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**“Shadows of the Good Things to Come”
CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE: THE
INTERFACE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY
AND IGBO INDIGENOUS RELIGION**

Jones Ugochukwu Odili[♦]
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Introduction

There are everyday occurrences that make one to wonder if one can truly be African and truly Christian. In the late 1990's at Delta State University, Abraka, I had an unforgettable experience, given my pentecostal background, that called for a question of my “level” of conversion. At the Abraka River Resort I heard a European saying “Up, up, Jesus, down, down mummy water! Come in and swim. Mummy water can do you nothing,” while swimming in the river which is generally believed to be a mysterious one. Being conscious of the African concept of the potency of mermaid spirits, being terrified, I hurriedly left the resort for home. At home he wondered the audacity by which the European could say such a thing. Was he not actually born again in the strict sense of it? I concluded that the European might not have had a conscious or a priori knowledge of the existence and potency of mermaids. In 2009, during my doctorate degree programme at the University of Port Harcourt, I had another baffling experience that seems more puzzling than the one just mentioned. I was stung to hear an eminent Roman Catholic priest, scholar and professor in African Traditional Religion say, “On no condition may I eat *ewi* (rabbit). It is my clan's totem.” I quickly

[♦]**Jones Odili** is a Pentecostal Christian. He is currently a lecturer in the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.. He obtained his Doctorate in African Christian Historiography from the *University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria*. He is an internationally published author of several academic articles and books. Email: jonesuodili@gmail.com

recalled that I too do not eat snails on the grounds that it is my clan's totem. However there was an incident that led me to assume that there is an interface between Christianity and indigenous religions of the world.

A certain Ukwuani woman was said to have confessed to a Roman Catholic priest that she had committed adultery. The priest pronounced forgiveness in accordance to the Roman Catholic's tradition. Years later, this same woman, due to delay in child birth (labour) had to re-confess the same sin publicly to her husband's family. It was reported that as soon as the confession was made, she was delivered of her baby. This incident would not have posed a problem to me as a researcher if it was not a common experience among the Ukwuani. Rather the incident causes one to wonder if the initial confession of sin before the priest was not sufficient enough to earn the woman forgiveness. How many of such folks are there who are not satisfied with mere confession before a Christian priest when they contravene a moral code of their various indigenous communities? This makes one ponder on the problem of "double identity". To state it clearly, what does it really mean to be converted? This issue seems to be a general challenge in which most professors of faith arrogantly shy away from. Could there be a compromise, an interface, a common ground upon which Christianity and indigenous religions could interact? Such so much sought points of equilibrium between Christianity and indigenous religions across time and space is what we refer to as "shadows of good things to come".

It is against this backdrop that this paper highlights two indispensable aspects of the interface on which the whole gamut of Igbo religio-cultural configuration and Christianity can operate in order to mediate the Gospel in Igbo thought forms so as to speak transformatively and salvifically to the situations of the Igbo people in their social and religio-cultural milieu. It explores the Igbo and Biblical concepts of confession and repentance and posits: (1) that both concepts are some of the "shadows of the good things to come," the roots of Christianity in Igboland; (2) the concept of interface between Christianity and Igbo cultures does not only serve to restore the biased image of Africa, it also points to evangelical models.

Setting the Stage

Right from the beginning of the nineteenth century missionary enterprise in Sub-Saharan Africa, a certain consistent, encrusted and

apologetic paradigm in African Christian historiography emerged. It accuses missionaries of failing to weave their message into the primal worldviews of the Africans.¹ Years later a different concern appeared. It ceased to complain that missionary cultural policy demonized African culture and that even the neglect of African roles was an aspect of the racism that suffused the environment of the resurgent missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century. It also boldly claimed that Christianity is not a non-western religion in the first place and the African version is an extension of African primal religion precisely because its expression of the Gospel was forged in the heat of the Gospel's challenge to the indigenous worldviews.²

The concept of interface between Christianity and indigenous cultures is an enduring problem and it belongs to common sense. We find it already at work in the communication of the Gospel among the Apostolic Church. The messengers of the Christian faith adopted their message to the audience (Jews or Gentiles) and, they spoke in

¹For further analysis see John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969; E. Ilogu, *Igbo Life and Thought*, Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1985; Emmanuel O. Okolugbo, *A History of Christianity in Nigeria: The Ndosumili and the Ukwuani*, Ibadan: Dayster, 1984; Elochukwu C. Amucheazi, *Church and Politics in Eastern Nigeria, 1945–1966: A Study in Pressure Group Politics*, Ibadan: Macmillan, 1986; James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Benin: Berburg and Wistram, 1986; E.O. Babalola, *Christianity in West Africa: A Historical Analysis*, Ibadan: BRPC, 1988; P. Wessels, *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Received and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*, London: SCM, 1990; Chukwudi A. Njoku, "The Missionary Factor in African Christianity, 1884–1914," in Ogbu U. Kalu and J.W. Horfineys, ed. *African Christianity: An African Story*, Pretoria: University of Pretoria Press, 2005, 218-257; Ugwuanya Nwosu, *The Religious Factor in the History of West Africa*, n.p., 1989.

²Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*. Mary knoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1983; A. Dulless, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, Dublin: Macmillan, 1992; Justice Ukpong, "Inculturation and Evangelization in New Testament Perspectives," Paper presented at the 3rd Catholic Institute of West African Theological week in Port Harcourt, 1992; A.F. Walls, and C. Fyfe, *Christianity in Africa in the 1990's*, Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1996; Frans Verstrachen, "Doing Christian History and Thought in an African Context: A Project in Scaffolding," in Jan Platvoet, et al., ed., *The Study of Religion in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects*, Cambridge: Roots and Branches, 1996, 313-331; Luke N. Mbefo, "Theology and Practice of Inculturation," in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 14 (2000) 76–95; Ogbu U. Kalu, "Ethiopianism in African Christianity," in Ogbu U. Kalu and J.W. Horfineys, ed. *African Christianity: An African Story*, 2005, 258-277; Ogbu U. Kalu, "The Shape and Flow of African Church Historiography," in Ogbu U. Kalu and J.W. Horfineys, ed. *African Christianity: An African Story*, 2005, 1-23.

the languages of their audience (Hebrew or Greek). The Epistle to the Hebrews is indeed grounded on this premise: "He could have come in the glory of an angel but found it more convenient to come like the son of Abraham... And was not ashamed to have children of Abraham as his brothers and sisters (Heb 2:16, 11).

Paul's address at the Areopagus (Acts 17) is a classic example of holistic interface between Christianity and indigenous cultures. Apologists, heirs of Greek and Roman education, who used the classical formation at the service of the Gospel, followed his example. The Catechetical school at Alexandria founded by Clement and expanded by Origen is a paradigm of theological inculturation. In the catechetical school, the "spoils of the Egyptians", those concepts, truths and values learned from the "pagan" and secular cultures, were deployed in the service of the gospel. The existence and validity of Latin and Greek dimensions to the theological and liturgical life of the Church are unimpeachable arguments for the need for other cultural windows into the mystery of God. It belongs to the church to continue the task of transposing the Good News of Jesus Christ as it enters new cultural regions by seeking for the shadows of good things to come in such cultures.

The Concept of Sin in Igboland

The understanding of the Igbo concept of sin is very crucial to this study. A.O. Iwuagwu³ emphasize that sin, to the Igbo, refers to the violation of the moral law. L.U. Nwosu⁴ agrees with Iwuagwu⁵ that sin means breaking the moral law. He argues that to the Igbo sin does not exist until a law is broken. He stresses that "Sin has no meaning for a person who has not transgressed the law."⁶ In broad terms, to sin is to go contrary to those acts regarded as *nsoala*, acts abominable to and forbidden by the goddess Earth. Writing about the Igbo, Ilogu⁷ points out that they do not see sin as rebellion against either God or spirit deities. Etymologically, the Igbo word for sin is *nmehie*, a compound of two words: *me* and *hie*. *Me* means "do" while *hie* stands for "deviated". When the prefix "n" is added, it makes the word a

³A.O. Iwuagwu, "Chukwu: Towards a Definition Igbo Traditional Religion," *West African Religion* 16,1 (1982) 27.

⁴Nwosu, *The Religious Factor*, 21.

⁵A.O. Iwuagwu, "Chukwu: Towards a Definition Igbo Traditional Religion."

⁶Nwosu, *The Religious Factor*, 24, 25.

⁷Ilogu, *Igbo Life and Thought*, 25.

noun, hence *nmehie*. Literally, *nmehie* means “doing deviantly.” In everyday language, it stands for “deviating from the norm,” that is, “violating the (stipulated) rule.” Other words from the same root, *me* are *nmeruala* or *imeruala* which means desecrating the land. Ala is the earth goddess in Igboland. She is recognized and renowned as the custodian of morality. Other Igbo words indicating sin, scandal, or crime include: *nmekpu*, meaning a deed done contrary to the norm. It is the situation that depicts the gravity of an offence such as bestiality. *Nmejo* (doing bad) is another Igbo word for sin. The word can be used also for both major and minor offences. It is often used in the relation to human beings instead of to deities. *Nmebi* (doing something in a faulty manner) another word for sin in Igboland is often used to mean “spoiling”.

The Igbo notion of sin is diverse and in categories. Aylward Shorter⁸ rightfully observed that faults are not transgressions of a law but factual contradictions of established orders in the society. These categories can be seen in the sanctions meted against different offences ranging from death to selling into slavery, banishment, ostracism, propitiatory sacrifices, to simple apology and doing some work to appease the anger of those wronged. Sin is classified below by citing different categories of sin. Sin as *aru* or *alu* (pollution, abomination or desecration) is among the highest of evils that can happen among the Igbo people. It is the greatest tragedy that can happen to an Igbo man/woman or in his/her family. *Aru* exists in two categories. The first are those within the controlling ability of the one and the second are those beyond one’s control. Those one cannot control are presented by Ilogu⁹ and Nwala¹⁰ as metaphysical or as natural evil and those he can control as moral evil. Moral evil among the Igbo are those evils such as stealing, murder, sexual immorality, and killing totemic animals, which affect the human freedom, right, or belonging. They are regarded as a great evil or sin because it affects the entire society. Mbiti¹¹ observes that within this situation, almost every form of evil that a person suffers, whether it is moral or natural evil is believed to be caused by members of his community.

⁸ShorterAylward, *African Culture and the Christian Church* London: Oxford University Press, 1978, 62.

⁹Ilogu, *Igbo Life and Thought*, 25.

¹⁰Ozudinma T. Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, Ikeja, Lagos: Literamed Publications, 1985.

¹¹Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 213.

Similarly, any moral offence that one commits is directly or indirectly against members of his society. Therefore, the offence of a culprit, say, a thief, affects not only this victim but other members of the society. Kinds of moral evils in Igbo-land include stealing, *ochu* (murder), incest, killing sacred animals –totems.

Aru as metaphysical or unnatural evil are evils that befalls one which one did nothing to cause and which he could do nothing to avert. Such evils are believed to have been caused by un-atoned evil committed in times past by members of the affected family. *Ala*, the earth deity is believed to have a hand together with the ancestors in causing such unnatural occurrences in the family. These unnatural evils are sub-divided into two: human-related metaphysical evil and animal-related metaphysical evil. Human-related metaphysical evil are evils that distort the ontological order such as bad deaths, giving birth to twins or a baby coming out with hand or leg first instead of the head. They affect people directly. Animal-related metaphysical evil are evil that affect victims through their animal pets such as a cock crowing at an abominable time at night.

A sense of apprehension is often present in every offending Igbo. This is because he is sensitive to the penalty that follows the violation of any moral law in the community. This is the basis for confession. According to S.O. Onyeidu¹² the Igbo “has a keen sense of sin, guilt, remorse, repentance, and confession.” It should, however, be noted that this sense of remorse pays credence only to the breaking of the moral law, as Nwosu¹³ emphasizes. Otherwise, the Igbo man as an African “does not believe that man is forever hopelessly submerged in sin.” He does not believe that “all men have sinned...” but for the fear of punishment he upholds the moral principles and is compelled by such fears to live within the bounds of such moral laws. Thus it is the idea of sin, judgment and punishment that gave rise to the rite of confession. Punishment often comes from the corporate community, the ancestor, the minor divinities and most of all, the Supreme Being who is in control of everything. Death does not free someone from punishment for what he committed in his life time for either that the ancestors refuse him acceptance into the community of ancestors or he suffers it when he reincarnates.

¹²Jones U. Odili, “The Alternations, the Resurgence and the Compromise: The Church in Emu Clan, Delta State,” *Journal of Religion and Culture* 6, 1 (2005) 81.

¹³Nwosu, *The Religious Factor*, 24.

Igbo Concepts of Confession

If a divinity is aggravated through any offence like adultery, the Igbo know that there is a need for pacification so that the former relationship will be restored. This relationship is restored through confession. The essence of confession in Igboland includes assertion of innocence, averting the wrath of the ancestors and gods, restoration of community unity, avoidance of cause of unusual natural occurrences, avoidance of future mishaps, and righting a wrong. Confession is strengthened by sacrifices; hence the two go hand-in-hand. The Igbo believe that sacrifice has a placatory function in itself yet when it is combined with confession the reparatory effect is more pronounced. The gods are more easily appeased. The offences are more easily forgiven and the penalty is more easily averted in most cases, therefore, sacrifice for sin is accompanied with confession of guilt. The Igbo know and believe in the consequences of breaking the moral law. To the Igbo, obedience to divine laws is responsible for the maintenance of ontological balance and it ensures life, health, and achievement.¹⁴

One of the definitions given to confession by S.O. Onyeidu¹⁵ is a statement of faith. Another one is the admission of guilt. The two definitions apply to the present point under discussion. Confession is a statement of the faith by the one who confesses his inclination and devotion to a particular tenet. He declares his stand and maintains it in the face of every odd. In the second definition, one confesses or admits his guilt. Admission of guilt either before an individual or to a group of people is a sure sign of submission and loyalty. It is so only because the person has submitted to all the claims of that religion. Serious consideration of the two definitions seems to see them as one. One who confesses his faults before a god indicates by the act that he accepts the claims of that god as true and so will abide by all he is made to know as its rules. It is when such known rules are contravened that confession of guilty of fault ensues. Confession depicts submission to constituted village authority. Recognizing one's offences show that one is sorry and may not commit the offence again. The Igbo man repudiates anybody who is obstinate.

¹⁴Nwosu, *The Religious Factor*, 30.

¹⁵Odili, "The Alternations, the Resurgence and the Compromise", 78.

Confession in Igboland

The Igbo attach importance to both private and public confession. Both the wronged person and their offenders express grievance publicly on ceremonial occasions after which they are expected to exchange food into their mouths from the same spoon. Before a medicine man suggests remedies for certain maladies, he expects to hear confessions as to the offence which caused such maladies. Any sin that will lead to any public or general hazard must be confessed publicly. Confessions are made to the Supreme Being, minor deities, spirits, dead ancestors, the living fathers and individuals. Confessions are also made to anybody injured either bodily or mentally. To accompany confession are certain ceremonial bathing, washings, sprinkling, fumigating and spitting, even vomiting. Among some Igbo village-groups the sisters of any woman confessing her conjugal infidelities to her husband strip her naked and replace the old cloth soiled by sin with altogether new ones. A ritual cleansing of the mouth accompanies the confession made by anyone who eats any forbidden animal or vegetable in some Igbo communities. Definite sins committed are confessed up to the time and place of the act of sin and the partners in crime. Confession is also required from both voluntary and involuntary forbidden acts. Thus in Igboland, confession has been identified as very important in religious activities and as practices before the coming of the Christian message. In other words, confession precedes atonement in Igbo traditional religion.¹⁶ This means that confession accelerates any expiatory sacrifice. Confession accelerates delivery when a woman in hard labour confesses her sexual infidelity.

Confession goes with some ritual practices. These ritual practices either prepare the ground for confession or corroborate it. Rebecca Egwu¹⁷ points out that the ritual steps must accompany confession. Five stages in the process of removal of sin are confession by the patient, an offering of sacrifice, absolution by the priest, washing and communal eating. Killing or eating a totem animal attracts another ritual activity during the confession exercise of a victim. Confession strengthens the propitiatory sacrifices for the expiation of the sins of

¹⁶Rebecca Egwu, "Concept of Sin in Christianity and African Traditional Religion: A Comparative Perspective," Doctoral Thesis Presented to the Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1982, 65.

¹⁷Egwu, "Concept of Sin in Christianity," 65.

the people. If confession is not made among the Igbo, real expiation does not take place. That is why Nwosu stresses that "Sickness, death and misfortunes of all kinds are attributed in one's destiny to the work of the enemy or the action for the goods a result of someone breaking one or the other of the laws without confessing the guilt and without offering the appropriate sacrifices for the removal for such offences."¹⁸ If animal sacrifices are made without confession the Igbo do not believe in the seriousness of the action. So, animal sacrifice goes hand in hand with confession for effective expiation. To Rebecca Egwu¹⁹ sacrifice and its attendant atonement are not efficacious until confession is made. She is of the view that confession of sin unburdens the mind of an Igbo confessor and gives him a new life which enables him to accept the effacing of the guilt and sin and then is assured of the cancellation of the punishment.

Igbo Conceptualization and Practice of Repentance

The Igbo concept of repentance is not completely the same with that of the Bible. Just as their concepts of sin are not the same so is their concept of repentance. An etymological definition of repentance shall be employed here. *Ncheghari* means "thinking again," "thinking around," "giving a second thought," "reconsideration," "thinking twice," "thinking the other way round." *Ncheghari* to the Igbo includes being sorry for offences committed against individuals, the gods or the society. The Igbo repents to avoid shame and punishments that may be expected from the gods. Repentance has natural repercussions and social repercussion. Society controls evil practices not because of personal repercussion mainly but because of the effect on society. Repentance in this instance refers then to the maintenance of the societal rules the violation of which will disturb the peace of all. If anybody falls short of the rules, he regrets or faces the consequences in order to avert the repercussion on the rest of the people. Their belief about the future with respect to ancestors affects their concept of repentance in reincarnation.

Udoabata Onunwa opines that the Igbo use reincarnation to infuse fear into people.²⁰ The fear meant here is that of facing the wrath of the ancestors in the next life if they happen to escape it in the present

¹⁸Nwosu, *The Religious Factor*, 31.

¹⁹Egwu, "Concept of Sin in Christianity," 55.

²⁰Udoabata Onunwa, *Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion*, Obosi: Pacific Publishers, 1990.

life. If people escape punishment for any vices committed now, the repercussion in the form of retribution hinging on the conduct in this life, still awaits them at reincarnation. "People therefore, become afraid of incurring the wrath of the ancestors and deities. The belief had therefore, helped to minimize the rate of quarrels within the kin-group."²¹ The Igbo would want to avoid whatever would lead him face the retributive experience in the after-life which would hinder him from reincarnating that of the present life in the society. This is where repentance comes in. the concept of reincarnation and future punishment helps to persuade people to desist from living wicked lives that could lead them to a future life of torture when they come back in the next life. The Igbo quickly repent to avoid everything that attracts any curse on his family after him; if he knows any evil committed, either by him or members of his family, he changes his mind just because of that in order to hinder or avert any consequent curse or penalty. Repentance involves the act of retracing the steps taken by the ancestors which lead to problems in the family. Efforts are made by present family members to live a life contrary to those which attracted the curse.

In summary, the essence of repentance to the Igbo involves retracing and reconsidering the steps which had caused problems in the past to avoid future repercussions, fear of punishment by *Ala* and the ancestors, he changes his mind over an intended evil, considering the shame he will face in the society, he refrains from certain actions that will lead to it. Every citizen tries to shun whatever acts of wickedness or infamy that could bring one into disrepute. In order to avoid excommunication and to attain the privilege of reincarnation, among other reasons, the Igbo repudiate or feel sorry for any wrong action he/she has done.

Biblical Concept of Confession and Repentance

Having investigated the Igbo concepts of confession and repentance, we shall now turn, in a nutshell, to the biblical perspective on the same concepts. Sin is represented in the Old Testament with some Hebrew words, *Hattah* (a missing) and *resh* (rebellion or transgression). Biblical scholars like Marvin Vincent²²

²¹Odubata Onunwa, *Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion*.

²²Marvin R. Vincent, *World Studies in the New Testament*, Mclean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d., 116.

and Merrill Tenney²³ define sin as an act against God. Harold Lindsell²⁴ spoke of it as a failure to conform to the law of God either in the negative or in the positive by omission or commission. Giving another side to the definition Donald Demaray²⁵ presented sin as the creature man thinking of himself as the creator. He saw pride as the source and centre of man's sin. Sin is also presented as an attitude of indifference, unbelief, or disobedience to the will of God. Sin is a want of conformity to, or a transgression of the law of God. It is living out of tune with the will and character of God. Prophets in Israel had a ministry of denouncing the sins of the people, thus leading them back to God in repentance. In summary sin in the Bible refers to those acts by men which are contrary to the revealed will of God. It is a direct disobedience to God's laws as revealed in the Torah or the Bible. It refers to the violation of the moral standards which are God's requirements from men. These acts of disobedience, behaviours contrary to God's will and violation of the moral and ceremonial standards must be repented and confessed, to restore relationship with God.

Confession in the Old Testament

Yadah and *towdah* are two Hebrew words translated as confession and its different derivatives in the Old Testament. *Yadah* means to throw at or away, to revere or worship with extended hands, to bemoan by wriggling the hands, to confess in a worshipful condition, and to worship God reverently. Such confession is accompanied by genuine conversion and repentance. Only in such confession could God forgive the sin and turn to do what He forsook when the sin was un-confessed. An example of confession out of non-genuine conversion can be observed in an earlier occurrence when Pharaoh performed an outward confession of sin: "I have sinned this time, the Lord is in right and I am in the wrong" (Ex 9:27; 10:16). On the contrary, Moses made a genuine confession when he confessed the deep sins of his people in response to which in contrition, the people "put away their personal ornaments and mourned from the heart."

²³Merrill Tenney, ed., *Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zonder van Publishing House, 1967, 45.

²⁴Harold Lindsell and Charles Woodbridge, *A Hand Book of Christian Truth*, Pasadena, California: Fleming H. Revel Company, n.d., 88.

²⁵Donald E. Demaray, *Basic Beliefs: An Introductory Guide to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1958, 93.

The deep heart touch which Moses had was pictured in his preferring to die if God would not forgive Israel their sin after his heart-felt confession (Ex 32:31). The word *yaday* was also used for confession in Number 5:7 "... he shall confess his sin which he has committed..." When somebody wrongs a neighbour, "He must confess his sin, confess it to God, confess it to his neighbour and so take shame to himself." confessions in these instances as in other verses are made to one who is wronged. If God is wronged, confession will be made to Him but if man is wronged confession will be made to both God and man because by offending man, God has also been offended. God's forgiveness of the people was conditioned by a confession of sin and repentance which has to do with turning from sin and turning to God. Also observed in this confession is the particularity of it: "In thus and thus I have done." Biblical confession entails being particular instead of making generalization in confessions. The sins committed are mentioned by name with its adjoining remorse for committing it. In the Old Testament confessions are made mainly to God but not without the culprits confessing to the individuals who might have been sinned against by the transgressor.

In the Old Testament, confession is a pre-atonement or pre-sacrifice requirement (Lev. 5:5). It is required for national cleansing when the people have sinned and need to be forgiven by God (Lev 16:21). It is a condition for averting national disaster (Lev 26:40). Restitution is authenticated by it and so is a prerequisite for restitution. It evidences repentance and reverses God's wrath (1Kings 8:33). and so it is an aid to answered prayer (2 Chron 6:24, 26; Neh. 1:6; 9:2-3). Confessing is a giving of thanks (2 Chron 30:22). It can be accompanied by certain rituals like fasting, prostration, weeping, and etc. (Ezra 10:1). Confessing is condition for forgiveness and it signifies recognition of having been guilty of one's offence (Prov 32:5). God's mercy is attracted by it and lack of it hinder prosperity (Prov 28:13). Confession as a requirement and an evidence for national repentance and so hastens answer to prayer (Daniel 9:4 and 20).

Repentance in the Old Testament

There are three kinds of repentance in the Old Testament. They are derived from two Hebrew words: *Nocham* and *Shuwb*. This summary treats *nacham* and *nocham* as meaning the same since their differences are not very conspicuous. *Nacham* means change of mind, being sorry, having pity, sighing deeply, having compassion, regretting,

and relenting. This kind of repentance centres mainly on God as about 35 out of the 40 references in the Old Testament refer to Him. Since God does not sin and does not have my higher being to be responsible to, it can be inferred that *nacham* means mainly, "regretting"; especially in instances where He had shown and relented from an intended punishment. The second main type of Old Testament repentance, *shuwb*, centres mainly on man. Man has the Supreme Being, God to be responsible to. He sins against Him and he should turn from those sins in repentance to God. Three major characteristics manifest themselves from the study of the Old Testament passages on *shuwb*: firstly, repentance entails the recreation of the heart and mind just as David cried, "create in me a new heart." Secondly, there should be a turning away from or turning back on sin or offences and turning into God (in particular). Thirdly, confession of sins is generally involved in this kind of repentance. This is why James Orr called *shuwb* the "scriptural idea of genuine repentance."

Confession in the New Testament

One of the two Greek words used for confession in the New Testament is *homologeō*. It refers mainly to confession in relation to confessing the faith. Only in one place was it used to refer to confession of sin. The significance of it is that confession in the New Testament stands mainly for confession of faith and lightly on confession of sin. In relation to sin, confession is a testimony or audible expression of repentance. It ensures pardon and peace, develops a holy relationship, fosters interpersonal relationship, hastens divine healing, makes answer to prayers possible, enhances forgiveness, restores relationship with others, restores relationship with God, makes God display his grace and faithfulness in forgiving, and cleanses from the guilt of unrighteousness. In relation to faith, confession means professing or declaring Christ before men publicly or identifying with Christ. It may mean declaring of one's faith or belief, testimony or speaking with the mouth.

Repentance in the New Testament

Greek words for repentance in the New Testament are *Metamellomai*, *Metanoeō* and *melanoma*. *Metamellomai* dignifies "caring after" or "regret". It is a shallower connotation of repentance. One can simply change one's mind or regret after an unfavorable

experience. That may not make one determine never to try that again. *Metanoeo* and *melanoma* entail a deeper involvement and stronger determination after being exposed to a committed offence. This kind of repentance involves tears often. It connotes a round-about-turn. The idea is forward ever and backward never when once one has turned and faced the opposite direction. *Epistrepho*, *apostrophe* and *stepho*, have the same root and they mean conversation or turning and returning. In summary repentance in the New Testament have shades of meaning: caring afterwards and regretting, a change of heart, a turning from sin to God, leaving the evil ways and turning to God, turning again and asking for forgiveness.

Conclusion

What we have discussed so far has exposed us to Igbo and Biblical concepts and practices of confession and repentance. It is clear that they both have a belief in the principle and practice of confession and repentance. Secondly, we cannot properly articulate and comprehend the concepts of confession and repentance in Christianity and Igbo cultures without a proper understanding of the concept of sin in both cultures. The study reveals that sin, in both cultures, alienates the individual, the family and the entire society from the Divine. It disintegrates and threatens the existence of the entire social structure. As such, sin must be confessed and repented from to avoid present and future catastrophic consequences. This means that when they encounter some ills or difficulties in their lives, they confess, repent and offer sacrifices and other acts of expiation to pacify the Divine. Without confession it means that the moral declension of the people will continue un-atoned. Individuals, families and whole communities will continue to suffer the consequence of their sins. The study further reveals that confession of and repentance from sin in both cultures, serve a ritualistic function of healing for the individual and the society at large. They maintain and ensure the continuous existence of the entire social fabric of both cultures.

Recommendations

It is common knowledge that the abiding truth of the Gospel never comes to human beings except in provisional and historically conditioned forms. Pronouncements made in a particular historical and cultural situation may require re-interpretation or modification with the passage of time. However, there is a permanent validity, a

kernel, underlying the differing forms of historical Christianity. We must distinguish between the kernel of the Gospel and that which is contained in the changing husk of outward forms: the core teaching is constant, but the forms in which it is conceptualized and verbalized are fluid. Consequently, the study posits that the resonance of the Gospel message should come from within the resources of the indigenous culture. Like the multicoloured clothes of Joseph, the Church of God should be seen as exhibiting a mosaic of cultural responses, none superior to the other, but all seen as grateful and valid responses to God who calls. The fear of African cultures is a decided lack of trust and confidence in God and in His power to make all things new, and to bring every creature, considered to be man's own achievements or God's gift to man, to his service. It is also an unwillingness to recognize the fact that God has made Himself manifest in the African experience. That God addresses the Igbo through the concepts of confession and repentance implies a Self-revelation of God in that culture. The task of African theologians is to discover, exploit and harness other "shadows of good things to come", vehicles of transcendence, native to their cultural regions, vehicles through which God continues to address His people in order for the Gospel to speak salvifically and formatively to the indigenous peoples of Africa. There are many links between the message of salvation and culture. In his self-revelation to the people, culminating in the fullness of manifestation in His incarnate son, God spoke according to the culture proper to each age. Finally, a proper comprehension, assimilation and appropriation of what this theme, "Interface between Christianity and Igbo Culture," is all about, would go a long way to check the dwindling of membership of orthodox churches in Nigeria today.²⁶

²⁶See Christopher Ejizu, "Endurance of Conviction. The Persistence of the Traditional Worldviews in Igbo Christian Converts," *Nuerzeitshrift für Mission Swissanshaft*, 43, 2 (1987) 24-45.