

CHURCH AND IGBO MASQUERADE INSTITUTION: A TALE OF TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE

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Abstract

The influence of foreign culture and its anti-masquerade stands through the eurocentric religious doctrines of the missionaries who refer to masquerade institution as an assemblage of evil, truly made the present day Christians, especially the born-again ones to see masquerade institution as something to be avoided by all means. Sadly, this cultural heritage of the people is fast losing its glamour and bastion owing to the existence of Christianity in Igboland. One is worried that this supposed innocuous cultural heritage of the people might go into extinction the moment it is not well looked after. Ethnographic method, essentially, interviews, and writers' privileged eye-witness account were adopted for optimal analyses. The study discovers that many Christians of today frown at masquerade institution following the missionaries' view on masquerade as evil. Opinions are divided as to whether the view of the missionaries is the true situation. The study advocates the need for the two religions to work together for the preservation of this Igbo cultural heritage.

Keywords: Church; Igbo; Masquerade Institution; Tale; Untouchable

Introduction

Historical evidence shows that following the controversies that surround the existence of masquerade institution in the Igbo society, it has continued to stir several comments and questions concerning its usefulness in a Christian milieu. Christians are of the view that Christianity is a belief in the worship of the almighty God which is to be separated from any other tradition and cultural activities such as masquerading. However, it is to be noted that the Christian missionaries did not bring Christianity to a cultural vacuum in Igboland. It has been long established that man cannot live without adhering to culture; neither would culture be without man. According to Iwe (n.d) culture is actually “a social heritage ... hereditary and transmissible from one generation to another and no one can escape the sway of culture, for all of us are born into the existing culture of one society or the other” (p.17). Masquerade institution stands out as one vital cultural heritage of the Igbo people but it has been wrongly construed by the missionaries as an evil that should be jettisoned. This negative and uncomplimentary conception of the early missionaries on Igbo masquerade institution possibly made Ekechi (1972) to imagine that missionaries were “operating on assumption that the society (masquerade) was evil and attempted to discourage early Christian adherents from becoming member” (p.166). The view of the missionaries cannot be isolated from their understanding of the name, *muo* to mean the spirit of the dead as represented in masquerade, something the missionaries were unable to understand. The Igbo people's belief in the immortality of the soul obviously informed their observance of masquerade as dead ancestors and forefathers who are to be respected and obeyed. On the whole, for Igbo people, masquerade is used as a focal instrument for entertainment and social control in dispute settlement and conflict resolution in communities. An insight in Afigbo (1981) shows that “In the context of Igbo culture, conversion to Christianity was not just a question of new ideologies for the old; it also involved exchanging one form of social life for another” (p.340). Suffice it to state that the main challenge of the Igbo Christian is that the missionaries condemned masquerade institution without providing an alternative for the people. No wonder most Christians of today find it difficult to detach themselves

from such cherished cultural heritage. This itself remains very worrisome and embarrassing to the church. To this end, this study tries to find a common ground in which masquerade institution in Igboland could be incorporated into the Christian practice so as to make Christianity to be at home in Igboland. This will hopefully address the perennial conflicts between Igbo masquerade institution and Christian faithfulness and consequently strengthen conviviality between the two religions for a cultural heritage preservation.

Masquerade Institution in Igboland

Masquerade in the Igbo society is an institution that is known and widely accepted for its multipurpose and seemingly robust impact on the people. Masquerade in Igboland is gender exclusive, which means the participation of women and even male ones that are yet to be initiated are strictly restrictive. Masquerade possesses spiritual characteristics and powers which are held in high esteem in the entire Igbo society. Nzomiwu (1999), while citing Anunobi posited that “Igbo words for masquerade, mmuo or mma-nwu points to the original notion and significance of masquerade. Mmuo means spirit while mmanwu is abridged form of (mmadu nwuru anwu) a human being that is dead” (p.94). The concept of masquerade in Igbo tradition and culture is a spirit of ancestral forefathers that manifest themselves as mmonwu. It is therefore a general belief in Igboland that masquerade is a spirit which springs from the soil. By implication, masquerade personifies the spirit of the dead ancestors that come to perform some cultural and social functions. According to Okodo (2009):

The masquerade of the Igbo people of Nigeria is a representation of the forefathers of the people among the living. One can say that it is by the masquerade that the dead and the living come together. It is by the masquerade that the dead reinforce their spirit in the living to enable continuity of the life of the Igbo people (p.258).

From the view of Okodo, one can depict masquerade as a symbolism of the Igbo ancestorship in an Igbo culture of mask. On a further emphasis, Onuigbo (2004) states that masquerade is a return of the deceased members of the community in the form of re-embodied spirit to their formal surroundings especially at festivals. Enekwe (1987) also postulates that “Igbo conceived of a mask sometime called mmanwu, odu, ekpe etc as the incarnation of the dead ancestor who continue to take interest in the affairs of their living descendants and relations” (p.14). This therefore goes on to show that the relationship of the living and the dead in Igbo cosmology is never separated even at death. But the living and the dead seem to continue to reach out to each other. Following this, it is assumed that the living dead are what Igbo masquerade portrays. And this speaks volume of the firm belief of the Igbo that life is cyclical and the land of the living is not far removed from the domain of their ancestors. Though masquerade could mean many things to different persons, some people even see masquerade to mean human beings on the mask. But that will not change the widely accepted belief that masquerade in Igbo traditional religion is the spirit of the dead. Just as Onuigbo (2004) put it, masquerade is a return of the deceased members of the community in the form of re-embodied spirit to their formal surroundings especially at festivals.

Be that as it may, it is an accepted norm in Igboland that masquerade denotes mmanwu or mmonwu, the spirit of the dead, and it portrays the belief of the Igbo people in the immortality of the soul of their deceased house member. The Igbo believe that these deceased family members live between the earth and the spiritual world and such beliefs can hardly be eroded. This goes a long way to show that the relationship of the living and the dead in Igbo cosmology is never separated even at death. But the living and the dead seem to continue to reach out to each other.

The Functional Role of Masquerade in Igboland

Masquerade institution in Igboland is a trans-generational culture of the people passed on from one generation to another. Its origin as suggested in Agwuna (1979) discloses that, "Masquerade in Igboland was an indigenous invention" (p.25). The creation or invention of masquerade institution in Igboland no doubt was for the presumed good and well-being of the Igbo people. Igbo masquerade at invention certainly has an assigned role to play in creation. Stating the role of masquerade for the Igbo, Adim (2011) reiterated that, "masquerades in Igbo society are of different types and they are attributed to be a re-embodied ancestral spirits with enigmatic and aesthetic values" (p.13). These aesthetic values of Igbo masquerades play a powerful role in the entertainment of the people as pointed out in Umeh (2005), that masquerade, otherwise "Mmanwu is one of the cultural institutions deliberately established by the Igbo ages ago to make the people happy" (p.14). Agbanusi (2006) defines Igbo masquerade roles "As a theatrical art ... a great source of entertainment to the people, old and young, male and female" (p.121).

Looking at the ancestorship as personified in Igbo masquerade, Madu (1997) observes that:

Ancestors were human beings who having lived in this world, experienced the suffering of humanity, and died. Thus by virtue of their death, they were ushered into the land of their forebears by full burial rites accorded to them here on earth. Having suffered with humanity on earth ... he is in a better position to appreciate the suffering of man. Being so close to Chukwu he is also in a position to gather information from Chukwu for humanity. Thus his position is that of intermediary between Chukwu and man (pp.65-66).

Also in Arinze (1970):

The ancestors neither are not just ghosts nor are they simply dead heroes like Julius Caesar and Napoleon, but they are felt to be still present watching over the household directly, concern in all the affairs of the family and property (p.19).

From the statements shared above, it is evidently true that those dead ancestors which Igbo masquerade institution portray are saddled with the responsibility of watching and intervening over household affairs such as protecting and administering justice to various Igbo communities. In most parts of Igboland prior to the coming of Christianity, masquerades were used to arbitrate and carry out peaceful settlement of conflicts such as land disputes and family disagreements. For Mbiti (1982) masquerades "serve as intermediaries between the people and the divinities, since they occupy the ontological state" (p.27). Therefore, with the belief of the Igbo people that masquerade serves as an intermediary between them and divinities, this of course firmly guides their absolute trust and confidence that the same would arbitrate over any matter brought before them with equity and justice. In his submission on the role of masquerade as an instrument for executing justice in Igboland, Nzomiwu (1999) affirms that "next to the ancestors in Igbo ladder of being as well as justice are the masquerades" (p.93). In addition, masquerade in time past plays a vital role in settling and ensuring that justice prevailed during land disputes in various communities of Igboland. In Onyeneke (1987) "civil strives among the community members can be similarly regulated through masquerade" (p.77). Really the trust of the Igbo people were predicated on their belief that masquerade being an ancestor cannot play partial and hence ever ready to accept any judgment that emanates from them. The role of Igbo masquerade institution cannot be over emphasized; a further insight from Ifemesia (1980) shows that:

The Igbo masking societies...help to stabilize Igbo society and culture by preserving hereditary rights, regulating conduct and entertaining the people. It is also a training ground for both youth and adults. Above all, it provides a bond of union that transcends kinship affiliations (pp. 80-81).

The above assertion is a straight forward fact on the capability of the Igbo masquerade to rekindle and strengthen bonds of cordial relationship among the people. For instance, during masquerade festivals in most parts of Igboland, it is a time of joy, happiness and celebration for the people. Families usually invite kinsmen and women, friends and relations far and near to come and celebrate with them. It is always a time of great reunion.

Gender Issue in Igbo Masquerade Institution

Masquerade institution in Igbo traditional society could be said not to be a gender friendly institution, following the exclusion of women in its activities. According to Emejulu (2003) “the masquerade institution in Igboland is a revered one, whose rules and secrets are predominantly a male affair since it does not permit women into its world” (pp.55-56). Though there exists in Igboland female masquerades such as *Agbogho-muonwu*. This actually does not preclude the fact that the person or the spirit behind the mask perhaps is never a female folk, neither were female allowed to move freely with the masquerade. These school of thought possibly sustain the suggestion that Igbo masquerade institution is completely all male affair since it accommodates gender discriminations. A further insight from Emejulu (2003) affirms that, masquerade institution in Igbo society is exclusively a male institution. Adolescent boys can be initiated into the institution. On initiation they are expected to guard the secrets of the masquerade cult. In fact, one of the sacrileges that can be committed against the cult is disclosing its secrets to women or an uninitiated person. This really shows the gender differentiation that surrounds masquerade institution in Igboland where women were left out or sidelined. Onyeneke (1987) asserts that “masquerade institution is what separates us (men) from women, showing us superior to them, it is the only thing that marks off who is a man and who is a woman” (p.82). The reason could be with regard to ensuring the management of secrecy, aura and prestige of the masquerade and since women are believed to be flip tongued and unable to keep secrets. The gender discrimination of women concerning masquerade institution in Igboland is seen as an accepted norm of the people which compels women to display awe on sighting masquerade as a supernatural beings. For Emejulu (2003):

In Igboland, women are expected to respect and revere masquerades, the status of women notwithstanding. Even education and wealth do not grant women the privilege of being allowed into the mystery of the cult. In Igboland culture forbids female participation (p.59). For Ezeajugh (2009), “The effort to down-play and possibly obliterate the involvement of women in such key cultural institution as masquerading, stems from the traditional acceptance to relegate the place of women in the society” (p.43). These assertions actually suggest that Igbo masquerade institution is one aspect of Igbo culture that is discriminatory against women folk, having excluded them from full participation.

This issue of exclusion and discrimination of women in Igbo masquerade society, in fairness may not be absolutely true, in the sense that in most Igbo community women are initiated into masquerade cult under cultural dictates. These cultural dictates in some communities takes the form of initiation of women into masquerade society based on certain age limit as well as the title a woman holds in the community such as female chief priest (eze-nwanyi). When initiated into masquerade cult in Igboland these women are addressed as *nne mmanwu* (mother of masquerade). To this end, Enekwe (1987) also upheld the fact that, “In Igboland aged women, especially those who have distinguished sons, may be admitted into the masking cult, because it is improper to frighten them. But they are not expected to participate actively in the preparation and performances” (p. 67). On the age limit issue, Emejulu (2003) agrees that “emphasis on old age is to ensure that women are matured and capable of keeping the masquerade secret” (p.61).

Based on already established insight, one could be tempted to say that women to an extent were accommodated in Igbo masquerade activity. A look at Odo and Omaba masquerade from Nsukka and Udi sub-cultural area as pointed out in Onunwa (1990), that “Odo is open to women for membership and as such has been described by members of Omaba as a female club, unlike Omaba itself which is exclusively for men” (p.28). The truth is that in Igbo traditional world-view, masquerade is an ancestor, the spirit of dead male relation that often comes to visit the land of the living especially during festive period. The non-recognition of dead female members of Igbo land as an ancestor by Igbo traditional religion may have really encouraged the exclusion of women from full participation in masquerading. In a related development, Obiefuna (2006) is of the view that, “African society is patriarchal and some areas of her culture must be reserved for men just like the classical Christian culture that does not accept the ordination of women into the priesthood” (p.162). By and large the common truth is that masquerade institution in Igbo culture is not alone in shielding its activities from a particular gender hence cannot be addressed as a secret society or otherwise.

Christian View of Igbo Masquerade Institution

Following the establishment of Christianity in Igbo land, and Christianity being an off-shoot of western culture, the missionaries rarely admitted that Africans by extension Igbo land had any culture of value. According to Ugwueye (2007) “the missionaries saw African culture and religion as a deadly adversary and as evil that had to be eliminated” (p.102). Speaking from the backdrop of the usual conventional view of the missionaries, Ele (2022) observes that, masquerade in Igbo socio-religious practice in its various forms is unacceptable to Christianity. This is because masquerade culture is a critical aspect of African traditional religion. Explaining this critical aspect of African traditional religion in question here, Onwuaturgwu (2018) believes the claim that, “muonwu cult as an institution is deep rooted in pagan cultism and magical manipulation that involves a great deal of diabolical influence” (p.50). The interesting narrative of Christians on masquerade hinges on the common thought of theirs that Igbo masquerade performance is an idolatrous activity. The level of rituals and rites associated with masquerade performance with its diabolical engagement was a concern to Christianity which suggests it to be evil and idolatrous. In a true testament of fact, Horton (1981) corroborated the point that masquerades have spirits that could be appealed to with fowl invocations. For Adibe (1992) “masquerading rites are linked to the worship of ancestors and earth goddess” (p.38). And since Christianity does not believe in the worship of ancestors nor the rites and rituals associated with masquerade institution as the representative of ancestors among the living, the institution is not acceptable to them. Masquerade for Christians are regarded as part of an idolatrous practices of men that should be condemned and jettisoned. Agbanusi (2006) once again echoed the seemingly bias opinion on Igbo masquerade institutions saying, “today obviously under the influence of westernism, some people are of the opinion that masquerade society has to do with idol worship” (p.122). However, there is a substantial reality that ought not to be ignored which is the fact that an act of masquerading in an Igbo society bears mystical characteristics, which could probably be hard to comprehend by some persons of alien culture. The truth remains that as part of the mysticisms, rituals are carried out before certain Igbo masquerade come out to perform perhaps following their close link with certain idols and deities even though some masquerade are not link to an idol. This could be the reason Igbo masquerade institution and its activities are encircled in secrecy known only to members of the cult with total exemption of women. Ele (2022) again portrays the fact that masquerade, “appearances, displays and performances in broad day light in the open places are preceded by these aforesaid rites and rituals known only to the members of the inner circle” (p.95).

In truth, masquerade in Igbo religion is clearly membership regulated as well as gender based institution. The secrecy and the gender discrimination aspect of Igbo masquerade institution falls

short of Christian's religious world view of openness and therefore in the eyes of the Christian worldview, Igbo masquerade institution is considered as an esoteric institution. An opinion warmly accepted by Madu (2004) saying, "since keeping secret is upheld in masquerade institution, it is an esoteric society" (p.54). In the sameness of judgment, Orji (1999) also submits that "masquerade society was a secret society; it was only those who were initiated into that had the right to go near the masquerade" (p.159). For an Igbo masquerade to carry the appendage of secret society as a result of certain intrigues such as non-sharing of its secrets with non-cult members vis-à-vis its ritual manifestations are critical areas Christianity not only frowns at, but as something that cannot be tolerated by the church.

The Relevance of Masquerade Institution to the Church

In the face of the negative narratives on masquerade, it is believed that a realistic fusion of the church and the masquerade institution with contemporary Christianity would be of immense relevance to the church. The coming together of the both cannot be a bad idea or an effort in futility. This is so because it is crucial for the church to avail itself of the chance to redress the erroneous conception about masquerade institution as evil for the good of its members and hence protect them from backsliding. In doing this, the church as a proponent of indigenous cultural practices, stands prepared to free itself from the shackles of cultural imperialism of the missionaries. As for the Catholic Church, Arinze (1990) pointed out that, "Catholic church has declared repeatedly that we respect the religions and cultures of the peoples of this planet and that we desire to preserve the entire noble, true and good in them" (p.368). To this end, church has a lot to offer on the issue of reviving and re-packaging some Igbo cultural values such as masquerade institution especially in this era when misguided individuals in the guise of masquerading do waylay, beat and through diabolical means hurt, cause deaths, pains, misery and sorrow to fellow human being. Even though, when some of the presumed masqueraders are Christians, their attitude to the church members on their way to church services on Sundays and other Christian activity days are to say the least very much disgusting. On the contrary, it could be argued that these attitudes of theirs could be attributed to ignorance as a result of inappropriate orientation which can be corrected by the church participation.

Better still, an idea of masquerade performance within the ambit of the church, according to Obiefuna (1980) is capable of "bringing forth cultures to the original expressions of a Christian life whereby the gospel is brought into the heart of the people and culture" (p.7). This in essence means that church masquerade performance could assume a platform through which Igbo culture would be Christianized. By so doing, those individuals that are neck-deep into masquerading would have found solace and relief with the church participation in masquerading activity and have their socio-cultural interests sustained. Indeed church participation in masquerading activities would definitely broker an exciting marriage between Igbo culture and Christianity that would push the gospel to penetrate the mind and culture of the people. This would in no small way create a form of catalyst for a positive and sound relationship between the two religious faiths.

According to Iwe (n.d) "our culture is still a growing and developing one" (p. 18), therefore today's church has a role to play in modernizing some aspects of Igbo culture such as masquerade institution so as for it to be in tandem with the principle of synchronization and convivial relationship with other religions. Taking a cue from Knudson as cited in Iwe (n.d), "religion needs culture for its illumination and culture needs religion for its purification" (p.61). In commendation of Awka Catholic diocese for her cultural syncretism following masquerade performance during the diocesan cultural day celebration event at Awka, Adim (2011) made it clear that:

The participation of the church in masquerading has certainly revolutionized masquerade as an indispensable recreational and entertainment aspect of Igbo cultural institution and not

otherwise. And this goes a long way to impact a positive orientation on what masquerade stands for, which remains the aspect of its entertainment (pp.60-61).

Umeh (2005-2006) in support of the assertion declared that masquerade performance will not be allowed to go into obscurity due to its entertainment prowess. In the words of the Cathedral administrator of Awka Catholic diocese, Rev. Fr. A. Ezeoke (Personal communication 26th September; 2010) in Adim (2011), he underscored the fact that “though masquerade has its negative sides but the church still maintain its view that the good aspects of the masquerade should be encouraged and not to allow the institution to go into extinction” (pp.37-38). The good thing is that cultural contact of both Christianity and Igbo traditional religion will definitely leave none of the cultures the same, for it would certainly have a good and hospitable impact on each other.

Christians and the Socio-Psychological Impact of Masquerading

Although it could be said that Christianity and some elements of Igbo culture observable in Igbo masquerade aspect of entertainment are for the common goal of human happiness. Yet some Igbo Christians are believed to have suffered emotional trauma, due to personal alienation from their culture exemplified in masquerade institution following the acculturation of the western culture. In the words of Agbanusi (2006) “Acculturation takes place simply by a person or group of persons beginning to imitate somebody who is of a different culture or to adopt another culture” (p.118). For Onwubiko (1985), “Africans developed an inferiority complex and began to copy blindly European culture and ways of life and despised African traditions and customs” (p.245). The common truth is that, it is in Igbo traditional or cultural context that every Igbo Christian of today is called out to follow Christ and become Christians. As rightly pointed out in Okeke (2006) that, “those who were eventually converted did not completely discard elements of their traditional beliefs” (p.13). And going further, neither was the missionaries in establishing Christianity in Igboland were able to wipe out Igbo culture and traditions in totality.

Therefore, the substance in these statements streamlined the fact that some ardent Christians that were once cultural devotees, find it difficult to suppress the intriguing cultural aspect of some Igbo culture such as masquerade institution, which they can no longer participate as a result of it being a forbidding act by their Christian faith. The emotional and psychological uneasiness of self-denial erodes their social lifestyle. Although Maduka as cited in Asiegbu and Umezina (1994) note that, “it is generally psychologically difficult to change characters and habits and views formed during impressionable years of a person, especially when such views are wrongfully taught to be the orthodox ones” (p.208). That most Christians of today are disillusioned having been culturally and socially alienated from their aged long practices cannot be overemphasized. Suffice it to say that church involvement in masquerade performances would build a psychological leverage on the people to overcome socio-cultural quagmire, of non-participation in masquerading performance.

Since it is obviously impossible for these Christians on their own to build a psychological force that would resist their urge to participate in masquerading each time without feeling faith indictment. An immediate measure to be taken that would help to eliminate frustrations and unsociable state of most Christians in terms of socio-cultural events as masquerade performances. The church has to demonstrate commitment that would play on the psychic of the people that the church is not totally against masquerading neither trying to diminish their social sensitivity. But where such a measure is not in place, some persons would be tempted to fall back to the seemingly unchristian Igbo cultural practices as masquerading in a traditional way. Therefore, in order to avoid the temptation of these Christians having a grip again of the traditions and cultures they once rejected, there is need for the church to deal with the issue of members being socio-psychological restricted in relation to masquerading, by being an active participant in a rather carefully modified form.

Masquerade Institution as an Agent of Evangelization

Masquerade institution in Igboland could serve as an agent of evangelization and aid the church in the dispensation of the gospel to the people. In Itodo (2005) “evangelization in its pristine and commonest parlance can be said to be the mission and vision of the church” (p.45). Really one of the core missions and the duties of a contemporary church are to work towards reconciliation of some conflicting and negative Igbo traditions and cultures. The fusion of what seems as an incompatible element of Igbo culture in area of the church and masquerade synergy, would establish a strong bond of cultural tie between the two religions. Although for some individuals it would be a tale of touching the untouchable, but be that as it may, the introduction of masquerade performance in church activities and events will not only serve as a cultural re-awakening, but also a means to re-focus the people irrespective of religious affiliations, using an energetic cultural aspect of masquerade to draw up the message of evangelization. Maduka's suggestions as cited in Asiegbu and Umezina (1994) state that “if we do not follow Christ cultural ways we would not obtain the desired results of our evangelical endeavor” (p.168). Christ lived and grew up under the culture of the Jews during his life time, no wonder he even participated in the cultural and traditional marriage of his people, where he performed his first miracle (John 2:1-11). From the flip side of it, it may not be far from the truth that Jesus' participation in that cultural event actually made known to the people his ministry on earth. Who knows if Jesus was to be an Igbo man, he would have loved to participate in a well-thought-out and regulated masquerade performance of his fellow Igbo? Walliggo (1986) believes that with:

Sincere dialogue and mutual trust the future will certainly bear out the truth that only when Christianity becomes authentically incarnated in the local cultures, does it become really strong and alive and shine out more beautifully and above all acquire the nature of permanence among all the people (p. 30).

Basically, an application of cultural activities into Christianity can effectively internalize the gospel into the mind of the people. This is to say that Christianization of Igbo culture is a potent force for the spread of the gospel of Christianity in particular and the growth of the church in general. Buttressing this point further, Onwubiko (1992) is of the view that, “the emphasis placed on the mission of transmitting the gospel to the entire world in the cultural context recognized the importance of the growth of the local churches” (p.95). The growth of the local churches are realistic with the blend of some basic core Igbo cultural values such as masquerade institution with Christianity to ensure a deep rooted evangelization of the people. According to Gladwin (1979) “A church which is busy in evangelism without any concern or desire to respond to the social pressures upon human life in society, is a church which has misunderstood the life-transforming thrust of the gospel itself” (p. 181). The truth of the matter is that cultural integration should become an essential part of evangelism in the churches of today and not suppression of the social life of members that are cultural votaries or an act of stigmatization on them. Putting the fact straight, Obiefuna (2006) warns that “the suppression of the evangelized people's culture encapsulated in their traditions and institutions is not a good disposition for the survival of Christianity in those cultures” (p.161). This throws more light to the fact that in knowing God and worshipping him aright in a setting as Igboland, there is a clear need of taking a theological route in Igbo culture in order to get the people safe and intact without controversies. After all, according to Gladwin (1979) “For the church, evangelism and social action are not in tension with each other; they actually feed each other” (p. 181). And that is what we expect to become the order of the day between Christianity and Igbo culture in area of masquerading as one of the social action of the people in support of one another. Most times the conflict inside of a Christian is that Christians cannot escape the battle of old and the

new man. To this end, it is not in doubt that the role of incarnating the gospel into Igbo culture which masquerade institution represents is the duty very much expected of every church to carry along and see that the idea and the principle of embodying the gospel into Igbo culture is put into practice. On a similar thought, while emphasizing the issue to Nsukka Church, Ugwu (2009) was of the view that the use of masquerades and dance groups in the churches be encouraged, but be devoid of diabolical features. Pointing out to the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka that these areas should be examined thoroughly to enable the Roman Catholic Church be at home with the congregation. Because it will no doubt bring people closer to the church perhaps as one source of evangelization and hence sustain cultural preservation of the people.

Conclusion

The missionaries were bias concerning some aspects of Igbo cultural life such as masquerade institution. This is so because the early Christian missionaries in Igboland failed to come to terms with the good aspects of some Igbo culture without adequate information about its existence. And this actually explained their assertions and attitude towards masquerade to be uncomplimentary. No wonder Uche (2011) sees such assertions as obnoxious labels. But from the context of this study the missionaries' conception that masquerade institution is satanic, evil and unchristian is quite unnecessary. The truth is that the Igbo people having embraced Christianity and western culture with every sense of enthusiasm cannot be mistaken to mean that the people deserted their culture in all form. Therefore the ideal thing for this present day Church/Christians to do, is for them to put in place a far reaching Christian and cultural integration plan for an effective inter-cultural assimilation of the two religions. As an agent of socialization, the church should ensure that Christianity is expressed in relevant Igbo cultural heritage such as masquerade institution for cultural preservation. Anda (2005) is of the opinion that, "each nation should express Christ message in her own way. Indeed, there are some things in the culture of a people that gospel should change and there are others, those that have nothing to do against the message of Christ which should be allowed to the people in their practice of Christianity" (p. 228). Of course, the need for our present day Churches in Igboland to play a supporting role in accommodating and tolerating some core cultural values of the people such as masquerade institution cannot be overemphasized. Masquerade institution is a product of good human aspiration and initiative meant for the joy and happiness of humanity. The dark spots of it notwithstanding, it has become imperative to ensure that Christian values are injected into this aspect of Igbo cultural heritage (masquerading) and allow the gospel of Christ to take a deeper root in this noble Igbo culture and therefore dissipate its seemingly dark spots such as diabolical acts and violence. Bearing in mind that, the activities of shenanigans can be restrained and possibly eliminated with prompt participation of the church to ensure that the act of masquerading be conducted on a platform of morality and ethical standard. In the words of Obiefune (1980), "the Church is not against local customs, except those which are irrevocably opposed to the faith and morals" (p.12). Over and above all, the coming together of these cultures, is not to be considered erroneous, or a transgression against the divine law of God. Rather it would be salutary if churches in Igboland were to participate in masquerade performance, so as to demystify masquerade institution as a cult while granting Christians with socio-cultural votaries on masquerading a place of satisfaction and integration.

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