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Definitional ceremonies in Igbo Religion: A test of Robin Horton's Theory

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This study was initiated against the background of a challenge posed by Horton (1995), in which he concluded that despite the enormous output in terms of research and writings in the area of African Indigenous Religion, previous scholars have not been able to respond adequately to three chief questions focusing on the basic tenets of the religion whose answers are important for a proper understanding of the substance of African Indigenous Religion. These questions, according to him, are: What are the focal objects or the key spiritual agencies of African religious thought? What are the attitudes of the African worshippers to the spiritual agencies indigenous to their religion? What constitute the fundamental aims of African indigenous religious life? Inspired by this challenge, the researcher undertook the study of four definitional ceremonies in Igbo Indigenous Religion to gather data for responding to these questions. In this regard, two communities, Nri and Ihiala, among the Igbo culture area of Anambra State, Nigeria, were chosen for the study. The Culture Area Methodology (CAM) as well as the Participant Observation Method (POM) were the principal design of the study. A select group of elders from the two communities were interviewed for the study. The major findings show that: "Igbo Indigenous Religion is a religion of many faiths or the type of religion in which the Supreme Being is recognized and worshipped alongside other gods, spirits and ancestors"; "the attitude of the Igbo worshippers to the spiritual agencies of their religion is egalitarian, and multi-partial, or rotational in its sensitivity to the respect and worship accorded to the various agencies; each agency is assumed to count in the economy of the welfare of the people"; "Igbo Indigenous Religion is grounded on the Igbo worldview and assumption that attendance to the gods and ancestors of the religion bring good results, while neglect leads to chastisement, bad harvest, physical illness, and various other sanctions on the offenders"; and "there are multiple goals to Igbo Indigenous Religion, almost all of them this-worldly and other (ancestral) worldly centered." The study equally discovered that orientation to meliorism is a major aspect of Igbo Indigenous Religion. These findings corroborate Horton's theory of African Indigenous Religion as entailing a quest for achieving control of events in the current world, and for making an investment for eventual citizenship in the world of the ancestors; and therefore, essentially a pragmatic religion. Implications of the study were closely examined and a number of recommendations for further studies were made.

Key words: Igbo, Nigeria, African/Igbo indigenous religion, definitional ceremony, rituals, ceremonies.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of this study arose from the challenge posed by Horton (1995), a distinguished anthropologist at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and a renowned authority in comparative religion. Horton's basic argument, put simply, in the context of the present study is that despite the enormous output in research and writings in the literature of African Indigenous Religion, previous investigators have not been able to respond

adequately to three chief questions underpinning the basic tenets of the Religion. The three questions according to him are: What are the key spiritual agencies of African Religious Thought? What are the attitudes of the African worshippers to the spiritual agencies indigenous to their religion? What constitutes the fundamental aims of African Indigenous Religious life? Horton, in raising these questions, had contended that:

The true nature and uniqueness of African Indigenous Religion as a full-fledged Religion could not be ascertained until scholars unbiased in favour of Christian religion are able to generate answers for resolving such questions.

Inspired by such a challenge the present researcher decided to engage in the study reported in this article which was undertaken (Nwoye, 2005) as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree programme in Religious Studies at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya, and encompassing a field-based methodology aimed at generating answers to the three questions highlighted by Horton (1995). In implementing this aim, the researcher chose as a topic of exploration, the study of four definitional ceremonies in Igbo Indigenous Religion, namely:

- 1) The Igbo naming ceremony (*Iba Nwa Afa*).
- 2) A component of Igbo marriage ceremony (*Okuku-Onye-Uwa*).
- 3) The ceremony of taking-over of a homestead (*Ikpocha Obi*).
- 4) The Igbo burial/funeral ceremony (*Emume Enim Ozu*).

The decision to target these ceremonies as a means of generating relevant data for responding to Horton's questions was based on the view credited to Wilson (1971), that the best way to understand the true nature of a religion in terms of its basic tenets and contents is to study its ceremonies. This is because, according to him, the key ceremonies of a religion provide a fertile ground and indeed a big access to a proper understanding of that religion's belief systems, ritual objects, operative and symbolic acts, music, artifacts, prayers and practices. This arises from the fact that the ceremonies of a religion represent the key sedimentation of the basic tenets of that religion. Clarifying this point further, Wilson (1971:

52) observed that although "Religion is not confined in ritual, but it is manifest in ritual, and in the smallest societies chiefly manifest in ritual." Unfortunately, this vital access for a true understanding of the indigenous religions of Africa has surprisingly not been sufficiently addressed in the past, and if we are going to test the accuracy of Horton's views on this matter highlighted earlier, it is through the study of definitional ceremonies of an indigenous religion such as that of the Igbo.

Indeed, the scant attention given to the study of the ceremonies of African Indigenous Religion as a means for understanding the basic principles of the religion has created its own problems, including those postulated by Horton (1995) earlier highlighted. Ejizu (2001), for instance contends that one chief limitation in the study of African Indigenous Religion, within its first four eras, is that such studies have largely been influenced by external motives. In his view, in the first era, mere curiosity of the explorers had been at the back of the entire effort. During the second, third and fourth eras, the

dominant motive then shifted to the value of understanding indigenous religions as royal roads for easy Christian evangelization and hitch-free colonial administration of Africa. He further contends that due to these externally induced interests and objectives, certain questions of less importance in the understanding of African Indigenous Religion got over-flogged, while some others of major significance like the one's raised by Horton which can most satisfactorily be answered through the study of the ceremonies of such religion, received little or no attention.

Some critics had actually pre-dated Ejizu's indictment of the field set previously (Bitek, 1970; Horton, 1995). They had argued that the key error among African Christian theologians and scholars of the indigenous religion has revolved around their adoption of a lot of Christian categories in their study of the elements of indigenous religions. For Horton (1995) and Bitek (1970), for example, the gravest error has been the resort by scholars of African Indigenous Religion to the use of Western theological schemes (such as emphasis on the Supreme Being) in their study of the field. In that way they failed in their researches and writings to respond adequately to the three chief questions on the basic dogma of African Indigenous Religion raised by Horton.

The purpose of the present study was to carry out an investigation into the four definitional ceremonies of Igbo Indigenous Religion earlier highlighted which entails the study of the people in real life's situations in an open system. The principal aim was to draw attention to some of the ritual elements and issues encompassed in these ceremonies, and to generate informed answers to the important questions about African Indigenous Religion identified by Horton (1995). In accomplishing this aim, the example of Indigenous Religion of the Igbo of Nigeria has been used. This is because previous investigators in spite of their efforts to improve our understanding of the religion (Ezeanya, 1963, 1969; Arinze, 1970; Ezekwugo, 1973; Echeruo, 1979; Metuh, 1981; Ubah, 1982; Nwoga, 1984) did not direct attention to the study of the definitional ceremonies of Igbo religion in their research. Such studies have rather tended to direct their attention on the notion of the Supreme Being and the cults and rituals associated with it. And this, the present researcher contends, constitutes a serious gap in the study of the religion that needs to be attended to, if Horton's challenge is to be comprehensively resolved.

Based on the aforementioned, the study's specific objectives included the task of investigating four definitional ceremonies in Igbo Indigenous Religion, with the intention to discover:

- 1) The key spiritual agencies in Igbo Indigenous Religion as reflected in the four ceremonies of the religion.
- 2) The attitude and view of the Igbo to the spiritual agencies of their religion as can be ascertained from the rituals and practices in the four ceremonies.

- 3) The chief purpose of Igbo Indigenous Religion as can be deduced from the rituals and practices in the four ceremonies earmarked for the study.
- 4) The principal belief systems, rituals and practices encompassed in Igbo Indigenous Religion.

In pursuing these objectives, it needs to be mentioned that this study was not interested in exploring the effect of Christianity/theology on Igbo Indigenous Religion, nor was it concerned with entering into the hair-splitting debate of whether or not, the ceremonies of Igbo Indigenous Religion are still in their pure form and shape as they used to be. What is assumed is that some tenets of the Igbo Indigenous Religion can be unearthed from the study of the definitional ceremonies of Igbo Indigenous Religion. It was also assumed that Igbo Indigenous Religion can be studied as a religion in its own right, without the need to bring in aspects of Christianity into such a study.

Given the previous assumptions, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- (1) What are the principal belief systems, rituals and practices encompassed in the four definitional ceremonies of Igbo Indigenous Religion?
- (2) Who are the principal spiritual agencies addressed in the operative symbolic acts and in the prayers and practices encompassed in the key ceremonies of the Religion?
- (3) What is the attitude of the African people to these agencies of the Indigenous Religion?
- (4) What constitute the major goals of Igbo Indigenous Religion as can be ascertained from a direct study of its ceremonies?

The scope of the study did not extend to all the religious ceremonies in Igbo culture area. The interest of the study was restricted to the exploration, study, analysis and interpretation of the four definitional ceremonies in Igbo Indigenous Religion namely, the Igbo naming ceremony (*Iba Nwa Afa*); Igbo take-over of a homestead ceremony (*Ikpocha-Obi*); a component of Igbo marriage ceremony (*Okuku-Onye-Uwa*); and the Igbo burial/funeral rites ceremony (*Emume Enim Ozu*) among the Nri and Ihiala people of Anambra State of Nigeria, West Africa.

In studying these ceremonies, attention of the researcher was directed at gaining an understanding of their religious meanings and implications in Igbo Indigenous Religion.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was used in the study. This was implemented through the Culture Area Methodology (CAM) as well as the Participant Observation Method (POM) and the interview technique. The CAM enabled the researcher to "look at the religion in the raw" (Mbom, 1996: 177). The interview technique was utilized to enable the researcher explore with the study participants the

religious import and symbolic meanings of the various elements and rituals implicated in each of the definitional ceremonies targeted for study. A purposive sampling technique was used to target the four ceremonies in the two communities (Nri and Ihiala, both in Eastern Nigeria) earmarked for the study. The geographical location of these communities in the map of Nigeria is presented (Figure 1).

A sample population of 200 elders (118 males and 92 females) from the communities studied was drawn, sensitive to variation due to gender and age of respondents. Snowball sampling technique was adopted in locating the relevant ceremonies of interest to the study and in reaching the sample elders. (The primary data on which this report was based were collected as part of a larger research undertaken for the present researcher's doctoral study (Nwoye, 2005) at the Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa).

The study was planned to move away from the methodological approaches of a number of previous investigators in Igbo Indigenous Religion such as Ezeanya (1963, 1969) and Ilogu (1974). These were criticized by Onunwa (1992), Horton (1995) and Cox (1996) for their inability to attain a methodological conversion or to leave their primary faith behind as much as possible in the context of their work. By that limitation, according to these critics, they had ended up seeing Igbo religious beliefs and practices through the Christian theological 'lenses'. Cox (1996) in this regard, had suggested that the best way to move away from this common limitation is to apply what he called the virtue of methodological conversion. This, in his view, entailed the researcher stepping out of the boundaries of his or her confessional faith to meet the people/faith (religion) they are studying at the space between the boundaries of the two faiths (religions).

Following the previous conceptual distinctions set by Cox (1992), the attitude that guided the researcher in this study was that of methodological conversion. In this way, the type of hermeneutics that was exercised in this study was therefore the type which Panikkar (1984) referred to as diatopical hermeneutics. He explains diatopical hermeneutics to mean the thematic consideration of understanding the other, without assuming that the other has the same basic self-understanding as I have. Indeed, according to Cox (1992: 163) "it is a place between confessions (religions) that genuine dialogue leading to understanding can occur."

Guided by the fact in the foregoing, the present researcher went into the field with an enormous attempt made to ensure that she allows the members of the Igbo Indigenous Religion to be selected into the study sample to speak for themselves regarding aspects of the definitional ceremonies of the Igbo under study; that is in such a way that they could (for example, through their prayer texts, for instance) communicate their traditional religious beliefs and understandings to the researcher without fear or censure. There was also further attempt made by the researcher to use various aspects of the techniques of participant observation and triangulation to enhance the authenticity and reliability of the findings (Milroy and Milroy, 1985). Even the choice of definitional ceremonies as the key elements of the religion for study was influenced by this desire to allow the religion to speak for itself. This was because, as Wilson (1971) has noted, the key ceremonies of a religion provide a fertile ground and indeed a big access to a proper understanding of that religion's belief systems, ritual objects, operative and symbolic acts, music, artifacts, prayers and practices. And this is mainly because the ceremonies of a religion represent the key sedimentation of the basic tenets of that religion.

RESULTS

Based on the data (particularly the prayer texts presented in Table 1) emerging from the field study of the four

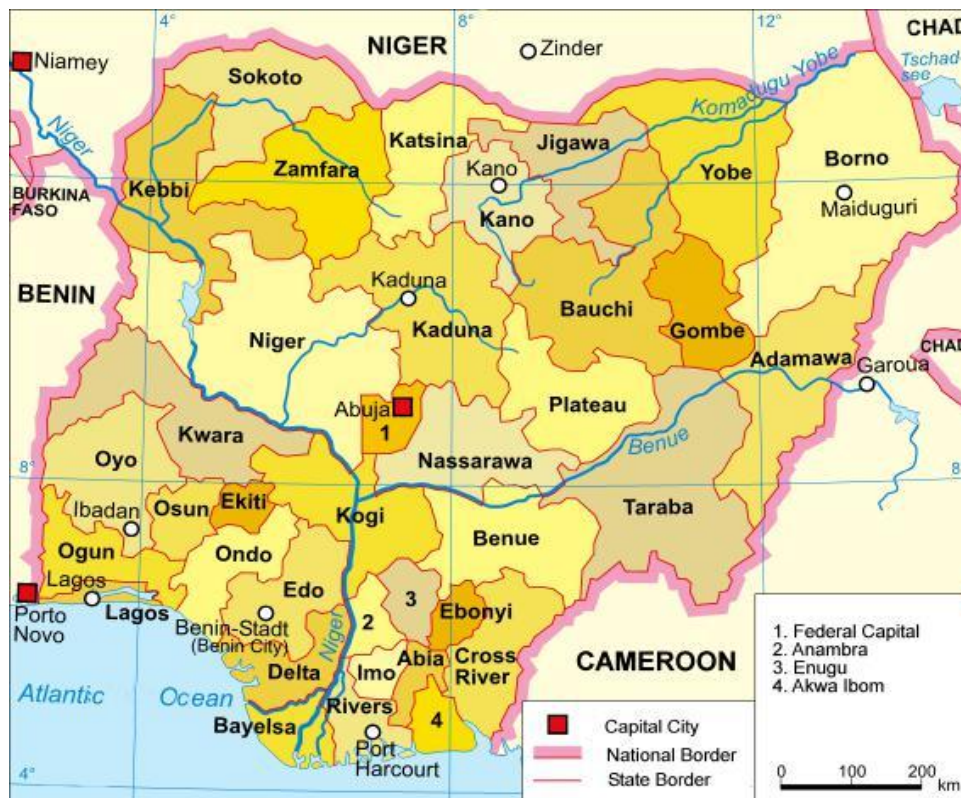


Figure 1. The geographical location of Nri and Ihiala community in the map of Nigeria. From Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/ora_no_na_ime_Nigeria. The study area is Anambra State labeled 2 in the diagram. This page was last modified on 27 January 2012 at 14:16.

ceremonies investigated, the following major findings were made, organized around the principal themes of the study.

Theme 1: The key spiritual agencies in Igbo Indigenous Religion as reflected in the four ceremonies of the religion

The results of the study under this theme show that: Igbo Indigenous Religion is a religion of many faiths. The sampled elders interviewed emphasized the view that Igbo Indigenous Religion is a type of religion that gives attention to many spiritual agencies encompassing not only the supreme Being but also others gods. The results show that Igbo religion is a kind of unique religion in which the Supreme Being is recognized and worshipped alongside other divinities, spirits and ancestors. In this context, from the results of the present study, the spiritual agencies of Igbo Indigenous Religion clearly emerged to the fore, and were found to be more than a dozen in number.

Thus, from the prayer formulas used in the ritualization of each of the four ceremonies studied, it became clear that the Supreme Being and some other deities (for example, the earth goddess), spirits and ancestors were

worshipped in their own rights in Igbo Indigenous Religion. This point can be found reflected in the following sample prayer form unearthed in the course of the present study under the theme of Igbo Naming Ceremony in (Nri) one of the study communities. This refers specifically to the prayer text collected under the ritual of breaking the kola-nut and asking for blessings and protections on the child. In getting ready for the prayer in the presence of the rest of the *Umunna* (or members of the child's kin group), the officiant, Uzonna Ike, the chief elder of the *Umunna*, took one of the kola-nuts in his hand and lifting up his face towards the sky prayed in the following words as shown in Table 1.

The members of the participants (*the umunna*) as shown in Table 1 responded with the single fixed expression: 'Indeed thus we say' or *Isee*, at strategic intervals during the prayer ritual. This gesture shows that this ceremony is one in Igbo Religion where the participants do not operate as a passive audience but as a participant community during the entire ritual process.

In particular, a close inspection of this prayer text shows an inclusive recognition by the people of the important contributions of not only the Supreme Being, but also other gods, spirits, and ancestors, in the affairs of their lives. Other principal elements embedded in the

Table 1. Prayers in Igbo and English (Theme 1).

Officiant Igbo	Officiant English
A: A greeting and addressing God, spirits and ancestors	
<i>Chukwu abiaama</i>	Chukwu, He who was before all of us
<i>Ezechitoke,</i>	The king of all creation
<i>Omama amacha amacha</i>	The known but unfathomable
<i>Isi nsiko gbalu Igbo ghalii</i>	The crab's head that is a mystery to the Igbo
<i>Eze bi n' Igwe Ogodu ya nakpu nani</i>	He who lives above with his feet on the ground
<i>Nwoke Oghologho anya</i>	A man with distended eyes that sees everything
<i>Ndi muo di ba anyi</i>	Our gods and ancestors
<i>Anyanwu na Agbala</i>	The sky and the sun gods
<i>Anyi ekene</i>	We thank you
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
B. Begging agencies to break the kola-nut for them and make it a sacred meal	
<i>Nalunu anyi (Nararani anyi) ojia</i>	Receive this kola nut
<i>Taanu n'otu k'anyi ta n'ibe</i>	Eat it whole, while we share the pieces
<i>Bianu gozie ojia k'anyi si na ya itaya nweta ndu</i>	Come and bless this kola so that we will obtain life through eating it.
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
C: Prayer of thanksgiving and for the Child's welfare	
<i>Obi di anyi uto rinne na nwa</i>	We are very pleased
<i>Enyere anyi</i>	For the child given to us
<i>Anyi na ekene unu</i>	We thank you all
<i>Afa ya bu Chukwuebuka</i>	His name is Chukwuebuka (God is great)
<i>Anyi na ayo agam n'iru ya Okpokpo ndu, na aru isi ike</i>	We pray for his progress in the world, for his health, virile and strong life
<i>Na ife eji ene ndu anya n'ebe ono.</i>	and the wealth with which his life will be enhanced
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
D: Prayer to the ancestors to pave his way for him	
<i>Ndi muo di banyi</i>	Our gods and ancestors
<i>Tivolu nu ya ezi,</i>	Make smooth his path of life
<i>Ka otoo, so lu ulo ya mee ife ibe ya n'eme</i>	So he can grow without problems, able to take his seat among his mates
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say.
E: Prayer for peace and joy	
<i>Udo no oghu</i>	Peace and Joy
<i>Eje abata</i>	Successful going out and coming in
<i>K'anyi nayo ebe nne na nna ya no</i>	We pray on his/her parents behalf
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
F: Prayer for offspring	
<i>Na isi nne na nna nwaa anyi na ayo</i>	We pray on behalf of the parents of this child
<i>Omumu nwoke na omumu nwanyi</i>	that you bless them with more children of both sexes
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
G: Prayer for wealth to sustain life	
<i>Ife aku aku ife enwe- enwe</i>	For animals and possessions
<i>K'anyi nayo n'isi fa (n'isi ha).</i>	We pray on their behalf
<i>Ka elii taa, k'eli e ozo</i>	May we come again in this family for a similar celebration of joy
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say.

Table 1 Continued

H: Prayer for the welfare of his entire <i>Umunna</i>	
<i>Ndi b'anyi, anyi ga adisinu</i>	Our people, we shall all live
<i>Ya gazielu ununine</i>	May things go well for you all
Participants: <i>Isee!!!</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say!!!

same prayer text include: praise and worship, thanksgiving, supplication for protection and support of the child, and his parents and other members present. In addition, a major contribution of this study from the results set in the foregoing is that Igbo prayer ritual is communally owned spontaneously generated and focuses in its contents beyond concern for praise and worship. The elements of the prayer place emphatic stress toward making petitions relevant to the needs of the participants. The whole ritual is not just God-centered, but human-need centered (Horton, 1995).

The content of the prayer text (Table 1) further shows that Igbo Indigenous Religion is not equivalent to ancestor-worship. It is a religion of many faiths, including, but not limited to faith in the existence and continued relevance of the ancestors in the life of their living descendants. The result of the present study is thus, crucial in reminding those who equiparate African Indigenous Religion with ancestor worship, to note that, that point of view is inapplicable to Igbo Indigenous Religion. This, in sum means that while, Igbo Indigenous Religion involves some kind of ancestor-worship, it is not synonymous with ancestor worship.

Theme 2: Attitude of the Igbo people to the spiritual agencies of their indigenous religion

The result of the study under this theme showed that “the attitude of Igbo worshippers to the spiritual agencies of their religion is egalitarian, and multi-partial, or rotational in its sensitivity to the respect and worship accorded to the various agencies.” Indeed, according to the interview data emanating from the study of the four ceremonies, each spiritual agency in Igbo Indigenous Religion is assumed to count in the economy of the welfare of the people and is approached with a respectful fear. None is underrated as a subordinate entity to the other. Each is believed to be entitled to its dignity and worship as long as they are able to reciprocate their roles. In particular, as discovered during the interview process with some of the elders included in the study sample, any of the agencies that fail to perform will definitely lose its respect among the worshippers and stands the risk of being discarded.

The aforesaid findings should thus be interpreted to constitute a departure from Mbiti's (1969: 58) conclusion that “God is the ultimate recipient of sacrifice in African religion whether or not the worshippers are aware of that”. The trend of the present study rather supports

Ubah's (1982) position that the spiritual agencies he studied are worshiped in their own right.

Theme 3: The chief aims of Igbo indigenous religion as can be deduced from the rituals and practices in the four ceremonies studied.

The findings of the study in Theme 3 showed that there are multiple goals of Igbo Indigenous Religion; almost all of them centered on the search for the reinforcement of the present life and a basis to deserve admission into the world of the ancestors after death. Indeed, from the data arising from the study it was made clear that although there are multiple goals to Igbo Indigenous Religion; the dominant goal is “enhancement of life of the worshippers, and their deliverance from all material misfortunes, including their unrestrained enjoyment of material prosperity in all its forms.” Thus, from the results of the present study, five principal blessings were found to be prayed for in Igbo Indigenous Religion: Offspring (*omumu*), long life (*Ogonogo ndu*), health (*aru ike*), wealth (*aku na uba*), and peace and joy (*udo na oghu*); all of them are life-affirming values and this-worldly centered (Ekwunife, 1997, 1990); a point indirectly corroborated by Ukpokolo (2010). On the other hand, the idea that the aim of Igbo Indigenous Religion is the urge to gain communion with the Supreme Being intended to foreshadow an eventual enjoyment of a certain future paradise; a generalization from the works of Idowu (1973) and Gaba (1978) was not corroborated in the present study. Igbo Indigenous Religion was rather discovered in this present study to be a means to an end and not an end in itself. This is a point that corroborates Horton's view on the pragmatic nature of African Indigenous Religion. Igbo worshippers from the ceremonies studied, and from the views of the elders interviewed, attend to their gods and ancestors to be in good terms with them and to invest in their moral and spiritual support in times of need. Igbo Indigenous Religion is thus found to be a life affirming religion. It therefore differs from Christianity and Islam which are understood as essentially ascetic and non-life affirming (Metuh, 1981). It also differs from Christianity and Islam, in that while both lay emphases on meeting God at death in a heavenly or otherworldly paradise, part of the idea of the good life in Igbo religion as can be seen from the prayer text earlier presented is that of deliverance from earthly misfortunes and enhancement of the worshippers' welfare in this world and being accorded a meritorious membership in the

world of the dead ancestors. The concern for gaining membership in the world of the ancestors just mentioned was discovered in the investigation and analysis of the ceremony of Igbo funeral rites or *emume enim ozu*.

Theme 4: The principal belief systems, rituals and practices encompassed in Igbo indigenous religion

The results of the study in relation to Theme 4 show, among other things, that: Igbo Indigenous Religion is a systematized religion with notable and enduring belief systems, religious myths, rituals and practices. In particular, the trend of the result reveal that Igbo Indigenous Religion could be said to be composed of four principal elements: (i) a belief in a multitude of spiritual agencies to whom worship is directed with this worldly and otherworldly aim, (ii) a well structured ritual component made of prayer, body movement, sacrifice and commensality, (iii) presence of animal and placatory gifts, and (iv) congregational participants. For instance, in each of the ceremonies studied, all participants, male and female, young and old, including the spiritual agencies to which the ritual is directed, was understood as united in taking part in sharing the meal indicating a unity of intention and purpose. This conclusion is made evident in one of the sample prayer texts collected during the ritual consecration of the man for the priestly functions of the homestead. In that prayer text (Table 2) the officiant, Mr. Ohanaonu, taking a bowl of kola-nuts in his hand prayed as shown in Table 2.

A close look at the prayer text in Table 2, drawn from one Ikpocha Obi ritual ceremony conducted at Nri, shows that it is composed of the following elements:

- (1) An eclectic/egalitarian orientation to the spiritual agencies of Igbo Indigenous Religion. The first lines of the prayer text, for example, makes reference to the multiple spiritual agencies of Igbo Religion: God, (Olisa, another Igbo name for the Supreme Being; the gods of the village and the community, the earth-goddess and the ancestors (Olisa, Chineke, *Ani/Ala*, *Nna anyi na Nnanyifa*, *Ofo na Ogu*)
- (2) A prayer of consecration and petition for the man undergoing the ritual. This is contained in the second section of the text.
- (3) Request for protection of the spiritual agencies on behalf of the beneficiary. This is the subject matter of the third stanza of the text.
- (4) Request for participant's well being, protection, and blessings. This makes up the subject of the concluding part of the text.

Such elements as these show that, prayers said during this ceremony covered a variety of utterances and intentions. They encompass the speaking of wishes for beneficence; supplication for good things and, especially, for the turning away of the wrath of a mystical agent.

They also include the calling down of blessings upon the subject of the rite; and the explicit request for the consecration, transformation/elevation and admittance of the subject of the rite into his father's headship of the Obi.

The trend thus presents the prayer text generated under the Ikpocha Obi ceremony as taking the character of a speech event, or a conversational monologue; with the Supreme Being, and village gods and ancestors as presumed listeners; all demonstrating the belief in Igbo Indigenous Religion for the interconnectedness of the universe. The same prayer text shows that both the officiant and the participants are talking to the spiritual agencies addressed as people near earshot, within and around, although invisible to participants.

The same elements also show that prayers said during this ceremony portray some recognizable attitude and framework of the people to the spiritual agencies addressed: God, the Supreme Being, the gods of the village and the community, the earth-goddess and the ancestors. The attitudes manifested include those of respect, supplication, fear, regard, condescension and humility, faith and trust in the capacity of these agencies to intervene in their lives and in the life of the beneficiary (the man undergoing the ritual), and certain egalitarianism in making reference to their gods. Each agency is being brought into the picture and having a semblance of being given its due. They are each looked at as those whose support the people need and whose protection and blessings they crave for and value.

These indications can be interpreted to mean that Igbo Indigenous Religion is not a haphazard religion; its principal rituals are systematized in stages and their contents rendered in high symbolic loadings in the manner propounded by Turner (1967). In addition, a number of myths, as mentioned by the elders studied, were used to justify and clarify the bases for each of the activities conducted and ritual objects implicated. For example, the basis for the dominant presence of the chicken was accounted for through the Igbo myth of the chicken and the consequence of its failure to attend a meeting called by its fellow animals to address the problem of human proclivity for the use of animals for their ritual practices. The final point of the story according to the elders interviewed was that on account of its absence in the said meeting, the other animals present unanimously nominated the chicken as the dominant animal of ritual in Igbo Indigenous Religion. In the naming ceremony or *Iba Nwa Afa* for instance, it was discovered that the reason for the delay to give a child a name immediately the child was born is based on the Igbo myth on the existence of the fore world of the unborn children. The same trend was true for the institution of the Igbo marriage ceremony or *Okuko Onye Uwa* ceremony. It was discovered by means of the present study that the ceremony was based on the Igbo myth and belief in the existence of *Onye-Uwa* (a destiny spirit for each person). Similarly, most of the rituals conducted during the Igbo

Table 2. Prayers in Igbo and English (Theme 4).

Officiant Igbo	Officiant English
A: Greetings and homage to their spiritual agencies and to their ancestors	
<i>Olisa bu uwa aka</i>	The creator that carried the world in his hand
<i>Ogbu ngada nga</i>	The great strength of the warrior
<i>Chineke, Chiugo</i>	God, the giver of important things
<i>Onye oma, anyi ekene gi</i>	The giver of good things, we greet you!
<i>Ndi muo di b'anyi</i>	You, our beloved ancestors
<i>Bianu welu oji</i>	Come and have your share of the kola
<i>Ani bu anyi nine</i>	The earth-goddess that carry our weight
<i>Bia taa oji</i>	Come and take your share of the kola
<i>Nna anyi, na Nna anyi fa</i>	Our fathers, and great grandfathers
<i>Bianu welu oji</i>	Come and take kola
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
B: Petition for his life	
<i>O Ndu Arinze k'anyi goo</i>	We pray for Arinze's life
<i>Ojidelu aka n'oyo Obi Nna ya</i>	His hands are at the father's <i>Obi's</i> doorsteps
<i>N'ayo k'unu kwadolu ya</i>	He prays to be allowed into the father's <i>Obi</i> It
<i>O'nwa n'eché be nna ya</i>	is the son that watches over his father's <i>Obi</i>
<i>Amuta nwa, Omuta ibe ya</i>	Getting a child that gets another child
<i>Bu ndu ebebe</i>	Is what gives rise to life everlasting
<i>Kwenu ka obata n'obi a</i>	Allow him the right of access to his father's <i>Obi</i>
<i>Nye ya ofo na ogu nk'iji eche Obi</i>	Give him <i>Ofo</i> and <i>Ogu</i> with which <i>Obi</i> is
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	protected Participants: Indeed thus we say.
C: For His protection	
<i>Chupulunu Ya Akologheli Muo</i>	Protect him against the assault of evil spirits
<i>Chupulunu Ya akologheli Mmadu</i>	Protect him against the assault of bad men
<i>K'owee nokaa nka n'Obi a</i>	So that he will live long in his position
<i>Obu ro ya bu onye mbu</i>	He is not the first to be allowed in
<i>Nke oga bu onye ikpeazu</i>	here May he not be the last to be here
<i>Omumu nwoke Omumu</i>	too May he be blessed with male
<i>nwanyi</i>	children and female children
<i>Ikilikiti okpa kanyi n'ayo n'Obi a</i>	We long for many children in this <i>Obi</i>
<i>Nne zuchaa nwa ka nwa</i>	May both parents gain from the toil
<i>zuo Nne zuo Nna ya</i>	of training the children Participants:
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Indeed thus we say
B: For blessings and long life for all participants	
<i>Anyi nwa no ebea</i>	We who are here
<i>Anyi ga adisinu</i>	We pray for our own lives
<i>Kwenu ka Obi ga na eti eti</i>	May this <i>Obi</i> be a blessed one
<i>Anyi na ayo Oganiru, n'udo n'oghu</i>	We pray for peace and joy
<i>Ogonogo Ndu n'aru ike</i>	We pray for long life and good health
<i>Ifa aku aku, ife enwe enwe</i>	We pray for wealth
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
<i>Onye nwee, Onye nwee ka anyi na ayo</i>	May each and everyone of us be blessed
<i>Onye Obi a n'ewu anya oku</i>	May he who is not happy about the growth
<i>Nya bulu Okuku uzo n'baa</i>	Go to sleep before the chicken
<i>ula Onye obuna no ebea</i>	May each one of us here

Table 2. Continued.

<i>Ndu ya na ndi be ya o</i> <i>Onye achobalu ndu ya</i> <i>Nya noo n'afu</i> Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Be blessed, he and his family and children May he who is threatened Hide his life away in the stomach Participants: Indeed thus we say
C: Peace and support for all participants <i>Ndemuo di ba na nna nna fa</i> <i>Na ndo unu k'anyi no</i> <i>Bianu solu anyi n'atu elo</i> <i>N'obia k'ife wee n'aga n'na udo</i>	All our ancestors We hide under your support and protection Be part of our deliberative team while in this Obi, so that there will peace and joy
D: Concluding prayer <i>Ndi b'anyi, nwoke na nwanyi</i> <i>Ya gazienu o</i> Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Our people, both male and female We include the interest of all in our pleadings Participants: Indeed thus we say

death and funeral rites were noted to be based on the Igbo myth of the difficult bridge or *mmiri na asaa, agu na asaa, mba na asaa* (7, 7, 7) to be crossed before the dead can reach the worlds/land of the ancestors. All these show that Igbo Indigenous Religion is highly influenced by the prevailing myths of the Igbo world and its peoples, and therefore firmly grounded on Igbo worldview.

Also, the findings of the study under the Theme 4 showed that there are both men and women officiants (who play the role of ritual celebrants) in Igbo Indigenous Religion. For instance, there are male officiants in each of the ceremonies investigated whereas women officiants only come into the picture during Igbo burial and funeral rites. It is, however, significant to note that in Ihiala a woman is responsible for dirge making. In particular, it was discovered that women take a lot of ritual space in most of the death and funeral rites concerning the death of a woman. They (the women) officiate in the ankle breaking ritual. The presence of maiden officiants in Igbo burial and funeral rites was again noted and is significant.

These observations regarding the important role of women in Igbo religion can be seen to be corroborated by the following statement credited to Van Allen (1976: 68), who noted that: "the *umuada's* (daughters of lineage) most important ritual function was at funeral of lineage members, since no one could have a proper funeral without their voluntary ritual participation ... a fact that gave women (among the Igbo) a significant measure of power".

Two principal ritual objects in Igbo Indigenous Religion emerged from the study: Animal offering and placatory gifts. The cock as was noted before remained the dominant ritual animal in Igbo Indigenous Religion and an Igbo myth to justify its dominant presence has also been highlighted. The ram and the sheep as well as the cock when they feature are found to be loaded with a lot of

symbolic meaning. Even the use of the cock in preference to the hen was also noted in the course of the study. Field (interview data) explanation shows that the cock features rather than the hen because of its special symbolic value. The cock in traditional Africa is an animal of transition, an animal that helps to mark the emergence of a new dawn in the life and day of the people. As seen in the prayer text in Table 3, under the ceremony of Igbo marriage or *Okuku Onye-Uwa*, this cockerel is a sign of the dawn of a positive change in the life of the bride for whom the ceremony is made. The relevant segment of that prayer text is given in Table 3.

Of course, it needs to be mentioned in some other ceremonies like in burial and funeral rites and in the ritual ceremony of the take over of a homestead, other animals like goats, rams and chickens, and in some cases even cows, can be used.

The kola nut is noted to be a dominant ritual object among the placatory gifts in Igbo Indigenous Religion. This, according to Mr. Abunwune, one of the elder respondents, comes from the fact that Igbo kola-nut or *oji (cola acuminata or atrophora)* is seen as a sacred fruit, with a visible exterior parts (that is, the separated but united lobes) and an invisible interior head (the radix) linking the lobes, signifying the presence and influence of the spiritual order in the human world. Its presence in this ceremony, according to Abunwune, is meant to reflect, the idea of *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* ceremony, as a ritual of dialogue between the brides's *Onye-Uwa* or destiny spirit and his guests, the bride's husbands' relatives. In this way, the kola-nut is respected as the symbolic ritual object that is held in hand by the officiant while addressing the bride's *Onye-Uwa* about the business of the day.

Other respondents drew attention to the extended social signification of the kola nut in this context. That is, that its presence at the *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* ceremony under

Table 3. The relevant segment of Theme 4: Prayers in Igbo and English.

Officiant Igbo	Officiant English
<i>Egbene okuku a n'egosi</i>	This cockerel is a sign
<i>N'ife mgbawo adigo</i>	That a positive change has come
<i>na ndu ada anyi</i>	In our daughter's life
<i>Na Okuata enwego di</i>	That Okuata has got a husband!
<i>N'oburozi agbogho</i>	That she is no longer a maiden
<i>N'obulugo nwunye mmadu</i>	That she is now somebody's wife

reference represents a spiritual consolidation of a marriage contract between two people (the bride and the groom) in the presence of their relatives and the bride's *Onye-Uwa*. Another significance is to teach the new couple to remember that as kola-nut is famous as a ritual fruit with a double (sweet/bitter) taste, so too the experience of human marriage: at one time it is sweet, while at another time it is bitter, and that they must be prepared to contend with such a complexity. The sweet aspect of marriage, according to the interviewed respondents, includes the children that can issue from it and the promotion of in-law friendships that a human marriage usually brings into being. The bitter aspects include the possibility of rancor among the couples, death of offsprings that may occur, causing grief, and the challenging process of effective upbringing of children.

Some other respondents contributed the added view that, the presence of kola-nut among the list of ritual objects for the ceremony is designed to serve as a wish by participants that the couple's love for one another should last long just like a kola- nut is believed to last long in the mouth of the elders who know how to chew it.

Another dominant ritual object is the wine both local palm wine and local hot drinks *kai-kai* (hot drink) and soft drinks/soda. The basis for their presence has been variously justified. But the principal explanation emerged from interview with the sampled elders during the *Iba Nwa Afa* and *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* ceremonies. For example during the *Okuku Onye Uwa* ceremony participants observe that wine is a valuable ritual object in symbolizing the celebratory spirit of the *Onye-Uwa* to whom the gifts are made (the meaning of these italicized Igbo words have already been provided several times in the introductory part of this report and should be consulted where need be).

The presence of the alligator pepper in the list of ritual objects for the *Iba Nwa Afa* ceremony is also worthy of note. The symbolic meaning for its presence is highly philosophical and culture specific. The explanation unearthed during the course of the present study is that it is embedded there to remind the parents of the paradoxical nature of parenting as both sweet and painful. This suggests that although there is no special space for sermons in Igbo religious ceremonies, the culture often uses ritual objects as symbols for educating

and instructing its members.

The same didactic symbolization is noted in the value of the kola nut in Igbo Indigenous Religion. Its presence during the study is seen as a symbolic object for reminding participants of the importance of human friendship, communality, commensality, and family solidarity or the lineage (*Umunna*) spirit.

The idea of offering of animal blood and yam *fou-fou* or porridge as diet for the gods reflect the anthropomorphic nature of Igbo Indigenous Religion where it was perceived that the gods and ancestors needed to eat and be fed as humans do. Items for ritual practice in Igbo Indigenous Religion such as goat, sheep, ram, chicken, yam, palm wine, kola-nut, alligator pepper, white chalk (*nzu*), and so on (emerging from the present study) reflect the impact of the Igbo cultural environment in Igbo Indigenous Religion. These items are the regular items of livestock and farm produce available in West Africa. This implies that Igbo religious ritual items are dictated by the kind of items readily and locally available in the community. The absence of wheat, millet, dog, and bull and pig that are not part of the agricultural produce of the people is noted. Igbo Indigenous Religion is therefore essentially an ethnic religion. Its rituals are performed and verbally in Igbo language: the language of the people (Nwoye, 2011).

Similarly, key elements in Igbo ritual practices were revealed in the present study to consist of four important components: prayer, worship, sacrifice, and communal meal. "The prayer component encompasses elements of petition and supplication, as well as that of confession" (Metuh, 1981: 125). It is always spontaneous and not read from a prepared text. Thus, in all the prayer texts collected, under the four definitional ceremonies studied, a kind of conversational monologue appears to be dominant. Such a trend confirms the position of Kopytoff (1971) that prayer texts of the African indigenous communities he studied exhibited the tone of conversational monologues, in which participants tend to make their petitions to the agencies of their religion as if these agencies are within earshot. In addition, prayers encountered during these four ceremonies are stylistically distinct, and are couched in the language of everyday discourse, easy to be understood and made to fit the occasion at hand.

The worship component, as noted through the process of participant observation by the researcher and her research assistants encompassed the praise and thanksgiving aspects of Igbo Religion. It also reflects the Igbo attitude of deference and a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving to the spiritual agencies of their religion. The wordings of such praises and thanksgiving rituals reflect the principal attitudes of the Igbo to these agencies: deference, democratic orientation, and the spirit of multi-partiality and feeling of rotational sensitivity to the various agencies of their religion. The prayer and worship components of Igbo religious practice were noted to be conducted through performative utterances. These two went hand in hand with a sacrificial offering directed to the agency or agencies focused on, on a given ritual. In this context, Rappaport's (1999) observation that the formality of liturgical orders helps to insure that whatever performatives they incorporate are performed by authorized people with respect to eligible persons or entities under proper circumstances in accordance with proper procedures is applicable to the experience in Igbo religious practice, as can be seen from the study of these ceremonies.

In Igbo Indigenous Religion, as discovered from the present study, the authorized ritual officiants that lead the worshippers in the prayers and worship are elders, and the consecrated first-born son of a given household (he that has undergone the *Ikpocha obi* ceremony). Similarly, because Igbo religious practice encompasses not only a prayer/worship ritual, but also sacrificial processes and worshippers' participation in a communal meal, Igbo religious ritual practices were observed in the present study to incorporate both performative utterances and operative acts (which often involves both music and dance and therefore a lot of body movements like in the ceremonies of *Iba Nwa Afa*, *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* and *Emume enim ozu*). Performative acts or utterances, it must be remembered, are those which have their conventional effects completed in the gestures or utterances themselves. Consequently, Igbo religious practice is full of conventional utterances and acts that achieve conventional effects. In the context of *Iba Nwa Afa* ceremony, for example, because an authorized person (the father of the child), following proper procedure, names his child 'Chukwuebuka', (God is great) the child is unquestionably taken as so named as it is the conventional thing to do. Others such as his classmates may, in the future if they like, nickname him 'Ebuka', (great) but his name is irrecoverably known to be 'Chukwuebuka' since he has already been so named.

In addition to the presence of performatives, a lot of symbolic acts were seen to be implicated in Igbo religious rituals. This is noted in particular, in the ceremony of *Iba Nwa Afa*, when the child is carried up to the air, before a name is given to the child. This, according to some of the respondents interviewed, symbolizes a double communication: on the one hand, to present the child to

the purview of the participants, and a prayerful wish for the successful growth and greatness on the part of the child. Other symbolic acts were also noted in the ceremony of *Okuku Onye Uwa* where prayers are said for the bride and the groom with the two kneeling down. The same is true of what happens in the burial rites where symbolic acts are noted particularly in the rituals of incorporation effected through gun shot sounds, washing of the dead, and laying of the dead in state.

The findings of the present study also showed that Igbo names serve as storage of meanings in Igbo Indigenous Religion. In this regard, the results showed that names given to children act like texts on which most Igbo religious creeds, cosmology and ethics are written. Some of the names operate to advice on value of moderation, team spirit; and the notion that we need to be sure before we can judge. Others are used as texts for hanging their hope and for surviving the pains and bruises of the human experience. Others locate the principal beliefs of the parents of those bearing them: *Igwe-bu-ike* (unity is strength), *Nwadiuto* (having children gladdens the heart), and *Chinwendu* (God is the source of life). Similarly, the findings of the present study showed that there are both social and spiritual elements in Igbo marriage process. Igbo marriage ceremony encompasses not only a social but also a spiritual component. The spiritual ritual that seals the contract of a marriage is the *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* ceremony. This means that for the Igbo, being married is not merely a social process. It also entails a religious undertaking, in which official permission for the marriage is sought from the wife's *Onye-Uwa* or destiny spirit, and his blessings for the marriage formally enlisted.

The results of the study also showed that the *Ikpocha Obi* ritual serves as a type of family headship/ priesthood succession ritual. It was discovered that succession to family headship/ priesthood among the Igbo is an exercise that is ritualized in the *Ikpocha Obi* ceremony. This means that before the eldest son to a dead father could be recognized as successor to his father in the headship and priesthood of the family, a traditional ritual is called for. And this according to the findings of the present study is what is understood among the Nri and Ihiala people as the *Ikpocha Obi* ritual or the ceremony of taking over of a homestead.

The findings of the present study similarly showed that burial/ funeral ceremonies in Igbo Indigenous Religion are geared at the transformation of the deceased. Specifically, it was discovered that burial/ funeral rites in Igbo Indigenous Religion are engaged in to enhance the deceased's capacity to grow from negative to positive status and to transcend subsequently to the status of an ancestor. The elders interviewed explained that through such rituals the basic conditions for the deceased's spiritual transition from death to life are fulfilled, contributing to his or her gaining a changed and elevated status in the world of the dead. The present study therefore corroborates the findings of Willet (1966) and

Abiodun (1976) in this regard. It also demonstrates the strategic importance of burial/ funeral rites in Igbo Indigenous Religion. They also corroborate Horton's view that African Indigenous Religion is a pragmatic religion. The trend shows that being given a decent burial and funeral rites at death is one of the major conditions of possibility for one eventually going ahead to becoming an ancestor in Igbo religious tradition.

The present study also revealed the influence of the "principle of reciprocity" in Igbo religious rituals. Interview data from the study of the four ceremonies show that the placatory gifts of yam, cocks, palm wine, kola nuts, goats and rams, offered to the agencies of their religion in sacrifices of petition, atonement, appeasement, thanksgiving, etc are offered guided by the Igbo "seed-yam mentality" (Animalu, 1990). This involves the idea that the earth (goddess) does not eat their yams for nothing. It rewards them with good yam harvests after eating their seed yam or *awa ji*. The same reward is received after taking their maize seeds sown in the ground. It rewards them with good maize harvests. And when this is not the case, the Igbo believe that something is wrong. In this way, an important deduction to be made from this is that Igbo religious worshippers give gifts to their gods, divinities and ancestors. They make their sacrifices as a way of alluring these agencies to reciprocate in kind. This finding tends to demonstrate the placatory and pragmatic character of the religion and it shows that they tend to engage in religious practices as a kind of deal with their gods, divinities and ancestors (a point in line with Horton's proposition). Similarly, Igbo indigenous religion was discovered to be a melioristic religion. The prayer texts (like the one given in Table 4) garnered from the study of the *Okuku Onye-uwa* Ceremony (an aspect of the ritual celebration of Igbo marriage) show that the worldview underpinning the religion is not one that reflects the spirit of naïve optimism or excessive pessimism but of meliorism (Williamson, 1974; Animalu, 1990; Touche, 2009; Campbell, 1995; Whyte, 1977). During a prayer session in one of such ceremonies studied the officiant or the leader of the prayer ritual is the eldest man from the bride's father's kindred. He begins this prayer ritual by lifting up a bowl of kola-nut in his hands, after picking up one of the kola-nuts from the bowl, facing the participants. He starts with the invocation and placation processes entailed in the prayer. The entire prayer ritual as noted earlier, collected among the Nri community is given in Table 4.

This is a long prayer text indeed (Table 4). But the aspect of it in which attention needs to be directed is sections C and D, a close look at which reveals that the content of the prayers reflects and betray this-worldly emphasis and the life-affirming and the melioristic nature of the religion. From those two sections and indeed the entire prayer text under reference, it could be deduced that the spiritual agencies made reference to in *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* ceremony are believed to be capable

of furthering human welfare, improving their lot in the world, in conformity with the society's desires and goals. For example, they are seen to be addressed as agencies that can make crops grow, increase fertility of soil, and to protect beasts and humans. In all instance the wish is for improvement of blessings and enhanced security in their lives. This is reflected in the worshippers' request for these agencies to bless them with wealth and prosperity, and with gifts of children, both male and female (*ife akuku ife enwe enwe*).

In this regard, the use of Igbo Religion by Zuesse's (1979) classification belongs to the category of religions of structure as opposed to Western Christianity. The latter, according to him, belongs to the category of religions of salvation. And Zuesse seems to be talking particularly about the Igbo when he suggested that African religions and other religions of structure are oriented to this-worldly goals such as fecundity (*omumu*), prosperity (*ife akuaku, ife enwe-enwe*), health (*Ndu*) social harmony (*Udo*) and emotional contentment (*onu*), all reflecting the entire five values of Igbo Religion as seen highlighted in the prayer text collected in the field study of this ceremony. In this way, Igbo Religion is to be interpreted from the trend of these findings to be a melioristic religion too.

Williamson (1974: 84) defines meliorism as "the doctrine that improvement is at least possible" and John Dewey cited by Campbell (1995: 261) referred to the same perspective as "the belief that the specific conditions which exist at any moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered". From the four ceremonies investigated the possibility of improvement is what participants in Igbo Indigenous Religion believe in, as can be seen from the prayer texts emerging from the study (Table 4). Hope, faith in a better future, and active engagement in matters influencing their fate, inform their efforts and influence their religious practice.

The previous observation, in particular, shows that the present study has not only brought data that corroborates Horton's framework (that African Religion is a pragmatic religion), but has also generated findings that have extended that framework. This means that one of the principal contributions of this study is that of discovering the orientation to meliorism that characterizes Igbo Indigenous Religion. This was found to be a pervasive attitude of the Igbo religious participants both in ceremonies of joy and celebration like in *Iba Nwa Afa* and in those of grief and mourning like in Igbo death and funeral rites.

DISCUSSION

The previous findings strongly demonstrate that the principal premise of the study that one can gain a good knowledge about the major components (beliefs, goals, spiritual agencies addressed, ritual objects and officiants)

Table 4. Theme 4: Prayers in Igbo and English collected among the Nri community.

Officiant	Officiant
Igbo	English
A: Greetings and invitation to the spiritual agencies to share in their kola-nut communion	
<i>Chi na Eke</i>	Chi and Eke
<i>Anyanwu na Agbala bianu taa oji</i>	<i>Anyanwu</i> and <i>Agbala</i> come and eat kola
<i>Chi Eke, Chi Oye, Chi afor, Chi Nkwo</i>	<i>Eke's</i> spirit, <i>Oye's</i> spirit, <i>Afor's</i> spirit, <i>Nkwo's</i> spirit
<i>Bianu taa oji</i>	Come and eat kola
<i>Chi ada anyi, bia taa oji</i>	Our daughter's spiritual father come and eat kola
<i>Obu ubosi gi di ifea</i>	Today is your day
<i>Ngị di n'isi ije uwa ya</i>	You are the source of her life in the world
<i>Uwa iratalu ya bu uwa oma</i>	The destiny you carved out for her is good
<i>Nya ka oji wee too rube isi, Bulu ezigbo mmadu, wee nwee di</i>	That is why she grew up an obedient child as well as well bred woman, able to get a husband
<i>Wele ekene o-o-o</i>	We salute you-o-o!
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
B: Gratitude, happy and fruitful marriage	
<i>Di ya bu oji na okuku bia</i>	Her intending husband is here with a gift of kola and cockerel
<i>Oji na okuku nru gi Nke o ji egosi</i>	The kola and cockerel of homage to you
<i>N'okwelu na nke gi</i>	A gift by which to demonstrate
<i>N'obu ada gi ka ona</i>	That he respects and recognizes you
<i>anu N'obu gi ji mma jide</i>	That it is your child he wants in marriage
<i>ji N'ebe ada anyi no</i>	That you are the last authority
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	As far as our daughter is concerned
	Participants: Indeed thus we say
<i>Obi di ya uto N'udi nwanyi ikpulu n'ime ya</i>	He is very pleased with the quality and character you fashioned in her
<i>Oji egbene bia, egbene bulu ibu</i>	He presents you with a giant cock
<i>Egbene ugo n'egosi k'anwuli di ya 'obi di</i>	White cockerel signifying and attesting to the purity and size of happiness
<i>N'ebe nwunye ya no.</i>	He has for his intending wife, your ward
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
<i>Egbene okuku a n'egosi</i>	This cockerel is a sign
<i>N'ife mgbanwo adigo</i>	That a positive change has come
<i>na ndu ada anyi</i>	In our daughter's life
<i>Na Okuata enwego di</i>	That Okuata has got a husband!
<i>N'oburozi agbogho</i>	That she is no longer a maiden
<i>N'obulugo nwunye mmadu</i>	That she is now somebody's wife
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
<i>Oji oji bia,</i>	The kola nut he came with
<i>Oji n'ano</i>	Four kola nuts
<i>Bu oji ekene,</i>	A kola of thanksgiving
<i>Oji nsopulu</i>	A kola of respect
<i>Oji oji ayo gi</i>	A kola of petition and application
<i>K'ikwe k'Okuata bulu nwunye ya</i>	So you can approve for Okuata to be his wife
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
C: Thanksgiving for spiritual support	
<i>Anyi na ekene gi</i>	Receive our thanks and gratitude
<i>Maka nkwudo gi n'ebe Okuata Nwunye ya no Ona</i>	For your continued support and protection of Okuata his betrothed wife
<i>ayo Ka ikwadolu fa Na anum di na nwunye fa</i>	He appeals for a similar support and protection in their marriage
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say

Table 4 Continued

<i>Tvolu fa ezi</i>	Smoothen their path of life
<i>Chupulu fa ajo muo</i>	Do not allow evil spirits to harass them
<i>Chupulu fa ajo mmadu</i>	Protect them from the machinations of evil people
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
D: For long life, wealth and good health	
<i>Ogonogo ndu</i>	We pray for long life
<i>Na aru isike</i>	And good health
<i>Na obi udo na oghu</i>	And the spirit of peace and joy
<i>N'ebe fa no</i>	On their behalf
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
<i>Di Okuata ga anoka nka</i>	Okuata's husband should live long
<i>Buolu ya uzo, kpelu ya azu</i>	Shield him from front and back
<i>Okuata ga anoka nka</i>	Okuata should live long
<i>Nolu lie aka di ya</i>	To enjoy the support and wealth of her husband
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say
<i>Chekweba di ya</i>	Bless her husband
<i>K'onwee ife akuku ife enwe</i>	So he can have good wealth and riches
<i>Fa ga amu izuzu eke n'izuzu oye</i>	Bless them with many children
<i>Nwa bu ezi nwa</i>	Real good children
<i>Omumu nwoke, omumu nwanyi</i>	Male and female children
<i>Nwa ma uche nna ya</i>	Children that respect their father
<i>Nwa ma uche nne ya</i>	And their mother
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say.
<i>Ka oga abu</i>	So that
<i>Fa zuchaa umu fa</i>	After training their children
<i>Umu fa azuo fa</i>	Their children will support them in return
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say.
E: Caution and warning to all participants	
<i>Anyi nine no ebea ga adisinu</i>	We pray for the well being of all here present
<i>Ndu olu Ndu Igbo</i>	We pray for the life of all and sundry
<i>Ndu onye iru Ndu onye azu</i>	The life of young and old
<i>Ndu nwoke ndu nwanyi</i>	The life of men and women
<i>Onye na nke ya Onye na nke ya</i>	Everybody according to his or her needs
<i>Onye achovalu ndu ya</i>	If anybody's life is threatened
<i>Nya no na avo</i>	Let him or her hide it in the stomach
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say.
F: Concluding prayer	
<i>Ndi ba anyi, Anyi ga adisi nu o-o-o</i>	Our people we shall all live-o-o-o
Participants: <i>Isee</i>	Participants: Indeed thus we say.

of Igbo Indigenous Religion through the study of its ceremonies has therefore been validated. From studying four definitional ceremonies of Igbo Indigenous Religion we have come to know much about the religious belief systems, the underpinning world-view, goals and emphasis, a multitude of its spiritual agencies, ritual

practices, objects, and nature of its officiants.

The same is true of Horton's framework which has formed a major basis for this study. For instance, the study of the naming ceremony or *Iba Nwa Afa* contains convincing evidence that Horton's theory of Igbo Indigenous Religion, as a worldly affirming religion or a

religion of protection, which was taken up for investigation in this study has been proved to be a valid conclusion. This means that the study's framework subjected to an empirical test in this study did come back confirmed as true to the facts.

From the *Okuku Onye Uwa* ceremony, for instance, it was clear that Igbo Indigenous Religion is a means to an end and not to an end itself. That ceremony was instituted to invest in the spiritual support and patronage of the bride's *Onye Uwa* (destiny spirit). And the goal is to ensure the success and peace in the bride's marriage. Even there, the participants' needs are not ignored. The prayer made takes into account the fact that the bride's *Onye Uwa* should always protect and support not only the bride but also her husband, parents, and the participants present. In each of the ceremonies the prayer form focuses not only on giving of praise and worship to the agencies addressed but in asking for earthly blessings and protection from misfortunes for those present. It is to be concluded that Horton's theory of African (Igbo) religion as a pragmatic religion is therefore confirmed in this study.

Igbo Indigenous Religion, from the findings of this study can also be confirmed to resemble the traditional religions of the different peoples of Africa. The key areas of possible resemblance include aspects of Igbo worldview (for example, the common belief in the interconnectedness between the material and the spiritual universe), aspects of its goals (for example, its emphasis of enhancing the welfare of the worshippers, the presence of the double or simultaneous recognition of both the Supreme Being and other gods in that religion and certain aspects of the religion's ritual objects and practices (for example, the dominance of the chicken in this venture). The dominance of the oral mode and the presence of spontaneity of prayers used in Igbo religious worship are also areas of assumed similarities between its religion and the religions of other ethnic communities in other parts of Africa.

Studies by Kirika (2002) on the role of sacrifice in the Indigenous Religion of the Gikuyu; Kahindi (1988) on the Agikuyu concept of Tahu (Harris, 1978) on the rituals for casting out anger among the Taita people of Kenya support this conclusion. The same is true of the study by Gaba (1978) among the Anlo people of Ghana and those by Turner on ritual practices among the Ndembu people of Zambia.

Some areas of possible differences between Igbo and other Indigenous Religions of Africa especially as can be seen from the findings of the present study can also be noted. The first is in regard to the place of the Supreme Being versus other gods, spirits and the ancestors of the religion. The result of the present study has shown that the dominant, special and exclusive status said to be occupied by the Supreme Being among the Kikuyu (Kibicho, 1978), the Anglo of Ghana (Gaba, 1978), and Yoruba of Nigeria (Idowu, 1973) is not the same in Igbo

Indigenous Religion.

Rather, it was discovered that other spiritual agencies mentioned in the findings of this study receive special attention in their own rights alongside the Supreme Being. Another area of the possible difference lies in the details of religious practices particularly as regards the ritual objects of the religion. The present research shows that choice of ritual objects in Igbo Indigenous Religion is influenced by the kind of livestock rampant among the communities studied, such as the chicken, and the kind of food-crops that are valorized among the people such as the yam and kola nut and palm wine. This being the case, it is obvious that Igbo Indigenous Religion will differ in this respect from other ethnic religions in other parts of Africa due to local variations, such that instead of kola nut or the yam being the regular material objects for rituals other items such as milk, various beers other than palm wine, meat, honey, and "the contents of the stomach of certain 'even-toed mammals (in practice among the Bantu pastoralists)" (Zahan, 1970: 33) will come into dominance.

IMPLICATIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED SOCIAL PRACTICE

In view of the preceding discussion the following recommendations are made. First, there is need to promote the spirit of solidarity and strengthening of filial friendship among members of the kinship group in modern Igbo families. The present study has shown that one way this can be achieved is through repeated participation in the traditional ceremony of naming the new born. Knowing this to be the case, it is recommended that a popular avenue be created perhaps through the mass media for reminding people of the great value of traditional naming ceremonies as a vital source for community building.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for a workshop or a public lecture on the *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* ceremony to promote a cultural resolution of the conflict bordering on its content and relevance. Through this, the crisis of confrontation that had bedeviled the relationship among practitioners of Igbo Indigenous Religion, Christianity and Islam about the true meaning and relevance of the *Okuku-Onye-Uwa* ceremony in some parts of Igbo land would be closely addressed. Previous commissioned research effort on this (Ezekwugo et al., 1978) by the Catholic Church in Awka diocese, Nigeria, is a step in the right direction but should in the future be done in collaboration with members of the other religions in the area. To improve on this, it is recommended that authorities on community building, justice and peace from the three religions in Igbo land be encouraged to devote joint effort to give a serious attention to the study of the traditional practices for validating marriages. In that way, the tension that usually confronts people who ignore to

follow the traditional channels for ratifying entry into Igbo marriages would be avoided.

Thirdly, data accruing from the Igbo burial and funeral rites show that the Igbo have a philosophy of great depth and are influenced by visions about the state of the dead that reflect a spiritual view of things. This is a challenge to the present emphasis on materialism that has gotten deep into a greater number of Igbo people. Workshops are needed to restore the spiritual image of life among the youth and elites in Igbo land and the entire African generally. In this way, Igbo elders should be able to continue to impress on the young with the great values of Igbo civilization embedded in its traditional burial and funeral rites, which come together to make them what they are.

Fourthly, there is need for avoidance of confessional pressure in carrying out studies in African Indigenous Religion. This is to prevent being tagged mere confessional scholars (Onunwa, 1992), studying African religion from Judeo-Christian spectacles (Bitek, 1971; Horton, 1995) in the context of their work. To achieve this, effort must be made by students of African Indigenous Religions to take seriously, as was the case in the present study, the proposal made by Cox (1996) and amplified by Pannikar (1984) of the need to adopt the attitude of methodological conversion in studying (African) subjects with a faith different from theirs.

Following up on this mature attitude to the study of other religions, Cox (1992: 163) points out that "it is in a place between confessions that, genuine dialogue leading to understanding can occur". Unless this critical attitude of leaving behind one's faith in stepping into another faith as a scholar without losing one's faith and without adopting the new faith being studied, it will not be easy for one to achieve some report accuracy in the study of the new faith. Resorting to culture area methodology approach is important in order to respond to the need to refocus on the use of the Culture area methodology (CAM) in the study of African Indigenous Religion. This methodology needs to be popularized in that although it was first used by Christian Gaba in the study of the Anlo people of Ghana in the late 1960s, not many scholars have further exploited its use until recently.

Having seen its value and importance in the context of the present study, the present researcher therefore sees it fit to recommend it as a choice methodology for scholars in the field. Indeed the importance of the culture area approach is that with it, it becomes easy to restrict wild generalizations from findings made in one location to experiences in other locations. At the same time the need for translation of data about the religion becomes unnecessary since essentially the culture area approach encourages scholars of the religion to focus their study on the religion of their own people with whom they share not only a common language but also a common dialect, proverbs and idioms. In that way no artificial barrier is

allowed to stand between the people being studied and the researcher studying them.

Fifthly, there is need for improved exploitation of the technique of methodological triangulation (TMT). This arises from a crucial limitation of most previous approaches to the study of Igbo Indigenous Religion where reliance is put on the single case/space/time methodology, such as the study of the Supreme Being, Ozo title taking, *Ofo*, *Chi*, and Salvation, in a given community. In this way, the benefit of trend analysis or the correction factor that comes with the inclusion of more than one location or community in a given study design is lost. The result rather becomes a mere piecemeal collection of data that makes the field lack a gestalt in the information available concerning its nature and content. To forestall this, it is recommended that the research technique of methodological triangulation (TMT) be popularized in the study of African Indigenous Religion.

Conclusions

This researcher believes that the present study has made an important contribution to a change in the direction of scholarship on Igbo Indigenous Religion. By focusing on the insufficiently addressed area of definitional ceremonies of the religion, it has contributed towards charting a new course and indeed an important step toward redressing the scant attention given to such ceremonies in the scholarship on Igbo Indigenous Religion. The study is therefore of great benefit to scholars who may wish to carry out thematic research in Igbo Indigenous Religion. It also provides insight that would enable researchers to learn to rotate attention to neglected aspects in the study of the religion as seriously complained against by Horton (1995).

In particular, data that emerged from the present study have helped to clarify the basic aspects and religious contents and meanings of these ceremonies. Through the data emanating from a close study of such ceremonies as undertaken in this study, we now see the point being made by Horton, that it is only from studying the religion and its practices directly can we be sure of truly understanding the components of the religion in terms of the goals of the religion, its spiritual agencies, and the attitudes of the people to these agencies.

In conclusion, this study basically focused on the four definitional ceremonies in Igbo Indigenous Religion. To extend the findings of the present study to other regions of Africa, the following suggestions for further research are made:

- 1) A similar study like the present one is necessary in Ghana among the Anlo, in Kenya among the Gikuyu and in Nigeria, among the Yoruba. This will help to clear the discrepancy between the findings of the present study on the parliamentary or competitive place occupied by the

Supreme Being in Igbo Indigenous Religion as opposed to the dominant and commanding status apportioned to it in Idowu's (1973) study among the Yoruba; in Kibicho's (1978) study among the Kikuyu of Kenya and in Gaba's (1978) study among the Anlo of Ghana.

2) Attention needs to be extended to other religious ceremonies, for example, commemorative ceremonies in the cultural groups of Africa, other than the definitional ones studied in the present research. In this way more facts about the nature and content of African Indigenous Religion will emerge to augment the ones unearthed in the present study. The results of the present study have suggested that more about the Indigenous Religion will be discovered when other aspects of the ceremonies that could not be covered in this study are explored.

3) A larger and more detailed image of the nature and content of African Indigenous Religion may emerge if a more extensive study to cover culture areas drawn from the whole of Africa is attempted. The result of such a study may yield an interesting finding. In that way the chronic debate about whether to use the term African Religion in the singular or in the plural will become easy to settle. In that case, it will be cheaper to see at a glance the extent of the local differences between African Indigenous Religion as practiced in one cultural location and that practiced in another location.

4) Another research is also recommended on the study of Igbo religious rituals of parturition (*omugwo*), and scarification (*Igbu Ichi*) as a means for further gaining of proper understanding of the core beliefs, symbols and practices of the religion.

On the whole, however, by means of a close study of the definitional ceremonies in Igbo Religion as accomplished in this study the greatest pathway for the discovery of the key belief systems, values, ritual elements and procedures of the religion has been opened. Thus, the results of the study have revealed that Igbo Indigenous Religion is solidly grounded on a clear egalitarian belief on the Supreme Being, the Divinities, and the Ancestors and on well-demarcated values that inspire the life of the worshippers in the culture of the religion.

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