

THE CONCEPT OF SIN AND THE ANNUAL IKPU ARU (CLEANSING) RITUAL AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN AND CHRIST EVENTS

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Abstract

Ikpu Aru is an annual cleansing ritual or sacrifice performed in Igbo society. An innocent victim usually a goat or a sheep and in some communities, a cow is sought for and used. Upon the sacrificial victim, the elders and chief priests, renounce the crimes and taboos of the community, known and unknown as they tie the freshest part of palm leaves called "Omu" in Igbo language, around the victim. At the end, the victim is let loose and it becomes an escape goat, a blameless goat or cow that has taken away the crimes/sins of the community. However, the bastardization of (Igbo) African culture, which did not spare even the supernatural and other vital tenets of African tradition religion, could not allow a comparative study of this ritual and its interpretation in the context of the Christian theology of Christ incarnation-the innocent victim and his sacrifice on the Cross as a remission of the sins of the world. This paper with an analytical exposition and critical comparative study discovers that there is a possible interpenetration of the two doctrines. It also makes an audacious assertion that since the Igbo is older than Christianity, that it is possible that they had influence on the Christian doctrine of the remission of sin by Jesus Christ.

Keywords: *Ikpu Aru* (Cleansing) Ritual, Igbo People, Doctrine of Original Sin, Innocent Victim.

Introduction

In every religion, sacrifice is central and basic. It offers adherents of every religion an opportunity either to reconcile with the gods, seek favour from them or as a thanksgiving for the favours received. Therefore, sacrifice is discussed under three categories of prophylactic, propitiatory and/or osadaka¹ or simply classified as penitential sacrifice, sacrifice of petition and thanksgiving sacrifice. The penitential sacrifice is in relation to sin committed either by individual member of the community or a corporate crime/sin. Sin and its effects in Igbo society remain vital in every community. Its sense does not elude any Igbo community because of the consequences of even an individual sin on the community. This is because; sin is interpreted within the context of common origin and community single identity and destiny. The African/Igbo worldview is a unitary-vision cosmology. The source of reality is one force, which, underlines the origin of all lives and uphold the interdependent of all within the planetary system.² They believe that reparation for every single taboo or crime is necessary for the life of the community hence the annual ritual of community cleansing called "*Ikpu Aru*". *Ikpu Aru* unlike or like other forms of sacrifices which are usually

performed as a demand from *Dibia* (translated most appropriately from its etymology-*di* and *abia* meaning an expert in knowledge and wisdom³) after divination, is often to be an annual event of cleansing for the known and unknown crimes and taboos committed against the gods of the land. During the time for the community cleansing, an innocent victim usually a goat; sheep and in some communities a cow is sought for and is used. It is placed at the center of the community square or at the entrance of the *obo* (*obo* is the deity that punishes those who have committed taboos and thus in need of cleansing) shrine, upon the sacrificial victim, the elders and chief priests, renounce the crimes and taboos of the community, known and unknown by mentioning them one after the other, as they tie the freshest part of palm leaves called “*Omu*” in Igbo language, around the victim. When all the known crimes, sins and taboos were renounced, then denunciations of the unknown sins follow. At the end, the victim is let loose and it becomes an escape goat, a blameless goat or cow that has taken away the crimes/sins of the community.

This work sets to see it from the context of Christian notion of original sin and Christ's salvific events especially the passion ritual of the cross. The original sin is seen within Christian ontology as having negative effects beyond the persons of Adam and Eve to affect every human race and species. By the single sin of Adam and Eve, all humanity was lost and fell short of the glory of God hence the need for a blameless sacrificial lamb outside humanity for none is good for the sacrifice. This is what necessitated the need for the divine to send the sacrificial victim. Jesus Christ became one when through the mouth of Isaiah, he exclaimed: here I am send me. Through the incarnation he became man and Christ- the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And taken upon himself the sins of humanity, he was hung and crucified on the cross like the escape goat and became a totem, sacrificial and sacred victim for our salvation.

However, the bastardization of (Igbo) African culture by colonialism, which did not spare even the supernatural and other vital tenets of African Traditional Religion (ATR), could not allow a comparative study of this ritual and its interpretation in the context of the Christian theology of Christ incarnation-the innocent victim and his sacrifice on the Cross as a propitiation for the sins of the world. This is so because the intolerance of Christianity to ATR presented a situation of superiority complex. Unfortunately, with archeological evidences, life seems to have started from Africa and with the belief that ATR is older than Christianity. Perhaps, this could be one of the legacy inheritances of Christianity from ATR. This paper with an analytical exposition and critical comparative study discovers that there is a possible interpenetration of the two doctrines. This justifies the reason d'être of this work.

The problematic

In this research work, the main problematic is to examine why the two religious and value heritages of the African still hold sway even when there is claim to loyalty to a new order-Christianity. For example, a woman committed adultery and she goes to the priest to absolve herself from the consequences of her action. The priest forgives and absolves her from the sin yet she goes home to suffer the consequence of the same sin which she is absolved or forgiven of namely either in madness or outright death. Why should she still suffer this consequence even when she was absolved and forgiven by the priest who is both a viceroy of God and the custodian of the new religion? There are several ways that this could be understood; firstly, the African is a hybrid of a sort whose traditional values still hold big sway on and thus he lives with those two realities in terms of values and orientations. This is why most times the sinner would go to both the church/ mosque and the tradition (ATR) to get absolution from the consequences of such sins. In this case what it amounts to is a split or dual personality in which the two orientations would be sorted out for such a one to be really free in his mind. In the instance above, the woman performed

the rituals for cleansing after getting absolution from the priest. The fact remains that even though the new order represented by modernity claims that it has eclipsed the old order, the reality is that it is not so in most cases. Another way one can look at this is taking recourse to the issue of de-coloniality where some scholars argue that for Africa to get better it must relegate, if not abandon modernity for African pristine traditional values. Whatever this means, what is obtainable is that there is a deep seated split value issue confronting most Africans. It is to lay to bare these issues and to seek for a more pragmatic and veritable approach that this work finds justification.

Igbo Notion of Sin

Generally, sin is associated with the notion of evil and pains and in some cases especially from the religious point of view; it has to do with those human acts that are contrary to the will of God (gods). But a critical analysis shows that evil should be used in the strict sense to mean natural disasters and physical and mental pains while sin is more of those moral weaknesses. From this, evil could be seen as the effects of sin. **Sin in African Traditional Religion, according to some African scholars is an issue mostly concerned with transgression of morals or community norms.** It is seen as an ontological reality than as a conventional reality. **It is more than a rebellious act since the concept 'rebellion' can be justified in some circumstances. To bring out the weight and effects of sin among the people, sin should be situated within the context of covenant breaking; a breach of vows against humanity, the gods or ancestors.**

The Igbo word for covenant is '*Igba-ndu*', a compound word made up of '*Igba*' (to bind, to join together) and '*ndu*' (life) so *Igba ndu* (covenant) literary means 'to bind life together'. Every Igbo person believes that there is a strong harmonious bond existing intrinsically between the spiritual world and the human world. It is the implication of their account of human origin where man is created by a supreme God leaving His life force in man and the destiny spirit linking man with the ancestors hence, the implication of their belief in the common origin and parenthood of all humanity as one family. So by virtue of creation and being created by one God, all humanity belongs to one family, every human being on earth though tongue and tribe may differ originated from one blood. Considering the long historical years of human existence on the face of the earth, the trace and connection seems impossible. In this primordial covenant, the whole of humanity dead and alive stands out as one individual entity and corporate personality and God stands as one. So for the Igbo, God is made known to man as a community and He relates to them as well as a community. Private revelations can only be interpreted and be regarded meaningful within its relevance to the community. God, they say can never reveal himself to the individual at the detriment of the community. It may be true that a community might have never performed an official ritual as a covenant binding them together either among themselves as members of a community or with the spirit world and God; the people believe that the bond that binds beings together is intrinsic and stronger than any man made covenant which can be invalidated or nullified.

Sin therefore, is nothing less than the breaking of this primordial covenant that was not initiated by any human community or agent but by God Himself; a covenant existing both at the ontological and essential levels of human existence. The Igbo words which capture all these notions are *ime nsọ ala*, *imeru ala* or *ime ihe ala na-asọ nso*, which could mean discarding the holy, sacred, or committing an abomination. It becomes an act which the community would regard as not just detestable but an offence or sin against the Earth Divinity. Sin is associated with the earth goddess because the earth sustains life and also based on the fact that the offences are committed on the earth. The *odinala* (translatable as the moral code enunciated by the earth goddess) in real sense is the abode of Igbo moral codes. This belief in the effects of individual sin on the community is depicted in the Igbo adage: *otu aka ruta mmanu, ofee ndi ozo* (when a single finger is oiled, it

spreads to others; what affects one affect the other)

Categories of Sin and Crime

There are different approaches to the classification of sin in Igbo society. Some approach it from the capital-minor perspective and others from the individual-community dimension. However, whichever dimension one is coming from, what is apparent is that the category a particular sin belongs depends on largely not exclusively on its likely effects on the community. And since sin is more associated with *odinala*, other forms of crimes are associated with law but not so easy to differentiate since all laws are made to protect the life of the built of the primordial covenant where sin is identified. But sometimes all criminal acts are called sin in the sense of being evil and painful acts. The categorization of sin is best understood within Igbo concepts like *Ihe ojoo* (bad thing), *aru* (sinful), and *imebi iwu* (going contrary to the law). Going contrary to the law; say law forbidden night movement may not be understood by the Igbo as 'aru' in the way abortion should be termed an 'aru'. So crime, sin and evil can be discussed under two broad notions of *iwu* (law) and *odinala* (primordial covenant codes).

Iwu (laws) are flexible and constant moral codes in Igbo society. The flexible moral codes are those day- to- day rules meant to guide the secondary aspects of human community and they originate from human community, they are 'human community made' while the constant moral codes or what we may call 'the primordial covenant codes' are those that originated from God and the ancestral world. It is not man-made hence cannot be altered at will by any human community. To go against the rules of the community is called 'Ida Iwu' (going contrary to the law) while to go contrary to the 'Odinala' is *ime aru* (committing an abomination). While the effects of *ida iwu* is lighter, *ime aru* is more seriously abominable and it is within this that the Igbos can in real sense of the word apply sin. The former is to an extent a crime against the human community only, while the latter involves God and the spiritual world. These two crimes have their effects and remedies but it is easier to reconcile with fellow man than the rigorous and complex reconciliation with God and the spirit. There are others who classified sin under major/ capital and minor sins. This work concerns itself mostly on *ime aru* and it is within the concept of sin as *ime aru* that *ikpu aru* is celebrated.

The Igbo Concept of Ikpu Aru (cleansing ritual) in the Context of Sin

In traditional African (Igbo) society generally, as we have said, the sacred and the secular are inseparable. There is no compartmentalization of life. There is an intrinsic bond holding the two together. What religion as the mouth piece of the gods, forbids or condemns, society also forbids and condemns, and likewise what is approved by the society is also approved by religion such that an offence against God and ancestors is an offence against man, and an offence against man is an offence against God and the ancestors. So every sin committed must be atoned for. The effects of an un-atoned sin continue to linger on until they are negated. Usually it is the duty of the community to do so since sins are not usually handled on the individual level for fear of being neglected thereby causing more harm to the community. The community can do this directly or indirectly, directly when she takes it up to perform the necessary rituals and indirectly when she compels the offender to do the same.

Sin and Sacrifice.

In Igbo society the good effects of sacrifice must equal in spiritual negating power to the negative effects of sin as to be able to negate them. Sacrifice does not only negate the evil effects of sin but restores the broken covenant. Besides praying to God and the deities, and pouring of libation to ancestors first thing in the morning there is a common practice of sacrifice in African Religions.

Sacrifice may be in the form of food, or drink, it may be an animal or even a human being in the past. Human sacrifices were never immolated but the invocation of appropriate prayers on the human victim whose blood must never be shed but exchanged for other humans killed especially in error. This is known as female ochu (murder)⁴. From this notion, sacrifice among the Igbos could be seen as one of the elements that proves the people's faith in the important roles of Chukwu, the gods and the ancestors in their lives hence sacrifice helps them to renew their relationship with these divine Beings. The Igbo offer "different sacrifices for different purposes; some are to feed the gods, some are to appease the gods if someone goes contrary to the laws, while some are for thanksgiving in appreciation to any good thing the gods may have done for them, e.g. a good year of harvest."⁵ Sacrifice can be something one does in a time of crisis or every day activity hence some African scholars see sacrifice as a form of insurance policy sometimes made to wage wars against evil spirits and assure the safety of human life. Just as there are different gods in Igbo society so there are different types of sacrifice since different gods are responsible for different events of human life. It can be likened to catholic notion of different saints being recognized in different areas of human life like saint patron of priests, of travelers, of lost items etc, but only that the gods are more deeply involved as each shrine and deity exists for a particular purpose. Sacrifice therefore could be said to be the highest form of Igbo prayer.

In offering atonement for sins, the nature of the victim for sacrifice is often determined by the gravity of the sin or taboo. Sometimes, rat may be needed, it can be lizard, an egg, kola nut, it can be dog or all combined. A higher and valuable animal can be required like goat, cow may be needed. The Diviners have to consult the offended deity, god or ancestors to know the nature of the victim to be used. On the other hand, because of the sensitivity of sin and its effects in the lives of both the individual and the community, once in a while or annually, a cleansing ritual called 'ikpu aru' is performed to atone for both the known and the unknown sins committed against the land.

Ikpu Aru Ritual Celebration

Ikpu Aru different from specific sacrifices, is an annual cleansing ritual or sacrifice performed in Igbo society. An innocent or blameless victim usually a goat and in some communities, a cow is sought for and is used. It must be blameless or innocent to be capable of taking away the sins of the community. When the fixed time reaches, a sacrificial victim is placed at the major exist of the community to be surrounded by the elders and chief Priest of Ala deity (the mother earth), against whom all crimes are committed. In this type of ritual, usually a goat to be termed an 'escape goat' is used. This goat is stationed with the elders or chief priests of different deities surrounding it and with palm fronds being tied around its body, the elders or chief priests renounce all known and unknown sins committed in the community within the period covering the last 'Ikpu aru' (cleansing ritual) and the present one. At the end, the goat is released and it is said to have escaped with the sins of the community hence the name 'an escape goat' or a free goat, a sacred and a totemic victim.

The implication of Ikpu aru is that every member of the community has now been cleansed from all defilements and once more reconciled with the Ala-the mother earth goddess- the goddess of morality. This could be likened to the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world?, only that, these traditional priests 'stand at their duty offering over and over again the same sacrifice which are quite incapable of taking away sins' while Christ 'has offered one single sacrifice for sins and then taken his seat forever at the right hand of God'⁶ it should be noted at this point that the author cited above is one of those having the superiority complex of Christianity otherwise why should one say that because this ritual is celebrated annually, that it is not efficacious? If we take this in the same light, it can be said that due the annual commemoration of Christ's death and resurrection, that it is not also efficacious. Worthy

of note also is that believers in the annual cleansing ritual get reinvigorated in standing before the gods in holiness once it is done.

Christian Notion of Original Sin

Among Christians, sin generally is seen as 'an offense against God and it sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it'⁷. It is seen from the view point of disobedience, a revolt against God through the will of one to become "like gods," knowing and determining good and evil. Negatively it is love of oneself since such love is towards contempt of God. As an act of disobedience, sin therefore 'is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation'. In classifying sin, the Catholic Church for instance, distinguishes sin 'according to their objects, as can every human act; or according to the virtues they oppose, by excess or defect; or according to the commandments they violate'. She also sees it from the point of its victim 'whether they concern God, neighbor, or oneself or from the point of being spiritual, carnal, or again as sins in thought, word, deed, or omission'.

According to Thomas Aquinas, it is 'when the will sets itself upon something that is of its nature incompatible with the charity that orients man toward his ultimate end, then the sin is mortal by its very object . . . while sin is considered venial 'when the sinner's will is set upon something that of its nature involves a disorder, but is not opposed to the love of God and neighbor, such as thoughtless chatter or immoderate laughter and the like, such sins are venial'.⁸

But majorly sin is discussed first either as the original sin or particular sin while particular sin can further be classified into two categories-either as mortal and venial sins.

Original Sin

The concept of original sin, as a [Christian doctrine](#), is the condition or state of depravity ([sinful](#)) into which each [human being](#) is born. The origin is said to be from the first human species- Adam and Eve. They sinned by disobeying in eating the forbidden fruit (of knowledge of good and evil) hence in consequence, transmitted its guilt by heredity to the rest of humanity-the descendants.⁹ It is based on the concept of cooperate personality. The concept of cooperate personality from the Christian perspective, presupposes an organic whole of humanity stemming from the creation story of one fatherhood of God. It treats the community as subsuming the individual into itself; and again it looks to the individual as representing the whole group. It was Paul who crystallized this doctrine when he states that sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, hence in this way death came to all people, because all were considered sinners through the one sin of Adam. Paul's position is drawn from the Old Testament treatment of human nature. For the Psalmist we were born sinners. "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51: 5.) The position of Augustine later brought the doctrine to its present nature. Augustine for instance in emphasizing the place of grace in human salvation developed that doctrine of depravity which was anchored on the doctrine of original sin. Augustine sees the fallen man as a *Massa peccati*, a "mess of sin," one who is incapable of helping itself out of spiritual death, who after the fall became so helpless such that even the ability to say 'thank you God' is in itself God's own gift. Man was unable to turn away from sin and turn to God hence the whole idea of redemption was initiated and affected by God who was offended. Augustine affirms,

that, by virtue of organic unity, the whole human race existed in Adam at the time of his transgression. It says that Adam's will was the will of the species, so that in Adam's free act, the will of the race revolted against God, and the nature of the race corrupted itself. All men existed as one moral person in Adam, so that in Adam's sin we sinned, we corrupted ourselves, and we brought guilt and merited

condemnation upon ourselves.¹⁰

Augustine believed that sin originated with human free will which implied that the ability to do evil is innate in man; grace and faith in Christ therefore remain what is required of man for salvation. On the other hand Pelagius categorically opposed some aspects of the doctrine of original sin according to Augustine, arguing that the original sin affected Adam alone and that infants at birth are in the same state of innocence just as Adam was before the fall. These were the doctrines that gave rise to the contemporary Catholic and non Catholic positions on the effects of original sin. For the Catholic Church as is stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, what man has is the wounded nature after the fall and not total destruction.

The non-Orthodox teaches that original Sin is the Personal sin and guilt of Adam transmitted from him to all mankind. If this is true of the effects of the original sin, that is, that the human nature is corrupt, then doctors themselves says Boehler, “are subject to the corruption of the fall, affecting their capacity of reasoning. They do not always reason correctly” The rest of creations like the “entire enterprise of modern science” are also subject to the corruption of the fall thereby making them incapable of offering solutions to every aspects of human life. So the doctrine of original sin in summary teaches that “the whole human race sinned in Adam when he sinned”; that his “will was the will of the race, so that all men sinned in Adam and rebelled with him when he sinned; and that it is through this single sin that human nature became corrupted, so that now all men are born with a sinful nature.”¹¹

The Christ Event in the Context of Christian Concept of Original Sin

There is a strong synergy between the doctrine of original sin and the Christ event of Calvary. But while the Christ event is clearly stated without ambiguity in the bible, the doctrine of original sin and its consequences as being taught today, that is, about the transmission of this hereditary sin to the entire human race has no direct origin in the Bible but the product of the 5th Century Church led by St. Augustine. It was Augustine while establishing a parallelism between Adam and [Christ](#), ([Romans](#) 5:12–19), who championed what was later came to be known as the “theory of Adam's Natural Headship and the Realistic Theory”¹². He taught that whereas sin and death entered the world through Adam, [grace](#) and eternal life have come in greater abundance through Christ.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Eph. 2:1-3)

In this passage, according to the Biblical scholars, Paul reminds Christian what they were like before their conversion to Christ (“you were dead in your trespasses . . . in which you formerly walked”). Thus, all people, until and unless they are converted, are sinners.

Paul goes on to make it absolutely clear that all Christians came from this state (“. . . we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh”) and that all non-Christians are still in this state (“. . . and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”) Thus, Scripture regards all people before they are saved by Christ as sinners and thus deserving of punishment from God. Which is to say that from the inception of our existence, we are sinful¹³

So the doctrine of original sin in summary teaches that “the whole human race sinned in Adam when he sinned”; that his “will was the will of the race, so that all men sinned in Adam and rebelled with him when he sinned; and that it is through this single sin that human nature became corrupted, so that now all men are born with a sinful nature.”¹⁴

The Description of Christ Event

The case of original sin according to Christian belief is a case as we have seen that has affected every human person in the universe for all have sinned in Adam and have fallen short of the glory of God. When there became the need for atonement, no one was good enough for the sacrifice. This is the implication of the cooperate humanity in Adam hence there was no innocent victim pure for sacrifice; a victim that can stand out as an escape goat. In search of an innocent victim, God sent His only son who became like us in everything but sin. Christ was born and his birth is described as an immaculate conception, a sinless victim hence made pure and blameless from birth. Matthew states it clear: she will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21)

He was with no traces of guilt of the original sin. Christ became a source of new life in and relationship with God. In establishing a parallelism between Adam and Christ, St. Paul affirms the effect of the death and resurrection of Christ as a payment for the sin of Adam. Therefore, while sin and death entered the world through Adam, [grace](#) and eternal life have come in greater abundance through Christ. (Roman 5: 12-19). There is no doubt that Christ event is understood by Christians as atonement for sins. John affirms Christ as the true Lamb of God. “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1: 29). Even before his birth, the prophets saw him as a sacrificial victim. Of him, Isaiah says “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers, is silent, so he did not open His mouth...yes it was the lord's will to crush Him and to cause Him to suffer and when His soul is made a guilt offering, He will see His offspring. (Isaiah 53:7,10).

Ikpu Aru and the Christian Confession of sin

There exist parallel existential value systems within the postmodern African existential orbit. In the African (Igbo) setting, when an aru happens in the community, there will be open communal ritual cleansing that is aimed at resetting the socio-centric order that has been destabilized. A typical example is a case where an Igbo society forbade adultery and an unwilling woman was manipulated by an unscrupulous man in authority who was not bound by such rule. Instead of being killed by the gods for such aberration, the woman became mad. On the consultation of a dibia¹ the cause of the madness was revealed and some very serious ritual cleansing process was initiated. The good thing is that by the end of the cleansing process the woman regained her sanity; the man's part was bearing the brunt of both materials and the ritual cleansing exercise by being present thus facing the open condemnatory odium for such offence.

If you compare this with the church situation, there will be a clear cut parallel. The Catholic Church for instance has a system where any sinner would go to the priest to confess his/her sin and after which; there will be an absolution of the sin. It is also done in seclusion between the priest and the sinner and thus maintaining the necessary privacy and confidentiality. In this case, the priest acts as a viceroy of God by heaving the burden of conscience from the sinner. In the former, it is believed

that the order of the society that was upset is of communal concern and ipso facto must be reset by a communal participatory involvement. This entails that it can never be done in the privacy or confidentiality of the individual who sinned. It is also believed that anyone who goes through the cleansing process may never commit such sins again. This brings to the fore the issue of deterrence for both the sinner or the would- be sinner. It is therefore trite to argue from the perspective of the traditionalists that the Christian absolution of sin may be encouraging multiple repetition of the same offense by the same person or making sins incessant in the society.

At this juncture, it is germane to raise a critical philosophical concern namely that some of those who have gone to confess before the priests would also believe at the back of their minds that they have not been fully absolved of the offense unless they also go to perform the ritual cleansing as enunciated by their culture. This is the main issue of concern; if they really believe in the abnegation process of the church, why do they repeat the *ikpu aru* by the community? What is of prominent relief here is that the African person is a hybrid between tradition and modernity. Such a one sometimes has split personality without knowing which part to join or get more commitment to. A typical example is that whenever one gets married in the church method it is always believed that there is no full consummation of marriage until the full traditional rites are done. This is more so with offenses capable of inflicting heinous consequences on the transgressors.

Evaluation

A critical analysis of the Christian view of Christ event in the context of the doctrine of original sin and its effects on humanity as well as the Igbo concept of sin and its effects on community and the annual ritual of *Ikpu aru*, present some common elements and issues. The two religious doctrines center on the concept of corporate personality assigned to Adam as representing humanity from the account of creations of Genesis (1-end & 2:1-25) as well the cooperate personality assigned to community in Igbo ontology where an ideality of individual does not exist except when viewed within the context of community.

This concept of corporate personality, in both religions as stated earlier sees the group as subsuming the individual into it; and the individual as representing the whole group. From perspective of the Christian mind, having strong link with Hebrew tradition and religion, passes easily from considering the individual as he develops within the group to the individual as representative of the group. There are “many scriptural passages that can illustrate this point. Moses tells the people “You” (plural) “have seen all that Yahweh did . . . in . . . Egypt, . . . the great ordeals your (singular) own eyes witnessed.”¹⁵ The same easy interchange of singular and plural is seen in Hebrew legislation.

From the Igbo ontological view, it is captured in the popular dictum of John Mbiti “I am because we are and we are because I am”. This point is epitomized in the *Ubuntu* Philosophy¹⁶. It suggests clearly the position of individual personality in Igbo society.

'In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; the individual depends on the corporate group'¹⁷

The two worldviews express more strongly the concept of communalism over individualism such that the explanations of sin and cleansing rituals are community centered. There is the need to state

clearly that though there is the “corporateness” of the perception of the human person in Igbo society, it does not subsume the person to a point that he is not recognized at all. Chukwuokolo, discusses the full implications and import of this elsewhere¹⁸.

Sin

Sin has communal impacts hence what could be termed an individual sin is not treated as such but is handled as a community matter. Sin in both worldview is a corporate reality. The sin of one man - Adam could not be treated as individual sin just as the sin of the individual in Igbo society is beyond the individual. For the Igbo society, sin is against the land, it is a covenant broken, a bond untied. This is true of the Christian community; Sin is against humanity and against God. One basic fact about sin in both communities is that it has corporate effects even beyond the human community to include the community of the Spirits. There could not have been the need for cleansing ritual of Ikpu Aru among the Igbo community and Christ event of the passion among the Christian community if not because of the communal effect of sin believed to be so among the two communities.

The Victim

Both rituals needed victims and are reparations for sin. None was a sacrifice of thanksgiving. More importantly are the image taken by both victims for the said rituals.

Blameless image

The blameless image of a sacrificial victim in both sacrifices took its root in the Jewish culture of the old covenant especially within the contexts of Passover feast and the exodus event. In the Christ event, the victim must be blameless and in Igbo society, blameless victim remains the rightful victim. And to be blameless, such victim is needed from outside the infected humanity. In Christian community, because, all have sinned in Adam and have fallen short of the glory of God (ref. Rom 5: 12-18), no one was good enough for the cleansing ritual, hence Christ came and became man. In Igbo society, a blameless lamb is to be used.

Image of a Lamb

The lamb figure is common in both rituals. While in Igbo cleansing ritual, lamb truly an animal is required, the Christian demanded a human sacrifice who took the image of a lamb. The Lamb image in both is not far from the image of the Jewish Passover Lamb. However, in the Igbo cosmology of sacrifice, it is abominable to immolate a human victim rather if there is a need seen from retributiveness, a human victim will be exchanged for another but never sacrificed as in killing a human for sacrifice. It is therefore wrong for the early Christians to fabricate stories that the Igbo society engaged in human sacrifices of immolation. This was neither backed by archeology nor by facts. Thurstan Shaw's Igbo-Ukwu: an account of archeological discoveries in Eastern Nigeria gave very deep insight into this claim.¹⁹

Concluding Remarks

So far in this work we have made some comparative overtures on two values of disparate religious cum cultural groups. This is with the intent of promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding how similar values underpin the religious beliefs and behaviours of people towards holiness and holistic living. We call to mind the humility of eschewing superiority complex as ideal for the maintenance of robust interdependent living and global tolerance and peace. This is because one of the most devastating markers of lack of global peace is religion due mainly to religious intolerance arising from superiority complex. If as I have averred in this work that there is a possibility of ATR's influence of Christianity towards the propitiation of sin as Christ has done, there will be an

understanding that various religions can influence the other positively for peaceful co-existence. There is no doubt that religions emanated as mankind's reaction to certain existential challenges in relation to a wholly other understandable variously as God, Krishina, Chukwu- Abiama, Jehovah etc. Our discussions in this work are pointers to the fact that various religious values as ATR and Christianity are intent on amongst other things to attain purity, holiness and bonding in their relationship with God. It is our conclusion that if religions eschew intolerance and embrace inter-religious dialogue and understanding of one another, the tensions arising from religious superiority complex and supremacy will ebb if not disappear completely.

End Notes

1. Mary -Blossom Chinyelum Okafor, (1998), Theatre of Life: Rituals, Transition and Progression among the Igbo, A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor Of Philosophy.
2. Okoro, (2019) African [Igbo] Holism: A Model for the Contemporary Quest for an Integrated Community/Humanity IN the international journal of human resource management 15(1):1-16, 2019. ISSN: 1466-4399 www.worldacademicjournals.org; www.wajournals.org
3. See J A Umeh, *After God is Dibia, Vol. 1* (1997) London: Karnak House PP. i-vii for a thorough understanding of the meaning of dibia as distinct from the pejorative description of the meaning of dibia given by early anthropologists and church missionaries.
4. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart
5. Ndubuisi Cajethan 'African Philosophy', (2004), in Geoffrey ,Klempner, ed. **Philosophy Pathways** *electronic journal*, ISSN 2043-0728, URL: <http://www.philosophypathways.com/newsletter/issue93.html>, accessed on 23.07.2022.
6. Hebrew 10:11-12.
7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 3, life in Christ, Section 1, chapter 1, Article 8ii, nos. 1850, 1853,
8. Ibid.
9. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/original-sin>, 14th Feb, 2023.
10. Alfred T. Overstreet, (1995) The Myth of Original Sin <https://www.gospeltruth.net/menbornsinners/mbs03.htm>
11. Ibid
12. Ibid
13. Matt Perman, (2006) What Is the Biblical Evidence for Original Sin?, available@ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-biblical-evidence-for-original-sin>, accessed 14/2/2021.
14. Overstreet Op. Cit
15. (Deut 29:1-2)

16. See Mogobe B Ramose, (2005) *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Book Publishers Rev. Ed. for in-depth discussion on Ubuntu philosophy
 17. John Mbiti, *African Religion and philosophy*, pg.106.
 18. See Chukwuokolo, J C 2009) "A Critique of Hegel's Metaphysical Holism" In *Philosophy and Praxis, Journal of the Nigerian Philosophical Association*, Vol. 5 Pp. 30-55 for
- See Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria* Vols. 1 & 2 London; Faber & Faber Ltd for the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan 1970. Here there was no findings from the excavation of the sites of the tombs of the Eze Nris where they were buried with human heads.