

A THEOLOGICO-PASTORAL RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF NEOPAGANISM AMONG IGBO CHRISTIAN YOUTHS

Michael Muonwe, PhD
Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
me.muonwe@unizik.edu.ng; makkymuo@yhoo.co.uk

Abstract

This paper provides a closer examination of the revival of neopaganism among Igbo youths and its implications for pastoral ministry. It delves into the reasons behind this trend, including feelings of disillusionment with traditional Christianity, the allure of ancestral spirituality, and the quest for identity and a sense of belonging. The study also explores the challenges that neopaganism presents to the Christian faith, some of which are competition for followership, the weakening of Christian values, and the risk of social and religious tensions within communities. A thorough analysis of the theological and pastoral responses to neopaganism is equally undertaken. Through a critical examination and analysis of existing literature on the subject matter, as well as participant observation, the paper highlights the significance of a thorough theological and pastoral approach in addressing the complex issues raised by neopaganism. The strength of this approach lies in its ability to reflect a deep understanding of Igbo cultural heritage and how it can be integrated into the Christian faith, prioritizing interfaith dialogue and fostering respect and understanding among Christians, neopagans, and adherents of Igbo traditional religion. The paper further emphasizes the importance of providing young people with relevant and meaningful spiritual guidance and addressing their legitimate questions and concerns about faith and spirituality in a culturally aware and theologically sound manner. By creating a supportive and inclusive community, churches can effectively counter the allure of neopaganism and present a compelling alternative. Ultimately, this paper aims to raise awareness, broaden, and deepen understanding of the challenges and opportunities that engagement with neopaganism presents, and to offer practical guidance for pastoral ministry in contemporary Igbo society.

Keywords: Theologico-pastoral, Neopaganism, Igbo, Youths

Introduction

Over the past few decades, Nigeria has seen a notable shift in spiritual attitudes, particularly among young people. Although Christianity and Islam have long been the dominant religions, there has been a growing revival of neopaganism—a modern

movement rooted in pre-Christian, indigenous beliefs. This trend has particularly taken hold within Igbo Christian communities. This development poses a significant challenge to traditional Christian pastoral ministry, raising key questions about faith, culture, and identity in modern Igbo society. This paper offers a critical examination of this trend, looking at its underlying causes and proposing a comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and theologically grounded response.

What draws young Igbo people to neopaganism is a complex blend of factors. Many feel let down by institutionalized Christianity, which they often see as culturally distant and sometimes hypocritical. This sentiment is fueled by the pull of ancestral spirituality and a strong desire for cultural identity in a globalized world. Neopaganism provides an alternative spiritual path that seeks to reconnect them with their heritage and give a sense of belonging they feel is lacking in mainstream Christian denominations. Social media's rapid spread of information has also played a role, making these alternative spiritual paths more accessible and appealing.

Neopaganism poses significant challenges to the Christian faith in Igboland, which this research examines in depth. These challenges include direct competition for followers, a decline in Christian values among young people, and the potential for social and religious conflicts in communities where both worldviews overlap. The paper critically assesses the theological implications of these movements and evaluates the effectiveness of current pastoral strategies. By drawing on existing research and participant observation, the study highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to understanding this complex issue.

Our approach begins with a profound understanding of Neopaganism and its impact on Igbo society. Rather than outright rejection of Igbo cultural heritage that Neopaganism tries to revitalize, the paper argues for a better realization of its rightful role within Christianity. Rather than outright rejection, it promotes a strong process of inculturation, where Christian teachings are blended with positive Igbo traditions to make the faith more relevant and meaningful. This also highlights the importance of interfaith dialogue in promoting mutual respect and understanding among diverse faiths. Ultimately, this work aims to provide practical guidance for pastoral ministry, emphasizing the importance of churches creating a supportive, inclusive, and spiritually enriching community that can effectively counter the appeal of Neopaganism and foster a resilient faith among Igbo youths.

Understanding Neopaganism

Although there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of religious movements that fall under the umbrella of "Neopaganism" (Fedele, 2013), it encompasses a diverse array of contemporary religious movements aimed at reviving, reinterpreting, and reimagining pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices (Adler,

1986). It is also referred to as modern Paganism or simply Paganism. Some refer to it as the "Goddess Movement." These movements are often characterised by a reverence for nature, a polytheistic or pantheistic worldview, and a focus on personal experience and spiritual growth (Harvey & Simmonds, 2005). It is essential to recognise that Neopaganism is not a monolithic tradition but a diverse collection of distinct paths and practices (Hutton, 1999). Magliocco (2012) uses Neopaganism, Modern Paganism, and Paganism as synonyms. For her, it "is an umbrella term for several new religious movements that strive to revive, reinterpret, and experiment with pre-Christian polytheistic religions" (p. 150). She suggests that since several of these groups exist, it would be better to refer to them collectively in the plural as Modern Paganisms. They share a common desire to "reconnect with nature, community, and the sacred, a view of the divine as immanent, and a search for religious experience that is personal, direct, and embodied" (p. 150).

Defining Neopaganism in Europe, Strmiska notes that it is a movement "dedicated to reviving the polytheistic, nature-worshipping pagan religions of pre-Christian Europe and adapting them for the use of people in modern societies" (Strmiska, 2005, pp. 11-12). Hanegraaff (1996) considers Neopaganism to be an assemblage of modern religious movements founded on the belief that those religions which Christianity termed superstitious and idolatrous represent a profound and meaningful religious worldview. Based on this, they strive to revive these religious worldviews in our present society. Neopaganism, he states, "covers all those modern movements which are, firstly, based on the conviction that what Christianity has traditionally denounced as idolatry and superstition represents/represented a profound and meaningful religious worldview and, secondly, that a religious practice based on this worldview can and should be revitalised in our modern world" (Hanegraaff, 1996, p.77). Discussing Neopaganism in southeast Nigeria, Okafor (2020, p.ii) defines it as "paganism with a new face and a new style. It is a modernisation of the pagan cult and practices to render them attractive to modern people, particularly the youths."

Halstead (2019) states that Neopaganism is not merely a revival of pre-scientific religions or the beliefs of our ancestors, but rather a human experience that transcends these origins. To be Neopagan, he asserts, is to embody what it means to be human. It involves connecting with nature, representing a human response to a more-than-human world. While it may share similarities with what our ancestors practised, we still inhabit the same earth and share the same air. This connection is inherent in our flesh and blood as humans. Some researchers characterise it as a singular religion, with its various expressions viewed as denominations. Others view it as a movement comprising different religions, due to the absence of a unified doctrine and practices among the various groups (Doyle White, 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite these differences, some commonalities persist. For Halstead, Neopaganism constitutes a religious movement within the broader pagan family, which includes other movements such as Wicca and various forms of reconstructionist paganism, an

umbrella term "referring to a wide variety of related, but distinct religious movements, including Neo-paganism as well as Wicca and various reconstructionist Paganisms and devotional polytheisms" (p. 5).

Etymologically, the term "Neopaganism" combines the prefix "neo," meaning "new" or "recent," with "paganism," which derives from the Latin term "paganus," meaning "rustic" or "country dweller." *Paganus* acquired a religious connotation in the Roman Empire during the late fourth and fifth centuries, when Christianity became the dominant religion. Paganus was applied to people who were not yet Christians at the time and could not identify with the state but rather with the rural territory where they dwelt. The Roman soldiers also used it as slang to refer to civilians, and in the Christian sense, it meant those who had not yet joined Jesus's army (Magliocco, 2012). The term later became more generalised, referring to those who belonged to any non-Abrahamic religion (Hutton, 1991). Neopaganism typically refers to "new paganism," thereby distinguishing modern paganism from historical pagan religions. This distinction acknowledges that while inspiration is drawn from the past, Neopaganism is a contemporary movement with unique characteristics.

Historical Development of Neopaganism in the West

While interest in pre-Christian mythology and folklore existed in earlier centuries, the foundations of modern Neopaganism were laid in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, coinciding with the rise of Romanticism, the development of folklore studies, and a growing interest in alternative spiritualities (Hutton, 1991). The mid-20th century, particularly after World War II, witnessed Neopaganism begin to crystallise as a distinct religious movement. European intellectuals such as Johann Gottfried Herder and the Brothers Grimm endeavoured to preserve and study folk traditions, which later inspired modern Pagan revivals (Hutton, 1999, pp. 14–17). Furthermore, the emergence of nationalist movements led to a rediscovery of pre-Christian traditions as a means to define cultural identity (Hutton, 2001, pp. 45–48). The publication of Gerald Gardner's *Witchcraft Today* in 1954 played a crucial role in popularising Wicca, a modern form of witchcraft that draws inspiration from pre-Christian European traditions (Gardner, 1954). With its emphasis on nature worship, ritual practice, and the divine feminine, Wicca became a significant and influential part of the broader Neopagan landscape.

The Occult Revival of the 19th and early 20th centuries also significantly shaped Neopagan thought. During this period, esoteric traditions such as Theosophy, ceremonial magic, and the Western mystery tradition gained prominence, influencing subsequent Pagan movements. The Theosophical Society, established in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, was one of the most influential esoteric movements of the 19th century. Blavatsky claimed to receive knowledge from "Ascended Masters," hidden spiritual teachers who were said to preserve the wisdom of ancient civilisations. Theosophy promoted the idea of a universal ancient religion from which all modern faiths descended (Blavatsky, 1888). This belief inspired later Neopagan movements to

seek out and reconstruct what they regarded as authentic pre-Christian traditions. Theosophy introduced key ideas that later shaped Neopaganism, such as reincarnation and karma, panentheism and divine immanence, and syncretism (Huton, 1999, pp. 105-107).

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, established in 1888, made significant contributions to the spiritual landscape that led to the emergence of Neopaganism. The Golden Dawn integrated elements of Kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, and Egyptian mythology into a structured system of magic (Regardie, 1984). Numerous early Neopagan leaders, including Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca, were shaped by the teachings of the Golden Dawn.

Aleister Crowley, a former member of the Golden Dawn and the founder of Thelema, made significant contributions to the rise of modern magical practice. His emphasis on personal will, ceremonial magic, and esoteric symbolism was later adopted by Wiccan and Pagan practitioners (Crowley, 1904). Neopaganism was brought to America in the 1960s by immigrants from England. During this period, it gained popularity among universities, which became fertile ground for recruiting students and academics, leading to the emergence of various forms. It developed into numerous witchcraft societies, becoming particularly popular among feminists due to the worship of goddesses that mainstream religions failed to offer (Magliocco, 2012).

Neopaganism does not adhere to a set of dogma or a central authority. Consequently, individual initiatives and innovations flourish, fostering a rich diversity (Berger, 2011). As it has continued to evolve and diversify, various traditions have emerged, each with its own specific focus and practices. Some, such as Druidry and Heathenry, concentrate on reviving particular pre-Christian religious practices, while others, like Eclectic Paganism, draw inspiration from multiple sources (Hutton, 1999). In the northern European country of Latvia, Neopaganism (Dievturība) underwent a significant transformation in the 1920s, shaped by the country's socio-political realities. It initially sought to establish itself as a national religion. However, this movement was interrupted by the suppression of religion by the communist Soviet Union. It was not until 1990, years after the fall of the Soviet Union, that it was officially registered as a religious organisation in the country. One of its significant features in Latvia today is its struggle to reconstruct the traditional religion of the ancient Latvians through Latvian folk songs, folk beliefs, and practices, as well as its opposition to globalisation (Stasulane & Ozolins, 2017). This diversity is a hallmark of Neopagan movements in the West. Another notable aspect of Neopaganism in the West is its appeal to women, resulting in their participation being slightly higher than in other religions (Berger, 2011). They worship the female "goddess," which resonates with women.

Neopaganism in Igbo Society

In contemporary Igbo society, many individuals engage in practices aimed at reviving

and reinterpreting aspects of Igbo traditional religion, often incorporating elements such as ancestral veneration, the revitalisation of various deities linked to different natural elements, seasonal festivals, and rites of passage (birth, marriage, death), sometimes adapted to modern contexts to accommodate contemporary life and perspectives (Isiani et al., 2022). Another significant feature is the veneration of Mother Earth, illustrated in the worship of the earth goddess. In traditional Igbo society, the earth goddess (*Ala*) occupies such a central role in the people's beliefs that any modern practice or revival of the pristine Igbo religion without reference to her seems illusory.

Neopaganism in Igbo society can be described as rooted in nature. Followers are convinced of *Ala*'s potency, and many avoid actions that might offend her designs (Onwuatiegwu & Mmadudiri, 2020). Although adherents believe in the transcendence of the sacred, which exists beyond every living creature in spiritual entities such as gods and goddesses, deities, and spirits, they also maintain that the sacred is present in every living being. They often perceive nature as sacred and interconnected with the divine. In their rituals, they utilise natural objects, animals, and living beings to connect with life, nature, and otherworldly entities. Rituals are, therefore, not merely performances but highly transformative events that can influence an individual through the power they are believed to invoke when performed.

There is significantly more involvement of the youth than the elders in Igbo Neopaganism. This can be attributed to factors ranging from their ease of adapting to change to the quest for exploring alternative spiritualities and the prevailing get-rich-quick syndrome within Igbo society, which is championed by the youth. Unlike their forebears, who showed genuine devotion to the gods, many of today's Igbo youth are attracted to Neopaganism due to promises of a brighter future and greater material wealth.

An offshoot of these beliefs is the infamous *Oke-ite* ("significant pot") ritual, which is believed to make someone who engages in it instantly rich. Here, traditional cultural practices of sacrifice and blood rituals, along with their potency, combine with the modern quest for quick wealth among Igbo youths. It is crucial to understand that this is not a traditional or accepted part of mainstream Igbo culture or religion (*Odinani*), but rather a dangerous and often criminal deviation within the current Neopaganism in society. The ritual consists of a charm or concoction prepared in an earthenware pot ("ite") using various ingredients. These ingredients are often reported to include bitter herbs, animal parts (such as dogs, elephants, monkeys, and bats), and, alarmingly, human body parts, sometimes specifically those of virgins or individuals who have not given birth (Nnatuanya, 2022; Mefor, 2025). The purported aim of the *Oke-ite* ritual is to bring sudden and immense wealth to the person who performs it, often without requiring hard work or legitimate means.

The *Oke-ite* ritual has been portrayed as an evil, barbaric, and satanic practice that is entirely at odds with traditional Igbo values of diligence, hard work, and ethical conduct. It is seen as a corruption of Igbo culture and a destructive force within the society. Mefor (2025) decries how this practice has destroyed many Igbo youths and asserts "that everything about *Oke-ite* is evil and negative destructive energy, which

and reinterpreting aspects of Igbo traditional religion, often incorporating elements such as ancestral veneration, the revitalisation of various deities linked to different natural elements, seasonal festivals, and rites of passage (birth, marriage, death), sometimes adapted to modern contexts to accommodate contemporary life and perspectives (Isiani et al., 2022). Another significant feature is the veneration of Mother Earth, illustrated in the worship of the earth goddess. In traditional Igbo society, the earth goddess (*Ala*) occupies such a central role in the people's beliefs that any modern practice or revival of the pristine Igbo religion without reference to her seems illusory.

Neopaganism in Igbo society can be described as rooted in nature. Followers are convinced of *Ala*'s potency, and many avoid actions that might offend her designs (Onwuatiegwu & Mmadudiri, 2020). Although adherents believe in the transcendence of the sacred, which exists beyond every living creature in spiritual entities such as gods and goddesses, deities, and spirits, they also maintain that the sacred is present in every living being. They often perceive nature as sacred and interconnected with the divine. In their rituals, they utilise natural objects, animals, and living beings to connect with life, nature, and otherworldly entities. Rituals are, therefore, not merely performances but highly transformative events that can influence an individual through the power they are believed to invoke when performed.

There is significantly more involvement of the youth than the elders in Igbo Neopaganism. This can be attributed to factors ranging from their ease of adapting to change to the quest for exploring alternative spiritualities and the prevailing get-rich-quick syndrome within Igbo society, which is championed by the youth. Unlike their forebears, who showed genuine devotion to the gods, many of today's Igbo youth are attracted to Neopaganism due to promises of a brighter future and greater material wealth.

An offshoot of these beliefs is the infamous *Oke-ite* ("significant pot") ritual, which is believed to make someone who engages in it instantly rich. Here, traditional cultural practices of sacrifice and blood rituals, along with their potency, combine with the modern quest for quick wealth among Igbo youths. It is crucial to understand that this is not a traditional or accepted part of mainstream Igbo culture or religion (*Odinani*), but rather a dangerous and often criminal deviation within the current Neopaganism in society. The ritual consists of a charm or concoction prepared in an earthenware pot ("ite") using various ingredients. These ingredients are often reported to include bitter herbs, animal parts (such as dogs, elephants, monkeys, and bats), and, alarmingly, human body parts, sometimes specifically those of virgins or individuals who have not given birth (Nnatuanya, 2022; Mefor, 2025). The purported aim of the *Oke-ite* ritual is to bring sudden and immense wealth to the person who performs it, often without requiring hard work or legitimate means.

The *Oke-ite* ritual has been portrayed as an evil, barbaric, and satanic practice

alters destinies and is upending Igbo core values" (par. 5). *Oke-ite* rituals are frequently linked to various criminal activities, including ritual killings, fraud, and other illegal means of acquiring wealth. The belief in the efficacy of these rituals is seen as a motivator for such crimes.

The internet and social media platforms are significant channels for spreading information and even marketing *Oke-ite* rituals by some native doctors and spiritualists, which contributes to their appeal among certain youths. According to Nwafor, Amatu, and Nwodu (2023), whereas in the past no one was guaranteed any information regarding such rituals without direct contact with the practitioners, currently, one merely needs to be online to communicate with "digital Priest, Priestess, Dibia (herbalist), Seer, Magician, and Grand Master who use social media platforms to promote their magic or religion" (p.86). Unlike traditional Igbo religious functionaries, these modern claimants charge exorbitant fees for their services.

The rise of *Oke-ite* has become a serious concern, prompting government intervention, as demonstrated by the Anambra State Homeland Security Law of 2025, which aims to combat it. Religious and community leaders have also strongly condemned the practice (Mefor, 2025).

Factors Contributing to the Rise of Igbo Neopaganism:

One of the key factors driving Neopaganism in Igbo society is the desire for a sense of cultural identity. This desire is closely linked to the wish to reconnect with ancestral heritage and traditional ways of life, which many believe were lost due to the influence of Christianity and colonialism. Often, Christianity did not regard the culture of the people seriously and failed to use it effectively as a means for evangelization. This caused many to lead divided lives, one in the Church and another at home. While church life appeals to Western culture, life at home reflects the native culture of the people. Some individuals, tired of this duality, prefer to return to their ancestors' religion, reinterpret it, and adapt it for modern society, aiming to restore peace and harmony in their lives. Therefore, Neopaganism's appeal to these individuals lies in its ability to provide a sense of cultural identity and connection to ancestral heritage, while offering a spiritual framework distinct from traditional Christianity.

The influence of globalisation, with its threat to local cultures, has not improved the situation. Indeed, globalisation has brought many benefits to nations, including easier international trade, increased investment, economic growth, the rise of global supply chains, and greater cooperation through international institutions and agreements. However, it has also led to increased income inequality, disruption of traditional industries, and concerns about cultural homogenization, as global cultures threaten local customs and traditions. As a result, many Igbo youths feel culturally alienated due to the widespread influence of Western culture. Neopaganism acts as a form of cultural resistance against the historical erasure of indigenous practices caused

by globalisation. By reconnecting with traditional spiritual practices and ancestral heritage, they feel they have distinguished themselves, reinforced unique Igbo cultural markers, asserted their individual identity, and preserved a sense of belonging (Uwaegbute, 2021).

Another aspect of globalisation that has influenced the Igbo youth and their engagement with Neopaganism is the rapid spread of information through the Internet. By offering unprecedentedly quick access to a previously marginalised and fragmented community, the Internet acts as a catalyst for discovery, community building, and personal exploration for many of them who may be seeking alternative spiritual paths.

Some youths also find mainstream Christian denominations to be culturally insensitive or inadequate in addressing their spiritual needs. Christianity practised by these denominations is perceived primarily as foreign and therefore not fully equipped to meet the deep-seated spiritual yearnings of the people. For them, traditional religion signifies a more authentic belief system relevant to their lived experiences. They argue that traditional Igbo religious practices and rituals offer more direct solutions to life's challenges, such as security, spiritual power, material benefits, and healing, compared to Christianity. This is mainly due to Christianity's inability to inculturate the faith—that is, its failure to utilize the cultural riches of the Igbo people to make the Christian faith accessible to them, including Igbo philosophy, folklore, traditional wisdom, and languages (Muonwe, 2019). Once inculturation is effectively carried out, the people will cease to see Christianity as an imported religion and will embrace it as an integral part of their societal heritage. The shortcomings of Christianity in this regard have led some to abandon it during times of crisis in favour of seeking solutions in traditional religion, as adapted to suit modern society.

The communal aspect of Igbo culture, for instance, preserved through indigenous religion, also motivates some youth to adopt their ancestors' beliefs. Many activities, such as masquerade celebrations, involve eating, dancing, and merrymaking. Wealthy members of specific Igbo communities often sponsor these celebrations to preserve their culture. However, they typically include elements of sacrifice, such as goats and cows offered to the gods, which the community then slaughters and shares among themselves. Due to the country's economic struggles, many young people see joining Neopaganism as an opportunity to enjoy free food and fellowship with fellow believers (Uwaegbute, 2021).

Another troubling aspect is the overall moral decline in Nigeria, which has affected Christianity, its leaders, and followers. When there is a significant gap between the moral teachings of Christianity and the actual behaviour of some adherents or religious leaders (e.g., corruption, materialism), many individuals, especially the youth, quickly become disillusioned. Recognising the hypocrisy involved, they see Christianity as failing to provide a strong moral guide. This is evident in various aspects

of Christianity within Igbo society. First is the exploitation of the vulnerability of lay faithful by Christian pastors in the region (Muonwe, 2024). This is achieved through false claims of miraculous healings, prosperity theology, and prophetic powers. In some cases, pastors discourage their followers from seeking legitimate medical treatment, attributing many illnesses to demonic attacks that necessitate spiritual intervention, often demanding substantial financial contributions. This is regarded as a dangerous practice that has led to preventable deaths and increased dependence on pastors.

Prosperity theology promotes Neopaganism because it presents a materialistic gospel that equates material wealth with direct results of faith and generous donations to the Church. This is seen as a manipulation of the Gospel for personal gain, with pastors living extravagant lifestyles at the expense of their often impoverished followers. Furthermore, prioritising wealth and physical prosperity over spiritual growth and ethical behaviour has led to a sense of spiritual emptiness among some youths. Some of these youths, therefore, view Christianity as a scam to be discarded. Disillusioned, they seek alternative solutions to their spiritual struggles, and, since Neopaganism is readily available to them, they embrace it wholeheartedly. Similarly, there is the misuse of prophetic claims, where pastors assert the ability to foretell the future and offer guidance on personal matters, thereby further reinforcing members' dependency and the control that pastors exert over them (Muonwe, 2024).

Incidentally, Neopaganism also exploits the materialist tendency of Igbo society to attract many young people to itself. However, because it is still in its early stages, many of them have yet to experience this. The promoters of Neopaganism in the region exploit the get-rich-quick mentality that has caught many youths. They promise instant wealth and success, just as some pastors do. This appeals easily to young people, causing them to support the religious claimants, unaware that it is the exact exploitative mechanism used by some pastors that these people use, though wrapped in another garment. Many of them believe that their sacrifices can fix financial problems and offer solutions to all monetary issues.

Poverty and unemployment are additional factors that contribute to the rise of Neopaganism among Igbo youths. Due to poverty in Nigeria, many young people in Igbo society feel disillusioned and have lost faith in the socio-political system. Numerous skilled individuals struggle to find meaningful employment that promises a future they can be proud of. Often, low self-esteem sets in. In search of purpose and acceptance, some turn to Neopaganism, particularly as it is portrayed on social media, viewing it as a source of hope and a means to find significance and community, even if this is based on false beliefs. Poverty and a lack of meaningful employment create a void that Neopaganism can temporarily fill by offering a sense of control and belonging (Abalogu & Nwokedi, 2024).

Responding to the Challenges of Neopaganism among Igbo Youths

To address this issue in Igbo society, the church must first understand the extent of the dangers involved. Additionally, a thorough study of Igbo traditional religion and culture should be conducted. This will help develop a proper understanding of society, its values, beliefs, and customs. Furthermore, Christianity needs to initiate in-depth and seasoned catechesis, along with meaningful dialogue with Igbo culture, to foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of its core message. These measures, along with others, are discussed in detail below.

Dialogue and Collaboration: The first approach that Christianity should adopt to address the challenges of Neopaganism is one of enhanced dialogue and collaboration with practitioners of Igbo traditional religion and Neopagan worshippers. Historically, the interactions between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion have been characterised by conflict. Christianity has often demeaned the traditional religion and its worshippers, believing that such actions might lead to its complete disappearance. Many never anticipated that the traditional religion could stage a comeback of this magnitude or in this manner. Christianity can foster a more inclusive environment by acknowledging past antagonisms and working toward a relationship founded on communal respect and acceptance (Chinyere, 2021; Okeke, Ibenwa, and Okeke, 2017). Disparity of cults should not be allowed to bring regrettable fragmentation in a society that "is fundamentally communal" (Muonwe, Osigwe, and Lebechi 2025). The attitude of superiority frequently exhibited by Christianity has not facilitated peaceful coexistence and understanding among individuals. The Church in Igbo society must take seriously the call of Vatican II for interreligious dialogue. This should be upheld. Engaging in open dialogue with community leaders and Neopagan groups can help address the tensions between Christianity and traditional practices and diminish the disdain harboured by the youth towards Christianity. This collaboration can promote peace and unity, ensuring that religious and cultural identities are respected and preserved (Chukwudebelu, 2024). This involves understanding and respecting traditional practices while emphasising core Christian values. The youth can better appreciate Christianity and its message in such a peaceful and vibrant dialogue environment.

Cultural Sensitivity and Inculturation: By emphasising the importance of Igbo cultural symbols, practices, and heritage—such as traditional festivals, arts, and language—and utilising them to communicate the Christian message, Christianity can maintain a strong sense of identity among Igbo youths (Chukwudebelu & Molokwu, 2024). This approach can mitigate the erosion of cultural values and counter the allure of Neopaganism, which often appeals to those seeking a return to traditional roots (Udechukwu, 2019). Christianity can adapt by incorporating elements of Igbo culture into its practices through a deeper process of encounter known as inculturation. Reviving traditional Igbo values, including industry, hard work, and diligence, should be of utmost importance. This strategy should influence all aspects of the Church's life,

including administration, architecture, manner of speech, liturgy, and fights for social justice and equity. Doing so can help reduce the perception of Christianity as a foreign imposition, making it more relatable and meaningful to Igbo youths, which may potentially curb the appeal of Neopaganism and the temptation to turn to it for cultural fulfilment (Chukwudebelu, Anowai, and Uba, 2024).

Emphasising Core Christian Values through Catechesis: The Church can offer a compelling alternative to Neopagan practices by focusing on core Christian values and teachings. Neopaganism attracts some youths who find the practice of Christianity superficial or lacking in personal meaning. Catechesis can provide a deeper understanding of Christian doctrines, scriptures, and traditions, fostering a more profound and personal relationship with Christ, who is at the heart of catechesis and the Church. As one of the primary tasks of the Church (John Paul II, 1979), catechesis can illuminate Christianity's rich spiritual heritage, encompassing prayer, sacraments, and the lives of saints. This can counter the perception that Christian spirituality is less engaging or meaningful than Neopagan practices.

Moreover, for catechesis to have the desired impact, it must highlight the spiritual and moral aspects of Christianity that resonate with Igbo societal values. It must be inculturated, acknowledging and engaging with the Igbo cultural context. It can highlight how Christian values align with positive aspects of Igbo tradition while respectfully addressing areas of divergence. This approach can make Christianity feel more relevant and less like a foreign imposition.

As some youths are drawn to Neopaganism due to misconceptions about traditional Igbo religion or a romanticized view of pre-colonial practices, catechesis can offer accurate historical and theological perspectives, address these misconceptions, and present a balanced view. Certainly, neopagan groups may offer a strong sense of community and cultural identity. Catechesis within the Church can actively nurture vibrant youth groups and communities that provide a positive sense of belonging rooted in Christian values and Igbo cultural heritage. Neopaganism often emphasises a direct connection with nature and the spiritual realm. Catechesis can highlight the Christian understanding of the sacred in creation, the mystery of God's presence (Muonwe, 2020), and the profound encounter with the divine offered through the sacraments.

Another crucial point is developing and encouraging critical thinking, as well as the ability to discern between different belief systems. Youth can be taught to evaluate the claims of Neopaganism in light of Christian teachings and through the use of critical reasoning. Catechesis can equip young people with the knowledge and skills to engage in respectful dialogue with those who adhere to Neopagan beliefs, fostering understanding and offering a Christian perspective. It should also emphasise moral formation based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. This can provide a strong ethical framework that contrasts with aspects of Neopaganism that may be inconsistent with

Christian values.

Pastors and catechists should also be well-formed in their faith, knowledgeable about Igbo culture, and equipped with the skills to engage with youth effectively. They should be able to address the questions and challenges posed by the rise of Neopaganism. This is not to say that the work should be left for them alone, for as John Paul II puts it, "catechesis always has been and always will be a work for which the whole Church must feel responsible and must wish to be responsible" (John Paul II, 1979, no. 16). According to the pontiff, the entire Christian community has a role to play, each according to his or her mission. Such roles include providing positive role models, creating welcoming and engaging church environments, and actively living out their faith in an attractive way to youths. Families should play a key role, especially the parents, whom the Catholic Church (1965, no. 3) describes as their children's primary and principal educators in the faith. Parents need to be equipped to discuss these issues with their children and reinforce the Church's teachings at home.

When executed effectively and contextually, catechesis can serve as a vital tool in helping Igbo youths understand the depth and richness of their Christian faith, addressing the perceived allure of Neopaganism, and empowering them to make informed decisions about their spiritual lives. To achieve this effectively, a serious commitment from the Church, catechists, families, and the wider community is necessary to foster meaningful and relevant engagement with young people.

Youth empowerment: The Church can also address the socio-economic factors contributing to the resurgence of pagan practices by providing increased support and resources aimed at reducing poverty and empowering the youth. It can create employment opportunities that will alleviate poverty and disillusionment among Igbo youth, making them less susceptible to Neopaganism. Because the Church cannot do it alone, it has to partner with the government in the region, attract, and encourage philanthropists to offer assistance. This will enhance the Church's influence and appeal among the youth. Besides, once busy and productive, the lure of Neopaganism will reduce considerably.

Conclusion

The resurgence of neopaganism among Igbo Christian youths is a complex and pressing issue that calls for a thoughtful and deeply rooted theological and pastoral approach. This paper observes that this trend is not just a fleeting phase but rather a reflection of deeper concerns, such as a longing for cultural authenticity, disappointment with established religious institutions, and the effects of contemporary social changes. The allure of neopaganism, particularly its promise of cultural reconnection and quick financial gain, highlights a spiritual and social gap that traditional pastoral methods have struggled to fill.

Thus, the suggested response should not be one of condemnation but rather one of inculturation and open dialogue. The Church in Igboland needs to move beyond a colonial-era model of evangelization and embrace the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people as a means of sharing the Gospel. By weaving Igbo values of community, hard work, and justice into Christian teachings and worship, the Church can present a faith that is not only spiritually enriching but also culturally relevant. This approach can offer a compelling alternative to neopaganism by demonstrating that a genuine relationship with Christ can enrich, rather than diminish, one's identity.

Additionally, this study emphasizes the need to reform pastoral ministry in light of the moral and economic challenges young people face today. The hypocrisy and exploitation often seen in prosperity theology and misleading prophetic ministries have left a spiritual gap. A genuine pastoral response should prioritize the moral growth of youth, equip them with critical thinking abilities, and foster a supportive community that stands against the temptations of instant gratification and harmful practices like *Oke-ite*. Through authentic leadership, meaningful conversations, and a commitment to social justice, the Church can rebuild trust with young people and effectively tackle the challenges posed by neopaganism.

Finally, the future of Christianity in Igboland hinges largely on its ability to adapt. By welcoming inculturation and fostering dialogue, the Church has the chance to transform challenges into opportunities—opportunities to cultivate a lively, homegrown faith that is not only theologically robust but also deeply rooted in the culture. This approach can create a strong spiritual foundation for the next generation of Igbo Christians.

References

- Abalogu, D. & Nwokedi, G. (2024). Contemporary trends of youth empowerment and employment in Nigerian society: Socio-Christian perspective. *Unizik Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 15(1), 172–190.
- Adler, M. (1986). *Drawing down the moon: Witches, druids, goddess-worshippers, and other pagans in America today*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Berger, H. (2011). Witchcraft and Neopaganism. In H. Berger (Ed.), *Witchcraft and magic: Contemporary North America* (pp. 28–54). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Catholic Church (1965). Declaration on Christian education, *Gravissimum educationis*. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html.
- Chinyere, N. (2021). The interface between Igbo Traditional Religion and Christianity 13(1), 37-42. <https://doi.org/10.5897/AJHC2020.0483>.
- Blavatsky, H. P. (1888). *The secret doctrine: The synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy*. London: Theosophical Publishing House.
- Chukwudebelu, I. (2023). The ecclesiastical factor and the rise of neo-traditionalism in

- Igboland: Unintended consequences and socio-cultural implications. *Journal of Media, Culture and Communication* 3(2), 7–8. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jmcc.32.7.18>.
- Chukwudebelu, I., Molokwu, G., Anowia, W., & Uba, E. (2024). Faith and friction: Christianity and neo-traditionalism in Igboland. *Journal of Media, Culture and Communication* 4(6), 9-21. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jmcc.46.9.21>.
- Chukwudebelu, I., & Molokwu, G. (2024). Faces of Neo-traditionalism: Reviving Igbo culture in contemporary society. *Journal of Media, Culture and Communication* 4(5), 12–23. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jmcc.45.12.23>.
- Crowley, A. (1904). *The Book of the Law*. London: Ordo Templi Orientis.
- Doyle White, E. (2012). In defense of Pagan studies: A response to Davidsen's critique. *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 14(1), 5–21. doi:10.1558/pome.v14i1.5.
- Fedele, A. (2013). The metamorphoses of Neopaganism in traditionally Catholic countries in southern Europe. In R. Blanes and J. Mapril (Eds.), *Sites and Politics of Religious Diversity in Southern Europe* (pp. 51–72), International Studies in Religion and Society, 19. London: Brill.
- Gardner, G. (1954). *Witchcraft today*. London: Rider.
- Halsted, J. (2019). *Neo-Paganism: Historical inspiration and contemporary creativity*. Research Triangle, NC: Lulu Press.
- Hanegraaff, W. *New Age Religion and Western culture: Esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Harvey, G., & Simmonds, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Paganism today: The new face of paganism across the world*. Delhi: Sterling.
- Hutton, R. (2001). *The Pagan religions of the ancient British Isles: Their nature and legacy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hutton, R. (2009). *Blood and mistletoe: The history of the druids in Britain*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hutton, R. (1999). *The triumph of the moon: A history of modern Pagan witchcraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hutton, R. (1991). *The pagan religions of the ancient British Isles: Their nature and legacy*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell.
- Isiani, M. C., Okafor, J. C., & Umezina, E. (2022). Reviving traditional Igbo deities in the 21st century. *Journal of Religion and Culture* 18(1), 45-62.
- John Paul II (1979). Apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi tradendae*. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html.
- Mefor, L. (2025). Oke-ite the evil pot and battle for the soul of Anambra. <https://anambrastate.gov.ng/oke-ite-the-evil-pot-and-battle-for-the-soul-of-anambra/>
- Magliocco, S. (2012). Neopaganism. In Olav H. (Ed.). *The Cambridge companion to*

- new religious movements* (pp. 150-). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Muonwe, M. (2025). Christian religious leadership and power abuse in Nigeria: Negative effects on development and the way forward. *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 15(2), 67-88.
- Muonwe, M., C. Osigwe, & C. Lebechi. (2025). The Emmaus narrative and the enduring values that shape Igbo identity and community. *Nnadiesbube Journal of Religion, Culture and Society*, 5(1), 22-29.
- Muonwe, M. (2021). Climate change and farmers/herders clash in Nigeria: Significance of Christian environmentalism and Pope Francis' *Laudato si. Aku: An African Journal of Contemporary Research* 2(1), 140-161.
- Muonwe, M. (2019). Translation of liturgical/religious texts (Catholic Igbo missal): Transfer or betrayal of meaning in the process of inculturation. *Ministerium Journal of Contextual Theology* 5, 28-46.
- Nnatuanya, E. (2022). The rise of Oke Itè ritual among the contemporary Igbo youths: The socio-religious implications, *Aku: An African Journal of Contemporary Research* 2(2), 48-58.
- Nwankwor, O., C. Amatu & G. Nwodu (2023). Psychosocial effect of social media use in communicating "Oke Itè" traditional charm on youths in Anambra State: An exploratory study. *ANSU Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (ANSUJASS)* 10(2), 84-100.
- Okafor, P. (2020). The church and the challenges of Neo-paganism in southeast Nigeria. *Ministerium Journal of Contextual Theology* 6, i-viii.
- Okeke, C., Ibenwa, C., & Okeke, G. (2017). Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in eastern Nigeria: The Igbo example. *SAGE Open*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017709322>.
- Onwuatiegwu, I. & E. Mmadudiri (2020). A philosophical investigation of Neo-paganism in the present Igbo society in the light of Martin Heidegger's fallenness. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies* 3(3), 33-47.
- Pike, S. (2004). *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Regardie, I. (1984). *The golden dawn: The original account of the teachings, rites, and ceremonies of the Hermetic Order*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn.
- Stasulane, A. and G. Ozolins (2017). Transformations of Neopaganism in Latvia: From Survival to Revival. *Open Theology* 3(1), 235-248.
- Strmiska, M. F. (2005). Modern Paganism in world cultures. In M. F. Strmiska (Ed.), *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (pp. 1-53). Oxford: ABC-Clío.
- Uwaegbute, K. (2021). Christianity and masquerade practices among the youth in Nsukka, Nigeria. *African Studies*, 80, 40-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2021.1886049>.