaids believed to have been blocking the water in the pipes."[93] Thus, water

spirits still have a role to play in the economic, social, scientific and technological lives

of Zimbabweans today. They are still relevant to Zimbabweans today as they were before

1890 and they require constant worship and respect in order for them to remain guardians

of the natural environment. Matamba Gumayi, a rural peasant in Sanyati district, stated:

> I am a member of the JMCAC and my church tells me to observe Friday as a
> sacred day of rest. God told Masowe to rest on a Friday. I feel oppressed by the
> chief and sub-chief when they force me to observe Thursday as a "sacred" day of
> rest. I observe the *chisi* for fear of the chief but my true sacred day of rest is
> Friday.

Gumayi concurs with Elizabeth Schmidt,[94] who argued that "in Zimbabwe, citizens,

especially women and girls, were the most oppressed, exploited and vulnerable members

of the society by chiefs and sub-chiefs." Women and girls were controlled and dominated

by both men and chiefs: "The citizens had no life of their own for they were part of the

property of the traditional leaders (chiefs) who could pass them on as presents to relatives

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[91] Abraham Mawere and Ken Wilson,. "Socio-Religious Movements, the State and Community Change: Some Reflections on the Mbuya Juliana Cult of Southern Zimbabwe." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXV (3) 252-287, p. 257.
[92] Jennifer Dude,. "Gokwe Mermaids Appeased." *The Standard*. (February 11, 2012) Accessed October 16, 2011. http://www.thestandard.co.zw/local/33881-gokwe-mermaids-appeased.html.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Elizabeth Schmidt,. *Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939*. Harare Baobab Books, 1996, p. 40.

and friends."[95] Citizens were disposable — exterminated during the times of extreme

scarcity of food and during war times and were regarded as equal to wild animals which

were killed if a chief one wanted to kill them.[96] Rural peasants are targets of chiefs'

social control. *Chisi* is used to control the captive rural population in Zimbabwe.

Where there is no Chief there is no *Chisi*

Sekai Taurai, a commercial farmer in Hurungwe, explained:, "I bought this farm, I have

title deeds to this farm so nobody tells me to observe *chisi* on this farm. I am not under a

chief or sub-chief who forces me to observe a *chisi*." The fact that there were no *chisi* on

commercial farms showed that the *chisi* only applied where there was a chief to enforce it

— in the rural areas. Interviewees attested to the fact that the *chisi* was not even practiced

by AIR devotees in urban areas and commercial farms showed that it had social, political

and economic benefits only to the chiefs and sub-chiefs. The *chisi* also has the same

benefits for politicians who use chiefs to mobilize peasants to vote for them during

national and council elections by threatening and forcing peasants. The *chisi* was a

creation of chiefs, sub-chiefs and water spirit mediums. Forcing people to work on their

church's sacred day of rest is widespread in Zimbabwe. Christians who observe Fridays,

Saturdays and Sundays as sacred days of rest are forced by their employers in commerce

and industry to work on these days. If they refuse to do so, they would be dismissed from

work, which is also a violation of one's human rights. Muzondida Riritirai, an urban

peasant in Masvingo city, remarked, "There are no chiefs and sub-chiefs in Masvingo

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[95] Ibid., p. 36.
[96] Ibid., p. 40.

city to impose the *chisi* on me. The land here belongs to the municipality. I grow my

crops without permission on municipal land. The municipality does not have a *chisi* day

so I work all days of the week on my field except on Fridays because I am a devotee of

the JMCAC."

The Constitutionality of *Chisi*

Human rights are an essential element of one's humanity. These rights include:

civil rights, or the rights of individuals to liberty, security, and freedom to travel; political

rights, or the rights of individuals to vote, stand for election, participate in state and social

management and, freedom of speech, press, and assembly; social, economic and cultural

rights, or the rights to education, work, health and working environment, practice of

religion, the use of one's language and the enjoyment of one's culture. Social justice is a

concept based upon the belief that each individual and group within a given society has a

right to civil liberties, equal opportunity, fairness and participation in the educational,

economic, institutional, social and moral freedoms and responsibilities valued by the

community.

Duri Muchabayiwa, a peasant in Nyanga district, stated:

I am a devotee of the JMAC, I observe Saturday as my sacred day of rest but the
sub- chief forces me to observe Tuesday as *chisi.* I do not like to observe
Tuesdays as "sacred" days of rest for that is contrary to my church's teaching. I
went to a Dutch Reformed Church (now Zimbabwe Reformed Church) school
where all students and teachers were forced to attend church services every
Sunday. Students who did not attend Sunday services were punished every
Monday or were beaten by the school principal. This is exactly what the chiefs
and sub-chiefs are doing to me. Forcing me to observe Tuesday as a sacred day of
rest is a violation of my constitutional and human rights of freedom of choice of a
religion I want to be an adherent.

Intimidation and arbitrary arrests of RPs who violate the *chisi* is the order of the day.

Since Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, it has continued to experience periods of

instability and violence, mostly against RPs. Amnesty International is perturbed by the

government's refusal to address the human rights transgressions and deference for human

rights protected in the country's constitution as well as international conventions.[97]

Sadism, coercion and politically instigated prosecutions of human rights defenders and

anticipated enemies have continued, while villagers in parts of Zimbabwe have endured

constant harassment by supporters of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–

Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) government, comprised of chiefs and sub-chiefs.[98]

The forcing of Christian rural peasants to observe *chisi* in Zimbabwe has been a

practice since the advent of Christianity in the country. Christian organizations like the

ZCBC, ZCC, ZCA, EFZ and PAZ, together with their bishops, priests and pastors, are

aware of the fact that Christian rural peasants are forced to observe *chisi*. The Christian

organizations do not oppose such violations of constitutional and human rights of choice

in as far as freedom of choosing a religion by rural peasants was concerned. Rindayi

Chatizembwa, a Roman Catholic bishop, said;

> The RCC and the ZCBC are fully aware of the fact that chiefs and sub-chiefs
> force Christian RPs to observe *chisi*. They do not want to raise this issue with the
> government, chiefs and sub-chiefs because the government, chiefs and sub-chiefs
> financially, materially, socially and politically benefit by forcing peasants to
> observe *chisi*. The Catholic Church does not want to put the lives of the peasants

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[97] Amnesty International News. February 10, 2010. "Abuse of Human Rights in Zimbabwe Continues under Unity Government." Accessed August 12, 2014. https://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/abuse-human-rights-zimbabwe-continues-under-unity-government-20100210.
[98] Ibid.

in danger of being victimized by the government and the chiefs for the rural peasants are the poorest and most vulnerable people in Zimbabwe. The RCC just ignores this violation and concentrate on worship, preaching the gospel and the creation of peace in the country. The church does not want to be seen opposing and fighting chiefs and the government.

I argue that the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe has been co-opted by the government in as far as the forcing of the peasants to observe *chisi* is concerned. The Church is turning a blind eye to the plight of its rural members who are forced to observe *chisi*. The Church cannot remain silent in an environment where religious freedoms of RPs are violated. Christian leaders could be committed to a Zimbabwean society based on human rights, social justice and the termination of forcing RPs to observe *chisi*.

Farisai Mbwirembwire, a rural peasant in Hurungwe, said, "I am a devotee of AIR. I feel oppressed when my sub-chief forces me to observe a *chisi*. I read the constitution of Zimbabwe and it says that I have freedom of choosing my religion and free to do what I want. I chose AIR but I do not want to be forced observe the *chisi*." Since the pre-colonial period, Zimbabweans have expressed their displeasure at chiefs and sub-chiefs who abused them and forced them to observe *chisi*. The intimidating tactics that originated with the pre-colonial chiefs and sub-chiefs forcing people to observe *chisi* by confiscating their hoes or banishing them from the chiefdoms were also used by the post-colonial chiefs and sub-chiefs. The chiefs and sub-chiefs have always been embedded in violating human rights and have created rival parallel structures consisting of chiefs and sub-chiefs on the one hand, and RPs on the other.

Human rights and the freedom to practice a religion of one's choice are an essential element of one's humanity. Social justice is a concept based upon the belief that each individual and group within a given society has a right to civil liberties, equal opportunity, fairness and participation in the educational, economic, institutional, social and moral freedoms and responsibilities valued by the community. The chiefs and sub-chiefs, who were meant to protect the people and foster an environment of peace have become the perpetrators and violators of human rights. Chiefs and sub-chiefs abuse their powers and they permeate almost all the spheres of their subjects' lives, including religion. There was almost no aspect of their people's lives over which they had no control.

Conclusion

Chisi was created by politicians, chiefs, sub-chiefs and water spirit mediums for their own material and financial benefits through fining the RPs who violated the taboos associated with *chisi*. The imposition of *chisi* on RPs was a violation of their constitutional and human rights to freedom of worship. Any natural environmental conservation management strategy that violates people's constitutional and human rights and freedoms is not worth pursuing. The Christian Church and all progressive political, economic and social groups should oppose the forcing of RPs to observe *chisi* and should fight for social justice and human rights in as far as *chisi* is concerned.

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IKWERRE RITES OF PASSAGE AND SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION: A FRAMEWORK FOR INCULTURATION IN PORT HARCOURT DIOCESE, NIGERIA

By Emmanuel Osigwe

ABSTRACT

The Second Vatican Council remains a major event in the Catholic Church. From the viewpoint of sacramental expression, the Council made it possible to reimagine and appropriate sacraments according to various anthropological groups. Inspired by this development, this essay argues that Ikwerre indigenous rites of passage provides a suitable template for inculturation of the sacraments of initiation in Port Harcourt diocese. The Rites in use in the diocese can be enhanced by engaging some elements of the indigenous culture. This makes the task of inculturation an urgent and necessary one. This challenge is however, potentially resolved by the existence of a parallel initiation narrative in the diocese, namely the Ikwerre rites of passage. The overwhelming overlap in the inner logic and expression of both rites is very compelling and makes it relevant to undertake a study of this nature. Both initiation rites exist precisely for the purpose of perpetuating the narrative of the respective traditions and exert lasting influence in the life of the initiate. A conversation between these traditions will truly give rise to a renewed evangelization and appreciation of the Catholic faith. Engaging indigenous anthropological and sociological models in the sacramental process is an urgent approach to authentic Christianity and a key to the birthing of a true local church.

Keywords: Vatican II, Rites of passage, Inculturation, Sacrament

Introduction

The survival of any institution largely depends on how its tradition is perpetuated and handed on. Initiation rites serve the purpose of socializing neophytes, and passing on the tradition from one generation to another.[99] Initiation rites in most African cultures and in the Christian tradition serve the purpose of handing on the tradition and assist individuals respond positively to attendant challenges that emerge from such changes. Thus initiation rites renews the community and the individuals who undergo the process.

In this essay, I argue that Ikwerre indigenous rites of passage provides a framework for the inculturation of sacraments of initiation in Port Harcourt diocese of Nigeria. This effort will not only inculturate the sacraments, but make them more relevant, meaningful and appreciated. Differently put, the Christian faith will attain a firmness that is analogous to stability guaranteed by the indigenous initiation rites. The work is divided into six parts. The first part is a brief overview of rites of passage. The second part is a brief ethnography of Ikwerre. The third part will present Ikwerre rites of passage. The fourth part is a sketch of Roman Catholic initiation rites as in use in Port Harcourt diocese. The fifth part attempts to propose a framework for inculturation of the rites of passage, while the last part is the conclusion.

Brief Overview of Rites of Passage

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[99]Thera Rasing. "Passing on the Rites of Passage: Girls initiation rites in the Context of an Urban Roman Catholic Community on the Zambian Copperbelt", in *African Studies Centre, Research Series*. Vol. 6, 1995, 97.

Rites of passage is a technical term for various initiation rites. The word initiation, from the Latin *initium,* means a beginning, an introduction.[100] Rites of passage, then, would imply a growth, dynamism, or progress. Initiation into a group implies commitment and self-involvement as a member of the group. It implies a binding that recreates the narrative of the community. Initiation rites convey a collective and communal appeal because they embody the myth of a people, and serve as a root metaphor for the study of a people. Victor Turner, in his study of the Ndembu people of central Africa, began with the study of their rituals. According to him, rituals relate a people's culture.[101] The study of rituals, therefore, becomes the best starting point for the study of a group of people.

For Arnold van Gennep, rites of passage fall into two major categories- one personal, the other chronological.[102] The personal rites is concerned with the passage of an individual from one social status to another in the course of life, while the chronological portrays recognized moments in the passage time- like new moon, new year, change of seasons.[103] According to van Gennep, "whenever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts, like those which make up apprenticeship in our trades."[104] Thus, there are "ceremonies of birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies, and funerals. In this respect, a man's life resembles nature, from which

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[100]James Paterson et al., *The Approach to Latin: First Part*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964, 279.
[101]Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti- Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969, 5-7.
[102]Arnold van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage*. Trans. Monika Vizedom. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, 3.
[5] Ibid, 4.

[104]Ibid, 3.

neither the individual nor the society stands independent."[105]A basic underlying assumption, therefore, in discussing rites of passage is the initiation of persons into communal life.

Changes in lifecycle, positions, and challenges consequent upon such changes require some form of preparation. This accounts for the description of rites of passage as a means of cushioning the effects of transitions in life.[106] Rites of passage transform the mind and prepares the individuals for the changes that result therefrom. However, for Ray, the purpose of these rites is to create integral and holistic characteristics. Thus, the rites create fixed and meaningful transformations in life cycle.[107] The basic elements of the initiation rites seem to resonate around the character of the community and the irreversible change effected by the initiation rite on the individual. The three parts of the rites, namely rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation, help to realize this transformation in the neophyte.

A Brief Ethnography of Ikwerre

For the purpose of this essay, I examine two basic areas in the ethnography of Ikwerre, namely, geographical location and religion, which is the lodestar to the Ikwerre meaning - making system. By cultural and linguistic delineation, the people designated as Ikwerre are found in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is the dominant ethnic group in the Rivers State and of Port Harcourt Diocese, with four Local Government Areas, Ikwerre, Obi/Akpor, Emohua and Port Harcourt City. The land mass of the Ikwerre Ethnic Nation

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[105] Ibid, 3.

[106] Ephigenia Gachiri. *Rite of Passage for Christian Boys*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, 173.

[107] B. Ray.*African Religion: Symbol, Ritual and Community*. New Jersey: Prentice- Hall Inc., 1976, 91.

covers about 21, 400km[2,] which is about 20% of cultivable land in the old Rivers State.[108] It is strategically located at the heart of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. To this extent, it has played host to the multinational oil companies in the region. Chituru Achinewhu situates Ikwerre between latitude 4 degrees 50 minutes North, 5 degrees 15 minutes North, 6 degrees 30 minutes East, and 7 degrees 15 minutes East of the Greenwich.[109] The 1991 Nigerian census records shows that Ikwerre ethnic nationality has a population of 0.85 million.[110] The language spoken by the people bears the same name as the tribe itself. However, *Iwhuoroha*[111] was the original name of the ethnic group, which for convenience was changed to Ikwerre by the colonisers.

The culture has been so influenced by religion that they have become to a large extent inseparable. Wellington Wotogbe- Weneka avers, "The Ikwerre are overwhelmingly religious. Of the three recognized religions in Nigeria, the indigenous religious system seems the most penetrating of the three as evidenced from the people's ways of life and the basic traditional belief systems such as their belief in reincarnation."[112] Ikwerre have an appreciable number of divinities which are spiritual forces brought into being by the supreme God, *Chiokike.*[113] The divinities are believed to be so powerful and all-pervading that they serve as the fulcrum of life in Ikwerre. The deities are approached for protection, progress and survival from the unpredictable forces of nature. As Elechi Amadi succinctly observes, "Paramount

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[108] Sam C. Eke, et al., *Onomatics in Ikwerre*. Port Harcourt: Osita International Publishers, 2003, 15. The areas now known as Bayelsa State were part of Rivers State before 1998. The use of the expression old Rivers State attempts to capture this whole picture.

[109] Chituru S. Achinewhu Ed. *The Case of Ikwerre Ethnic Nationality*. An Unpublished Submission to the Nigerian Constitutional Conference, 1994, 4.

[110]Ibid, 4.

[111] An Ikwerre word for light of the nations

[112]Wellington Wotogbe- Weneka. "The Significance of Reincarnation in the Indigenous African Religion of the Ikwerre People of the Upper Niger Delta" in *Studies in Ikwerre: History and Culture*, Vol. 2, Otonti Nduka. Edited. University of Port Harcourt Press, 2003, 99.

[113]Elechi Amadi et al, "Divinities and their Role in Ikwerre Religion and Culture" in *Studies in Ikwerre History and Culture,* Vol. 1, Otonti Nduka. Edited. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited, 1993,106.

and common to all Ikwerre divinities is the protective function. Votaries expect their gods to protect them from harm, from physical and spiritual forces, witchcraft and the vicissitudes to which life is prone."[114] In such an atmosphere of pervading influence of the sacred, rites of passage becomes no less a sacred function. It is to the Ikwerre rites of passage that we now turn.

Ikwerre Rites of Passage

Van Gennep's classification of rites of passage into three related stages perfectly captures the Ikwerre rites of passage. The discussion of Ikwerre rites of passage in this essay, will be limited to puberty rites which offers the individual full identity and membership of the community, akin to the sacraments of initiation. Life cycle in Ikwerre consists of a series of initiations, even to the ancestral world after death.

Rites of initiation shoulders enormous responsibility in Ikwerre. Birth and naming ceremonies which welcome the individual into the community are well celebrated, yet they do not totally make him a full-fledged member of the community. The preparation for the initiation begins with the organization into age sets or grades at an early age of about ten years. Otonti Nduka explaining the age grades states, "The corporate unity of Ikwerre as a people and its magnetic cohesion as a society have, to a large extent, rested chiefly on their dividing all the males into regular sets or grades, by age. Young men and women of the same relative age in a society are thus grouped into age sets or age grades."[115] The male have a different age set from the female, even if at some time they come together for communal activities. Similarly, they have respective guardians, appointed for them by the head of each

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[114] Ibid, 109.
[115] Otonti Nduka ed., Studies in Ikwerre: History and Culture, Vol. 2, 76   .

clan. The guardians are expected to be knowledgeable in the customs, values and norms which form the basic curriculum during the periodic encounter with the neophytes. The basic initiation process commences with the separation of neophytes from the community- a seclusion from normal daily life.

At a particular season of the year, the members of a particular age set (who are mature enough for initiation), are separated from the community, to a forest or huts made in the bush, some distance away from habitable area, in order to be prepared for initiation.The Separation is an important part of the initiation process. It signifies a break with the past, with all the characteristics of the preceding stage of life. Separation, then, is the beginning stage of the initiation process. It is a time of testing of obedience to a designated authority, a time to embody the cultural life, a time to bear hardship and prepare for the adult life, with all the attendant challenges. The various initiatory ordeals basically serve the purpose of initiating the neophyte into the act of bravery and stability.

During the separation the rite of circumcision of the candidates is carried out. However, the circumcision could also be done earlier (about the eighth day after birth), in which case the seclusion becomes a time for training in ordeal and initiation into the cultural ethos. Initiation rite for boys is the circumcision and clitoridectomy for girls of corresponding age set. These acts are imbued with deep symbolic and ontological meanings. The removal of the foreskin of the genitals and the blood (that issue from the removal of the foreskin) are symbols that bind the initiate to the community for life. The blood of circumcision is like making a covenant, or a solemn pact between the individual and the people.[116] Blood for the Ikwerre is representative of the person. When the initiation blood touches the ground, the

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[116]Ibid, 93.

initiate is considered forever united to the ancestors and to the land. The scars of the circumcision also serve as an indelible reminder to the initiate of his commitment to the culture. Thus, the permanence of these symbols perpetuates the tradition and culture of Ikwerre.

At the end of the separation (for boys), the candidates return to the village, while awaiting the public ceremony of incorporation. This intervening period known as transition is also the liminal stage, when the candidates are in the period of interregnum. This moment is the period between separation and incorporation into the community. It is also a moment of ambiguity and uncertainty since the candidate is severed from his former life and is yet to be incorporated into the next stage. [117] Victor Turner captures this moment clearly, "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law…." [118] Thus, the liminal stage is a period of inactivity since they have no opinion of theirs but dependent on their instructors. It portends the irony or paradox of life from death. Thus, there could not be life without death in some way, or one could not be high without having been low.[119] The liminal stage is a temporary period that varies from one ethnic group to another, but its significance remains undermined. Liminality is the threshold of the rite of passage, but nonetheless, an indispensable stage. The liminal stage opens to door to the final rite of incorporation.

The rites of incorporation initiate the neophyte into the membership of the community, in order to participate and serve the purpose of rejuvenating the ethnic group. Through rituals and performances the candidates are presented to the community gathered at

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[117]Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[118]Ibid, 95.
[119]Ibid, 97.

the village square. The rites of incorporation takes place once a year (a day after the New Yam festival, sometime around September and October). It is a special day in the community, since the group is about to beget new members. Perhaps, the ultimate reason for the celebration is because the generational link is assured for posterity.[120] The incorporation creates new adults in the community. The incorporation is marked by great rejoicing and celebration that new individuals are being added to the community. In fact, the celebration is akin to the celebration at the Holy Saturday Catholic liturgy, when the Church (through the waters of baptism) gives birth to new members.

The rites of passage have the pragmatic value of ontologically binding individuals to the ethnic group, a binding beyond what is achieved by the fact of being born into the group. The initiate deliberately takes full responsibility for his future actions, with their attendant rights and duties. This is precisely the immense dignity and honor the sacraments of initiation confers on the initiate. The Roman Catholic initiation rites, which serve the purpose of acquiring membership and propagation of the faith can, therefore, be meaningfully interlaced with the cultural initiation rites. A cursory look at the Roman Catholic Initiation rites as celebrated in Port Harcourt diocese reveals these convergences.

A Sketch of Sacraments of Initiation in Port Harcourt Diocese

Geographically, Port Harcourt Diocese is located in Rivers State of Nigeria. It is a cosmopolitan diocese with headquarters situated in the Ikwerre region of the diocese. This strategic location owing to the majority of the ethnic group in the diocese further makes inculturation with the Ikwerre indigenous model a worthwhile effort. It is a growing diocese

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[120]Abel Pasquier. "Initiation and Society" in *Structures of Initiation in Crisis*. Luis Maldonado et al, eds., New York: The Seabury Press, 1979, 6.

with phenomenal growth in vocations to the religious life and population of the faithful. Currently, Port Harcourt diocese uses the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), approved for the English Speaking nations. A review of this document as practised in the diocese may be apropos.

The rite of Christian Initiation of Adults begins with the rite of acceptance and welcoming of candidates. This period begins the formation of the candidates for initiation into the mysteries of the church.[121] The candidates, having accepted the Christian narrative, indicate their readiness to be trained in the mystery of the Church. The candidates are called by their new names, which indicate a change in their persons by the ontological union affected by the initiation rites.

A significant element in the rite of initiation is the community's promise of accompanying the candidate in the new way of life. It follows, therefore, that the candidate is initiated and inserted into the collective memory of the community. The Christian community similarly assumes the responsibility of assisting the neophyte in the Christian journey. The period of formation technically known as catechumenate, is a period clearly marked for introducing the neophyte into the mystery (culture) of the Church. The catechumenate is one of the products of Vatican II and emphasizes formation in the Christian life beyond the formality of ritualism. The catechumenate helps to insert and immerse the neophytes into the mystery that creates and recreates the community. In effect, the purpose of the catechumenate is to bridge the gap between faith and life.

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[121]Shawn Madigan. "Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults", No. 5 *Forum Essay*, Archdiocese of Chicago, 1997.

The initiation process as designed by the RCIA consists of four interconnected stages. The succession of rites indicates progress in the journey of faith. The stages are: Evangelization and pre-catechumenate (acceptance into the order of catechumens), Catechumenate (election or enrolment), Purification and Enlightenment, and finally Mystagogy (post baptismal formation).[122] The pre-catechumenate period is when the individual decides to begin personal reflection on the faith. This is more of a personal response to the hidden voice of God. The period consists of inquiry by the candidate, concerning questions about the Christian faith.[123] Upon this inquiry by the individual, the church is offered a great opportunity for evangelization. This period is symbolized by the handing of the bible to the candidate, as a sign of acceptance of the faith. The candidate is also given a sponsor, who has the duty of accompanying the candidate in the journey of faith. The ceremony of acceptance is concluded during the liturgy of the word with signing of the cross on the forehead of the candidate and imposition of hands.

The catechumenate is a period of formation based on the information the candidate had acquired during the inquiry period of the previous session.[124] The basic formation style is catechesis and through liturgical celebrations. It is a formation period based on the word of God, as participation in the Eucharistic communion awaits the completion of the rites of initiation. The RCIA prescribes the following as ways of helping catechumens mature in the faith, namely, prayer, instruction, suitable liturgical rites, and active involvement in spreading the Gospel.[125] An important aspect of the catechumenate period is that, it understands the

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[122] Edward Yarnold. *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A*. Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1994, 2.

[123]Ibid, 2.

[124]Liam Kelly, Catechesis Revisited, 70.

[125]The Rite of the Catholic Church. New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1983, nos. 19-20.

period as "a journey, and not a programme."[126] The emphasis is on a journey, which describes also the life of faith. The Christian life is a journey, a pilgrimage. The encounter with God through faith continues to grow as the individual participates in the mystery of the church. The period of the catechumenate concludes with the rite of election,[127] which is the beginning of the period of initiation proper.

The initiation begins with the rite of purification and enlightenment. The Six weeks intervening period between instruction and initiation (probably the six weeks of the Lenten period), is designed to be a time of purification and enlightenment. According to Edward Yarnold, "it is a time for spiritual preparation rather than instruction."[128] The purification consists of exorcism, scrutiny, confession of sins, and the general preparation that is commensurate with the Lenten season.

Initiation into the Church proper takes place during the Paschal celebration of the Holy Saturday vigil. The Holy Saturday liturgy in songs and readings recount God's marvellous deeds at creation and salvation, culminating in the baptism, confirmation and reception of the Holy Eucharist. In recent times, the chronological order of baptism and confirmation and the eucharist has been restored. In the baptismal ritual, the candidates profess the faith in God, with the rejection of Satan, all his works and empty promises. In other words, they take on the privilege and responsibility of becoming disciples of Christ and members of the Church. The reception of the sacraments of confirmation and eucharist along with baptism on Holy Saturday properly designate the candidates as adults in the faith, ready

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[126] Liam Kelly, Catechesis Revisited, 71.
[127] Ibid, 72.
[128] Edward Yarnold. The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation, 9.

to become soldiers of Christ. However, one more step is required before the initiation process

is said to be completed, the post initiation formation.

The post initiation mystagogy, during which time the neophytes meet and gain

further instruction on the Christian lifestyle is an integral part of the initiation process. During

this time, the community joyfully accompanies the new initiates in incorporating them into the

life they have just been initiated. On the post initiation Mystagogy, the RCIA states:

> To strengthen the first steps of the neophytes, it is desirable that
> they be helped carefully and familiarly in all circumstances by the
> community of the faithful, by their godparents and by their
> pastors. Great care should be taken that they obtain full and joyful
> insertion into the life of the community.[129]

In this declaration, one clearly sees that the initiation is designed to bring about the

participation and involvement of the community. The community is supposed to embody the

Catholic narrative and through its designated teachers hand on the faith of the church. To

enable us to establish a framework for inculturation of sacraments of initiation, it was

necessary to examine how the diocese of Port Harcourt, following provisions of RCIA

celebrates these sacraments. We shall now proceed to the possibility of inculturation.

Framework for Inculturation

The important aspect of current sacramental celebration is that it gives wide latitude

for adaptation according to various anthropological groups. Inculturation makes the

sacraments more relevant and truly appreciated in a way that the necessary link between

sacraments and ethics is clearly emphasized. In very specific terms, the Roman *ordor* makes

inculturation of the sacrament of baptism an imperative when it declares:

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[129] The Rite of the Catholic, no. 235.

> As stated in nos. 37-40 and 65 of the Constitution on the Liturgy, it is the responsibility of the Conferences of bishops in mission countries to judge whether certain initiation ceremonies in use among some people can be adapted for the rite of Christian baptism and to decide whether these rites are to be incorporated into it.[130]

This approach, in some sense, allows various cultures to possess the gospel and simultaneously to be transformed by the same gospel. Such a rediscovery responds to the new contexts of the gospel in a global world. In fact, the Second Vatican Council categorically states,

> Nevertheless, the church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race and nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern … it can then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves.[131]

The above statement clearly responds to the need for true incarnation of the gospel in every culture, even as it presents mutual enrichment of cultures as the purpose of the inculturation. Post Second Vatican Council documents, especially *Evangelii Nutiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio,* give credence and elaboration of the Church's position concerning inculturation. Although *Redemptoris Missio*[132] uses the term insertion in talking about inculturation, it acknowledges the need to go beyond a monolithic and monocultural expression of the faith. George Worgul articulates the need for inculturation from a very theological perspective states:

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[130]The Rites of the Catholic Church, no. 31
[131]Ibid. no., 58.
    [132]The process inserting the gospel into peoples' cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.

> The church, whether it admits it or not participates in culture. It always has and it always will. At one and the same time, the ecclesial community is a product of revelation and culture, of the divine and the human … Moreover "revelation" and belief system of the Christian community are expressed in and through the medium of a culture's language, patterns of behavior, and social structures.[133]

It is then possible, at least, theoretically, to make a distinction between what is cultural and that which is strictly divine. Besides, what constitutes the core of the Christian faith, at best remains fluid.[134] Hence, the presence of concepts and rites of passage in various cultures, like the Ikwerre rites of passage, makes inculturation an imperative in contemporary Christianity.

Salient points in the Ikwerre rites of passage already discussed will now be interlaced with the sacraments of initiation. It may be necessary to underscore the unity in the overall effect and significance of Christian initiation and Ikwerre initiation. The rituals exert the same influence both on the community and the individuals. Beginning with the naming ceremony, the importance and dignity of waters of baptism in conferring identity on the candidate must be emphasized; for not having a name and an identity is a disaster. This dignity and separation from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Christ (1Peter 2:9-10), is crucial. In this regard, it might be helpful to make the following recommendations: First, just as the Ikwerre indigenous system divides the neophytes according to age grades or sets for ease of catechesis under a seasoned elder in faith, we recommend the creation of similar age sets in the parishes under the guardianship of knights taken from the locality. The essence is to insure that the Catholic young adult lacks nothing from the cultural initiation process. The blood of the initiation process (that binds the initiate)

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[133]George S. Worgul. *From Magic to Metaphor: A Validation of the Christian Sacraments*. New York: Paulist Press, 1980, 9.

[134]I use the word *fluid* to describe the core message of Christianity because to most authors the core message appears inseparable with the gospel message. See Orlando Espin et al., *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006, 3

is not necessary for the Christian, but he should be taught the indelible mark created by the waters of baptism and the anointing. The diocese has numerous knights of Saint Mulumba and Knights of Saint John International. This suggestion is inspired by the fact that knights in the diocese are looked upon as successful and models of Christian life in the diocese. Their moral probity and high societal rating would serve as invaluable assets to the church. Second, the emphasis in the catechumenate must be heavily laid on formation. The formation must be accompanied with hardship just like in the Ikwerre rite of passage, especially during the rite of separation. Training in the ordeals of life must be a necessary component of this period, such that nothing would separate the candidates from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:31-39). With the increasing threats to the Christian life this aspect of the formation cannot be trivialized. This training will further enhance the emotional and physical maturity of the candidates. The firmness of this stage of formation will enhance the attachment to Christ no matter the vagaries and vicissitudes of life. Third, the need for ongoing formation in Christian life for the various groups of the community will need to be emphasized. Interestingly, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has issued a number of documents targeting different segments of the Church in Nigeria for ongoing formation.[135] These documents could be made available to chaplains and various organs of the church. These will help not only priests and religious, but also every faithful follower of Christ in their spiritual and Christian life."[136]

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[135] Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria.*Salt of the Earth and Light of the world(Matthew 5: 13-16):Manual of the Laity*, 2009, 107-118; *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 2005,55-59; *I Chose You: The Nigerian Priests in the Third Millennium*, 2004, 36-44; *Formation and Collaboration in Communion: On Mutual Relations Between Religious Institutes and Dioceses in Nigeria*, 2009, 30-34.

[136]Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. *Called to Love: Ethical Standards for Clergy and Seminarians in Nigeria*, Revised Edition, 2012, 37.

Indeed, Inculturating the rites of initiation, especially the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, by emphasizing the dignity of the initiate and the maturity acquired through initiation into adulthood will ground the initiates more firmly in the Christian life. The close nexus of Ikwerre rites of initiation and sacraments of initiation already offers a paradigm for inculturation. The best way to transmit Christian tradition is through culture.[137] This is an approach that will create Christians who are true to their religion and true to their indigenous culture. Such inculturation could then become the starting point of local theology, as envisaged by Robert Schreiter.[138] A theology that takes seriously the uniqueness of a people and their experience of the divine cannot afford to ignore the elements of goodness and value in the indigenous cultures.

Conclusion

The documents of the Church, especially from the Second Vatican Council, have given enormous room for inculturation. Inculturation has become an important aspect of the mission of the church and imperative in the current ecclesiological dispensation. For the diocese of Port Harcourt, the existence of a parallel narrative, the Ikwerre rites of passage, makes it possible for the proper inculturation of Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults. The diocesan liturgical commission and other relevant organs can fast track this urgent need of the church in the diocese. The local church of Port Harcourt diocese can become more culturally situated through inculturating the sacraments of initiation. It is through this approach that culture can

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[137] Orlando Espin et al. eds, *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*.14.

[138] Robert Schreiter proposes a theology that responds to contexts, histories, and particular experiences of believing communities. In his opinion the interaction of these factors, with the gospel, church and culture will give rise to a local theology. See Robert Schreiter. C*onstructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, 20.

become the best way of handing on the Christian faith. The Church cannot shy away from the

service of inculturation due to its necessity.

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