iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 11 **Issue:** V **Month of publication:** May 2023

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2023.51450

www.ijraset.com

Call: 08813907089 | E-mail ID: ijraset@gmail.com

International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 11 Issue V May 2023- Available at www.ijraset.com

African Identity and Christian Faith in Igboland: A Critical Evaluation of EGWU IMOKA Masquerade Festival

Nzoiwu, Azuka Abigail[1], Mmaduabuchi Obinna Chekwubechukwu[2]
[1, 2]*Department of Fine and Applied Arts Faculty of Environmental Sciences Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State*

Abstract: ***Christianity as a way of life among Africans (The Igbo people precisely) is believed to have shaped and influenced African Culture. African religion and culture according to Okoro, "stand a better chance to offer an alternative method awareness, which is imbedded in different indigenous languages, myths, folklore, cultural heritage and rites and rituals of African traditional faith" (Cultural globalization: 26-37). The identity of the African can be clearly seen in their cultural, anthropological features. The cultural, anthropological features of the Igbo people is influenced by both Christianity and African Traditional Religion. In an attempt to further understand the values behind this cultural influence as it is manifesting itself in the life and thought of the Awka people through Egwuimoka in the contemporary time, the searcher became interested in this- study. However, the influence of culture on Christianity is seen in the attitudinal disposition of the Igbo people towards the Christian faith. Now the question is does Christianity support the Igbo culture which is emerging in the modern time? Does the comparative study of Igbo traditional morality and Christianity ethical concepts clarify a bit of this confused background? if this work helps to answer these and other questions, in any small way, and further helps in clarifying the confused background of our morality today, then, it is not useless effort after all. Our culture is fluid today, because it is rapidly changing. Therefore, this work tries to point to some aspects of the Igbo peoples basis of traditional cultural patterns and beliefs, that can be applied from the values and the beliefs of the past so that the change in culture may not continue on a speed lane and, therefore becoming e confusing as to moral basis of worthwhile existence.***

I. INTRODUCTION

African identity is more or less epitomized in her cultural display. It has been accepted that culture does not exist without a people. Culture is part and parcel of the people and her way of life, it has been observed that the way people behave is their cultural influence. Achebe Opines "Culture lives in life of the people, even in life and at death" (65). In the midst of cultural influence of Igbo land, Christianity has come to exist.

The Church has continued to struggle with the culture of the society with which it co-exists, which forms part of the struggle and rejection of the human culture.

The struggle with culture has lingered even right from the time of Jesus Christ's.

Richard Niebuhr Opines, The enduring problem evidently arose in the days of Jesus Christ humanity when He was a Jew remained a Jew till His last breath, confronting Jewish culture with a hard challenge. Though Jesus a product of that culture, He ignored it. He did not come to enlarge His nation's knowledge, art and culture, but abolish even such culture as it possessed, bound up with religion (1)

The influence of culture on Christianity is seen in the attitudinal disposition of the people towards the Christian faith and life because culture is intrinsic. Here is why Achebe described the action of Okonkwo to Ikemefuna as inevitable because it is what the cultural setting of the people demands.

Sometimes it discourages ecclesiastical gatherings, social instructions and Unity. The traditional culture frowns seriously at Christian incursion, because the Church does not seem to condone its beliefs, practices and polytheistic tendencies. Since Christianity sees the cultural and traditional practices as godless or idolatrous, the custodians of the African culture and beliefs have continued to strengthen cultural practices, which seem not to have allowed Christianity to really flourish. According to Arazu "Christianity has come to abolish our cultural practice in the name of belief in God (2).

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved

The subject of this research is African identity and Christian faith in Igboland, a case study of Egwumoka festival in Awka, Awka South Local Government of Anambra State. Over the years, Christianity has been struggling to survive as she meets an existing culture in various parts of Igboland that are firmly gripped by cultural identities, which Awka Community will not be overemphasized. Aro dynasty is strong in the confederacy Era, hence Eze Opines

The Aros knew that British penetration would .destroy their dominance. They also opposed their religion, Christianity, which some of the Aro's were converting to. Aro rulers saw the new religion as a British method of peacefully capturing Aro territories. Aro raids and invasions on many Communities were conducted in order to bully those who favored the British. But the Aro invasion of Obegu around November 1901 signaled for the direct invasion of Arochukwu. 400 people died and the government of Obegu was destroyed. Obegu was a town belonging to the rival Ngwa clan which had been at war with the Aro's for many years and was siding with the British the Aro invasion of Obegu marked their signal for the Expedition which began in 1901. (1)

Christianity took advantage of Aro kingdom as they fail to the British as a result of the war. Arondizuogu was an exception. According to Eze, "some Aro kingdom were founded and named after great commanders and Chiefs like the legendary Izuogu Mgboko and Iheme whom led Aro forces to destroy and conquer Ikpa Ora and founded Arondizuogu" (10).

Awka in question held tenaciously their cultural Heritage and did not allow Christianity to infiltrate fully in their soil. As Awka people believe, according to Chukwura, the Chief Priests of Imoka in an oral interview in his compound at Amachalla on 23rd October, 2010, "they are been protected by this deity "Imoka" as she manifested to Ikwuodiaku the mother of Amikwo the first village to settle in the geographical area called Awka town today". Being known that Awka is divided Historically into two the "Ifite" and "Ezii" governed by Otochalu Awka (the oldest man in Awka) before she lost her independence and control from the British and ceased to be a free self-governing nations. Chukwura further states:

"Otocholu Oka" was the "Nne Uzu" or master blacksmith, whether he knew the trade or not, for the only master known to Awka people was the master crafts man, The "Nne Uzu".

The Awka people comprising "Ezii and Ifite" which had 33 villages viz, Umudioka, Umuogbunu, Umuogwali, Umukwa, Umueri, Omuko, Umuogbu, Umuonaga, Umubelu, Umuike, Umuoruka, Umujagwo Umuenechi and Ikwudiaku (Amukwu) of "Ezii" and "Ifite" comparing Umuzocha, Umuayam, Umuoranma, Amudo, Anachalla, Umunoke,

Ifite Awka, Nkwelie and Umuokpu which was extracted from Umuzocha kindred to protect Amawbia from invasion of the enemies; were a great people, resourceful, inventive and courageous. (4).

Before AD 1900s, when the British came, Awka people have been a known race for their craftsmanship, in consequence to this, Akuja Onejeme maintains: Awka were a race of specialists, working in iron,, Copper, brass and bronze; skilled in the carrying of the wooden implements and ornaments; in farming, in the practice of medicine betrothed to Ikwodiaku and their cultural Heritage which culminates in her famous festival "Imoka festival participating by the Age Grades, cultural attires, dance of different kinds and masquerading all in veneration of their deity. Ikwodiaku and achalla concord to, venerate the aberration manifested to them with totem animals tortoise and monkey and for her healing and protection upon them, all before the advent of Christianity (4).

In consequence to African identity Mbiti opines: Africans like to celebrate life. They celebrate events in the life of the individual and the Community these include occasion like the birth of a child, the giving of names, circumcision and other initiation ceremonies, marriage, funeral, harvest festivals, praying for rain, and many others. Some of these rituals and ceremonies are done on a family basis, but others are observed by the whole Community. They have a lot of religious meaning and through their observation religious ideas are perpetuated and passed on to the next generations (19).

Chukwura the recent Chief priest of "Imoka" from Amachalla called the deity "Okpo Orimili" the dark blue sea, that protects the children who nevertheless uses the totem animals to heralds its season. In his own words:

Cultural exhibitions are been exhibited after the Onwa Mkpokoloba (the half moon) through plays of Drums and Ikolo (wooden gung) the festival stipulated on Onwa mvu late April and May.

On the day following the women will dance in an elegant dress parading the town which heralds the D day; Age grades wresting are exhibited at Nkwo Amaeyi where Ikolo dance at Of/a Imoka and cultural Artifacts like masks are beed displayed. Every family are notable of the famous bitter leave soup called "Avulu" in Awka dialet.

Imoka festival is a compendium of cultural identity's celebrated by Awka people.

A. Statement Of The Problem

Since the western culture has infiltrated our culture in disguise of Christianity, the struggle is still latent but conflicting in opposing each other.

From every indication, the cultural background of the people of Awka has not ailowed Christianity to flourish in all realms of her life. The issue of culture conflicting with Christianity has remained a persistent phenomenon in the social, economic, political and religious life of Awka people. There cannot be meaningful human development in a town where there is partial acceptance of the gospel as it eradicates our cultural heritage.

Does it mean that every cultural heritage of Igbo people like; New Yam festival, cultural dance, acrc^ :::; dance (Nkpokiti) and egedege dance of Arochukwu and Umubi respectively, child naming, child visit (Omugwo) Age Grade Festival, Traditional Marriage, Traditional Wrestling, Traditional Dressing, purification of land in case of taboo or incest, masquerade dances, story/folk dramma and tell, Town cries, libation to chu-Ukwu (Almighty) and all culminating in puppet shows are nonsensical and idolatrous. Is it Christianity that introduced God whom we known as "Chi" and Almighty "Chi-Ukwu" for us and our traditional libation to Almighty, marriage precepts. Christianity have come to stay through rigorous ways, changing and Ostracizing our identity by tagging it dark practices. The problem we have as people adhere to Christian faith is the lack of understanding that Christianity is embedded in peoples cultural settings, therefore abolishing African cultural settings, which had existed spontaneously with Christian culture Okoro Opines Christianity is a child to many culture but a son to none (3). Should we now tag all our cultural heritage "Teboos" or should we uphold our cultural identity and make it consolidated.

B. Research Methodology

The methodological concept of this work is primarily defined in its title; which elicit the motivation of this research work. Considering the fact, of this research work, it is a tripolar method, culminating the Historical, sociological and religions matters. Historically, Igbo people and their migrations which Awka town is not an exception had events on record both oral tradition and written.

How our people guard their cultural heritage and identity. It is also sociological, because it came across the cultural practices of Igbo people of case study of Egwuimoka festival that concerned with the socio-political life of people. Notwithstanding the belief of Igbo land to their God "Chi: is performed through worship which is religious expect.

C. Purpose Of The Study

This work is intended to explore

1) The cultural Heritage and identity of Africans precisely Igbo people which Christianity tends to Evangelize
2) The culture practices of the Awka people as it regards to Egwuimoka festival and its effects/effects to Christian faith.
3) Christianity and African Igbo culture the journey so far.
4) Socio-cultural, political, economical and religious implication of Christianity to African identity.

D. The Relevance Of The Study

The study will be relevant to the 21st century students who may want to engage themselves in relation to this study. The reason being hat we have a way of life that makes up our livelihood and dignity. It is to protect and promote our culture heritage and identity which culminates in our way of living.

E. The Scope of the Study

For the fact that this research work would be very broad in scope if the researcher was to carry it out throughout Igboland, the work is therefore aimed at a thorough research of African identity and Christian faith in replica of Egwuimoka festival of Awka town in Anambra State as a restriction. The research will be limited to the life, culture and Religious belief of Awka people and the cultural identities in Imoka festival and Christian strength of Awka people.

F. Organization of the Work

The research work is organized in five chapters. Chapter one is the methodological consideration which consists, the introduction, statement of problems, Research methodology, purpose of the study, the Relevance of the study, the scope of the study and the organization of the work. Chapter two elicits the review of related works, while chapter three is on the African identity: a case study of Egwuimoka festival. Chapter four is on a critical evaluation of African identity and the Christian faith: A case study of Egwuimoka festival which have as sub cross-road of African identity and the Christian faith and the implication of the junction in the contemporary society. And the concluding chapter which is chapter five is on the evaluating recommendation and conclusion.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved | SJ Impact Factor 7.538 | ISRA Journal Impact Factor 7.894 |

ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 11 Issue V May 2023- Available at www.ijraset.com

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Western Culture in disguise of Christianity have come to modernize the worship and ethical principle of our people to suit theirs. Okoro in his article, "Cultural globalization, the last onslaught on African personality: the Igbo Example" in (2QQ9) international journal of philosophy and religion Vol. 1 No. 1 Nigeria.

Opines, However, the most dreaded dimension of Globalization that has adversely affected Africa is the Cultural aspect This has the overall aim of making Africans, lose their personality as it attempts to universalize the world culture into Western categories. Since culture in whatever form is always ethnocentric and value loaded, the universalization or rather Westernization of culture undermines African self definition, self realization and unique contributions in the global village arrangement. Africans having been defined within the Western categories have lost their cultural/ social values of solidarity, spirit of liberty; sense of democracy, principle of justice, sense of self reliance, industry and personal enterprice etc. (26-37).

From the above citation one can see that African identity have lost its value, through Westernization which Christian faith stood for. This makes African identity and Christian faith to be at cross road. In consequence to this, he further states: Western culture, with its dominant features has transported across the globe with great ferocity secularism as the only civilized way of behaviour in the contemporary world. This is done with the overt intention of diluting and summarily destroying the rich and dynamic African culture. Therefore, Africa as a cultural cornucopia - a rich harvest of indigenous tradition and culture that have attracted several people around the world to witness the manifestation and largess of her culture have now become a victim of the sledge hammer of the Western cultural invasion (26-37).

Reacting on the overt intention of destroying other cultures mostly African, which he captioned cornucopia - a rich harvest by the Westerners, he sees it as sledge hammer to Africans. And it is against this backdrop that he further stated.

Thus: The globalization of culture has undermined the people's sense of personality, aspiration, values and norms. The global culture has overtly attacked and destroyed all indigenous spiritual values and faith traditions, the cumulative effect on Africa and Africans is a crisis of cultural confidence, continued economic uncertainty and increase crime rate, which globalization inadvertently promotes. This created a real problem of social solidarity at both the national, community and family realms (26-37).

He expressed that the attack and destruction of indigenous spiritual values and faith traditions have attracted a crisis of cultural confidence, people are in dilemma of their faith and approaches. Spontaneously African identity has been existing, mostly Igbo people and of course any other people are bequeathed with values and norms which are manifested to the external world through their cultural accretion. "African traditional religion and its rituals have already disappeared due to the onslaught of Islam and Christianity" (26-37).

As he was pointing out the agent that piloted the disappear of African identity he says: The major medium of transmitting culture from one generation to another is language. Thus, the preservations and transmission of cultural values are not possible without language. Thus, culture is noted to be inseparable bond up with language, therefore to destroy the peoples language means the destruction of their culture, this globalization of culture has succeed in doing (26-37).

He further notes "Another major phase in the Western effort in the destruction of the African personality occurred through the imposition of Western religion and culture represented by various shades of Christianity on African" (25-37) in the above citation one can see that the onslaught came through communication medium as he rightly pointed out. Noting that language being part of culture, been watered down, culture in that respect have been affected.

Against this backdrop on non-chalancy of using our mother tongue he opines, overtly, the "Imo mother" and by extension "Igbo mother" substantiates the fact that the lose of language is inadvertently lose of culture and lose of culture is an invaluable knowledge and self identity lost.

Therefore is pathetic to note that most Africans, especially the Igbo from the elite background, cannot communicate freely in their mother tongue. It is noted that all the home level that most Parents of the Igbo stock do not consider it necessary to communicate with their children in their dialects. The obvious reason is the belief that English language is superior to their indigenous ones. Hence, children learn to speak English language first from their parents at home even before reaching the school age. (26-37).

On the above citation he was saying that basic assumption that prompted the impossible was the development from the colonized people must involve a denial of their history, a rejection of their cultural heritage and an adoption of western cultural practices. He further states "The new definition of globalization will be with the aim of making African to think globally but act locally" (26-37).

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved | SJ Impact Factor 7.538 | ISRA Journal Impact Factor 7.894 |

For Africans to think globally but act locally there is an important role to play and on this role Okoro avers: Africans still have a huge role to play in the world's development quests, by advocating for people centered development, through their cultural heritage. It therefore becomes pertinent to note that if African must make any meaningful contribution in the global village arrangement, her cultural heritage and .institutions must be harnessed to address the global problems, facing the entire humanity (26-37).

To facilitate this point in clearer understanding, he further insists "for instance, Africans must have the courage to harnessing the resources of her traditional medicine and knowledge system to fighting the endemic diseases that plague the global village citizenry" (26-37).

Okoro seeing the richness in the cultural heritage of Africans, the Igbo example suggested that Africans features can stand the test of time in making sure that corruption, crime and violence infiltration on globalization will be proved abortive. He opines further: Summarily, with the western societies finding spiritual emptiness in materialism, African religion and culture stands a better chance to offer an alternative method to addressing the rising corruption, crime and violence. This is because African culture is renowned for its moral awareness, which is embedded in different indigenous language, myths, folklore, cultural heritage and rites and rituals of African traditional faith (26-38).

In consequence of the ongoing argument, llogu in his work Christianity and Iqbo Culture Enugu. Nok, Publishers, 1974 elicits the paradigm of African identity as its regards Christian faith. He notes:

African identity in her Religion have effected the society in ceremonies, institutions and symbol. The Christian values being taught to the Igbo people in terms of modesty, Justice, regard even from the humblest as the neighbour to be loved as one's self, are being undermined by the competitive spirit in which the Igbo people delight very much as a means of upholding the achievement, motivation already present in their culture before the advent of Western technological cultural (116).

Furthermore, llogu speaks on Colonial Government manipulation of Christianity, which influences our social order Of course Government found a way and Christians were required to swear in a British Colonial Court with the Bible to justify a claim or prove innocence when falsely accused. But Ibo system of control through oath, sacred shines and sacred bushes had been shattered by the Christianity teaching thereby influencing the tempo of social change (70).

It is against this backdrop that he further emphasizes on cultural practices of the Igbo people as it regards to the "Otu Muo" (the masquerade society) which Awka people adheres in their Annual masquerade festival known as Imoka in veneration of their deity.

"The 'Otu Muo' (the masquerade society) members also perform some political duties: they guard the village against thieves, collect fines from people pronounced guilty of offences, and help in seeing that "Aru" (pollutions) are not hidden". (16) llogu here emphasizes the importance of masquerading in African Society setting with particular reference to Awka town. He moves on to the efficacious nature of African medicine as part of our culture where he writes:

The genus for prophetism in the form of vision seeing and vision interpretation is like traditional divination. The combination of healing through herbs and oils with religious practices and the desire for visible symbols of religious vitality in the form of spirit possession, ecstasy and the feeling of abandon and carefree" worship patterns have their counterpart in traditional religion also (61).

In the above citation he elicits the richness of African culture in worship, showing that traditional religion and Christianity are alike but only interpretation. Supporting his view on the interpretation he pointed out the features of the interaction between traditionalism and modernity in Igbo land in which he sees our cultural value falling apart.

He opines, Ibo traditional religion as a system of beliefs, practices and social as well as cultural values is falling apart, the only centre that is still holding on In the face of modernity consists of the cultural institution, relationships and some of the structure of human interpretation, but none of these remains as neatly as before the impact of Western Technology and Christianity (117)

From the above citation it could be discovered that llogu was lamenting on the dilapidation cultural structure. He further says "This integrative force of the traditional religions begins to weaken when such traditional religions are impacted upon by another religion or another value orientation". (234).

The impartation-on this fact have given room for derogating names against our tradition. The time is long past when derogating terms "fetish", primitive", "magic" are applied to these facts and facets of African traditional religions and therefore describes them as useless, irrelevant and archaic (235). Also in the ongoing argument Mbiti in his work introduction to African Religion London, Heinemman educational Books, 1975. Observes some names given to African deities, which he considers derogatory:

Paganism or pagan is sometimes used as a derogating word to describe Africans who are not followers of either Christianity or Islam.

Yet there are many people in Europe and America who do not follow either of these world religions, and are often wholly irreligious, but they are never called pagans. Afr5ican who follow African Religion are deeply religious people and it is wrong and fooling, therefore, to speak of them as pagans, or to regard their religion as paganism (17).

In the above citation Mbiti was bettered about names given to African deities and her adheres. Pointing out areas where these identities may be found, he says "Africans likes to celebrate life. They celebrate events in the life of the individual and the community. These include occasions like names, circumcision, marriage, funeral, harvest festivals, praying for rain and many others" (19). He later have a wider scope on the richness of African identities culminating in circumcision and initiation, and these two could be found in Christian faith adherence of circumcision and initiation through the Baptism "until the individual has gone through the operation he is still an outsider". (96). Seeing that religion, particularly Christian religion is anthropocentric (man centered) he further states:

Since African religion belongs to the people, no individual member of the society concerned can stand apart and reject the whole of his people's religion. To do so would mean to cut himself off from the total life of his people. Even if the individual is converted to another religion, this should not mean abandoning his African culture altogether. Where there is no real conflict between African religion and other religions, the covert retains much of his cultural and religious background as long as he remains within the traditional set up of life (41).

To show the richness of this identity as it concerned marriage he says, Marriage in the traditional African view (Igbo example) is an affair of more than two people. Therefore through marriage many relationships are established, and the married couple are very much in the public eyes. For this reasons, weddings are carried out with celebration and festivals, going an opportunity for everyone to be involved (102).

To the above citation it shows that the cuitural identities of Africans brings people together in oneness. Marriage as heavenly injunction is equally seen in the religion of African.

As the religion brings people together, even at death they believe that they are still together. Remembering the departed is a serious matter in the African traditional religion that is why Mbiti rightly says:

African peoples believe that death is not the end of human life. A person continues to exist in the hereafter. This continuation of life beyond death is recognized through a very widespread practice of remembering the departed, which is found throughout African, in some areas more attention is paid to it, especially in the farming communities, then is customary in nomadic and pastoral communities. This remembrance of the dead concerns namely the living dead, that is, the spirits of those who died up to four or five generations back. Head of families adults and married peopleare remembered in his way longer than babies, children and the unmarried. (123)

To show how important the departed were to them they name children after their deads: The departed are also remembered by naming children after them, especially if their features have been inherited by those children. In some places, animals such as bulls or goats may be dedicated to the departed, and slaughtered for them or in their honour when it is thought they may need than (125).

In the above citation Mbiti attempted showing how important the dead are to the people. He further stipulated on the parallel nature of Christianity and African traditional beliefs, as he writes: The Christian idea of the Church has parallels with African traditional life in which kinship and the extended family play a central role. The church is the Christian family, in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. The Church also includes those who have died and those who still live. This is similar to the African view of the family of both the living and the departed (16).

Metuh Ikenga, in his work, African Religion in Western conceptual schemes: the problem of interpretation. Ibadan Pastoral institute publishers, 1985. Stressed on the Igbo world view about God and he further says.

The idea of "Chi" pervades Igbo life and Its belief system. Every event in a man's life, whether it be success or failures, is "Onatara Chi", a gift of chi. The goal of a man's life is to achieve his "Akara chi"- destiny imprinted on his palm "Chi" whether it be the personal god or personal destiny finally derives from "Chukwu", God. "Chi" could in fact be said to be the Igbo expression of God's-providential care for each individual person. "Chi is God's own representative in man it protects and guides man through the dangers and snares of the world (28).

Metuh further categorized the different names for the creator Thus: Igbo have three different names for the creator in their cosmology: "Chukwu" the great providence, Chineke - creator providence and Osebuluwa or Olisa (shortened form) Lord carrier of the word. Although all the three names are now used in all ports in Igbo land each name stems from a different area (38).

Metuh shows the existence of God in African traditional religion, which Christianity claims to have introduced to our religion. In the same vain with the ongoing argument, many prayers are offered to God through the deities, especially Chi. Prayers addressed directly to God are mostly in form of invocations as he notes: These are very frequent; thus when the head of a family wakes up in the morning, he may, after washing his hands lay a kola or some snuff on the ground saying "Obasi Idinenu" (Chukwu), watch over me and my children this day. Any one setting forth on journey may ask Chukwu to make the object of the journey successful and bring him home again in safety. The Igbo Morning Prayer is addressed to God curiously, enough, this is the first thing each paterfamilias does very morning before this he speaks to no one (50).

Here above, Metuh was explain the importance of prayers to African traditions religion adherers, and the belief in existence of God. Igbo people are very fond of offering sacrifices, they rarely try to define them. Igbo consecratory sacrifices are called "Igo Muo" and these are done for purifications in all realms. Basically the sacrifices are for God

as Metuh observes further: The Igbo are one of the few African peoples which have direct sacrifices to God. I have discussed the different direct sacrifices to God in another article. Here I will describe the rituals of one of such sacrifices called "Iruma Chukwu" (setting an alter for God). This sacrifice is part of an Initiation rite into the status of elder, and fits one to set up a symbol before which he could offer daily prayer. There are two stages to full initiation into the cult of Chukwu. The first stage is open to men with family responsibilities. The second stage may be performed by those who have passed the middle age. A sacrifice to Chukwu is made at each stage of the initiation rite. I describe the sacrifice as offered at the second stage of the initiation rites (61).

In this above long citation one can see how Igbo people attached more importance on sacrifice as Metuh opines. All the sacrifices like Exorcist sacrifices - "Ichu Aja", purificatory sacrifices "Ikpu Alu" and propitiatory sacrifices "Ho Muo or I meria Muo" the most important among the equal that governs and guides the ethical principal, in Igbo societal setting is the purificatory sacrifices "Ikpu Alu". Purification rites of both major and minor pollution are called "Ikpu Alu" (dragging pollution). The character of purification rites very according to the gravity of the crime and the nature of the offence. (64).

The meaning of sacrifice should therefore be sought in the totality of the sacrificial act, and not just in the significance of the gift. Sacrifice is indeed a gift to the God or gods, but more deeply, it is a pray, and to this Mbiti adds: By and large, the meaning of sacrifice as defined in the History of religious have enables us to gain a deeper understanding of Igbo sacrifices. Sacrifice is primarily a ritual prayer. It allows men to achieve Communion with God through the mediation of the offering, God is the giver of absolute life which paradoxically involves also death. Creatures of God are bearers of divine life and death. Through consecration and immolation, they allow man to pass from human to the divine I clam to achieve Communion with God who is the source and plenitude of life. (70).

III. AFRICAN CULTURAL BACKGROUND: AWKA IN PERSPECTIVE

A. Awka Before the Advent of Christianity

Historically, Awka settled before the advent of whites in Nigeria around 7th-8th Century. Consisting 33 villages with a high sense of craftsmanship. Akujaoka Onejeme gives a vivid picture of the scenario as he writes: The Oka people, before A.D 1905 were a great people, resourceful, inventive and courageous. They were a race of specialists, working in iron, copper, brass, and bronze, skilled in the carving of the wooden implements and Ornaments; in farming; in the practice of medicine; and in the pursuit of wisdom. They did not belong to any known clan in Igbo land, neither had they any known relatives. They referred to themselves simply as "Ebe Anyi" - Our stock (1).

"Oka' spelling was reverted, which some people say is simpler. The change in the spelling of the name from "Oka" to Awka was made by the British colonial office in 1908. According to Akujaoka "this charge of spelling was made by the colonial secretary, Mr. F.C. James, in 1908, through Government notice No. 729 published in the Southern Nigeria Gazette of 1908, No 42 volume 3 at page 8511" (2)

Akwa people are known with a peculiar dialect that differs from other Igbo tongue. In consequence to this, Akuja states, Oka people have a language of their own, which is variation, on dialect, of the Igbo tongue. One outstanding peculiarity of that Oka language is a sound not found in other Igbo dialects, it is a sound that is made of slightly parting the lips and blowing out air to make a sound that is between "V" and "B", but without actually pronouncing "V" as "V" or b as b. This peculiar sound is also found among the Bini, and in the Benin alphabet it is written as "VB", as in the name Evbare". I have adopted these letters of the benin alphabet, "vb" for this Oka sound. The "vb" in Oka dialect would be pronounced as "f" In onitsha dialect, or as "h" In owerri dialect For example; where the Oka man would say: "Ivbe nkee ivbe kwe!" (this is extraordinary!). The onitsha man would say: "ife nka Ife kwaf" And the Owerri man would say "Ihe nka ihe kwa" (3)

Up to 1905 Awka town was a sovereign nation- state, self contented, self sufficient and prosperous, with a well defined. Akujaoka Onejeme further commented on the system of government Awka were involved as he writes: By their system of government the Oka people were the freest people in the world. They are republicans. No one man ruled over, them (Oka enwere Eze). In other society they regarded each other as equals. They were ruled by their laws, in the making of which every citizen participated. The managed their affair in the democratic assembly of the whole . people, called "Izu oka", to which every citizen had the right to attend. The women folk had their own assemblies. The nearest thing to king that the Oka people had was the society of Ozo tittle holders. The members of this society had traditional functions in Oka, and had a part in the management of the affairs to the town. They declared wars and make peace, on behalf of the town; and they settle disputes. But they rule no one. They are just "primus inter pares" - first among equals. (4)

When the British came, according to the oral interview by Nweke Ugbaja, who rightly pointed that Onuru Uzoku the paramount chief of all refused to be made warrant chief, declined by saying that anyone who allowed himself to be made king of Oka (Awka) would be struck dead by the gods of Oka instantly!. Akujaoka. commentes on this matter further thus: The government of Oka could be Likened to that of ancient Athans, in the heyday of Athenians greatness; or such other Greek city states as Wiietus and Corinth. But whereas the executive organs of IzuOka were the Age - Grades (Age-grade being a grouping of people born within three years of one another, counting upwards). The Greeks. Were said to be the inventor of democratic government, far from whom did the. Oka people learn their own? The answer is from no one. They developed their form of government themselves.

With that it means that Awka people formed a concensus that no man will emerge as a leader but to be ruled by elders. Nweke Ugbaja in that same oral interview said that before the advent of Christianity that the elders concerned that it is only Ozo tittle holders will be governing their affairs. Till date Ozo title men still have say in the administrative abiter of Eze Uzu II of Awka, Obi Gibson Nwosu. in the on going fact Akugaoka Acknowledged so many people that

helped with this facts he further says: I must, however, single out For special mention, and of course, thanks, the under mentioned persons, who, along with many others gave me the inner core of Oka history. It was their patience and understanding, over many sittings, that made coherent story of my people.

Ozo Nwakafor Ndum - Ozo chukwuchili of Amudo, Ozo Chinwuko Nweke- Oz nyilagha of Umuonaga village, Nnonyelu Ebem of Amudo village, Nwejiofor Ninyl of Amudo village Ozo Nwanna Nwudozo Owulubego of Umuogbu village, Ifediora Nwamgba of Umudioka village, Ozo Onwuemelie of Umuonaga village and Ozo Chiriunna, Ozo Esselu of Umuogbu village and to mention but few (2)

All these aforementioned had in one way or the other contributed in making this piece of history a reality as Akujako Acknowledged. Awka is today the capital of Anambra State.

B. Historical Background of Egwuimoka Festival as a Culture

Igbo people are fond of celebrating and adoring their deities through festivals. As Ulogu rightly observes: Communities in Nigeria are known: for one deity or another, commonly venerated during festivals. Commonly, Agulu is known for their deity "HABBA-AGULU" Umunze is known with their Udo likewise Nanka. Akwa people are known for their agbala called Umoka, the feast is known as Egwu- Umuoka which they believe that protects them (66).

Nweke Ugbaja of Umudioka village Awka in an Oral interview about the origin and nature of this festival on 23rd of October 2010 at his compound avers: Amikwo village was the first village that settled in Awka area, a notable 'dibia' (Native Doctor). But with a molesting problem about her daughter Ikwodiaku who had from birth a disease called "Idigili Okpa" (Elephantiasis). Amikwo tried all he could but his efforts was proved abortive, till a day an apparition like a beautiful woman with monkey on her shoulder appeared to him and told him what to do for the disease to be cured.

Nweke Ugbaja, on trying to let known about the help the apparition offered to Amikwo concerening the disease, he says, The spirit told Amikwo of a prominent dibia called dioka; a mirror and a native doctor. Before then Awka was such terrified because of a man who came through ifite Nibo to molest them and by name Odikpo. The dibia mounted a siege for Odikpo and killed him with this they began to see and admire the protective nature of this apparition and traced where to locate its alter, which by then, Ngene from Amachalla in Umueleke kindred a soothsayer made them know about the deity. The visit attracted a day in adoration of this deity.

Ugbaja, says that with that visit to Ngene, it now became a tradition and have it that in "Onwa ede muo" (April- May) the festival of Imo- Awka should be celebrated. As the time goes on according to Ugbaja he says, Imoka festival was indeed a colorful event in the life of Awka people.

On a week to the great feast on Afor market day, they visit their brother Umuokpu village who were extracted from Umuzocha village to protect Amaobia from the inversion of nearby communities. This visit is called "Nkata agba olulu egwu Umuoka" (information of the advent of Imo Awka festival) which started in earnest after the Biafran Civil War of 1967- 1970.
The festival is therefore marked by ample feeding. This celebration continues till date "Every home in Awka on that day will prepare a good bitterleaf soup which is commonly called in Awka dialect 'Avulu'.

C. African Cultural Identity and its Implication for the Awka People

Arinze explicates on the fundamental beliefs in Igbo culture. Hence he maintains, "Igbo culture is the existence of the three interacting orders namely muo, the spiritual order of the dead; Madu, the human order of the living human being; and the Ihe, material order of things. These interact daily and continuously" (214). African culture further shows itself in art and literature, dance, music and drama, in the style of building houses and of people's clothing, in social organization and political system, in religion, ethnics, moral and philosophy, in the custom arid institutions of the people in their values and laws and in their economic life (Mbiti,4)
All these cultural expression influence and shapes the life of each individual in this society, and in turn the individual makes a cultural contribution to his society through participating in its life and in some cases through creative works. Stories, proverbs, riddles, myths and legends cannot be overemphasized in African cultural identity. Culturally Igbo people believe in Supreme Being who protects patrons. African religion is the thinking and the experience of our fore fathers. They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious beliefs, they observed religious ceremonies as Awka is fond in cultural ceremony "Egwu Imoka and rituals, they told proverbs and myths which carried religious meanings and they evolved laws and customs. According to Mbiti, "African religion functions more on communal than an individual basis" (13)
African cultural practices relatively function as a social control. As it borders on rituals it includes sacrifice (Aja), initiation ceremony (mkpobata). For example "Igo Osu" is a ritual designed to cleanse and purify a village or clan of any abomination. Rituals are integral parts of festivals. Both are practical expression of the basic beliefs of the people, "there are festivals pertaining to the gods like "Izu Afia Ichi" in Agulu, "Ime Ekpe" in Itu, Mbaise, new yam festivals "Ime ala" etc (Madu ,14). All these cultural outfits has its implication which could be positive or negative as the case may be. African cultural heritage is of positive side for the people that adhere though there are other cultural traditions which in the world views are bad like killing of twins and ostracizing people but their cultures are for social control.
Age before now, Awka in their Imo Awka Festival had it as social control to their young and aged. Masquerades are being displayed, wrestling and Awka artifacts were exhibited. Metuh therefore observes: Oka in Igbo tradition seems to be a quasi sacred profession. There are two we!! Known dans of artist in Igboland. There are Oka dan (present day Awka Town) which from time Immemorial has been a dan of blacksmiths, and the umudioka dan Umua di Oka (children of expert artist) which specialized in culting the ICHI scarification marks and in marking charms (3)
Because of this cultural craftsman's of Awka people it has contributed culturally to the needs of the people by providing farming implements. The master blacksmith (Nne Uzu) as Awka has it as a culture has contributed tremendously in the training of younger craftmen, whereby creating job opportunities to the young. This position Nne uzu has dual purposes in the cultural setting of Awka as rightly pointed out by Akujaoka,
Before the inception of British rule, Awka was governed by titled men known as Ozo and Ndichie who were accomplished individuals in the community. They held general meeting or Izu Awka either at the residues of the oldest man (Otchafu Awka) or at a place designed by him. He was the Nna Uzu or master blacksmith, Whether he knew the trade or not, for the only master known to Awka people was the master craftman, the nne Uzu (4)
"This respect to Nne uzu is attributed to Igbo philosophy of life "Igwe bu ike" multitude is strength. "Umunna bu ike" kinsmen are strength. These emphasize the virtue of belonging in a beneficial reciprocal relationship with One's kinsmen. (United we stand divided we fall)" (Nwala, 151).

1) Socio Cultural Implication

Socio culturally, Igbo people have attained a high sense of co- existence amongst themselves. "The societal pattern of Igbo communities are well organized. Igbo culture adopts it from their father's life of oneness, sharing things in common and living for another" (llogu, 7) "In our social setting, it recognizes elders as the ruling party and the Patrilinage. The localized Patrilinage (Umunna) Is the central or basic social unit of Igbo society. It is made up of the descendents, in the male line, of a founder ancestor by whose name the linage is sometimes called.

At the bottom of the linage are families of men, their wives and children living in homesteads. Surrounded by mud wall. Sometimes the homestead lived in no surrounded compound which shows unity and trust to one another" (llogu, 8) In later part Igbo people are not known in walling their compounds. It was a case of acculturation in our town (Awka). They Learned it through their trade merchants, whom thy supply their artifacts, Like my village. Umudioka (the children of chief craftman) started fencing before the Biafran war but in the traditional setting of Igbo people, it is not common in fencing the compound. Nweke Ugbaja says, "it is through trading of irons.they learnt it". Nevertheless, there are other social attributes like village wrestling which is epitomized in Imoka (Umu-Awka) festival of Awka town in recent past. Nweke. Ugbaja says that masquerading is not an exception which serves as an agent of peace and social control. In that same cultural pattern of Igbo people, Awka are seen Omenani (custom) as vital key. Sometimes the word is interpreted tradition and there are many observance on this tradition.

As lleogu rightly says, Aru (abomination or pollution) ornso a/a (Behaviour contrary to the laws of Ala, that is the earth deity) are two words that are used when speaking of contravention against approved social and religious norms. There are two kinds of custom: Customs that pertain to morality and those that are purely social and cultural. All the codes of morality are nearly always in the form of prohibitions and communicated from her by the dead ancestors (Ndichie or Ndebunze) to the community. (22).

"Another aspect of Omenani is what is commonly called taboo or rituals avoidances. There are taboos or ritual avoidances, which custom prescribes for persons holding specific office or position. Ala present especially "Nwanmou" Imo Awka (chief priest) or Ozo Awka title men, dibia or minstrel do observe taboos peculiar to their callings" (Nwala, 62).

Culture controls the life of Igbo's society because the elder who arbitrates over a matter fears the land and says the truth. Elders of Awka fears Imo-awka while passing judgments as Nweke U.gbaja rightly pointed out in the oral interview.

2) Political/ Economical Implication

In political setting each household has it head and each linage i.e., Umunna has its own. Most, if not all of such heads, are elderly senior titled men in those parts of the Igboland where the Ozo titled exists.

When there is a dispute to be adjudicated publicly in the interest of a village made up of various Umunna, all the elders and heads of all the Umunna concerned • would assemble at the senior Okpara Obu (The noble public meeting and ceremonial house) with this Ofo sticks (emblem of being representatives of dead ancestors and of religious authority) and listen to the two sides of the quarrel and punishment decide according to custom. (lleogu,6).

This citation holds that Igbo political setting is solidified.

In Awka the "Otu Muo" (the masquerade society) is a consolidated fraternity. Members also perform some political duties: they guard the village against thieves, collect fines from people pronounced guilty of offences, and help .in seeing that "Aru" (pollutions) are not hidden. "The masquerade institution therefore cannot be exempted from this religious ambient (Mmadu,51).

All these agents are to submit to the king of the land. Looking at the political setting of Awka, all the political agents are under the Eze Uzu of Awka. Today Awka is been governed by Eze uzu II of Awka, Obi Gibson Nwosu, who pilots the affair of Awka people. For example when the indigenes are levied, the Otu muo and the age grade help to collect the money through the Umunna (Patrilinage).

In recent past, Onyekulie masquerade of Umudeke clan of Umudioka village, where I came from displays it's potential by guarding what is been planted like cassava and checking for exploiters of it at night. This helps in grounding the economy of the people. New yam festival is also an agent of economic boost. Every man will like to produce the biggest yam for award winning at Igwe's palace, which helps economically to maintain stability. llogu accepts this without equivocation as he writes: Ibo traditional society knows only of subsistence economy and trade by barter. Self supporting family units do farm work on land sometimes commonly owned (by the male adult members of the lineage concerned and sometimes on privating owned land. The alternate this farm work with the making of crafts of household necessities which are sometimes marketed (20).

So many communities with the idea of artifacts makes wealth for themselves. Economically, Awka saw development because of the gift of crafteness.

Amanke Okafor (Lawyer Okafor) of the blessed memory opines that Awka were a race of specialist, working in iron, copper, brass and bronze.

On this reason trade by barter were attracted, that is why my community lived and are still living in a river line state for making skills for fishing and hoes for cultivation. "For instance Awka was the centre from where many people travelled out to various Ibo communes as blacksmith, medicine men (dibia) and wood carvers" (llogu, 21).

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved | SJ Impact Factor 7.538 | ISRA Journal Impact Factor 7.894 |

3) Religious Implications

As in every ethnic or national group within what is commonly described as pre-literater or traditional societies, religion among the Igbo is a group affair.

"The gods, as well as the world over soul (Chi Ukwu) or (Chineke), have jurisdiction over the whole group. Therefore, those are common celebrations and common religious practices covering a large area, although the details vary from village to village or from extended family or clan to another. The core of all Religious observances of Igbo's is the biannual, annual, quarterly or seasonal celebration. Held at the shrine of the gods, this includes sacrificial celebration held at the shrine of the gods. Prayers are always offered to the Almighty God (Chukwu) through the minor gods directly concerned, and nearly always through the ancestors" Chukwu (Chineke) is sometimes spoken of by the Igbo as the Amama Amcha Amach, the known and the unknown. It is a name which among other things indicate the mysterious nature ofchukwu. The world view related to the Igbo concept of God is a very healthy one. The world is created by God; who is a beneficent, uncaused cause, as well as the personal chief of the heavens. He is all-powerful and lord over all inferior spirits. There is no dualism in Igbo religion. Prayer request are preceded by a short historical account of the clan's origin, emphasizing the assistance that the ancestors had received from the gods. The Chief priest, who may also be the head of the dan, leads the prayer, holding his Ofo stick in his hand. At the end of each significant section all the Ozo titled men strike the ground with their OFo and say! Ehea, I see- Amen, so be it. (llogu, 8).

At Awka, for instance, their are the junior and the senior titles, the former consisting of Ime Amanwulu, Ime chi and Ajigirija and the latter consist of Ime Ekwu, Ime Ozo uno Nnekwu ozo. These people are regarded as the mouth piece of God. "The religious aspect of marriage include the preliminary divination by which the young man who seeks a wife is enabled to find out from what clan or lineage his chi (guardian spirit) permits him to take a wife of future when the diviner pronounce the clan and lineage from. Where the future wife will be found he also prescribes the sacrifice to be offered to the ancestors to prosper the young man and to help him fund a good wife, which invariably means a childbearing woman. Because of the Idea of good and bad they had. They know that good things comes from God, they equally seek God(s) present and permission, only the midi am they use is contrary to the religious view" (Mbiti, 4).

Because of the principled modemites of Igbo religion and sacred they value good.

"Good" is expressed by the word "Nna," which sometimes takes an independent existence more so than it's word "bad" does in Igbo expressions. A child can be named. Nmakasi (goodness is the superior virtue) Obioma (Kindly heart),Ifeoma (a child of beauty or the good one).

However the bulk of expression in which Nma is used show it more as adjective qualifying action, decision, state in life as well as hopes rather than as substantive expressing "goodness" as having "Ontological" existence.

Turning to the moral code of Igboland (omenani) which is believed to be handed down from the earth goddess from time immemorial, the prohibition (Nsoala) seem to predominate. "Like all thenomous social as religious injunctions, the Igbo code with it's many "thou shalt not" include both purely moral demands of the religious nature as well as the purely social political and economic considerations" (llogu, 126). lluogu in support of prohibitions further says, "There are variation in various parts of Igboland, but in general any list drawn up from any part will include the major and the minor prohibitions (Nsoala). The major ones to which one could prefix Thus shalt not" are:

a) Stealing yams either from the barn or
b) Homicide
c) Incest
d) A freeman, having sexual relationship with Osu (slave of a shrine) or spending the night especially with the Osu in her house.
e) Suicide especially by hanging.
f) Poisoning someone else to take his life secretly.
g) Theft of domestic fowls, Especially a hen in her hatching pot where it can easily be taking away with the eggs
h) A woman climbing a palm tree or a kola nut tree especially if in addition she attempts doing so with the special palm tree climbing rope.
i) Theft of any kind by an Ozo titled position

The minor ones are:-

j) Adultery by the wife
k) A wife throwing the husband on the ground during fight

l) A widow having sexual relationship while still "wearing" for her late husband. Mourning clothes she is considered to be in ritual danger until she had performed the cleansing rite" normally after one year, such sex relation is regarded as spreading pollution. (126)

All these mentioned are checked by Igbo religion and the priest of gods are the people that performs the rituals for cleansing.

Religions equally affect the pattern of healing in igboland. These are performed by "Dibia". "The Igbo distinguishes between the dibia Afa, diviner and dibia ogwu (medicine man) both are dibia (healers)". (Metuh, 163).

The functions of a dibia, generally, could be said to consort of providing solutions to all kinds of human problems. They achieved that through the means of herbs. So the dibia in the traditional Igbo society is a friend of the people.

IV. A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF AFRICAN IDENTITY AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: A CASE STUDY OF EGWU IMOKA

A. The Cross-Road of African Identity and the Christian faith

Christianity and African identity came at the cross roads at the first meeting between C.M.S Missionaries of 1857 at Onitsha and our Igbo culture.

From the religious point of view Christianity found a people with a serious and well organized natural religion. The Igbo traditionally believe in God, in spirits; good and bad, and in ancestors. Their worship revolved generally around the worship of the ancestors and the spirits (incorrectly called gods by some writers), although God was often invoked at prayer and names were given to children to His honour. The Missionaries found the Igbo to have clear ideas of right and wrong, although not all their moral laws agreed with the Christian code. Igbo society showed itself to be alive with the spirit of religion. It was not secularltlc. Religion celebration marked such social occasions as birth, marriage and death, building of a new house, the eating of first-fruits, and even the drinking of wine. Streams, village squares and trees, dances, masquerading, title taking were all connected somehow with the spirits or ancestors and their worship. (Arinze, 185).

"It is to be expected that the early Missionaries would differ in their approach to local customs and their ability to promote a meeting between Christianity and Igbo culture" (Arinze 186). Many missionaries, such as Bishop Ajayi Crowther (1857), Shanahan (1885); used the stepping stones already placed among the Igbo people by Divine Providence to scale to the heights of Christian beliefs and practices. Such wise missionaries are like St. Paul who could delude a Jewish audience with masterly rabbinical quotation from the Holy Scripture, but who could also speak to the Greeks at Athens from the book of nature, and by quoting one of their own poets.

According to Paul in the Holy Scripture it says, All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious for as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and earth, and does not live in temple built by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man, He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exalt places where they should live (633).

As Paul has it, early missionaries from Europe did not have it easy their evangelical movement in our soil. We must, however, admit that not every missionary from Europe has abeen able to achieve the best results in the planting of Christianity amidst our people's culture. Many of our custom were not understood and so were condemned. There is no surprise if a European missionary brings to Africa Christianity such as he knew it in Europe. The early missionaries did not have the advantage of advanced ethnological studies such as we have today. Often they had to depend on books written by Itinerant adventures who delighted in sensational reporting and who often wrote about what they little understood. There was also not that general appreciation of our culture both by the missionaries and by our own people such as we are beginning to see in the past twenty years (Arinze, 186).

Although good ground has been covered in the reaching of understanding between Christianity and Igbo Culture, here let us touch such questions as initiation rites, marriage celebrations, burial ceremonies, libation, dance in sacred worship, masquerading, the use of “Ofo” and ceremonies touching agriculture.

Initiation rites figure prominently in Igbo Culture at such milestones in life as entry into Manhood or womanhood or admission into age-grade or other societies.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved | SJ Impact Factor 7.538 | ISRA Journal Impact Factor 7.894 |

These rites have great moral, sociological and educative value. What Christians are expected to do about them is to give them a thorough study in order to see what can be preserved, or purified, or elevated, and also whether any Christian Baptism or Confirmation rites can be enriched with elements judiciously chosen from this igbo Cultural Patrimony (Arinze 191). it is also a boarding issue in Christendom about marriage practices of our people as Arinze rightly says: Marriage celebration generally raises the problem of two rites for the Christian. He first goes through the traditional ceremonies. These do not a/ways include superstitious practices. After the native law and custom ceremonies, the couples are regarded as husband and_ wife by Igbo Culture. But the church does not yet regard them as such until they are married in the church. Some couples ignore this church ceremony. Others carry it out, but it is not certain how convinced they are of the importance of the church ceremony, (192).

That is why some people, even Reverend Silas Ike of Awka Diocese is asking whether the church ceremony could be arranged in such a way that, it would form a unit with the traditional ceremonies so Mat couples could not complete one without the other. Since blessing of carriage is paramount, let the Priest come to the day of traditional Carriage and perform the rite.

Other rites that borders our native religion and Christianity is the issue of burial, Arinze further comments: "Burial ceremonies are a major event in Igbo society. The celebrations are tied up with respect for the deceased and belief in a life after death. They increase in solemnity if the deceased was a mother of many children, a rich or a titled man, gun shots, feasting, dancing, consultation of the fortune-teller and sacrifices are prominent features. For decades, some churches have solved the problem of what a Christian can do for his deceased pagan relative by ruling that, all the traditional ceremonies are forbidden (192).

Awka people and even Christian will finish the Christian burial and the rest days are for the inlaws and relatives with traditional dances without distinguishing a Christian burial to Pagan. "But this type of blanket condemnation does not solve the problem. Nor is it correct to suggest that Christians can carry out all traditional ceremonies. This would be to sanction superstition" (Arinze, 192). The answer must lie in a scholarly research in the entire custom in order to distinguish what can be preserved, what should be modified and what must be abolished.

Libation is done generally by respectable heads of families on big occasions. Before they drink wine they let down a few drops on the ground in honour of God Almighty (sometimes) the earth spirit (generally) and the ancestors (more often). Is this superstition? Is this perhaps of deeper significance than strikes the eye? I think that libation is a prayer which Christian should adopt but to be consecrated to Almighty God" (Arinze, 192).

Some people have thought that dance can be introduced in some form into sacred worship. They pointes out its prominent place in Igbo traditional society and religion. Monsignor Maduka was right in his cultural adaptation to sacred worship in Ekwulobia area of Anambra State. Some are not sure where Christianity will end up if dance is ntroduced into worship, but our men (Christian fathers) engage :hemselves in series of dance in community because of the intrinsic ature of our culture.

A typical Awka man can forfeit church activity and follow remonial dances of the society because it is part of them. It is also ertinent to note in the importance of Ofo. The "Ofo" is a piece of wood ot from a tree of the same name (deuterium Senegalense). "It is a mbol of authority which descends from the ancestors, a guarantee of truth, and sometimes part of the regalia of the spirits in their shrines. Some people think that "Ofo" as a symbol of truth need not be regarded as a superstitious, object which I submit for further study", (Arinze 192).

Farming is one of our cultural identity and Igbo people like sacrificing to God before they begun to reap from their farm produce and Arinze in support of this says: The Igbo have been traditionally an agricultural people. Their religious beliefs and practices also influenced their farm work. "Ifejioku", the yam spirit, receives his special cult before and after the planting season. The new yam festival was one of the most widespread in Igboiand. The Igbo recognized the existence of higher powers and offered them worship when they planted or harvested first fruit" (Arinze, 193). In which Christians believe in rogation and first fruit Sundays. In some ways Christianity does not ridicule this religious sense but a proper teaching should be made so as to let the people know that the Supreme Being supposed to be God. It now remains for it to correct, purify and elevate this religious conviction and give it fresh expression. To do this effectively, study and guided experimentation are necessary.

Finally, masquerades as an agent of social control and adjustment Igbo society has created so many concern in the lives of practical Christian. Igbos which Awka people are not left out believed that masks the personated ancestors. A fuller understanding of what they stand in Igbo society which can be found in the settlement of the marriage dispute between Uzowulu and his in-laws as portrayed by Achebe in Things Fall Apart. The dispute wars settled by the ancestors masquerade) and not by man. Madu rightly says: In fact, throughout Igbo land, masquerades are used to extract fines from defaulting community members. The masquerades are immune from count cases because they are regarded as ancestral spirits. By virtue of their higher vital ranks than humans, humans cannot engage them in a fight and it is believed that anybody who does that will meet with terrible disastrous consequences.

The Igbo world-view of our dependence on the spiritual forces underscores the rationale behinds the Igbo's perception of the masquerades as agents of social control and adjustment (57).

In recent part, Awka people has been using masquerades for social control and mostly for personal aggrandizement to the deity imoka. But Christianity in their teaching has condemned it as idolatry, and seeks to prove that practice abortive. Recently, an Archdeacon in Awka while preaching said that a masquerade stopped him with the Church bus and called him Archdeacon, meaning that the masquerade can recognize him which epitomized the clash of Christianity and cultural heritage in Awka.

The church condemns it but people accept it directly or indirectly. Even last year, 2010, it happened that I am in Awka, and after the church service people who were dismissed from church joined the clew of Imoka adherers. Seeing the African identity and Christian faith at cross roads, issues are needed to be ironed out regarding the issue of culture and Christianity because man is culturally anthropocentric.

B. The Implication of this Junction in the Contemporary Society

The year 1960 marks a turning points in the history of many African countries, including Nigeria. With political independence the desire to develop one's culture, to be oneself, asserted itself more and more. Many Africans began to develop greater self-confidence and to strive to discard what has been called "colonial mentality". In Nigeria, one manifestation of this cultural awakening was the festival of the Arts and culture of 1977, culminating our music, dances, folklore, dress etc. were encourage (Arinze, 186).

"This welcome silent revolution could not be without its influence on the religious field. People began to ask what part of our religion is unchangeable and what elements are due to the culture of Europe where Christianity had grown. For 1500 years before it reached us" (Arinze 186). The question was raised of what names should be taken at Baptism. The better educated wondered why we should sing English hymns from the West ministers hymnal. A bold writer asked why we do not use palm wine at Holy Communion instead vine from the Mediterranean countries. At the same time the Nigerian priests and bishops were increasing in number and the church was assuming more and more of local colour. "It is in line with this silent revolution that the Igbo are showing more interest in their language and culture. This respected society for promoting Igbo language and culture is a concrete proof of this growing interest. A happy consequence is the increasing introduction of Igbo not just into teachers' colleges but also as full fledged departments at Colleges of Education and Universities (Arinze, 187).

This growing positive attitude towards our cultural heritage is also going on in the church. Both the Catholic Churches and the member churches of the Christian Council of Nigeria are engaged now in dialogue with Igbo culture more than in any other period in the past hundred years.

As if to emphasize the importance of greater understanding between Christianity and Igbo culture, there is the problem of some Igbo Christians who are torn between their Christian religion and their Igbo traditional practices. Arinze says: Christianity does not seem to have satisfied the yearnings of their souls. They serve two masters. They carry out exercises of the Christian religion but they do not omit those of the traditional religion. They, for example, consult a fortune-teller to advice them what sacrifices to offer so that spirits will permit them to build a house and live in it in peace. And when the house is built they call in a priest to bless it! They receive Holy Communion but they also carry charms in their pockets! Add to this the recent phenomenon of 'prayer houses' or 'Alleluia churches'. Nearly all their devotees are Christians (from the churches) who are in dire need of good health or a child, or a pass in an examination, or some other cherished goal (188).

Looking at it some are attracted by their style of prayer. The question can be asked whether these new religious groups are supplying something culturally adapted which the older Christian bodies are not giving sufficiently, or whether the secret of their attraction lies in man's readiness to try anything in time of stress and dire need.

Arinze says: The mere preaching of Christianity among our people already carries with it a certain meeting between this religious and our people's culture. It is, however, right that we should recount briefly some specific details of grounds covered by the implication of the Christianity and cultural junction in this contemporary society. I am thinking of such areas as language, names, music, architecture and title-taking. Language is an important vehicle and carrier of culture. The early missionaries were quick to see its importance. The Anglo-Catholic Churches translated the Bible into Igbo in the early days. Now and most recently the Roman and Anglo-Catholics under the auspices of the Bible Society of Nigeria have translated a unanimous bible. Church of Nigerian Standing Committee had already adopted the use of local language into all parts of Christian worship. And with almost all church leaders in Igbo land local at the moment, language is no longer the problem in any Christian community (188).

Names are important in all cultures, more so among the Igbo. The Igbo never adopted the attitude of what's in a name? A person's name is chosen with care. It has a meaning all its own, sometimes the names of the children in large family are a short account of the fortunes of that family. Its joys and its sorrows, its hopes and its fears. Christians take names at Baptism, mostly Roman Catholics takes at confirmation and at Religious Profession of Brothers and Sisters. An Igbo Christian should take a name which has meaning for him. It is a traditionally praiseworthy practice in the church to take the names of Saints who then serve as patrons and models for us. A suitable local name, in addition to, or in place of a Saint's name is good, provided that it does not refer to anything opposed to Christian faith and morals. Arinze rightly says; "some Christians in the early days of evangelization made the mistake of distinguishing Christian names from Igbo names. Others did worse and identified Christian names with English names. Some Igbo names are Beautiful baptism names, such as Ikechukwu, Ngozi, Chukwuka, Jchenna, Chukwuemeka, Nwakaego, Ifeanyi, Ikenna, and Chinyere" (189). Because of the junction and its implications, people have known, especially in Awka area the beauty of Igbo names while some people should be entirely dissuaded from taking such culturally empty names as violet, Winston, drink water, Seagrave and Friday.

Egbufama Chika in his publication the Igbo idea of God says, "the Igbo nomenclature is another side to it". The Igbos answer "Chukwudi" meaning that God exists. How would they answer this name if they have no idea of big God or god as the case may be?" (2) Ezeanya of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1967 compiled a book of beautiful Igbo names for Christians.

However, church music is also beginning to take on local colour. Commenting on that Arinze says, "gone are the days in which it was thought a matter of prestige to sing from hymnals emanating from Westminster or Canterbury, or to force Igbo words under a foreign musical air" (189). Experts in Igbo music tell us that Igbo music must respect the tonality of our language and also the recitative nature of many of our traditional charts. Arinze furthers, words and music set to reflect our cultural heritage have special power to help.us to pray. Local musical instruments are also being introduced into church use with good results, although some attempts are amateurish and unfit for sacred music" (189). Most paramount to note is that Africans especially Igbo people are now coming home to build their culture and so many writers are written to distinguish from religious pattern and cultural pattern which is vise vassal. People can now realize that Christianity is a child of many culture but son to none.

"Every people has it's peculiar customs and traditions, its own code of moral laws, and its own view of the universe and man's place in it. In short, every people has its own culture" (Arinze, 181).

V. EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

A. Evaluation

The clarion call for a synthesis of African identity and Christianity, which was made by well-meaning clerics for example, Ven. Ilogu Ph.D, Ven. Okoro Ph.D and canon Onunwa Ph.D has gone beyond the realm of logic.

Christianity is fast adapting itself and giving very cultural and traditional elements a Christian garb, a development which leads to cultural bastardization which Onunwa lamented thus: Christianity has tremendously affected the African life. Traditional societies have been disrupted. A new social order is emerging partly out of the old and partly as a response to the new contact with powerful external change-agents. Often the impression one gets is that Christianity has made such a huge success in Africa that the tradition religion has no strong grounds again. Often it is presented that Christianity completely affect the traditional religion and transformed it in such a way that people lose sight of the fact that the form of Christianity in Africa today has a lot of traditional element in it. In effect Christianity in Africa is a "tenant" of the traditional religion from whom it has "borrowed" many things. There has been a lot of conflicts and compromise between the two. (131)

African identities culminating in her culture and tradition (Religion) have put ail her iron on fire with Christianity, The contest is this, Christianity as a western child have come to a soil of values and identities which, they claim contradicts theirs. Christianity has enabled herself in a Contemporary word "Globalization". Western culture, with its dominant features has transported across the globe with great ferocity secularism as the only civilized way of behaviour in the contemporary world.

Okoro further states, "This is done with the overt intention of diluting and summarizing destroying the rich and dynamic African culture" (Okoro, 26- 37).

The cultural accretions of Africa are simply the concrete moods of preserving and transmitting African values, norms, and idea. African identities figuring in Igbo people have an antiquities as it regards to religion, marriage, Child naming, masquerading, folklore, etc.

Some are of the opinion that African identity and her religion should be a stepping stone and a vehicle through which Christianity could be propagated and this had for long dominated the thoughts of the African indigenous Christian theologians, who could aptly be described as "Cofessional scholars".

On this same argument Onunwa says "For instance in eastern Nigeria, in the 1950s many catholic priests like S.N. Ezeanya and M. Maduka did a study on how the traditional religion of the Igbo could be used as a stepping stone to the meaningful interpretation of the Christian ritual of the mass to the converts to Christianity" (Onunwa, 132).

As we observe, the main concern of this research work is to answer these questions: How does the Igbo Christian asses the respond to the demands of his culture, which are facts which he can no longer ignore? This culture and its demands have grown out of non-Christian, traditional religious influences. Secondly, how can the Igbo people at the same time as he responds to the demands of his culture, remain faithful to the Christian faith? In addition to the demands of his culture, he must also respond to the influences of the recent past, influences that result from the existence of the church for over one hundred years, from the confrontation Igbo life has with western technological civilization and secularization and the influences from the crack in the Igbo traditional code's interaction with both Christianity and technological secularization. "Decay in the Ibo moral code started when Christianity preached directly against some Ibo beliefs like the spirit-world of the Ibo and the earth goddess (ala) and her sanctity around which a good deal in the moral code was built".(llogu, 201).Still observed, so many ingredients of African identity like her religion holds that God is the almighty. Egbufama Chike hold, " The other beings that collaborated in the system do not struggle or compete with the supreme being. This big God is submerged in.the economic, social, spiritual, and culture life of the Igbo's". (1)

Therefore African identity and Christian faith should not be on a striving part rather Christianity should accept the fact, that Africans, and by extension Igbo people has an Identity which reciprocates to Christian faith.

B. Recommendation

This issues of African identity and Christian faith has been, pursued by many Christian theologians with a sense of vigor and interest, in the early 60's till this contemporary society. In his "Christianity and Igbo culture" llogu, a prominent Anglican Christian theologian, vividly explained the interaction between Christianity and African identity (culture and tradition). He tries to work out modalities on how the church in Africa, particularly in Igboland can "take some traditional religious and cultural element to make Christianity incarnate in Igbo society in order to make it an "authentic Igbo religion".

Still on llogu, in his work, "Igbo life and Thought" A critical evaluation is carried further in a comparative discussion of some aspects of Christianity. They all depict various strands in Igbo life and thought with a good measure of critical assessment of the cultural place of Igbo beliefs, Igbo practices such beliefs in worship and in moral education and inclinations which informs habit and character.

History has it that a significant exercise on this was carried out in 1955 when the Christian council of Ghana held a conference in which vital issues were discussed. The papers presented at the conference were published with the title "Christianity and African culture" The essence of the papers was a strong plea by the contributions to the church to expunge all its foreign accretions in order to become a part of the African soil. About four or five decades ago (1965) a crop of African theologians met in Nigeria under the auspices of all African conference of churches In Conjunction with the Theological Education Fund (T.E.F) And extensively discussed how the bible and scriptural revelation and teachings could be contextually explained in a African background. The hermeneutical problems had obviously been recognized in African Christian Churches. One of the useful result of the 1965 conference was the publication of some of the papers into a book; "Biblical Revelation and African .Beliefs" jointly edited by; Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (1968).

From the ongoing, it's now obvious that the need, to a Christian reader, according to Onunwa, for understanding the fundamental religious forms of the past calls for urgent action and study in order to discover more satisfactorily how to make Christianity probe deep into the heart of the African. (134.)

On the same existing issue about African identity and Christian faith, Okoro buttressed its argument in an International Journal of Philosophy and Religion, on "Cultural Globalization, the last onslaught on African personality: the Igbo example" were he stressed emphatically the damages curse by Christianity on African personality. "The greatest consequences of globalization is that, like colonialism it is going to spell doom to weak indigenous cultures. African traditional religion and its rituals have already disappeared due to the onslaught of Islam and Christianity" (26-37).

He submits that this paper underscores the fact that the two extreme positions are both mere dream and as well as fatal. Okoro concludes his facts,

Thus, this paper opines that we must not deny humanity the unique contributions of African to the world Community. It noted that our contributions lie in our moral culture, since the material cultures of the west have bequeathed the global community with moral emptiness (26-37).

From the ongoing, it is now obvious that African identity and Christian faith is not working on a parallel course rather on the game of interest. Both should accommodate each other for extremity.

C. Conclusion

In this work, we have been able to attempt a hermeneutica! examination of the concept, African identity and Christian faith in Igboland. We have also reestablished the fact that African culture which Igbo people exemplified is an interesting heritage which should not be over emphasized or be tagged a derogatory name like "fetish" and "paganism".

It is and should be an onslaught to the Igbo if our cultural heritage and identity goes absconded in a reigning issue of Christianity and globalization.

Evaluating Imoka as a cultural heritage has helped to deduce and support such cultures that promote our integrity as an existing people.

"African religion and culture stands a better chance to offer an alternative method awareness, which is embedded in different indigenous languages, Myths, folklore, cultural heritage and rites and rituals of African traditional faith". (Okoro, 26-37).

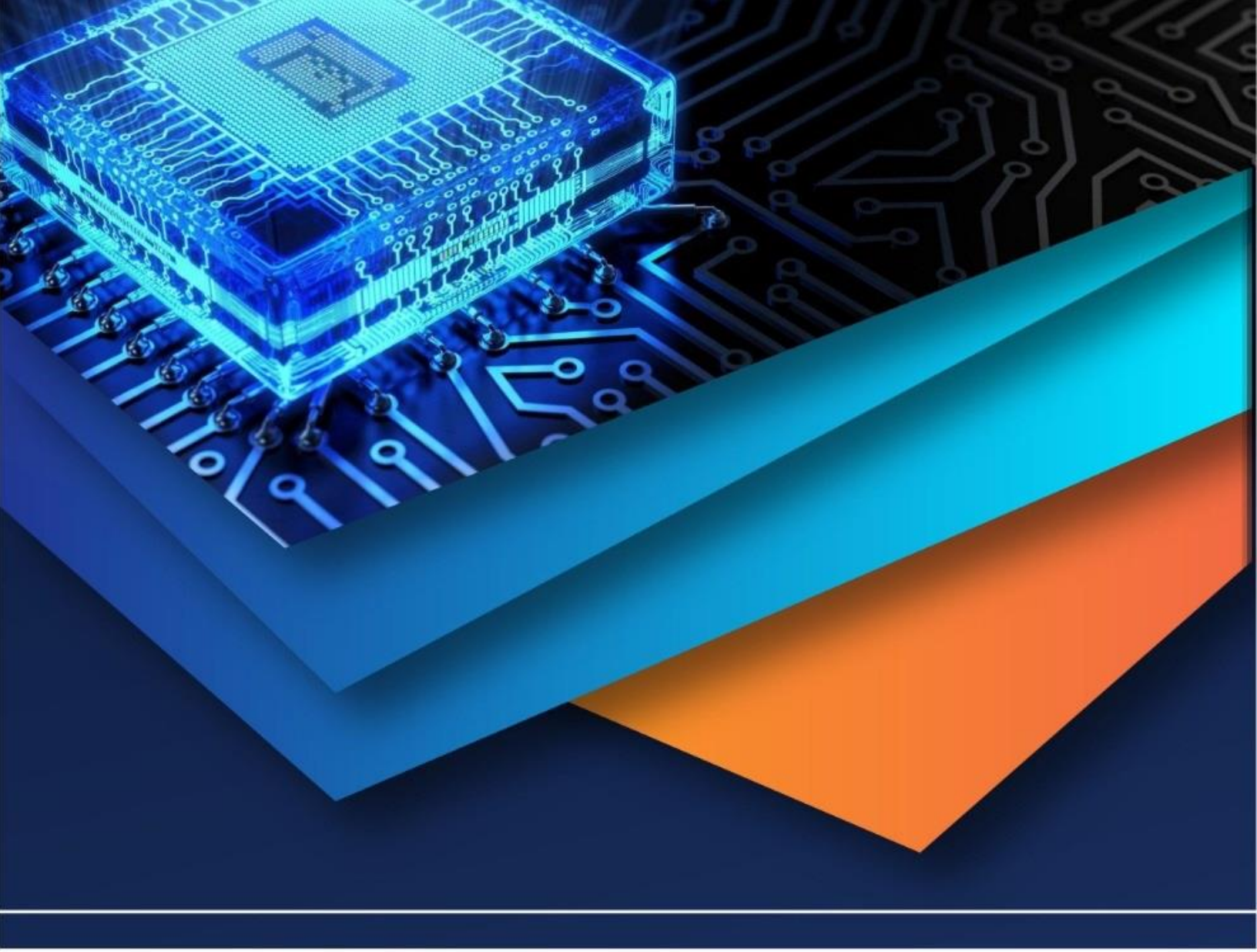
Africans by extension Igbo people believes in God before the advent of Christianity by so many mediums but the best medium is Jesus Christ which Christian faith teaches and that does not make us pagans.

Libation, marriage precepts, rituals of all kinds, traditional healing and prayers are done under the veneration of Supreme Being which Igbo people hold. All these are culminating in our culture, "culture, therefore includes and refers to all that people have learned and through cultural facts, people thought, actions and feelings are known. Culture therefore defines values, attitudes, beliefs, mindsets, central tendencies, world views and orientations that are prevalent in a given society". (Okoro, 26-37).

REFERENCES

[1] Achebe. C. (1958) Things Fall Apart. William Heinemann publishers. Ibadan.
[2] Achebe. C. (1967) Arrow of God. William Heinemann publishers. Ibadan.
[3] Arazu. (2002) Our Religion past and present. Vacating publishers. Enugu.
[4] Chukwura Oral interview 23rd October, 2010
[5] Egbufoama, Chika. The Igbo idea of God: http/www/lgbo cul/co/org/Elu/Edudownloaded on 5/11/2010.
[6] Eze-Uche Aro confederacy-A History lesson: http/www/Aro/His/edu/orgdownloaded on 8/11/2010
[7] llogu. E. (1974) Igbo life and thought. Lagos University publishers.
[8] Madu. J. (2004) Honest to African Culture Heritage. Coskan publishers. Onitsha.
[9] Mbiti. J. (1975) Introduction to African Religion. Heinemann Educational Books. London.
[10] Metuh. I.E. (1985) African Religious in western conceptual scheme: the problem of interpretation. Pastoral institute publishers. Ibadan.
[11] Niebuhr. R. (1951) Christ and culture. Harper Collins publishers. London
[12] Nwala. (1999) Igbo Philosophy. Leternand publishers. Lagos.
[13] Okoro. K. (2009) Cultural Globalization, the last onslaught on African personality: the Igbo Example. In International Journal of Philosophy and Religion vol.1 No.1. Nigeria.
[14] Onejeme. The history of Awka people. http/www/Awka/His/org/downloaded on 8/11/2010
[15] Onunwa. U. (1990) Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion. Pacific Publishers. Obosi.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved



10.22214/IJRASET

45.98

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.129

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.429

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Call : 08813907089 (24*7 Support on Whatsapp)