

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, BOON OR BANE IN IKWERRE OF THE NORTH EASTERN NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

Rowland Olumati, Ph.D
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria
olumatirowland01@yahoo.com

Abstract

The focus of this paper is on Intercultural Communications: Boon or Bane in Ikwerre of the North Eastern Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Before the coming of Christianity and other modern forces of change into Africa in general and Ikwerre ethnic nationality in particular, Ikwerre have had various ways of expressing their religious and cultural experiences about the humans relating with the supernatural invisible sacred being. These ways are expressed in symbols, idioms and metaphors which are indigenous to them. The use of Ikwerre names in liturgy, names of Ikwerre in African cosmology, the use of Ikwerre songs and musical instruments in worship, the use of native agencies, the use of indigenous Ikwerre ritual objects and symbols, oath-taking and investiture, as well as initiation into manhood (igbaiku) and other findings in the research work make it a boon in the Ikwerre religious life because Ikwerreman cannot do without his religion. However, some features of the Ikwerre belief systems elapsed and others remain resolute. The work adopted the phenomenological methodological approach in the interpretation of data because this enabled the researcher to observe the phenomenon he was investigating over time allowing it to unravel and reveal itself instead of forcibly reading in or reading out meaning on the object of the research. However, when the missionaries came to Ikwerre from the 19th century, they adopted or borrowed these idioms and metaphors and incorporated it into their Christian liturgy (Anglicanism), hence, intercultural communication. The work recommends that the good side of African traditional religion should be allowed to take place and should be incorporated into the Nigerian educational curriculum.

Keywords: Intercultural, Boon, Bane, Ikwerre, Traditional and Culture.

Introduction

The language of religion is often colored with rites and symbols. Man the “*homoreligiosus*” has in every age and culture, in his horizontal and vertical relationship with the sacred and the humans, evolved means of communicating and expressing his sentiments and belief patterns. Patent and evocative as they may be, rituals in symbolic forms have remained a rhythm of significance in man’s response to the sacred and his experience within the ecosystem.

Configured in icons and expressed in metaphors, religious rituals and symbols convey a people's religious consciousness, thought-logic and world view.

In this paper, the researcher shall be dwelling on the interrelationship between two or more cultures or better put, how two or more cultures inter-mingle to yield positive responses or results. Since in human communication, no culture can boast or pride itself as being independent but rather they are dependent and inter-related borrowing one or more aspect from other societies' culture and other larger or macro society borrowing from the micro society and vice versa. But before dwelling on this adequately, it is pertinent to clarify some terms.

What is intercultural communication?

According to Larry, A.S. et al (2007:9-15) in their edited book communication between cultures, "intercultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces a message for consumption by a member of another culture". More precisely, according to them, intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol system are distinct enough to alter the communication event. It is important to state that intercultural communication is important because life in an age when all of the people on earth regardless of their background or culture are interconnected. It seems that now more than ever, what happens in one part of the world touches all parts of the world. Therefore, intercultural communication could be seen broadly as the transmission of values, norms, beliefs, practices, language, history, symbols etc. from one society to the other to yield positive result and to bring about change in human society. Whereas, human communication is the process through which symbols are transmitted for the purpose of eliciting a response. Consequently, this paper will elucidate on how western cultures imparted their mission, evangelical-oriented cultures with case studies in names in African cosmology, use of African songs and musical instruments in worship, use of native agency in the evangelization process, use of indigenous Ikwerre African ritual objects and symbols, African concept of salvation, title-taking or investiture in African Ikwerre, initiation into manhood (*Igbaiku*) in Ikwerreland. At the end, the work will be concluded by drawing an analysis on whether intercultural communication is a boon or a bane.

Names in African Cosmology

Gbule (2011:187-197), argues that at birth, all persons born in Ikwerre land are given a name(s). The choice of the name is a product of the agreement between the father and the mother. It may be after due verbal consultation or divination.

In the case of the latter, the parents would consult a diviner to know who has reincarnated. The right to give a name to a child could be delegated to friends, relations, grand-parents or other associates. The choice of a name to give could be determined by the place of birth, the month or season of birth, the prevailing circumstances at the time of birth. Indeed, any phenomenal or historical event may influence the name parents give to their children. For example, a child born at Ibadan may be named Bamidele to reflect that the parents were living in a Yoruba city. If the child is born on any of the traditional days in Ikwerre, such as an *ekhe* day, the child could be called *Nwekhne*. But if the parents had the child after a protracted trial on a heinous crime and adjudged innocent the child could be called *Chinugonum* (God advocates for me) or *Chinweikpe* (Judgment belongs to God). A historical event can also determine the choice of name in Ikwerre land, for example, if the parents have just completed a new house the child could be called *Woroma* (good house). Children born during civil disturbances like Nigerian civil war could be given the name *Ndidi* to evoke their perseverance or endurance. Sometimes, the child could be born shortly after the death of one of the parents. If she is a girl, who was born after the death of the father she could be called *Nnedah* (the father's mother). If he is a male he could be called *Enyidah* (the father's friend). Ikwerre names therefore embody worldview and are very significant. Names are not given arbitrarily. This explains why Eke and Chukwu (2003) affirm that "the tendency to name child English names by missionaries during baptism was a rape of the people's culture: as it did not reflect people's psycho linguistic world".

One wonders why a child should be named Donatus, or Pamela, or Rose or Justus when these names represent the names of flowers and other objects in Europe and America. Before now, it was unacceptable to use Ikwerre names at baptism as conversion to Christianity meant doing away with all that was associated with the indigenous religious culture. This was to say the least a colonization of the mind. Fortunately, the Anglican Churches now allow the use of indigenous names at baptism. There is no doubt that this will help to preserve Ikwerre Christian identity within the Anglican Churches. Thus, people take names such as *Okechukwu*, or *Azundah*, or *Chimzi*, or *Chitukpobi*, or *Nnedah* at baptism.

Use of Ikwerre Songs and Musical Instruments in Worship

The Anglican Church has also accommodated the use of worship songs in Ikwerre or native airs in the Churches, especially during offertory. The songs are rendered with local musical instruments such as drums ("*nkwa*"), gongs ("*ugele*")

tambourine (“*ayara*”), dug out wood (“*ogwo*”), bells (“*ngbinigba*”), et cetera. In the past, the destruction of these objects of worship was a symbol of conversion to Christianity. This was based on the belief that the traditional musical instruments constituted a medium of communication between the gods and their votaries. In Ikwerre, it is believed that through the sound of the drum (*nkwa*) or gong (*ugele*), together with the accompanying rhythmic dancing and clapping of hands, the traditional priests invoked and made supplication to the deities or ancestral spirits. It is for this reason that the pioneer missionaries disallowed indigenous Ikwerre songs, dance and clapping of hands. Today, the Anglican Churches have begun to incorporate and adapt these ritual objects in their worship and liturgy. For instance, Madam Irene Wali of Holy Trinity Church, Choba and Madam Love Onuegbu of Mgbuitanwno, Emohua, have produced praise songs in Ikwerre, which today are used in most Anglican Churches in Ikwerre land. The songs and accompanying Ikwerre dance steps are a delight to watch. Men and women wave their white handkerchiefs in praise of Jehovah of hosts (“*Chiokike*”). According to Rev. Canon E. N. Worlu (2010), Church services have become more exuberant as the people can make sense from the songs rather than sterile and fuzzy tunes of organ music of hymnal companion. The repertoire of songs is drawn from a source that has influenced African theology and Christianity in general, i.e., African religious thought forms and idioms (Kalu 2008). It is this dynamism and diversity in worship and liturgy that is responsible for the shift in Christianity centre of gravity, and for Africa to be described “the next Christendom” (Jenkins, 2002).

Use of Native Agency in the Evangelization Process

Again, Gbule (2011:187-190), argues that perhaps one area the Anglican Churches in Ikwerre land have made significant progress at contextualization of the gospel is in the use of native agents, catechists, teachers, chiefs, “bible-women” in the evangelization process. It has been noted that the beginning of Anglicanism in most Ikwerre communities is traceable to the conversion experiences of indigenous Ikwerre men and women from itinerant Ijaw traders and fishermen. These native agents provided the funds and materials with which the new mission stations started. For example, Madam Wojiewhor Erinwo of Ibaa, Jessy Daniel of Evekwu, Chiefs Beniah Ihuordu and John Orlu of Ogbakiri were instrumental in introducing Christianity to their respective communities. There were yet others who served as interpreters, guides, and aides to the Ijaw missionaries by advancing the work of evangelism in their communities. These proved to be the strong pillars on which today’s Ikwerre Anglicanism is built. From these native agents have arisen three Ikwerre Bishops, notably Sam

Onyekwu Elenwo, who became the first Ikwerre Bishop and fourth diocesan of the Old Niger Delta after Bishop Yibo Fubara. The other two are Rt. Rev. Blessing Enyindah, the bishop of Ikwerre Diocese and Rt. Rev. Innocent U. Ordu, bishop of Ewo Diocese. The statistics of the clergy disposition of the Diocese of Ikwerre for 2010/2011 shows that out of a total ninety-four (94) clergymen distributed in over ten Archdeaconries only six (6) are non-indigenes. Undoubtedly, the indigenous Ikwerre are much happier receiving the gospel message from the hands of their own kith and kin. Christianity is no longer perceived as an alien religion nor is the Ikwerre the object of mission. Instead they are now active participants in the reception, transmission, and transformation of Christianity in Africa. It would be recalled that the Anglican Church Missionary Society, hereafter CMS, has recognized the use of native agency as missionary principle and praxis. Henry Venn, the Secretary of the CMS from 1841-1872 had advocated the use of native agency as the key to mission (Chatfield, 1989:64). This was his vision of the "three-self's": self-governing, self-propagating, and self-financing congregations. It was because of this policy that Samuel Ajayi Crowther, an African was ordained priest in 1843, and subsequently made Bishop in 1864. His achievements in the Niger Mission have been hugely documented by scholars of different feathers (Ajayi 1965, Ayandele, 1966, Tasiel 1978). In Ikwerre land, the native agents serve as pioneers and catalysts in the contextualization of Christianity in the Anglican Churches. For example, Madam Irene Weli and Love Onuegbu have used their repertory of Ikwerre songs in worship and liturgies to make the worship of God have meaning for the indigenous Ikwerre. As G.OM Tasiel has rightly expressed "the native agents made Christianity reflect the immediate environment and be presented in the liturgy and language the indigenous converts could easily appreciate and follow" (1978:325). Thus the use of indigenous agency in the evangelization process has made the Anglican Churches in Ikwerre land assume a native character, thereby giving them a sense of identity.

Use of Indigenous Ikwerre Ritual Objects and Symbols

Ritual processes are a series of symbolic action which are both highly complex and multi-dimensional. They involve actors, actions, use of time and space, as well as other symbolic agencies and agents. Ritual symbols or the use of concrete objects are visible elements in several religious traditions or denominations. Their visibility can be observed in the profusion of religious emblems, ideograms, rituals, songs, prayers, myths, incantations, vows, customary behaviour and personifications (Nabofa, 1994:4). The symbolic use and significance of water, sand, oil, salt, palm fronds, leaves, feathers, kaolin (native

white chalk), and other ritual objects is commonplace in Ikwerre ritual system, the context under which the Anglican Churches exist. By locating these religious objects within the precinct of the host, religious and cultural substrate, some features suggestive of affinity and discontinuity in both worldviews become manifestly clear. For many religious groups, water ("*mini*") is an ancient symbol of "life" and "power". The Anglican Churches use holy and sanctified water to perform both therapeutic and prophylactic functions after it has been sanctified through prayers. It may be used in bathing, ingested as a purgative, drunk to restore spiritual powers and to heal physical ailments, sprinkled or wetted on a space to confuse and chase away unwanted malevolent spiritual forces. Such water is added salt, which in biblical imagery is to destroy or neutralize or render impotent such evil powers. The Anglican Church also uses water as ritual of baptism. The rite of baptism represents an important ritual of passage for any Anglican. According to Wotogbe-Weneka (1997:57), baptism consists of two parts; "the visible and invisible sign and the inward and outward grace. The outward grace is water 'in which the person is baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'." Thus water ("*mini*") and the name of God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit are regarded by the Anglican Church as the essential parts of baptism in which the individual is incorporated into the Anglican Communion. The Church does not discriminate between baptism by total immersion or sprinkling, both are allowed. This probably explains why some Anglican Churches make provision for baptismal fonts suited for both immersion and sprinkling. In the absence of baptismal fonts, baptism can be conducted from a flowing stream, river, lagoon or sea, in after the appropriate prayer and sanctification rituals have been offered.

Olumati (2013), argues that another important ritual symbol used by the Anglican Church in its healing ministry is sand. The sand here is understood not its biological sense but it symbolizes the source and ground of all humanity true existence. It is everywhere, and on it everybody moves. From the earth also comes food for all creatures and to the earth will creatures return at the end of earthly existence. Thus, the earth symbolizes power and real existence. According to Chikodi Wachukwu (2010), sand is used in prayers of healing and judgment. The idea is that sand which is everywhere is a living testimony to the action or inaction one takes and if one tries to tell lies or break the covenant the impartial mother will judge him in several ways which includes sickness and other calamities that may result in death. In Ikwerre cosmology, the Earth goddess ("*Ali*") is the guardian of morality and any moral infraction ("*nso Ali*") against it is visited with sickness or even death. No Ikwerre man can have sex in

the bush or bare ground because it is a taboo against the Earth goddess. Besides sand, the Anglican Church also uses anointing oil for its healing ministry. The oil is used for consecration for holy works and to empower the individual against enigmatic malevolent forces which afflict humans with various diseases and sicknesses. The Scriptures in several passages enjoins the believers to pray for the sick and anoint with oil within the context of prayer of faith.

The point being made here is that the symbolic use of water, sand, oil and other ritual objects for purposes of healing, fertility, purification, prevention, and spiritual empowerment has been re-valorized and reinforced in the ritual system of Ikwerre Anglicanism. Thus as Afe Adegome has argued that:

What has changed in this sense is not the attitude towards and the motif behind the ritual symbolism, but rather the medium or object to which the rituals are directed. Such symbols are seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is a symbol which helps to strengthen and reinforce faith of the members (Adegome. 2000:74)

Thus the affinity and continuity of features or elements from the indigenous Ikwerre religious culture in the healing praxis of Anglican Church cannot be overemphasized. There is no doubt that as the indigenous Ikwerre begins to see elements of continuities of Ikwerre ritual cosmos in Christianity; it will impact significantly upon the inner meaning of his faith. After all, during the early stages of Ikwerre Anglicanism, some Ikwerre people testify that their conversion to Christianity was due to their healing, which they attributed to the Christian God. Such persons as Beniah Wosu and John Orlu from Ogbakiri became Anglicans after hearing the biblical accounts of healing miracles (Orlu, 1990).

On the use of indigenous symbols and ritual objects for greater pastoral attention and proper contextualization, the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) had had a head-start over the Anglican mission, particularly since the Vatican II. For example, in Igboland the Roman Catholics have employed local materials as well as indigenous religious and cultural ideas, symbols and motifs to express some important Christian themes and values. Consecrated water is sprinkled on the congregation during offertory and before the celebration of the Eucharist. During the Holy Week, it is usual to see Catholics rob on ashes on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday. Besides, it is common place to see huge and beautifully carved doors rich in indigenous art-forms and symbols adorn several churches and Catholic centres in Igboland (Ejizu, 2009:12). Ozigboh (1985) explains that one of the strategies the Roman Catholics adopted to make more progress than the

Protestants in Igboland was the use of aesthetic and indigenous ritual symbols. Because the Igbo are symbol-loving, the RCM make profuse use of candles, incense, water, sand, oil, masks, and palm fronds to inculturate Christianity in Igboland.

Iwe (1979), has advocated for the replacement of imported wine and wafers with local palm wine and yam as substances for the celebration of the Eucharist. Because Iwe's prescription has generated a lot of debate, i.e., between the Roman Catholic idea of transubstantiation and co-substantiation by the Protestants, he is worth quoting at length:

Why can we not make use of our native materials for mitre and crosier and thereby end our stultifying dependence on materials and stones from Europe? Can our glittering native palm oil not be a fit and worthy material for consecration and other sacramental and liturgical purposes? Can any ontological, biblical or liturgical superiority of the mild Mediterranean olive oil over our buoyantly glittering palm oil be proved and established? Why can we not use decent and high-quality palm wine for mass or Divine Worship?... If Christ were a native of this land would he have waited for wine--imported wine--for his last supper? Were the elements of his last supper imported ones or local Jewish elements? (Iwe, 1979:101)

The implication of all this, is for Anglican mission to harness elements of African religious culture for use in church life and worship so that there would be a down-to-earth and meaningful contextualization of Christianity. A serious attempt should be made to substitute foreign vestment, vessels and other ritual objects with local ones to ensure the emergence of a dynamic, original, and exuberant church at the grassroots.

Title-Taking or Investiture in Ikwerreland

One notable aspect of the contextualization of Anglicanism in Ikwerre land is that it has mainly occurred primarily among the indigenous Ikwerre communities who have retained their rootedness in traditional Ikwerre values and beliefs, accommodating Christianity to them i.e., from 'the ground up' rather than the reverse. For these communities, the conversion process succeeded only to the degree that they found points of convergence between their beliefs and values and the new religion (Wicker 1998:358-91). This analysis is reflected in the traditional institution of title-taking and other liminal rites, such as initiation into manhood.

In the political structure of Ikwerre, titles were invested on men and women with exemplary character, as a mark of communal honour, prestige, and achievement. These values were mined from primal ethics in order to maintain civic order. For instance, among the indigenous Ikwerre the clan head (*'nyewe-eli'*) is the ritual agent par excellence, even in situations where there are priestly guardians of communal shrines. Priestly functions are invested in the paterfamilias, first sons (*'ekpera'*), kinship heads (*'nye-vu-oro'*), village or clan heads (*'nyenwe-eli'*), the council of elders (*'ohna'*), and female priestesses. Gerontocracy, the rule of the elders, predominates, because elders and ancestors are thought to be in close proximity. However, in every Ikwerre community there exists ritual power nodes- diviners, seers, herbalists, and witchcraft experts- who provide protective enhancements and destructive medicine, charms, and amulets. General practitioners may combine some of these roles, and elastic structure enables the recruitment of spiritual forces from foreign communities for witchcraft detection (*'oje-nkoro'*) and achievement-enhancing medicine. Guilds and secret societies also co-exist, sharing wisdom, craft, cult, and medicine. They mobilize around certain interests, including healing, wealth, influence, esoteric knowledge, material aid, and entertainment. In some communities, leaders can only emerge from among the members of the secret society. This explains why in the formative years of Ikwerre Anglicanism the institution of title taking was condemned. Thus, a Christian taking traditional title was considered to have compromised the faith, and therefore excommunicated from communion. So the problem then was can a Christian take a traditional title? Or can titled man be saved? And if a Christian accepts a traditional title what are the rites he should undergo?

In some contexts, a Christian was in dilemma of becoming a member of the council of elders (*'ohna'*) or he may send some body as proxy. Because the rites of initiation into *oha* are hedged with many traditional religious rites, the church educated their converts against becoming members of *oha*. This has affected the institution adversely. In some communities, this ended in disaster. For example, in Ibaa community, an Anglican convert had to commit suicide because he was under pressure to join '*Ohna*' by his village and because of the religious rituals involved, which he considered unchristian (Onu 2005:276). In a related example, Chief James Kejeh of Mgbueto in Emohua refused to use the sacred "*owho*" stick and also refused to serve "*Agbada*" deity. Today, there are attempts by the Church to inculturate the institution of *Ohna* (Council of Elders). Many Christian nominees are now insisting on the conditions for membership, which includes the removal of what they consider offensive religious rituals involved, such as

the substitution of “*nnokam* or *Agbada*” deity with the Bible. The other practices are the abolition of the divinatory and oracular roles the *Ohna* performed, which they consider contrary to Christianity. Others eligible Christians into *Ohna* have urged the removal of “*owhor*” stick, which is carried by *Ohna* man. For example, in Isiokpo community, a retired Archdeacon of the Anglican Church S.Y Chukwuigwe became a member of *Ohna*. This shows the ingenuity of the Church to incorporate and re-valorize indigenous religious ideas and practices to make the people have a sense of identity.

In many parts of Africa, titles are usually invested on individuals who had distinguished themselves in one field of endeavour or the other during the new Yam festivals, and other socio-cultural activities. Such persons may be conferred with such titles as the voice of the people (*'onu-nu-kwonu-ohna'*), the strength of the people (*'nye-dike-mbam'*); the leopard which guards the village (*'agnu-ne-che-mbam'*), and other self-aggrandizing titles like, the light, the sun, the moon, and the lighting that shows the way, etc. The imagery is a cluster of money, power, and light on the darkened path of the communities (Kalu, 2008:202).

There is no doubt that some of these titles may be well intentioned and good. They promoted primal ethics. The pastoral challenge the Anglican faces is how to accommodate these titles so that the elite can be won over for Christ. For example, only the eldest male of the village are admitted into *Ohna* Council. His office is a composite one. He performs political, religious, social and judicial functions. He is the custodian of the village *'owhor-nu-ogwo'* and a repository of the ancestral wisdom.

Nye-ohna is an embodiment of right living. Membership is by ascription and not achievement. Usually, in most indigenous communities the head of the council of elders (*'nye-risi-ohna'*) is the leader of the clan or the paramount ruler (*'nyenwe-eli'*). Unlike the “*ozo*” among the Igbo neighbours whose membership is by achievement *'ohna'* was not. In fact, as N.J Gbule avers that to be enlisted into *ohna* is to be initiated a spiritual life of encyclopaedic inclusiveness (Gbule, 1982:5). This is how revered significant the *Ohna* institution is to most Ikwerre communities.

Besides, the *'Ohna'* institution, the commonest titles among the Ikwerre are chieftaincy titles. There are compound chiefs, village or clan chiefs. These assist the paramount ruler or clan head (*'nyenwe-eli'*) in adjudication of cases and other functions. Chieftaincy titles are conferred on worthy sons and daughters of the community who have distinguished themselves in politics, education, and

business and contributed to the development of their respective communities. Most times individuals who are conferred chieftaincy titles are also members of the Church. For example, in 2000 Chief J.J Ohaka the paramount ruler of Uvuawbu community and foundation member of the Holy Trinity Church conferred chieftaincy titles on some sons and daughters of the community. Most of the people that received these titles were also members of their local Anglican churches, thus, showing intercultural communication.

Initiation into Manhood (“Igbaiku”) In Ikwerre land

Related to title-taking is the initiation into manhood (“Igba-iku”). It varies from one Ikwerre community to another. Among the Ibaa community, the ceremony of initiation into manhood is very elaborate and extends over many days. Only males who have attained the age 50 are eligible to take part. Some Ibaa Sons abroad (overseas), who are unable to attend, are represented by proxy provided they fulfil the customary rites involved. The climax of the initiation ceremony involves the members gathering all their walking sticks together into bundle on the ground and take an oath of unity, moral integrity as well as to support each other in all circumstances.

Among the Ipo, Omademe, and Izuaha, all in Ikwerre, the ‘*Itu-nu-enya*’ is also an initiation ceremony into manhood. But unlike the Ibaa example, one does not need to get to the age of 50 before undergoing the traditional rites. The ‘*itu-nu-enya*’ is still shrouded in secrecy. It is open to only males between the ages of 18-40. Initiates into the *itu-nu-enya* are expected to spend a week or more in the bush where they undergo tests of manliness before emerging from the forest. During the period of ordeal it is believed that they have been energized by the ancestral spirits concerned. They also swear to an oath of secrecy not to divulge what goes on to an outsider, even under the pain of death. Initiates are expected to climb the palm tree with bare hand and cut down the young tendrils (*omungwu*). The first person to do this has achieved a feat. Oral testimonies of some of the Anglican priests in the area show that this is one of the traditions that has refused exorcism. For example, the last ceremony in 2010 was held on Sunday at Ozuaha community and it was to be a day of worship for all Christians.

But that day, almost all the churches in these communities were deserted with empty pews. There is no doubt that the ‘*itu-enya*’ ceremony poses a pastoral challenge to the Anglican Church and its leadership. The Bishop, Rt. Rev Enyindah of the diocese of Ikwerre is even unsure what to do.

However, with the introduction of honorific titles to honour elders and all those who had distinguished themselves in the service of God and humanity by Anglican Communion, there appears to be light in the horizon. The order of knighthood was introduced into the Anglican Church in Ikwerre land in 1995, even though it had been introduced into the Eastern Province of the Anglican Communion ten years earlier by Bishop Benjamin C. Nwanikiti (Adiele 1996: 225). The history of knighthood dates back to the medieval era in Europe. They were known for their chivalry or knightly conduct like bravery, loyalty, devotion generosity and above all reverence to God. According to Shed Adiele (1996), during the crusades, many of them joined the order to defend the faith against the Muslim invaders. The patron saints of the order include St Christopher, St. Augustine, St. Paul, and Knights of Good Shepherd. There were also ladies of St. Mary and St Bethany. The lives of these patron saints serve as inspiration and a role model for Anglicans. The words of Long Fellow, an Anglican historian, is apt here: "Lives of great men all reminds us that we can make or lives sublime, and departing; leave behind us foot print on the sand of time" (quoted in Adiele 1996:227).

As noted above, the first investitures into the knighthood order in the Niger Delta Diocese occurred in 1995, when Rt. Rev Bishop Samuel O.Elenwo knighted eight (8) Anglicans at St Andrew's Anglican Church, Diobu, and Port Harcourt. The Knights were given the title "Sir" and their wives as "Lady Auxiliary". But now a woman who is knighted took the title "Dame" rather than 'lady', an inversion of "Madame," as the title "lady" had the pejorative connotation of spinsterhood.

An aspirant to the knight order must be a communicant of the Anglican Communion, a husband of one wife (I Cor. 9:5), blameless in conduct (I Tim. 5:7, 6:14), given to hospitality (I Titus 1:8, Rom. 2:13), not a member of secret society, and not given to much wine (I Tim 3:3 Titus 1:7) (Adiele 228-229). The regalia of Knights included a red coat, and black trousers stripped by the sides, and a long parade sword. There is doubt as to whether the introduction of the knighthood in the Anglican Communion has encouraged devotion and a spirit of philanthropy in the Church. Infact, the Methodist in order to counter the drifting of their elite members to other denominations has introduced the knight of St Wesley. Thus, many dioceses in the Anglican Communion now have Council of Knights as a statutory body to mobilize funds for projects and other development plans. This has encouraged the laity to participate actively in Church activities, as the vibrancy of any Church depends on what the laity does.

The honorific title of Knighthood is an ingenious solution by the Anglican leadership to re-appropriate such indigenous Ikwerre social values and political structures as title-taking and initiation rites for the service of God and humanity. For as African and Ikwerre life is interwoven. There is no dichotomy between the secular and the profane, for religion is part of the warp and woof of culture. The African, in this context, the indigenous Ikwerre, looks at a person holistically and therefore Christianity needs to retain this integrity in its teaching (Makau-Olwendo 2009:120). According to Ntetem (1987:100) "the conversion of man should not be regarded as a break at whatever cost with his past and with his tribal religion, as if to make a kind of dichotomy between light and shadow, between what is holy and what is perverted. If a cultural practice is in conflict with the Bible, then, that practice should be discouraged. If the practice has some elements that can enhance the understanding of Christian living but does contain some aspects that conflict with the Bible, then, the practice can be redeemed by deconstructing the principle behind the practice in some church programmes. This is clearly demonstrated with introduction of honorific titles by the Anglican Churches in Ikwerre land.

Andrew Walls also shares the same sentiment when he avers that "conversion is to turn what is already there in a new direction... It is not a matter of substituting something new for something old... Rather, Christian conversion involves redirecting what is already there, turning it in the direction of Christ". He cites the case of the Jerusalem believers and what they did with their Jewish inheritance and in the tabernacle. He asks rhetorically:

How was it possible in the wilderness to make the gold cherubim that symbolized the divine presence? Or whence came the gold pot that held the manna, or the vessels in the Holy of Holies? All these precious metals could have come only from the spoiling of the Egyptians. And the tabernacle curtains must have been made from the Egyptian cloth. The work of Christians is to take the materials of the heathen world and fashion them into objects for the worship and glorification of God. Thus by such means the highway of old Athens were painfully rerouted in the direction of the New Jerusalem (1997:8).

This is the ingenuity the Anglican Church in Ikwerre land has demonstrated with the introduction of the honorific title of Knighthood. The Church through the investiture of knighthood has perceptively intercommunicated cultural, socio-

ethical values in the African primal worldview and those of Medieval Europe for the worship and glorification of God.

Conclusion

As seen from our study, intercultural communications have facilitated development, enhanced inter-marriages, increased cultural awareness, promoted information technology and contributed to globalisation among others, thus it could be said that intercultural communication is a boon and not a bane, because through inter-cultural communications, inter-religious dialogue is enhanced.

However, Ejizu (2011), underscores the point that dialogue with ATR reveals the many values which are common to both Christianity and ATR which can serve as a "*Praeparatio Evangelica*" as stepping stones for introducing African adherents of ATR into the full acceptance of the Christian faith, this may not be right since inter-cultural communication enhances cross-fertilization of ideas. This however, should not be the immediate purpose of dialogue. Nor should this possible outcome be positively excluded. However, the value common to both religions unveiled through dialogue are indispensable for inculturation. There can be no serious inculturation without dialogue with ATR where our (African traditional) religious values have their natural habitat. The Christian church itself gains from this, for inculturation helps the African Christians to live in an integrated life which is truly Christian and truly African.

Most often, religious pluralism cuts across national, tribal, and at times even family line. In Nigeria, for example, people belonging to different faiths (ATR, Islam and Christianity) in the same village, town, or live in the same compounds or bloc of flats in the urban areas and even in the same family. They meet at family meetings, birth, marriage and funeral celebrations, village meetings. They work side by side in the same office, schools, factories. So that a situation for dialogue a sort of imposes itself on the people who find themselves in such situations. This immediate aim of inter-cultural communications is to work out workable comprises for co-existence and cooperation which often paper over their religious differences, in order to maintain social harmony and integration, to avoid conflicts and discord in the society.

Consequently, indigenous African Religions face the critical crises of existential proportion and with the crises arises a fundamental challenge to the humanity of Africans globally. Many indigenous African religions have become extinct, succumbing to the centuries of concerted efforts from both east, west and within

to destroy them. Every single indigenous African religion is under severe assault and is endangered and to be complacent is to actively encourage the perilous disaster waiting to happen to global African Religions. There is no doubt that African Traditional Religions are fundamental elements in terms of Africans having a positive cultural identity and hence has been a primary target for destruction in order to dehumanize and derogate the identity of African peoples globally. Forces from the East and West were in full understanding of the direct relationship between the people and their religions and with the way the people felt about, saw and related with themselves. Iconoclasm and epistemicide have been the most effective tools used throughout Africa to dispossess Africans of their religious heritage, indigenous knowledge systems, scientific heritage, cultural identity and value systems and that is exactly what this work recommends. Also, some belief systems elapsed and others remain resolute. That the good side of African traditional religion should be allowed to take place and should be incorporated into the Nigerian educational curriculum. It is clear that what is at stake is the preservation of the indigenous religions of Africa and the cultures they encapsulate, thereby making an Afrocentric connection to the natural world in a sustainable way possible.

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