

**IGWEBUIKE: AN AFRICAN EXPRESSION OF COMMUNITY LIFE  
AMONG RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES**

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**Abstract**

*This work examines Igwebuiké philosophy as an African expression of community life among religious institutes. It is common in Africa to live together while paying attention to culture, language, origin, common background and sharing. This is the idea that Igwebuiké Philosophy stand to remind us. However, Religious communities have similar expressions especially in living and sharing things in common keeping in mind their common vocation, constitutions and charism. This work nevertheless stands to see how Igwebuiké philosophy finds a place in the community life of religious Institutes. It was later suggested that Igwebuiké Philosophy should guide Religious communities in times of conflict.*

**Key words:** Igwebuiké, African, Expression, Philosophy, Community Life, Religious Institutes.

**Introduction**

This philosophy according to Kanu I.A (2017) means “when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful and can constitute an insurmountable force. Its English equivalents are solidarity and complementarity. It is anchored on the African worldview, which is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Life is a life of *sharedness*”. Religious life is a way of life for whoever is comfortable to live it. This entails total commitment to the chosen congregation. Members come together to follow Christ according to the specific constitution.

As members of a specific religious community, they share a common vocation, a common mission, a common charism. As one body, and not individually, they are called to leave this common vocation mission charism. Here lies the absolute

necessity of mutual accompaniment of the charismatic following of Christ. And mutual love among religious cannot take a more concrete and a more evangelical expression that mutual accompaniment in the Charismatic journey. Now, mutual accompaniment in following Christ requires, above all, that there should be communication among members and mutual understanding. There is always a constant reminder by words and by life of witnessing of the community charismatic journey. Personal experiences must be regularly shared in relation to this common journey. It is equally important to inspire and challenge one another to carry on with the journey more faithfully and creatively.

### **Igwebuike Philosophy and Community Life among Religious Institutes**

Igwebuike Philosophy emphasises common life and sharing. As in the description of the philosophy itself by its authour, "Life is a life of *sharedness*" this view is not difficult to be compared with what religious institutes practice in reality especially in Africa. Communal life is not strange to African way of live. They live every moment together in a family manner. Children who are brought up in this type of situation may not find religious life difficult to life. Religious life is a stable life approved by the Catholic Church for men and women who are ready to be fully dedicated to God in the service of humanity. They live together in a house, sharing things in common. Religious life is a way of life, a life style to all who have embraced it. As Vanier (1991) describes it, one of the signs of life in a community is the creation of links with others. An inward-looking community will die of suffocation. Living communities are linked to others, making up a huge reservoir of love for the world. And as only the one spirit inspires and gives life, communities being born or reborn will be alike without ever even knowing each other; the seeds the spirit sows across the world, like prophetic signs for tomorrow, have a common source. It is a sign of maturity for a community to blind itself in friendship with others.

Igwebuike philosophy is anchored on the African worldview, which is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny as analysed by Kanu I.A (2017). This is much related the constitution of the Sisters of St Michael Archangel congregation describe the community life and encourage her members to live it. "They shall be truly present to one another and share their life of prayer and service. Their sensitivity to one another and good inter-communication shall make possible the trust and

love which characterised a living community in understanding, forgiveness and acceptance." Vanier (1991) gave a beautiful description of how Africans live the communal and religious life. This comes through their rituals and traditions. Each person has a sense of belonging to the other; men of the same ethnic origin or village are truly brothers. Most Africans do not need to talk about community, they live it intensely.

Most of the times, they have common apostolates but regularly return home to evaluate, discuss and share their experiences of the each day in a spirit of support and encouragement to each other. Their life of sharing is shown in community prayers, sharing meals, attending functions together and mainly in given moral support to one another in good and bad times. Sharing in community life involves material and non-material goods. Material good comes in form of what they need day in day out to achieve their apostolates. In the non-material: the spiritual gifts with which the Spirit lavishes each one of us. In other words, those living this type of life are concerned with faith-life experiences. Sharing faith-life experiences is a question of being able to impart to others.

When the members of a community are living in communion, it is a sign of the presence of God. Jesus came to reveal to humanity that God is not a solitary, eternal being, contemplating his own glory: he is not just an extraordinary Creator of a beautiful yet painful universe. God is a family of three; three persons in communion one with another, giving themselves totally one to another, each one relative to the other. And God created man and woman as a sign of the Trinity; he created them to be in communion, one with the other, in this way reflecting between father, son and Holy spirit: 'that they may be one, as the father and I are one' {John17:11}.

The religious community is an atmosphere of joy that comes from the fact that everyone feels free to be themselves in the deepest sense. Members have no need to play a role, to pretend to be better than the others, to demonstrate prowess in order to be loved. They do not have to hide a whole part of themselves behind barriers and masks. Community members come out to use their talents when the need arises because members are developed according to talents. A community is not simply a group of people who live together and love each other. It is a place of resurrection, a current of life: one heart one soul, one spirit. It is people, very different one from another, who love each other and who are all reaching towards the same hope and celebrating the same love. This is what brings the special atmosphere of joy and welcome which characterizes the true community.

Pulickattil B (2004) feels that in a religious community the plan of God for the community or for the individual religious, here and now, is found out by fraternally seeking together. Open and sincere sharing together by shedding one's own petty interest, unfolds what is the best for the building of the kingdom of God.

However, Canilang (2005) describe as a place where everyone- or, in the real sense, the majority is emerging from the shadows of egocentricity to the light of a real love. Love is neither sentimental nor a passing emotion. It is the recognition of a covenant, of a mutual belonging. It is listening to others, being concerned for them and feeling empathy with them. It is to see their beauty and to reveal it to them. It means answering their call and their deepest needs. It means feeling and suffering with them- weeping when they weep, rejoicing when they rejoice. Loving people means being happy when they are there, sad when they are not. It is living in each other, taking refuge in each other. 'Love is a power for unity', And if love means moving towards each other, it also and above all means moving together in the same direction, hoping and wishing for the same things. Love means sharing the same vision and the same ideal. So it means wanting others to fulfil themselves, according to God's plan and in service to other people. It means wanting them to be faithful to their own calling, free to love in all the dimensions of their being.

There we have two poles of community: a sense of belonging to each other and a desire that each of us goes further in our own gift to God and to others, a desire for more light in us, and a deeper truth and peace.

The community is enriched by the members' different viewpoints, ideas, sensitivities, attitudes, behaviors, and so forth. This is so when they approach their differences from the perspective of complementarity and communion. Communion and complementarity banish jealousy and envy, because everyone is led to rejoice in the good of others; everyone is led to the conviction that, precisely because of their Moreover, a sense of communion which values complementarity generates mutual trust that eliminates suspicion and negative judgements. In turn, mutual trust nourishes communion.

The idea of running a common purse is equally emphasized in community. This is real in the sense that whatever one earns belong to all. With this idea, the need of individual can be met. This can be likened to number is strength' or 'number is

power' that this philosophy is emphasising. The contribution of each member of the lining community to the life of individual may not be easily described. It makes life easy and burden light. Meeting the urgent needs of members comes in both moral and financial support.

The three evangelical counsels of the religious life (Poverty, Chastity and Obedience) are better lived in the community. Community gives strength and courage to become what one has earlier professed as a religious. The life and solidarity /support of others give meaning to the vows. To outside world, it is quite strange to live the vows without thinking of gaining more since critical look at the vows shows that all is 'lost' while heaven is the only gain. Though the understanding of the vows cannot be sought within the society, the community gives enough support to live out the vows. In the mind of Otene (1983), a true communitarian life vivifies our life of chastity. It gives us what a life of community founded on Christ can really give. It shows, at the same time, that in all love of chastity there is a life of solitude of human beings and especially in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, who 'having loved his own who were in the world loved them to the end'.

### **Conclusion**

Igwebuike philosophy is not really strange or far from what the Universal Church is teaching. Moreover, it is a way of reminding Africans about the important value that we have ever known and lived. A religious community is only truly a body when the majority of its members are making the transition from the community for me and me for the community, when each person's heart is opening to all the others in total solidarity. Living together must reflect total self-giving to the entire congregation through the community. Though, members of the religious institutes are not living without conflict and tension but they strive day in day out not to allow their misunderstandings to blur their vision of reaching their goals. Finally, Pulickattil (2004) feels that religious community is built up with persons. If the persons are defunct the community will also be defunct. Hence the constant reminder of Igwebuike philosophy is a good guide.

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