



## EVANGELIZATION AS A TOOL FOR FORMIDABLE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC REVIVAL IN IGBO LAND

By

**Amobi S. Umeayo**  
*Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu*  
[mobismayor@gmail.com](mailto:mobismayor@gmail.com)

&

**Florence Uju Ibeh (PhD)**  
*Department of Igbo, African and Communication Studies*  
*Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*  
[uf.ibeh@unizik.edu.com](mailto:uf.ibeh@unizik.edu.com)

### Abstract

This study was prompted by the authors' interest on the need for adequate security, economic recovery and cultural renaissance in Igbo land. The purpose is to see how the existence of Christian religion in the region given its population density can act as a catalyst for providing these needs. The method adopted in the study is the qualitative research method. It was observed that the Igbo are deeply religious people and that it will not be difficult to co-opt them into various forms of synergic actions that can reposition any sector of their concern if Christian leaders can offer proper direction and encouragement in pursuance of the objectives. It was also observed that the subjects of economy and culture have commonly remained outside the purview of Christian discussion as what mattered up until now in the churches was more of the salvation of spiritual souls than the temporal welfare of the human person. However, as religion is better understood today, it can also be a means of addressing human temporal needs. What it means is that we need to see the nexus between evangelization and these temporal matters. That is why priests/pastors in Igbo land need to be trained to understand that theirs is not only to pray, build churches and utter prophecies. Since they command a lot of followers in our society, they can and should embark on economically and culturally boasting programs in order to revive and reposition these sectors for better. Once economic challenges are reduced, it will effect positively in the area of security. Hence, the understanding of the church as a museum will need to be balanced with the idea of church laboratory; bringing in creativity, industry and responsible stewardship.

### Introduction

The call to evangelize is solely the initiative of Jesus Christ. He with his disciples immersed themselves in the culture of their people and at the same time, preached the good news of the Kingdom of God. He lived and preached in such a way that his life captivated many people. Such people got converted to his way of life. They formed an army of followers and become global evangelizers at the same time. Jesus did not only preach. He was initially a carpenter. He was seen interacting with fishermen and many commoners, who got enthralled by his message. It was he who claimed that the spirit of God was upon him as he had been anointed to bring good tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, set prisoners free, and proclaim a year that is acceptable to the Lord (cf. Lk. 4: 18-19).

Accordingly, Jesus was seen healing the sick, feeding the hungry, freeing demoniacs, raising the dead as well as prophetically challenging the structures in which human beings were treated with indignity. Additionally, Jesus' immediate disciples also organized themselves, such that their



communal and synergic actions benefited everyone and brought succor, especially to the most vulnerable (cf. Acts 4: 32- 37). Therefore, if we are to talk about salvation as Jesus and his disciples preached it, we must not see it as an entirely spiritual and eschatological event only. Hence, it must also be seen as a way of liberating humanity from any worldly shackles that demean it. In this way, evangelization would not only have to do with preaching and praying with the view of sending people to heaven. It will have to be a witness of life in which Christians will synergize and work together to liberate people from hunger, diseases, and other realities that humiliate them. The Church must not absolve herself of this task.

Therefore, the thrust of this paper is to show that the mission of the Church is not only to save souls. The Church also has the noble task of liberating people from earthly hazards and providing them with happy lives. For those who have been massively converted to Christianity, such as the Igbo people of Nigeria, we have to understand that religion is not an act of God but a human construct. Thus, the Christian religion in Igbo land can be constructed and reconstructed in such a manner that it will benefit the people.<sup>1</sup> Christianity does not need to distance us from our culture/s. It does not need to be a means of exploiting people or a recipe for conflicts and insecurity. It has to be constructed in a manner that will make it beneficial in revitalizing our good cultural values, ensuring economic recovery as well as maintaining peace and security without in any way neglecting mankind's ultimate concern of the hereafter.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The Religiosity of the Igbo as Catalyst and Prospect for Evangelization

The fact that the Igbo people are very religious is a corollary to their nature as human beings, and more so, as a result of the fact that they are Africans. Accordingly, the Igbo people, just like every other African people, have always credited the source of their existence to the divine and engaged themselves in several religious activities in thanksgiving to these invisible powers. According to Pope John Paul II, "Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred of the existence of God the creator and a spiritual world."<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, John S. Mbiti is famous for his view that religion is one of the richest parts of Africans' heritage. He opines that religion "has dominated the thinking of the African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities."<sup>4</sup> According to him, "religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of African life, while at the same time, this way of life has shaped religion as well."<sup>5</sup> For Africans, whether they are traditionalists, Muslims, or Christians, religion does not fail to maintain its standing as the preeminent factor that guides and invigorates the other facets of their existence as a people and as individuals. It is in this sense that religion is said to concern the deepest root of human existence and integrates

<sup>1</sup>J.L.Moral,*Pastorale giovanile Sfida cruciale per la prassi cristiana*(Torino:Elledici,2018),36.

<sup>2</sup>Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [On Evangelization in the Modern World], December 8, 1975 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), n. 32; Henceforth EN.

<sup>3</sup>John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* [On the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission], Sept. 14, 1995 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), n. 42

<sup>4</sup>J.S.Mbiti,*Introduction to African Religion*(London:Heinemann Educational Books,1975),9.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*



liberation will need to re-acquire its place as the reason for the existence of the Church. There is also the need to train Christian leaders to understand that theirs is not only to pray, prophesy, and organize fund raising for the building of museum churches where only prayers are said but also to establish laboratory churches where employment opportunities will be created for the youth and where income will be generated for the running of the church and other charitable ventures.

## 2. Establishing the Link between Evangelization, the Kingdom of God as well as Salvation and Liberation

Before the Church can play such vital roles in the temporal domain of human life as expected, there has to be a proper understanding of its mission as evangelization. According to Pope Paul VI, the Church “has a vivid awareness of the fact that the Saviour’s words, ‘I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God’ apply in all truth to herself.”<sup>10</sup> The reality, according to the Pontiff, is that the essential mission of the Church is constituted by the task of evangelizing, wherein evangelization is seen as the grace and vocation proper to her as well as her deepest identity.<sup>11</sup> It all means that the Church cannot deviate from the mission of Christ, her founder, who identified himself as the anointed of the Lord, sent by the Spirit to bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, free the oppressed, and to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord (cf. Luke 4: 18-19). Therefore, Jesus’ lifestyle and practice must be seen as the supreme model of every Christian life, experience, and practice.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, evangelizing cannot but be necessarily tied to the proclamation of the good news of God’s Kingdom. It, therefore, implies that the project of the Kingdom must be at the core of the Church’s mission in accordance with the mind of Jesus Christ, her founder. How, then, do we understand this Kingdom?

Indeed, there is no better way to appreciate the term “kingdom” than to see it as a double-faced reality, which, on the one hand, has to do with ‘the Kingdom of God’ referring to everything that is earthly and calls for evangelical attention.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, is ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’ which is the subject of every spiritual/eschatological concern that calls for the same attention. This is to avoid the unfair situation in which purveyors of the Christian message may jettison all that is good to the well being of the earthly existence of the humankind in order to pursue that which is solely understood as being good to its aspiration for eternal life. In many cases, this partial understanding has led to a kind of reductionism in which the kingdom project, according to J.L. Moral, came to be overly spiritualized, leading many Christians to self-neglect and excessive as criticism that disdain their earthly wellbeing.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup>G.N.Akigbe, N. Ngwoke and O.G. Chukwuma “A Critical Analysis of Tithe and Seed Sowing on Contemporary Christianity in Nigeria” in *HTS Theological Studies* vol. 77 n. 1 (Pretoria, 2021).

[http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0259-94222021000100004](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222021000100004)

<sup>9</sup>Researchgate, *Nigeria Religious Records*, [https://www.Familysearch.org/en/wiki/Nigeria\\_Religious\\_Records](https://www.Familysearch.org/en/wiki/Nigeria_Religious_Records)

<sup>10</sup>EN14.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>José Luis Moral, *Pastor alegiovanile. Sfidacruciale per la prassi cristiana*, (Torino: Elledici, 2018), 172.

<sup>13</sup>William Barclay, *The Daily Study of the Bible The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1 Chapters 1-10* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2003), 210; A.S. Omeayo, *Our Father A Treatise on The Lord’s Prayer* (Enugu: Delta Publications, 2013), 84; Stephen Senaldi, *The Holy Trinity Saily Meditations* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2004), 28.



Actually, it was in his effort to correct this mentality that Pius VI explains that there are profound links between evangelization and human advancement/liberation. According to him, "These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions."<sup>15</sup> Alluding to the deliberations of the 1974 Synod of Bishops, he says, "We ourselves have taken care to point this out, by recalling that it is impossible to accept 'that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbor who is suffering and in need.'"<sup>16</sup> Consequently, "The Church considers it to be undoubtedly important to build up structures which are more human, more just, more respectful of the rights of the person and less oppressive and less enslaving."<sup>17</sup> That is why it is necessary to link human liberation with salvation while avoiding the risk of seeing them as identical.<sup>18</sup> To be properly understood, then, one has to view the two as a continuum in which liberation is seen as the present of salvation, while salvation is understood as the future of liberation.<sup>19</sup> According to Paul VI, Christ proclaims salvation as the kernel and centre of his Good News. He identifies it with "liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One."<sup>20</sup> It is for this reason that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council consider it inappropriate for the Church to stand aloof while many of her sons and daughters wallow in penury, ignorance, diseases, injustice, and insecurity brought about by greed and war. For this, they say, "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find echo in their hearts."<sup>21</sup> It is against this backdrop that we can now talk about poverty alleviation, education, cultural renaissance, as well as maintenance of peace and security as a duty that also rightfully belongs to the realm of evangelization. However, there is no way an initiative of this nature can be pursued if the "shepherds do not smell the sheep"; that is, if the priests/pastors who are the vanguard of the churches' evangelical actions do not feel the poverty, the ignorance, the cultural disconnect as well as the insecurity that menaces the society. The very first task to be undertaken then is to train the evangelizers to be able to feel the socio-cultural and economic realities around them and so be able to use their innate or acquired skills to bond with the environment and the people.

### 1. Providing the Evangelizers with Bait and Bringing Them Closer to the People

One of the ways to be a good evangelizer is to have the disposition, dexterity, and other evangelical skills that can put someone in contact with people in their localness and categories so that such an evangelizer will be able to rapport with and draw people to himself. Jesus was aware of this when he called a group of fishermen and promised to make them fishers of men (cf. Mat. 4:19). To make them fishers of men, therefore, is to equip them with evangelical knowledge and

<sup>14</sup>J.L.Moral, *Giovanisenzafede?Manuale diprontosoccorso perricostruire conigiovanilafedeela religione* (Torino:Elledici:2007),180-181.

<sup>15</sup>EN31.

<sup>16</sup>EN31.

<sup>17</sup>EN36.

<sup>18</sup>EN35.

<sup>19</sup>Moral, *Pastorale giovanile*, 121.

<sup>20</sup>EN9.



know-how that can facilitate their mission as evangelizers. Usually, evangelical knowledge is a practical type of knowledge through which one gets imbued with the practical skills (i.e., the evangelical know-how) that facilitate evangelical actions. It is, however, unfortunate that most of our seminaries have not equipped their students with this type of knowledge. At the moment, the type of knowledge acquired by priests (catholic priests) in Nigeria is still the speculative theological form of information sourced from the scriptures and the traditions of the Church and belongs to what Humphrey U. Ani refers to as theoretical knowledge. According to him, "Theoretical knowledge is often associated with the knowledge of the fundamental nature of a thing or its principles or logic."<sup>22</sup> Thus, it "is that form of knowledge in which one seeks to understand something with no utilitarian goal."<sup>23</sup>

Traditionally, the curriculum in most seminaries across the globe until recently could only provide the learner with speculative knowledge. Positively, this system provided the where withal for apologetics.<sup>24</sup> It also provided the priests with elegant locution and bureaucratic efficiency. On the flip side, the sole dependence on it provided its possessors with a systematic orientation of thought, which, because of its essentialist, deductive, and abstract nature, distanced them from the realities and people around them.<sup>25</sup> Instead of such speculative knowledge, what an evangelizer needs is evangelical knowledge. Evangelical knowledge belongs to what Ani calls practical knowledge, which is basically utilitarian in nature.<sup>26</sup> Evangelical knowledge is usually in the biographic/narrative style. Its historical/inductive nature equips it with hermeneutical ingredients that enhance creativity, flexibility, and adaptability to different human situations. For instance, the story of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph and Mary who was born in Bethlehem, who was a carpenter and a friend of fishermen, and who was so much involved in the culture of the Jews and the life of the ordinary people to the extent that he fed the hungry, healed the sick and performed other compassionate acts can evoke such passion for originality, humility and compassion than the finest formulations of any systematic theological thought. Evangelical knowledge is the knowledge of the ordinary people. It can easily bring someone to the arena of praxis.

Nevertheless, for our evangelizers to be properly equipped, they need to move from the domain of evangelical knowledge to that of evangelical know-how. Jesus' metaphor "fishers of men" is actually meant to score this point. To draw people to themselves, Jesus' disciples needed to acquire some practical skills to attract human beings, just as they used baits to attract fish. In Igbo land of our time, pastors/priests should not seek to attract people, especially the youths, with prosperity gospels and unrealistic prophecies. During their training, evangelizers should acquire some artisan skills that can put them in tandem with the needs of the people, especially the most vulnerable and destitute in society. A priest/pastor who has farming skills, animal husbandry, carpentry, auto-mechanic, shoe making, tailoring, furniture making, bakery, fine art, or some

<sup>21</sup>Second Vatican Document, *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], December 7, 1965 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), n.1; Henceforth GS.

<sup>22</sup>Humphrey Uchenna Ani, *Introduction to Epistemology*, (Enugu: PUKKA Press, 2023), 122.

<sup>23</sup>Ani, 122.

<sup>24</sup>Salvatore Soreca, *La formazione di base per i catechisti: Criteri, competenze e metodologie* (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2014), 132.

<sup>25</sup>Jim Gallagher, *Seed for the Soil* (England: McCrimmons, 2001), 112.

<sup>26</sup>Ani, 124-125.



other artisan skills has such an evangelical bait that can attract young people, especially the less privileged, and get them apprenticed in the skills.

## 2. Exploring the Means of Laboratory Ecclesiology in Tackling the Economic Problems in Igbo Land

Ecclesiology is a branch of theology that studies the Church as a community or organic entity, its origin and destiny, and how it understands itself in relation to its salvific role, its relationship with Christ, and how its leadership and followership are organized.<sup>27</sup> On another note, the term “laboratory” etymologically is of the Latin root *laborare*, which means to work. Therefore, the term “Church laboratory” is used to distinguish a church that embarks on economic activities through drudgery from one that only organizes spiritual activities such as prayers and liturgies. All the same, two things often come to mind whenever the term “church” is mentioned: the people as a community of believers and/or the building in which they pray and organize their worship. Since worship/prayer is at the core of every religious gathering, the church laboratory would designate a worshipping community that not only gathers to pray but also to work. Church laboratory is different from a museum church, which underscores the mode of being and mentality of a community of believers who are not open to innovations, warmth, and enterprising. Moral, while stressing the need for investing as a way of evangelizing, uses the image of the Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25:14-30) to explain the differences between a museum Church and a laboratory church.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, the third character of the parable represents a museum church: the one who dug a hole and hid his talent. According to him, this type of church is obsessed with security and orthodoxy and wants to constantly repeat what it has always done without thinking of new ways.<sup>29</sup> In Nigeria, many Christian churches have remained at this level of development. Hence, it is not uncommon to find churches only interested in building physical structures where they gather to pray with little or no thought that their communal living can also benefit them should they synergize to embark on some profitable economic ventures. Therefore, by contrast, we can better understand the meaning of laboratory church. Accordingly, Moral explains that a laboratory church is represented by the first two characters of the Parable of the Talents, the ones that invested their resources and made gains. It is a church that becomes a kind of creative workshop, where faith is put at work for the commitment to transform life and the world.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, if the idea of a church laboratory is adopted in Igbo land and there are priests/pastors who have been trained as evangelizers on artisans skills, as we already proposed, it will not be difficult for churches to convert the proceeds from tithes and seed sowing as well as income from other fundraising activities to a more profitable, authentic and dependable enterprise. In this sense, churches, instead of the incessant fundraising activities that currently happen during liturgies/services today in Igbo land, can set up farms, mechanic workshops, bakeries, carpentry

<sup>27</sup>NewWorldEncyclopedia, *Ecclesiology*, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ecclesiology>

<sup>28</sup>Moral, *Pastorale giovanile. Sfida cruciale per la prassi cristiana*, 190.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*



workshops, and so on as laboratory churches. The profits of this kind of initiative are uncountable. First, it will be a business whose income will be used to run the church. In that sense, liturgies/services will no longer be exploited for mere economic gains but will be used to serve only spiritual needs.<sup>31</sup> As such, the emotional blackmail suffered at the hand of money-minded priests/pastors who make them believe that it is because of their inability to donate money or make pledges during 'liturgical/prayerful fundraising' that inflict hardship or misfortune on them will become a thing of the past when pastors/priests learn hard work and start teaching it. Second, it will provide a lot of young people who will be hired to work therein with employment. Third, it will promote a culture of hard work that the Igbo people are known for. While discouraging laziness and crimes, it will reinstate the idea of the dignity of labour. Fourth, various states and local government authorities in the region can partner with these churches, which will now become a go-between between the former and the youths in poverty eradication projects. Fifth, a priest/pastor or a Christian community embarking on this type of venture becomes a teacher, witness, and a good shepherd.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Drawing from the Church's Principle of the Preferential Option for the Poor in Tackling the Problems of Crime and Insecurity in Igbo Land

The best way to tackle criminality in any given society is not by policing but by engaging the youth, especially the poor ones, in meaningful enterprises. This explains why artisan ventures enjoy a more privileged position than elitist ones in our idea of a church laboratory. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis blames the rise of insecurity in many parts of the world on the unfortunate culture in which societal benefits and common goods are usually slanted in favour of a few, creating a type of inequality wherein an overwhelming majority of the population are marginalized economically and are pushed to the fringes of the society where they suffer untold hardship. He warns that "until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reserved, it will be impossible to eliminate violence" no matter the amount of "resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance system."<sup>33</sup> Policymakers among the Igbo, whether they are state or ecclesiastical, should be mindful of this fact.

Efforts should be made in all sectors of life to see that such inequality that, according to Francis, "spawns violence" is not allowed to fester the Igbo societies. Churches that embark on business ventures must avoid elitist projects that exploit and marginalize the poor. It bespeaks what Francis calls the "economy of exclusion" when churches collect money from poor people and spend it on the rich. We are not unaware of some cases where some churches have collected money from their members irrespective of their economic status only to use it to build universities. These projects can hardly benefit the poor. Moreover, no matter how the argument

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi* [On the Liturgical Formation of the People of God], June 2022 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2022), n. 16.

<sup>32</sup>Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium* [Instituting the Ministry of Catechist], May 10, 2021, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2021) n.6.

<sup>33</sup>Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* [On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World], November 24, 2013, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), n.59; Henceforth EG.



is advanced, churches in Igbo land who embark on building universities can never exonerate themselves of the guilt of the economy of exclusion. Decrying the phenomenon of exclusion, Francis says,<sup>34</sup>

Today, everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless.... Human beings themselves consider consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a "throw away" culture which is now spreading.... Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the "exploited" but the outcasts, the "leftovers."<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, to avoid the risk of an economy of exclusion, Igbo policymakers have to draw inspiration from the Church's idea of a preferential option for the poor. In his paradigmatic ecclesiology of "the church that goes forth," Francis expounds the theology of a church that must not be confined to itself or obsessed with narcissism but must go out to the crossroads and to the margins of society to encounter all and sundry.<sup>36</sup> Although the church goes forth to everyone without exception, Francis insists that her first port of call cannot be the rich but the poor since, according to him, "the poor are the privileged recipient of the Gospel' and the fact that it is freely preached to them is a sign of the Kingdom Jesus came to establish."<sup>37</sup> That is why "the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty."<sup>38</sup> The idea of leaving the diocesan centres for the parishes to establish laboratory churches is therefore laudable and *ad rem* to Francis' idea of going to the periphery to engage the destitute, drug addicts, prostitutes and the vulnerable of all sorts. First, the parish unlike the diocese is where you encounter people in their different categories: the poor and the rich alike. That is where you find all the members of organs, structures, ministries, charisms, and everything that makes the Church a living, emotional, and active being.<sup>39</sup> Second, the laboratory church of artisan skills can be affordable to most people, even the poor, except in some cases where the Christian community will need to help sponsor the poor people in skill acquisition. Moreover, what can be a better way of preventing crimes and securing the land than meaningfully engaging those whose social and economic conditions predispose them?

#### 4. Leveraging on the Church's Practice of Inculturation in Revitalizing and Repositioning of the Igbo Cultures

One of the most basic understandings about culture in general is that it is not static but dynamic.

<sup>34</sup>EG53

<sup>35</sup>EG53.

<sup>36</sup>EG24.

<sup>37</sup>EG48.

<sup>38</sup>General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean [CELAM], *Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our Peoples May have Life in Him* (Aparecida: CELAM, 2007), n. 391.

<sup>39</sup>Luciano Meddi, *Catechesi Proposta e formazione dell'avvicinamento cristiano 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (Padova: Messaggero, 2004), 197-200.





Therefore, it would be senseless to think that Igbo cultures are a reality that still enjoys a pristine form of existence. According to Francis, "Culture is a dynamic reality which a people constantly recreates; each generation passes on a whole series of ways of approaching different existential situations to the next generation, which must, in turn, reformulate it as it confronts its own challenges."<sup>40</sup> Hence, we are not unaware of some of the factors that have, over more than a hundred years now, modified our cultures. Among these factors, colonialism, western education, and the advent of the Christian religion are paramount. It is also incorrect to think that civilization can happen among any people if their culture is not frequently modified. That is why it would be unwise while advocating for a cultural renaissance to think that we can restore the culture/s to the conditions by which our forefathers knew them. Even at that, we know that the method employed by the white missionaries in bringing Christianity to Africa was that of denigration for anything indigenous, including the very good ones. For this reason, we cannot but key into the Church's practice of inculturation as a veritable means of evangelization. Thus, the Church today insists on inculturation based on the conviction of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council that there exist some links between the message of salvation and cultures.<sup>41</sup> Hence, "the project of inculturation must recognize that there is in the recipient culture, a progressive line of truth of God's revelation of himself, a line which must not be disrupted and which must be brought to light and incorporated if the people are going to be well informed in the Christian faith."<sup>42</sup> In other words, recognizing and appreciating the good elements of our cultures will be of mutual benefit both for the Igbo cultures and to Christianity. The reason, according to Pope Benedict XVI, is that "God does not reveal himself in abstract, but by using languages, imagery and expression that bound to different cultures."<sup>43</sup> Even at that, there is no way inculturation can happen if we do not have the perception or awareness of the need for it.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, how is it possible to feel this need if we are the ones who today, in line with the early missionaries, undermine our cultures? Thus, "It must be regrettably noted that such contempt for one's culture, which our people inherited from the missionaries, is so ingrained that before inculturation can take place, there has to be very serious catechetical effort aimed at recovering the dignity of the indigenous culture."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, "Such effort will include trying to rediscover those elements which are already in stasis, clarifying and authenticating those that are doubtful and then reestablishing and upholding those that are still standing."<sup>46</sup>

Christianity and the indigenous cultures can only stand if there is a conscious and painstaking effort to marry the two. That is why John Paul II says that "the split between the faith which many profess and their lives deserve to be counted among the more serious errors of our age."<sup>47</sup> Consequently, he maintains "that a faith that does not affect a person's culture is a faith not fully embraced, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived."<sup>48</sup> Paul VI is also of the same view. In his words, "The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel."<sup>49</sup> It all boils down to the fact that the survival of the Christian religion in Igbo land cannot be assured, just as the revitalization of cultures therein cannot be assured without inculturation. That is why Francis is of the view that "Being human means 'being at the same time son and father of the culture to which one belongs'" such that "once the Gospel has been inculturated in a people, in their process of transmitting their culture they also transmit the faith in new forms." That is why, according to him, it has to be understood that evangelization is



inculturation.<sup>50</sup> A good example of inculturation is the way Christians in some Igbo communities (such as Ukehe in Igbo Etiti LGA of Enugu) have assimilated the Ozo title institution and its values of truth, integrity and hard work into their Christian lexicon and practice such that successful men who wish to take the title no longer feel inhibited to do so as Christians.

## 5. Conclusion

The existence of the Christian religion in Igbo land, given its population density, can be an advantage for the survival of the Church, a catalyst for economic stability and cultural renaissance, as well as the foundation for the prevention of crimes and maintenance of peace and security in the region. The Igbo are deeply religious people, so co-opting them into various forms of synergic actions that can reposition any sector of their concern is possible and effective if only the Christian leaders can offer the proper direction and encouragement in pursuance of these objectives. The subjects of economy and culture have commonly remained outside the purview of Christian discussion as what matters up until now in the churches is more of the salvation of spiritual souls than the temporal welfare of the human person. However, as religion is better understood today, it can also be a means of addressing human temporal needs. We have tried above to create a nexus between evangelization and these temporal matters. Accordingly, priests/pastors must be trained to understand that theirs is not only to pray but to build churches and utter prophecies. Since they command much following in our society, they can embark on economically and culturally boasting programs to revive and reposition these sectors for the better. There is a need for the local churches in Igbo land to key into the Church's principle of preferential option for the poor in order to reduce inequality and eschew all forms of exploitation and economic exclusion of the poor and the vulnerable in society. Our museum churches have to be built alongside laboratory churches where employment opportunities will be created for our youths, and income will be generated to run the churches. Once this is done, a great impact will be created in the area of security of lives and properties since the number of people that will be predisposed by poverty to indulge in crimes will drastically reduce. We must also embark on inculturation to revitalize our cultures and ensure the survival of the Christian religion in Igbo land.

<sup>40</sup>EG122.

<sup>41</sup>GS58.

<sup>42</sup>A.S.Omeayo, *Catechesis in Nigeria: Problems and Prospect Towards a Catechetical Catechetical Updating of Priests, Consecrated Persons and the Laity in the Church in Nigeria* (Enugu: Choice Flame, 2011), 32.

<sup>43</sup>Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* [The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church], Sept. 30, 2010, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2021), n. 119.

<sup>44</sup>J.O.Ogoeji for, "Ecclesia in Africa and the Truth about Inculturation" in *Ecclesia in Africa: The Nigerian Response*, ed. J. O. Ogoeji for and I. Enweh (Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Company, 1997), 58.

<sup>45</sup>Omeayo, *Catechesis in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*, 33.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christi Fideles Laici* [On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay People in the Church and in the World], December 30, 1998, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), 42.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>EN20.

<sup>50</sup>EG122.