

ANTHONY KANU'S IGWEBUIKE: AN ACCESS TO IGBO PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

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DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.30346.95682

Abstract

The question of inculturation of the Christian faith has been a theme that has gained acceptance especially in Africa. The focus of this article is to present practical theology through the prism of Professor Anthony Kanu's Igwebuiké theologies of ikwa ogwe and omenani. This is to further the thesis of inculturation of the Christian faith in an Igbo cultural setting, which has been made possible in the ambience of practical theology, especially as it deals with the relation between faith and lived experience. The Igwebuiké thought process as championed by Anthony Kanu, is seen in this article as an ally of theology to continue to deepen faith's comprehension as against being an abstract reality that is inaccessible.

Keywords: Anthony Kanu, *Igwebuiké*, Practical theology, Igbo culture.

Introduction

The continuous discourse on the dialogue between faith and culture in Africa is an adventure that has brought together the message of Jesus Christ and the indigenous life experiences of the people. Since the Second Vatican Council and the various African synods in the last century, a lot of progress has been made in the actualization and teachings of Christian doctrines in the African cultural settings. However, we are not to turn a blind eye to the issues of fundamentalism, religious indifference, syncretism, religious fanaticism and the rising adhesion to non-belief philosophies and creeds. This evidently points that despite the progress that has been made, a lot still needs to be done for the better cohesion of the Christian faith and the indigenous cultures of the people.

To this end, this article wishes to present from an Igbo cultural perspective, the philosophical concept of *Igwebuiké*, through the modulation it has received from

Professor Anthony Kanu, especially in the theologies of *omenani* and *ikwa ogwe*. This will be done by presenting *Igwebuiké* as a ground for practical theology from an Igbo perspective.

This article is therefore divided into four parts. The first will deal with a presentation of what practical theology is by using the definitions given by F.D Schleiermacher, Karl Rahner and Bonnie Miller-Mclemore. The second segment will briefly treat the Igbo culture and tradition, the bedrock of the Anthony Kanu's *Igwebuiké* philosophy that forms the central theme of the third segment. The last segment will present the theological insights that are found in Anthony Kanu's *Igwebuiké* theologies of *omenani* and *ikwa ogwe*.

What is practical theology?

Practical theology is a theme that has existed for quite some time beginning with Friedrich Schleiermacher who made use of the term "practical theology" in his work, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*. Schleiermacher is considered the Father of Practical Theology. As it will be seen, practical theology is not easily defined, but it is necessary to entertain the views and perspectives that have been offered to define it.

Schleiermacher defines theology as a positive science whose parts are connected to a whole by their common relation to a determinate mode of faith¹ and he defined Christian theology as "the collective embodiment of those branches of scientific knowledge and the rules of art, without the possession and application of which a harmonious guidance of the Christian Church, that is a Christian Church-Government², is not possible."³

In order to capture the meaning given to practical theology by Schleiermacher, it is important to note that, for him, there are three divisions that constitute the whole of Christian theology: Philosophical theology, Historical theology and Practical theology. Practical theology deals with the knowledge of the purpose of Christian Church-

¹ Schleiermacher, Friedrich, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, Farrer, William (Trans), T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1850, §1.

² Gräb, Wilhelm, "Practical Theology as Theology of Religion: Schleiermacher's Understanding of Practical Theology as a Discipline" in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9 (2005) 183-184ff explains two very notable concepts in Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline*: "Church government" and "leadership of the Church". He avers that Schleiermacher used the concept of leadership in a broad sense which means leadership on the level above the parish and this reality is captured by Schleiermacher's concept of "government of the Church". But the concept of leadership also applies to leadership in local congregations.

³ Schleiermacher, *ibid.*, §5.

Guidance.⁴ According to him, practical theology regulates and develops means and processes of dealing with problems and situations brought under the notion of Church-Guidance.⁵ Schleiermacher's understanding of practical theology as a methodologic science, as "technology" or "rule of art", led him to aver that not everyone is a practical theologian nor is theory of practice to be equated to it. Wilhelm Gräb captures it succinctly in his explanation that a practical theologian is one who reflects upon the practical life of the Church methodologically and in this way is shaping and contributing to the life of the Church.⁶

Karl Rahner defined practical theology as a theological discipline that is concerned with the Church's self-actualization both here and now. For Rahner, this self-actualization is done through theological illumination. He continues by stating that practical theology is a reflection oriented towards the committal relationship between theory and practice. Therefore, it is not only referred to the application of the results but also the process of reflection that precedes it. It is an ecclesial discipline since it is realized in the Church, by the Church and for the Church.⁷ There are two points that are worth highlighting in this definition presented by Rahner.

The first has to do with the concern of self-actualization this theological discipline has for the Church. The ability to be self-actualized also remits to her origin in the Trinity and how she understands her identity as an agent of salvation on earth and her responsibility in serving the greater purpose of the realization of the Kingdom of God. The role of the Church in the society requires her to be actualized on how she interprets her identity to the society today. It is important for the Church to show her relevance to the world today especially in the progression and growth that the society is experiencing, the change and the rise of various ideological perspectives, the economic imbalance that continues to exist among nations. It is also necessary for the Church to be self-actualized especially in her encounter with various culture, the preaching of the gospel and its magisterial responsibility in those cultures where she has found a home. This is to help in promoting the distinctive aspect of her faith from which she can rightly interact with cultural elements in a communicative and dialogical manner.

⁴ Schleiermacher, *ibid.*, §25.

⁵ Schleiermacher, *ibid.*, §260.

⁶ Gräb, *Ibid.*, 184.

⁷ Rahner, Karl, *Theological Investigations IX*, 6.

The second has to do with the committal relationship between theory and practice.⁸ When there is a separation and non-agreement between theory and reality, we are faced with the problem of ineffectiveness and from the theological point of view, it is a disadvantage to the gospel and doctrines if the reality is not positively affected by the word preached. The dangers of fundamentalism and dogmatism must come to mind as the resultant effect of the distance between theory and practice. Most times, this distance between the discourse and the reality is not due to ignorance or human errors but rather, the lack of insufficient theological evaluation of what is obtainable.⁹ Practical theology, in the definition of Karl Rahner, therefore helps to bridge the gap and distance that usually occurs between theory and practice since this will involve the presentation of reality as it is and what it should be. It drives at a theological analysis of a particular present situation in which the Church is to carry out the special self-actualization appropriate to it at any given moment.¹⁰

Bonnie Miller-Mclemore presents four connected definitions of practical theology. Practical theology refers to an activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday; a method or way of understanding or analyzing theology in practice used by religious leaders and by teachers and students across the theological curriculum; a curricular area in theological education focused on ministerial practice and subspecialties; and, finally, an academic discipline pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to support and sustain these first three enterprises.¹¹

She believes that theology should be studied in practice as it has become evident that practice is of vital necessity in contemporary education. More of this is understood as she dealt with some misunderstandings about practical theology while offering corrective measures.¹² According to Bonnie, the multifaceted nature of practical theology makes it

⁸ In agreement with the opinion that there is no straight line from theory to practice Cf. Cahalan, Kathleen A., - Mikoski, Gordon S., "Introduction", Cahalan, Kathleen A., - Mikoski, Gordon S (Eds.), in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Roman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD 2014, 2.

⁹ Audinet, Jacques, "¿Qué es una teología práctica?" in Lauret, Bernard – Refoulé, François, *Iniciación a la práctica de la teología*, Cristiandad⁵, Madrid 1986, 189.

¹⁰ Rahner, Karl *op.cit.*

¹¹ Miller-Mclemore, Bonnie J., "The contributions of Practical Theology" in Miller-Mclemore, Bonnie J (Ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, West Sussex 2012, 5.

¹² Miller-Mclemore, Bonnie J., "Five misunderstandings about Practical Theology" in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16 (2012) 5-26. In this article, Bonnie delineates five misunderstandings about practical theology: "1. Practical theology is a marginalized discipline with a serious identity crisis; (2) the problem with practical theology and theological education is the clerical paradigm; (3) practical and pastoral theology are interchangeable terms; (4) practical theology is impossible to define or, inversely, can be defined simply (e.g., study of the relationship between beliefs and practices); and (5)

difficult to have a concise definition, a fact that should not be judged negatively for aside the definition of it as “the study of the relationship between beliefs and practices” or “the correlation between the Christian tradition and contemporary experience”, practical theology should be seen as the discipline that redefines what constitutes theological knowledge.¹³

In another article where she critically analyzed the conceptions of practical theology by some theologians, Bonnie Miller-McClemore tries to respond to the question of how practical theology understands and contributes to the study of both religion and theology. And I think it helps to further the general understanding of the discipline of practical theology. Miller-McClemore avers that understanding theology in the midst of the everyday life and activity is a key task of practical theology but that this theology should not be held solidly as if it belongs predominately in the Church and not the academy. For her, in the words of Gräb, “Practical theology can recognize religious forms “beyond the expressly theological and churchly”¹⁴, which means that both the society and the Church form the arena where practical theology identifies its subject matter.¹⁵

The question of Christian practical theology's definition is set in the tone of the dialectical relationship between the lived experience¹⁶ of the people in a society and the Church and

practical theology is largely, if not wholly, descriptive, empirical, interpretative, and not normative, theological, and in some cases (dare I say) Christian”. These misunderstandings are what she tries to correct by averring, firstly, that there is a growing increase and appreciation in the use of practice to impart knowledge. Secondly, it is important to view the plight of defining practical theology from the problem of intellectualism that distorts how religious knowledge is learned, conveyed and practiced (15). Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize that practical theology is distinct from pastoral theology even though they have identical theoretical assumptions and historical roots whereas the former is integrative, concerned about broader issues of ministry, discipleship and formation the latter is person and pathos-centered (18). In addition to these redefinitions and corrections, she adds that the difficulty of defining practical theology does not mean that it is an invalid enterprise but rather it highlights its complex and extended responsibilities. However, its definition can only be achieved when its uses are clearly differentiated. This will foster better understanding and clarification (23). And finally, she addresses the fifth misunderstanding of practical theology more as a lapse on the part of practical theologians on the lack of concrete theological quality attached to the objective of practical theology. In her correction she opines that practical theology is normative because “it makes demand on those who practice it to live by the sacred and transcendent convictions it professes” (25).

¹³ Miller-McClemore, Bonnie J., “Five misunderstandings about Practical Theology”, 20.

¹⁴ Miller-McClemore, Bonnie J., “Toward greater understanding of Practical theology” in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16 (2012) 107.

¹⁵ Miller-McClemore, *ibid.*, 110.

¹⁶ Hembrock, Hans-Günter, “Practical theology as empirical theology” in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 14 (2011) 161 defines lived experience as human experience rooted in perception,

the faith that accompanies it. It is, as Karl Rahner states, the relationship between theory and practice, whereby our lived experiences and practices beyond the confines of the faith of the Church and its doctrines can also influence and deepen our understanding of the teachings of the Church. And coming from an African perspective, this is a vital identity and outlook theology must have in order for it to be adequately communicative. As far as Africa is concerned, theology and theologians have a role to play in excavating the “practical” of the Christian faith- insofar as it relates to our experience.

But it also implies the responsibility to improve in and confront our African experiential realities also from the basis of the faith we have received from the Church. Kwame Bediako puts this idea perfectly by stating that:

“We cannot artificially create an African theology or even plan it; it must evolve spontaneously as the Church teaches and lives her faith and in response to the extremely complex situation in Africa...”¹⁷

This evidently brings about the renewal of the outlook and viewpoint of theology in general whereby it continues to stretch beyond its zone to interact with other disciplines in the academic setting and with reinvigorated zeal and enthusiasm dialogue with different cultures, ideologies and creeds.

The Igbo culture and tradition

The presence of faith and praxis in the discipline and activity of practical theology cannot be overemphasized and this is the important element of the first section. Since practical theology requires that these two realities- faith and praxis- be in constant dialogue, it is necessary that they are understood within the context where they are found. Therefore, an attempt at practical theology as far as faith and praxis are concerned, implies that the context in which these two relate must be understood. The practical theologian should embark on an adventure in discovering for him or herself the culture or the homestead where faith is received and lived out.¹⁸

The Igbo culture found predominately among the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria is the designated homestead of faith and praxis- two elements of practical theology and we shall try to give descriptive notes of this Igbo practical theology in this segment but this

not in an abstract or intellectualistic manner but in a situated mode of being of a finite body subject which is living and perceiving the world in a specific spatial situation.

¹⁷ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Regnum Books, Oxford 1992, 311.

¹⁸ Cf. Nwachukwu, Daisy, “West Africa”, in Miller-Mclemore, Bonnie J (Ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, West Sussex 2012, 515ff.

will be done after we must have said a few things about this culture and to do this, one needs to understand the general Igbo worldview.¹⁹

To talk about an Igbo worldview is to move into exploring the beliefs, religious practices and the life of the Igbo people. One thing that must be said is that all aspects of the life of the Igbo people are interconnected and they are nourished based on this understanding of interconnectedness among them. The religious beliefs cannot stand alone nor apart from the cultural system, neither is practical life nor lived experience dissociated from immaterial reality. Traditional festivals are garbed with religious significances and meanings for they provide the people the opportunity to celebrate the providence, sustenance and protection of the divine. In the daily lives of the Igbo people, there is the ever-present consciousness of the divine, the ethical codes and norms are enshrined not just by the idea of the good of the community and the society but that the spirits are invested in the destiny of the people. It is important to ask after the religious belief of the Igbo people as this will help usher one into their worldview.

That the Igbo are a religious people is a statement of fact²⁰ and tied to this fact is the undeniable belief in the existence of a Supreme Being- *Chukwu Okike* or *Chineke*, which goes on to prove that the Igbo are monotheist²¹, as there are a good number of academic materials testifying to this.²² The relationship this Supreme Being has with man has gone

¹⁹ Cf. Uchendu, Victor C., *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York 1965, 11.

²⁰ Nwala, T. U., *Igbo Philosophy: Philosophy of the Igbo-speaking peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Triatlantic Books, New York 2010, 219.

²¹ Contrary to the idea presented by Uchendu, *op. cit.*, 94, who qualifies the Igbo religion as polytheist- beliefs in the existence of and the worship of more than one god. This thesis does not represent the identity of the Igbo Traditional Religious perspective given that it believes in one Supreme Being to whom all things belong and is the origin of all that exists unlike the idea one is presented with from the ancient Greek and Hellenistic religions. However, it must be said that that this monotheistic identity is not as rigidly held as in the Abrahamic religions. The Supreme Being in Igbo religion, *Chukwu*, has with him other deities that share in his responsibilities but this is not to mean that they are in equal in rank and power with him. A laconic explanation is given by Francis Arinze "God is the supreme Spirit, the creator of everything. No one equals Him in power. He knows everything. He is altogether a good and merciful God and does harm to no one. He sends rain and especially children, and it is from him that each individual derives his personal 'Chi'. But this Supreme Spirit has made many inferior spirits who are nearer to man and through whom man normally offers his worship to Him. (*Sacrifice in Ibo religion*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan 1970, 10).

²² Arinze, Francis, *Sacrifice in Ibo religion*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan 1970; Metuh, Emefie, "The Supreme God in Igbo life and worship" in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 5 (1973) 1-11; Ubah, C. N., "The Supreme Being, Divinities and Ancestors in Igbo Traditional Religion: Evidence from Otanchara and Otanzu" in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 52 (1982) 90-105; Azuonye,

on to be questioned as there have been views that presented *Chukwu* as a distant God in the life of the Igbo people. But the Igbo are conscious of the presence and interest of *Chukwu* in their lives- a consciousness that does not deny his ontological transcendence. The closeness and the presence of *Chukwu* can be proven by how the Igbo people use the name “Chukwu”²³ as prefixes or suffixes to their personal names. But this is not just found in the personal names but also the divine presence is experienced in the morning rituals of thanksgiving, the constant supplication and prayers for protection and guidance, the responses to greetings and enquiries on how one’s family and business is going.²⁴

The structure and the functioning of the universe is also an important aspect in the Igbo epistemology and this is driven chiefly by the idea that everything is ordered, that is, an intrinsic rationality that underlies the universe which gives the universe its ordered structure. For the Igbo people, the universe is not a product of chance neither does it react without a reason. The Igbo tradition believes in the smooth order and coordination of things and realities in their respective places and when everything is ordered, balance and equilibrium is achieved.²⁵ The universe, in the Igbo tradition, is structured according to

Chukwuma, “Igbo folktales and the evolution of the idea of *Chukwu* as the Supreme God of Igbo Religion” in *Nsukka Journal of Linguistics and African Languages* 1 (1987) 43-62; Orji, John N., “Sacred Authority in Igbo Society” in *Archives de sciences sociales des* 34 (1989) 113-123; Nwala, T. U., *Igbo Philosophy: Philosophy of the Igbo-speaking peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Trialantic Books, New York 2010; Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Towards and Igbo-African Christology: A Cultural Christological Construct in Post-Missionary Africa*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Mauritius 2017, 17ff.; “Chi n’eye ndu: Understanding God in an Igbo-African category” in *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4 (2018) 202-218; “Igbo-African Gods and Goddesses” in *Nnadiabube Journal of Philosophy* 2 (2018) 118-146; Okeke, Chukwuma O., – Ibenwa, Christopher N., - Okeke, Gloria Tochukwu, “Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo example” in *Sage Open* 7 (2017) 1-10; Ndiukwu, Aloysius Eberechukwu, *Authenticity of Belief in African (Igbo) Traditional Religion. A critical appraisal in the light of Christian faith*, Peter Lang GmbH, Frankfurt am Main 2014, 160-173.

²³ It is important to note that “Chukwu” is not the only name used in the address of the Supreme God as there are other popular names like “Olise bi n’enu”, “Ezechitaoke”. (Cf. Arinze, *op.cit.*, 9).

²⁴ Metuh, “The Supreme God in Igbo life and worship”, 2-3.

²⁵ It is not entirely clear what Uchendu. *op.cit.*, 10. points to when he says “The world as a natural order which inexorably goes on its ordained way according to a “master plan” is foreign to Igbo conceptions”. This is could be mean that the Igbo people do not entirely depend on a teleological interpretation of the universe, driven to a final cause- a response to the question “why was the universe created” as we have in the Christian faith that understands the reason of the creation of the universe under the benevolent desire of God who wants created entities to participate in his blessedness. It could be postulated that the reasons for the absence of a clear-cut teleological reason for the universe in the Igbo tradition are that: firstly, life is unending although can be transformed after death and funeral rites

extension and realms. By extension, the universe is structured into *Igwe* (The Heaven, sky) and *Uwa* (The Earth); its structure according to realms is given as these: *Ala mmuo* (land of the spirits) and *Ala madu* (the human world).²⁶

The socio-political setting of the Igbo society is generally patriarchal and republican with a special interest directed towards the good of the community and according to Nwala, the most important aspect of the community is the human element.²⁷ The traditional Igbo community understands and values the concept of hierarchy and this is found in various spheres of associations, families and the town structures. The village, is a sub-group of a town and it is autonomous in its mode of governance. Each village is comprised of various kin-based lineages who belong to the same patrilineal root.²⁸ The family, which is the smallest social unit of the traditional Igbo society, is structured and centered hierarchically around *Nna*, the father, whose duty is to be the head of his family, the upholder of the values and tradition of the people, the representative of the family in the public sphere. In the wider social unit, in the kin-lineage, for instance, there is always a head, *okpala*, who represents the entire family and carries out the duty of being the symbol of presence and unity to all who belong to the same kindred. In summary, the Igbo political community is an organic one that is sustained by various factors like common land and economic ties, blood relations, a mythical charter that provides an ideological legitimacy for the political order.²⁹

While it is stated that the Igbo society is patriarchal, it is important to understand that this does not translate to considering the Igbo society as one absolutely dominated by the male figure, rather it must be seen in the light of dynamic and vibrant representations of other realities within the society. The matrilineal institution in the Igbo society is never overlooked and the role of women- mothers and daughters- in each community is as important and vital as the role of the menfolk. This is linked to the strong effect of idea of the fact that one cannot live without the other, an idea that will be looked into while discussing *Igwebuike*.

have taken place. Secondly, the presence of the belief in reincarnation. And finally, the place and admiration of human hard work in determining the order of the universe.

²⁶ Nwala, T. U., *Igbo Philosophy*, 76.

²⁷ Nwala, *ibid*, 315.

²⁸ For illustration purposes, Abatete is one of the towns in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State. Abatete is comprised of four villages: Nsukwu, Agbaja, Odida and Ogbu. In Ogbu, these are the communities in it: Ogbu-ikwelle, Enu-ogbu, Ire-Ogbu, Umulich, Orofia and Umuebeke. Each of these communities have their various *umunnas*. In Ogbu-ikwelle, for instance, we have Ubahu, Obalacetiti and Uhuani.

²⁹ Nwala, T.U., *ibid*, 316.

The Igbo people have a strong sense of community and communality but not at the detriment of the individual and republican identity and this is because the community protects the interest of the individuals in the group and at the same time seeks the common good. The people work in the community to maintain the central unity and all who belong to the community have equal rights and privileges. This is possible because the idea the Igbo people have about life, is that it is a shared reality in which everyone contributes to the growth and increase of the human person and the community at large.³⁰

Understanding the dynamics of existence in the Igbo community is what will be done in the section that follows using the *Igwebuiké* idea. The *Igwebuiké* philosophical concept until in the last decade had not really come into the academic limelight of philosophical and cultural discussion and credits need to be given to Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, the academic midwife of *Igwebuiké* philosophy who continues to labor to give this Igbo cultural idea an opportunity to be heard and be interacted with, not just within the Igbo circle but also to in the greater academic African circles.

Anthony Kanu's *Igwebuiké* philosophical paradigm

The term *Igwebuiké* is a well-known concept among the Igbo people, a thoughtful idea that permeates and inspires existence and activity in Igbo land. *Igwebuiké* is not a new word or concept, however its novelty in the Igbo-African academic circle is owed to Professor Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu who continues to evolve in thought and reach of this indigenous Igbo cultural philosophical idea. *Igwebuiké*, an Igbo philosophical concept which can also be assumed as a personal name, is composed of three Igbo words viz: *Igwe-* multitude, *bu-* is and *ike-* strength. From this, we can etymologically deduce that *Igwebuiké* means that there is strength in number or in unity there is strength.³¹ While this is the general panoramic view of *Igwebuiké*, it is important to highlight the various perspectives from which Anthony Kanu has tried to not only explain this Igbo philosophical and cultural concept but also in the ways he has applied it.

For Anthony Kanu, *Igwebuiké* refers to the strength in solidarity and complementarity that exists or should exist in the human relations and society³² and these two words- solidarity

³⁰ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuiké as an Igbo-African ethic of reciprocity" in *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5 (2019) 9-16; Ndiukwu, Aloysius Eberechukwu, *Authenticity of Belief in African (Igbo) Traditional Religion*, 262ff.

³¹ Ugonwafor, Chukwuebuka Charles, "The Blessed Trinity and Igwebuiké philosophy" in *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5 (2019) 108.

³² Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuiké and the question of superiority in the scientific community of knowledge" in *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3 (2017) 108.

and complementarity- are pivotal to his explanation and application of the *Igwebuike* idea which must be comprehended in first of all in the general purview of ontology.³³ Kanu's metaphysical comprehension of reality from an Igbo-African perspective has helped shape his presentation of *Igwebuike*. In the Igbo-African ontology, according to Kanu, reality is subsumed into these categories: *Muo* (Spirit), *Mmadu* (Human being), *Anu* (Animal), *Ihe* (Thing), *Ebe* (Place), *Oge* (Time) and *Uzo* (Modality or Manner of being)³⁴ in these categories, everything is in relation to the other except the Creator.³⁵ *Igwebuike*, according to Kanu, is a mode of being that signals existence-in-relation to the other or being-with-the other, it captures the Igbo philosophy of relationality, complementarity and interconnectedness of reality which is characteristic of traditional Igbo-African worldview where inclusiveness, community and interpersonal structures are valued³⁶ and that makes it more meaningful as he summarily perceives *Igwebuike* from a literal and linguistic point of view as *otu obi* (one heart and soul, cor unum et anima una).³⁷

Igwebuike in Kanu's submission is a reality that we can perceive including in the human body. He used the dimensions of the brain- the Olympic and the Neocortex- that deal with different questions that the human being is faced with and each of these function in their capacity to help with the rational identity of the human being. This singular characteristic of the brain underlines a fundamental promotion that *Igwebuike* does, which is the search for inclusivity and the satisfaction that is gained when inclusiveness is maintained and acquired.³⁸

This value for inclusivity is perceived not just in the human brain but also in the physiological and metaphysical structure of the human person. For from the physiological perspective, there is need for every part of the human body to be available and functional, we describe as healthy when all these parts are available and functional. The inclusive

³³ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Sources of *Igwebuike* philosophy: Towards a socio-cultural foundation" in *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 9 (2017) 1.

³⁴ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuike and being in Igbo ontology" in *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4 (2018) 12-21.

³⁵ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "The Dimensions of *Igwebuike*" in *IGWEBUIKE: An African journal of Arts and Humanities* 6 (2020) 2.

³⁶ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African ethic of reciprocity", 12; "Igwebuike as a conceptualization of Igbo-African Worldview" in Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony (Ed.), *Igwebuike philosophy and complementary relations*, AuthorHouse, Bloomington IN 2022, 9-10.

³⁷ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *IGWEBUIKE: An operative condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture. Towards a thermodynamic transformation ontology*, Maiden Inaugural Lecture, Tansian University, Umunya 2021, 21.

³⁸ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African philosophy of inclusive leadership" in *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3 (2017) 174.

nature and activity of the head, hands, legs, kidneys will always determine the health of the human being hence the reason why when one of these parts is not available or functional, the human body cannot be said to be fully healthy. The same goes for the metaphysical structure of the human person. As it is known, the human person is a composite of body and soul- the material and the immaterial. It cannot be said that the human person is without a body nor can it be said the human person exists without the immaterial aspect, the soul. The value of inclusivity, as posited by Kanu, is one that permeates every fiber of our existence and *Igwebuike* is the Igbo-African vehicle that transmits to us that different components or parts of reality need to be part of the overall identity of reality and none should be discarded.

Igwebuike is a product of the community and the society. It is not a term or a concept without foundation. It came about through reflection on and experience about life in general but from Kanu's perspective we must refer to the sources of this concept especially as it concerns us in the academic circle.

According to Kanu, the *Igwebuike* philosophy has its roots in various areas of the experience and reflections in African philosophy and this is seen by the fact that *Igwebuike* philosophy springs from African proverbs, folktales, names, songs, symbols, mythology and academic African philosophers.³⁹

In all of these, there is a basic focal point that it resonates and this is the message of relationality or the relational character that is present in beings. Existence and activity are understood in the terms and context of relation- Kanu presents *Igwebuike* in such a way that it argues that "to be is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. To be is to be

³⁹ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Sources of *Igwebuike* philosophy", 1-23. In this article, Kanu studied these sources in order to highlight how they uniquely contribute to its development. This was done on the foundation and knowledge that Africa has its own unique way of life and manner of interpreting its experience of life, death and other realities that shape it. This is a further recognition of that which is "particularly African". However, it is important to keep in mind that not all that has to do with Africa are to be considered philosophies, for philosophy requires a rational examination on these facets of the African reality and so *Igwebuike*, a rationally examined thought, is an offspring of the various aspects earlier on highlighted. A clear example that can be used to drive this home is the illustration of the Kola nut (*cola acuminata*) used by Kanu. The kola nut, a very important fruit in the Igbo culture, symbolizes life but Kanu points to a very outstanding element and which "is a symbol of communion, not just among the living, but also between the living and the dead" and that "in a traditional sense it is the Igbo sacramental communion" (16). This is an ambience in which dialogue can take place between the doctrine of the Church on the Eucharist and the Kola nut in Igbo culture as fundamental elements of communion.

with the other in a community of beings".⁴⁰ This thesis is further strengthened by the idea of the characteristics of unity, sharing and community that the Igbo worldview possesses⁴¹ and also resonates with the postulation of J. S Mbiti "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am".⁴² It is obvious, therefore, that *Igwebuiké* which is the consequence of experiences enshrined in names, myths, folklores and proverbs of African roots in the Igbo traditional cultural setting, also shares basic ideological tenets with philosophical ideas of other cultures in Africa.

In Kanu's conception of *Igwebuiké* as a manner and modality of being, we can be certain that he uses it to highlight and further the need for inter-relation in the society, in the relationship of man with others. This relationship also extends to that point of convergence between the personal realities and the universal world, it departs from the positive belief that there is an interaction between the human person and the universe in which he or she is found in. This interaction, as Kanu posits, is conceptualized in *Igwebuiké*.⁴³ *Igwebuiké* is devoted to preaching the need for continual inclusivity, solidarity and attitude of complementarity in every sphere of human life. These are important aspects of the Igbo traditional society, that no one exists alone but with others and this philosophy is not an abstract idea but a fruit of the practical and lived experiences of the people as to what life entails.

The theological in Anthony Kanu's *Igwebuiké* philosophy

The idea that has been given in the foregone segments is that *Igwebuiké* is a culturally themed concept. This cultural ambience in which *Igwebuiké* is borne and nourished, as can be deduced, constructs its knowledge of life and reality from an experiential dimension, that is, a dimension that is accessible principally to the senses. This is to aver that with *Igwebuiké*, as a cultural idea, we are not dealing with an *a priori* theological idea since it does not depend on revealed truths and divine inspiration.

However, this clarification that has been made does not mean that there are no elements of revealed truths in *Igwebuiké* neither are we moving for an *Igwebuiké* that is closed within itself and contented with merely the sensual. *Igwebuiké* is cosmopolitan in nature. It is interdisciplinary in belief. The theological is present in *Igwebuiké* but it needs to be

⁴⁰ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *A Hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, Theology and Philosophy*, Augustinian Publications, Jos 2015, 67.

⁴¹ Iroegbu, Pantaleon, *Metaphysics. The Kpim of Philosophy*, International Universities Press, Owerri 1995, 345ff.

⁴² Mbiti, John S, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Anchor Books, New York 1970, 141.

⁴³ Kanu, Anthony Ikechukwu, "Igwebuiké as a conceptualization of Igbo-African Worldview", 14.

unearthed and I believe that Anthony Kanu presented some theological insights we can find in *Igwebuiké* philosophy. Kanu mentions “*Igwebuiké* theology” in some of his articles and has used it to talk about the understanding of *Omenani*⁴⁴ and *Ikwa ogwe*⁴⁵, two realities in the Igbo culture. *Igwebuiké* theology is, according to Kanu, “a quest to arrive at a unique understanding of faith in Christ in such a way that it captures the African worldview and his or her life circumstances”. It is intended to make theology more contextual and help it become more comprehensible to the African.⁴⁶

In the article on the *Igwebuiké* theology of *Omenani*, which is influenced by St. Justin the Martyr’s *Logos spermatikos*, Kanu avers that the African culture, and in a more concrete term the Igbo culture, already had the Seed of the Word of God embedded in it even before the advent of Christianity and her missionaries, but unfortunately, it was not properly utilized by the missionaries in their task of evangelization because of their lack of openness to the African culture and religion.⁴⁷ What the *Igwebuiké* thought process offers theologically, in the position of Kanu, in the confines of mission and evangelization is the value of the correct understanding of the culture in which the Christian message is targeted at and what it does in the long term is to make the message of Christ feel at home in the African culture.

This is possible due to the contextual perception *Igwebuiké* has its method in marrying culture and faith. Therefore, in *Igwebuiké* theology, *omenani* is not discarded nor considered unworthy in the quest of seeking a home for the Christian faith and gospel. *Igwebuiké* theology, following the submission of Anthony Kanu, opens up the dynamic nature of receptivity, openness, correlation and hospitality of *omenani* in the Igbo culture but importantly, it helps Christian missionaries and theologians discover that the Seed of the Word of God is present in *omenani*.⁴⁸

This is also linked to the labor of inculturation that is facilitated by the bridge building method of *Igwebuiké* theology that connects the Word of God with the culture.⁴⁹ *Igwebuiké* theology fosters this companionship between culture and faith, because it

⁴⁴ This refers to the traditional beliefs and practices of the Igbo people in general.

⁴⁵ It is an Igbo word that refers to the act and process of bridge building.

⁴⁶ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, “*Igwebuiké Theology of Omenani* and the missionary bifurcation of horizons” in *Ogirisi: A Journal of African Studies* 16 (2020) 131; “*Igwebuiké Theology of Ikwa ogwe* and the inculturation of the Gospel message”, in *Ogirisi: A Journal of African Studies* 16 (2020) 17.

⁴⁷ Kanu, “*Igwebuiké Theology of Omenani* and the missionary bifurcation of horizons”, 127.

⁴⁸ Kanu, *ibid.*, 137ff.

⁴⁹ Kanu, “*Igwebuiké Theology of Ikwa ogwe* and the inculturation of the Gospel message”, 17.

presents the complementary nature of being in the cultural setting which is, as Kanu avers, the pre-condition for the attainment of true knowledge and gaining insight into reality.⁵⁰

In order to talk about the theological in *Igwebuike*, we also need to focus on the values that *Igwebuike* offers us. When we refer to *Igwebuike*, we also want to see it from the various aspects of its effects.

- *Igwebuike* is theological because it is a place of communion. Its essence is in the ability to convoke and invite divergent realities and situations to unity. It flows in the spirit of excavating reasons and points of convergence and harmony.
- *Igwebuike* is theological because it stands for the participation of everyone. It understands differences but it has the capacity to use it for the advantage of all and sundry. *Igwebuike* does not seek to annul difference nor does it seek to segregate. It believes that complementarity can only make sense when participation is duly recognized by all parties.
- *Igwebuike* believes in dialogue and reconciliation. This is a theological element that continues to be relevant to us in our society today. It offers warring factions an opportunity to come to the table and engage one another in honesty and reasonability.
- *Igwebuike*, even though it believes in the right ordering of hierarchy and its position, it does not seek to be absolute nor dictatorial. It believes that everyone must be carried along and it is not just the mere democratic process of the majority having their way after the minority have had their say.

Conclusion

This piece has focused on presenting Anthony Kanu's thought on *Igwebuike*, an Igbo philosophical concept, as an access that gives rise to a practical theology that is Igbo originated. This follows from the demands of practical theology of a harmonious relationship between theory and practice, between faith and culture especially in an Igbo-African context that values lessons from experience and daily activities.

The article began with the presentation of various ideas on practical theology from F. D. Schleiermacher, Karl Rahner and Bonnie Miller-Mclemore. The ideas of the Karl Rahner and Bonnie Miller-Mclemore on practical theology differ from the church governance of Schleiermacher. Given that practical theology requires a reflective dialogue between the Christian faith and the life of the Christian, it is believed that Anthony Kanu's philosophical application of *Igwebuike* qualifies to be that necessary ingredient that

⁵⁰ Kanu, *ibid.*, 23.

fosters meeting between the daily lived experiences of the people from an Igbo perspective and the possibility of a theological enterprise that is at home with and comprehensible to both the culture in particular and the faith of the Church in general. The Christian faith, as far as it is evangelical and missional, needs all the cultural alliance it can get in order for its message to be understood and comprehended better. This is what *Igwebuiké* offers and Anthony Kanu has also presented some of its theological capacity in the theologies of *omenani* and *ikwa ogwe*.

The task, especially for the Igbo- African theologian, is to apply this in more theological discourses that affect the Church, the faith and the Christian faithful in today's society.

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