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AN INTERCULTURAL THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND
IGBO TRADITIONAL MARRIAGES

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Statement of independent work

Hereby I, Innocent Chinedu Orji, declare that I have composed the present thesis with the title: *An Intercultural Theology of Marriage Between Christian and Igbo Traditional Marriages*, independently, that I did not use any other sources or tools other than indicated and marked those parts of the text derived from the literal content or meaning of other Works – digital media included – by making them known as much as indicating their sources.

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an aspect of human life that is characteristically universal. The interest on marriage in this research is specifically born on the conviction that it guarantees the continuation and maintenance of the family, the Church and the society – locally and globally. This is beautifully expressed by Pope Francis. Thus: “The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church” (Pope Francis, 2016, n. 31). Therefore, the Church is expected to highlight marriage values in different cultures. This is because marriage has cultural nuances in its institutional practice and ritualization. In Africa, according to Mbiti, marriage is a “complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects which often overlap so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another” (Mbiti, 1990, p. 130). In Igboland of Nigeria, marriage is a socio-religious and cultural institution, and the ceremony is the official rite of passage into the family-hood. At the birth and flourishing of Christianity in Igboland, as in Africa generally, this socio-religious and cultural practice became dually celebrated. At that time, the celebration of these two marriage rituals go concurrently in a simple undertone by Igbos who are perceived within Nigeria as synonymously Christians. According to Ibeka, the people came to be regarded as “originally Igbos and originally Christians simultaneously” (Ibeka, n.d., p. 7). Thus, from the time Igbos massively embraced Christianity, Igbo Christians have celebrated Christian marriage after performing the required traditional marriage rites. This is to say that Africans, according to Ngundu, have a double marriage ritual celebration – traditional marriage rite on the one hand and the rite of Christian marriage on the other (Ngundu, 2011, p. 46).

During the heydays of the European missionaries, people normally performed the traditional and Christian marriage rites respectively. And without prejudice to the polygamous families and custodians of deities in the traditional religion, there was hardly any couple who did not perform the Church marriage after traditional marriage. In the recent time, some couples who have wedded traditionally are less resolute in performing the Christian marriage. In fact, when the growing Christian population is considered between the time of the missionaries and nowadays, Church marriage is on the decline as alluded to by Hastings. Thus: “Even in some old Christian areas where a tradition of church marriage has been established, there has been a marked decline in the number of marriages in comparison with the number of Catholics” (Hastings, 1967, p. 170). The same observation was also not debatable to Shorter who said that “marriages in Church are not keeping pace proportionately with baptisms” (Shorter, 1973, p. 156). It is remarkable that as far back as the 1960s and 1970s when Hastings and Shorter were

writing respectively, Church marriage decline is already notable. This shows that Church marriage decline is an issue that is not only recent, but cuts across Africa and beyond. Nevertheless, focusing on the successes of Christianization in Igboland by the early missionaries, one would wonder what went wrong, when and why? Apart from the factual impact of modernization and global development upon the generality of human life, the untold devastation of life and property in Igboland by the Biafra-Nigeria civil war [1967-1970] is dramatically contributive to Church marriage issues in Igboland. This is because after the war in 1970, the Nigeria government forcefully repatriated all the European missionaries working in this region – owing to their humanitarian efforts to Biafrans during the war (Nwalo, 2012, p. 148). The emphasis is that the few indigenous priests lost substantial ‘evangelizing powers’ in the name of destroyed schools and hospitals. Moreover, the missionary schools were also forcefully taken over by the government. Be that as it may, there is need for a new marriage rite or way of celebrating marriage that will, according to Ndiokwere, “bring out clearly the relationship between both rites of marriage and make the Christian marriage more meaningful to the people” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 134). Since the trend of postponing or dropping Church marriage altogether after traditional marriage demeans the values and riches of Christian marriage, and considering the complexity of Church marriage decline, this research will be exploratory. This is geared towards developing a new marriage rite, and at the same time explore a new theology and way of teaching marriage in Igboland which will be enriching pastorally and otherwise, and at the same time contend the major reasons or causes for Church marriage decline.

1.1. The Project Context

Igboland is the focus of this research. The Igbo people form one of the major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Igbo is both the language and the ethnic identity of the people. Geopolitically, it is the southeastern region of the country which is made up of five homogenous Igbo speaking states – Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia and Ebonyi States. In as much as Igbos are migrationally spread across the world, there are Igbo communities who are part of some neighboring States outside southeast. They include Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Benue States (Okuma, 2002, p. 69). Wherever they are found, they are always distinguished by their communal life and values. Marriage is one of those outstanding institutional values in Igboland. And the beacon of this socio-cultural and religious value is the procreation of children (Udoye, 2011, p. 232). It is pertinent to state that children are the ultimate reason for marriage in Igboland. And it is on this backdrop that Igbo marriage ritual

is constantly patronized and reproduced. This is because the procreative dividend of marriage guarantees the maintenance and continuation of the family lineage. And because it upgrades one to a special position in the society, marriage becomes an expected, aspired and desired status for every grownup. In fact, marriage is so cardinal because the community sees marriage, due to offspring, as a responsibility and obligation for the preservation of not only the family lineage but the entire community. It is on this ground that we understand Mbiti when he said that marriage in Africa is “a duty, a requirement from the corporate society” (Mbiti, 1990, p. 130). The social rank and nobility of any family or community depend largely on the human power and resources. The family and the entire community see the couple as worthy ambassadors of family’s posterity and community growth. For this reason, the community makes marriage an eventful celebration. And because human power and economic power are associated, many wealthy men in Igbo pre-Christian times married several wives. Discussing this form of marriage in Africa, Onwubiko elucidates that “both monogamy and polygyny (in the forms of polygamy and polyandry) were forms of African marriage situated in and oriented towards the realization of the family” (Onwubiko, 1999, p. 98). However, the massive Igbo monogamous life today is an eloquent appreciation of Western education and the Christian religion.

As a matter of custom, before the prospective bride moves to her prospective husband’s home or family, certain rituals are carried out. These marriage ritual practices are both socio-cultural and religious obligations. Unless the traditional marriage rites [at least up to the payment of dowry] were fulfilled, cohabitation and raising of children by a man and a woman is never tolerated. It was even more stringent in the past that “the only time when one expects a prospective bride to have any contact with the future husband and the family was after the official marriage rites had begun” (Okonkwo, 2003, p. 77). *Igba nkwu* ceremony is the climax and the last rite in Igbo traditional marriage. We remark that certain reasons or conditions can make the two families to leave off the marriage ceremony of *igba nkwu*. This can happen in a case of abject poverty, dependable bodily deformity or psychological imbalance. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of other rituals up to the dowry are not side trackable. This tantamount to saying that with the *igba nkwu* ceremony or paying of bride price, a couple is considered culturally, socially, religiously and legally married. This is orchestrated by Udoye who said that “after the traditional ceremony of *igba nkwu* or paying the bride price in some areas of Igbo land, marriage is believed to have been traditionally legitimized” (Udoye, 2011, p. 232).

Marriage between two families is a loving favor to and from the family that proposed and the one that accepted respectively. Because it is a happy extension of the family history, lineage, and socio-economic power and security. According to Okonkwo, “in the pre-colonial days, marriage procedures were simple and not heartbreaking for the man or woman desiring to marry. Bride wealth was then really a token of gratitude for the efforts of the girl’s parents in rearing her up” (Okonkwo, 2003, p. 67). This means that marriage in Igboland was undertaken on trust especially by the bride’s family. The family allowed their daughter or gives her away in marriage with hope that the husband will take good care of her. Also, the Igbos believe that *‘anaghi alucha nwanyi alucha’* [you cannot finish marrying a woman away from her home]. As is true today, this is founded on the fact that the woman keeps assisting her family back home in all ramifications and as much as possible. Likewise, when the woman has issues at her matrimonial home, her biological family avails their assistance. This is a pointer to the fact that marriage in Igboland is oriented on the union and oneness of the two families.

The emergence of Christianity and her rite of marriage in Igboland marks the beginning of a new dawn of meaning and attitude towards marriage. Christian marriage mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church, and as such, a place of meeting with Christ. According to Grun, “the mutual love of husband and wife enables them to sense what Christ’s love actually means for them. Through married love they constantly grow into the mystery of Christ’s love, which he completed in utter devotion on the cross” (Grun, 2003, p. 167). It is a rite of covenant with God, a special vocation of family life and a sacramental means of salvation based on love, trust, and fidelity. Christian religion reached Igboland first by the Protestant Missionaries [Christian Missionary Society] in 1846 and Catholic Missionaries [Holy Ghost Congregation] in 1885 (Amucheazi, 1986, p. 6). The subsequent mass exodus of Igbos into the new faith explains the double marriage rites in Igboland as we have it today – the traditional rite on the one hand and the Christian rite on the other. The traditional marriage takes place before the Christian marriage. This shows that Christian marriage never supplanted the Igbo traditional marriage. They coexist and celebrated side by side. This is because the Igbo traditional marriage practice is neither antithetical nor idolatrous both to the early missionaries and the present-day pastors in Igboland. Instead, the missionaries only impressed on the people the priority and supremacy of Christian marriage and worked to its realization. And till date, Christian marriage is taken as the validation of the traditional marriage. In as much as they have their cultural and contextual differences especially in their socio-religious practice and ritualization, they have more amiable properties in common such as sacredness of marriage,

indissolubility, age of marriage, pre-marital investigation, sensitive to impediments, marriage instructions and so on (Okonkwo, 2003, pp. 173-178). Interestingly, these two-faceted celebrations of marriage have gone on concurrently without frictions since the Christianization of Igboland. At a time during the prime days of the European missionaries, Igbo Christians came to cherish without measure the values and goodies of Christian marriage.

The missionaries built Churches, schools and hospitals in Igboland and these were veritable channels of Christianization. These can be described as their substantial ‘evangelizing powers.’ The missionaries [both Catholic and Protestants] were heavily active in the educational and healthcare services because of their schools and hospitals. The emphasis here is that couples or families necessarily need the Church – in the hospitals for medical help and schools for the education of their children. On account of this, people ordinarily listen and adhere to the teachings of the Church. We must mention forthwith that the compliance was never coercive nor compulsory but out of necessity and joy of ‘better life.’ It is this time that Anyanwu described as the tone of Christianity in Igboland. In his words, “the period before the Nigerian civil war, when Christian missions had a full hand in educational institutions, was also the better period for the tone of Christians and Christianity in Igbo society. It was when the Christian mind and approach dominated group and individual strategies for solving societal problems” (Anyanwu, 2003, p. 87). Consequent to modernism and development, the Church in our time finds herself in a different ballgame. As a result, people now have options for education, medical care, Christian denomination and even religion. In addition, the forceful takeover of missionary schools by the government after the Nigeria civil war in 1970 was another setback. Moral and religious instructions were struck out of the education curriculum – thereby limiting the ‘evangelizing powers’ of the Church. By shortchanging the Church’s missionary network of administration in Igboland through the schools especially, she lost one of her major missionary assets and tools. Surely, this has had some attendant implications not only on the marriage ritual but on other aspects of Church’s life in Igboland. Although, life-value and attitudinal changes is a global process of development, the dramatic event of the Biafra-Nigeria civil war and the government takeover of mission schools did not augur well with the Igbo Church and people. Anyanwu is right to say that “the post war period, when the government unilaterally took over the schools, diminished the influence of Christians and Christianity and unorthodox methods became manifest in Igbo life and culture” (Anyanwu, 2003, p. 87). In fact, the dramatic event of the civil war is virtually responsible for the unruly behavioral transformations. Describing the situation, Orji said: “By the end of hostilities in

January 1970, the Church and its property [...] were in ruins to the extent that all hopes for early recovery were lost. The unjust civil war ended up leaving Ndi Igbo (Igbo speaking people) devastated, psychologically disturbed and traumatized” (Orji, 2012, p. 153). This is the foundation of Okoma’s remark that the nascent Church “seems not to attend enough nor give satisfactory answer to their complex issues and situations” (Okuma, 2002, p. 17). One of the resultant challenges, which is the focus of this research investigation, is the trend by some Igbo Christians who, after celebrating their traditional marriage, postpone [and sometimes indefinitely] or forsake entirely the rite of Christian marriage. And it is good to mention directly that the context is not exclusive to Igboland of Nigeria; since most marriage problems are shared in other ethnic Christian communities in African.

1.2. The Conceptual Design

1.2.1. The Research Objective

The normative reference and the point of departure of this research is the era of the European missionaries in Igboland which experienced a mass exodus of Igbos into Christianity. In his appraisal of the predominance of Christian religion in Igboland, Anyanwu remarked that a serial penetration and productive expansion of Christianity in Igboland took place between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and 1970s (Anyanwu, 2003, p. 69). It is worthwhile to mention that prior to the advent of Christianity in Igboland, Igbos were all traditional religionists. The presence of Islam and other religions were completely unknown. This is buttressed by Anyanwu when he stated that “Christianity remained the only historic religion with structures and adherents in the area, challenged only by traditional religion which progressively lost ground to Christianity” (Anyanwu, 2003, p. 69). Within this period, people normally celebrated the Christian marriage after their traditional marriage. It was a time when Church marriage, with all the values and dignity that are attached to it, is taken as the validation of the traditional marriage. In fact, it was almost imperative that Igbo Christians planned and executed their marriage rite of passage up to the final ceremony of Church marriage – such that couples without Church wedding were as insignificant as nonexistent. Nowadays, the situation is no more the same. Some couples plan their traditional marriage differently from the Church marriage. After their traditional marriage, it takes some of them years, if ever, to wed in the Church. We recognize this scenario as a challenge against the continuation of mission work in Igboland and Africa in general. In his practical study of some parish registers of marriage, Hastings orchestrates the reality of Church marriage decline. According to him, a parish “with an average of 53 marriages about fifteen years ago has since sunk (with a rapidly rising

population: infant baptisms almost doubled meantime) to an average of 23. With priests so overworked, these little things may not even be noticed” (Hastings, 1967, p. 176). Since the Church cannot use extra-pastoral [punitive or legal] measures for her members, it is incumbent on the mission theologians to devise ways and means of addressing such pastoral challenges as this. We argue that any recommendation that is credible to be a solution, will necessarily overlap the boundaries of Christian and Igbo traditional marriages. It is such a pastoral bridge that is needed to assure a dialogical relationship between the two marriage rituals of Christianity and African traditional religion. Such bridge, according to Jansen, is a proper task of mission theology. She said: “Missiology is critical theological guidance for crossing borders” (Jansen, 2010, p. 45). Hence, mission theologians have continued to develop models towards responding to pastoral problems like the one under investigation. Intercultural and interfaith frictions are indubitable because inter-culture border crossings are occurring facts of history. Highlighting the intercultural excellence of missiology, Wijzen opined that it is a discipline which “deals with communication of faith across the boundaries of one’s own cultural meaning system” (Wijzen, 2015, p. 47). In fact, he criticized all forms of cultural rigidity and selfishness. In his words, “cultures are not only coherent and integrated but also ambiguous and inconsistent, not timeless (static) but dynamic (flexible), not closed but open to outside influences” (Wijzen, 2015, p. 37). This is the truth about intercultural theology which will guide this research.

Building on the backdrop of two-way traffic of intercultural dialogue and mutual enrichment, and maximizing the masterly and richly intercultural acumen of Frans Wijzen, we shall develop an intercultural theology of marriage between Christian marriage and African traditional marriage. The prospect of the proposed intercultural theology of marriage is to integrate the singular ritual of ‘inter-drinking’ of palm wine between the groom and the bride [which is the traditional exchange of matrimonial consent and the highpoint of Igbo traditional marriage] into the Catholic marriage celebration within Holy Mass. As a theory oriented practice, our objective is to develop an intercultural theology of marriage. It is a dual-pillared model of catechesis and interculturated marriage rite between Christian and Igbo traditional marriages. Catechesis is more pedagogical; while interculturated marriage rite is the proposed integrated ritual between Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage. The task is to develop a model of marriage rite that will be pastorally attractive to Igbo Christians on the one hand, and on the other hand, address the issues of Church marriage decline. The hunger and thirst for an integrated marriage arrangement between Christian and traditional marriages is already there

among the clergy and the laity alike. This need is captured by Ndiokwere when he said: “To strengthen the marriage bond and avoid dangers which might threaten the Christian marriage many priests as well as good Catholics are strongly in support of any suitable arrangement in which at least both the traditional rite and that of Church marriage can be combine or celebrated together” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 137). Therefore, we aspire to come up with a recommendation that will enhance marriage celebration and impact positively to the general wellbeing of Igbo Christians and beyond.

1.2.2. The Theoretical Framework

As factual as it is, problems or challenges arising from marriage is global. Possibly because, according to Hastings, “it is the nodal point of human life, the root from which all aspects of society grow” (Hastings, 1967, p. 162). The issues may vary from culture to culture in terms of emphasis and effect on the religious or civil society. Church marriage decline among Igbo Christians and Africa in general has continued to receive attention. The Church has taken resilient steps or measures to address this declining development. Some are very stringent. For instance, couples without Church marriage are banned from receiving Holy Communion, and are considered ineligible to head Church council and other cardinal groups in the Church such as the Parish Pastoral Council and others. Sometimes the punishment is drawn to the extent of affecting the children. Not only that such couples are denied the sacraments, Hastings observed that the children are considered “illegitimate and (in some dioceses) debarred from becoming priests” (Hastings, 1967, p. 168). On account of this, there is an ideological deviation from what the Church teaches about Christian marriage. Some Igbo Christians think that the “motive in contracting the Church marriage is the desire to receive the other Sacraments, particularly the Holy Eucharist. Even some men agree reluctantly to go in for the Church marriage merely to satisfy the nagging wives who would not bear the long exclusion from the Sacraments simply because they had not married in Church” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 143). In fact, due to their passivity towards the reception of Holy Communion, couples in this category are grossly perceived as less good Catholics.

However, there are some laudable and kind measures employed by the Church. Catechesis is intensified and diversified through the sodalities and organizations in the Church, the media and some cultural institutions. Another is the arrangements of what is called ‘Mass wedding’ at parish levels. ‘Mass wedding’ is a catchphrase used to qualify a scenario whereby a number of couples, even up to one hundred and more, got wedded in one celebration of Holy Mass.

The arrangement guarantees free financial obligations for the couples. As a matter of fact, “some churches organize mass wedding for members with little means to reduce cost per couple” (Ewherido, 2014). The parish takes up the financial responsibilities such as the stole fee, Mass stipend, managerial fees. The magnanimity extends to the costs for wedding reception which is the major reason as expressed by such couples. By this means, the Church bears the cost of decorating the wedding reception ground or hall, pays for wedding cake, band music, and at the same time feed and entertain guests of unrestricted crowds. In Owerri Archdiocese alone, virtually all the parishes have at different times organized mass weddings of diverse number of couples (Nzereogu, 2016). Interestingly, this strategy is also in vogue in other parts of Nigeria. In 2016, Catholic bishop of Lafia in Nasarawa state [North], Bishop Matthew Audu, celebrated the wedding of 109 couples in a Mass (Oyibode, 2016). Fortunately, this method is not exclusive to the Catholic Church, because it is also employed by other Christian denominations. For instance, 50 couples solemnized their union in 2015 at the Anglican Diocese of Ohaji/Egbema in Imo State (Uzoma, 2015). Although not verbally explicit, the brain behind this trend of mass wedding ceremonies is mostly to curb the issue of Church marriage decline. Taking cognizance of the more liveliness of the parish communities and the appreciation of those who availed themselves of the opportunity – expressive in their ardent commitment and support to the Church, it is indubitable that ‘mass wedding’ is a right step in the right direction towards solving this challenge of decline to Church marriage.

Nevertheless, some people are still reluctant to avail themselves of this vivifying opportunity. Such people wallow in a deceptive euphoria that ‘they want to organize their wedding themselves; mass wedding is for the poor.’ Many of them allow this deception till old age and at the long last fall back to the same ceremony of mass wedding. This goes to underscore the fact that the problem is beyond intra-pastoral solution within Christianity. There is cogent need for pastoral partnership between Christianity and Igbo religious culture. That is why an interaction between Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage is a veritable option. Marriage celebration is one among other frictions between Christianity and African religious cultures. To this end, Wijssen recommended interculturalism as a method of mission in the present circumstances of Africa. He said: “In our 21st century Africans cannot be satisfied with narrow-minded ethnic identities. They must go for concrete universality, without losing their particularities. This is what interculturalism is all about” (Wijssen, 2015, p. 177). Obviously, the Christian religion has done much in wakening Africa from the slumber of cultural narrow-mindedness. This is attested to by Udoe: “The encounter of Christianity with Igbo culture and

the Igbo people had advantageously opened new windows against cultural parochialism and culturalism that were sometimes dehumanizing” (Udoye, 2011, p. 15). To identify the particular within the universal has an enormous good and advantage. This is the motivation and the cause of action in this research – to have a ritual that will “blend the customary marriage and the Church wedding in such a way that the two will be accommodated in one ceremony” (Udoye, 2011, p. 232). It is on this ground that some African theologians have laid bare their thoughts – throwing their weight behind a partnership of the two religious cultures as solution.

Some theologians and scholars have put forward their recommendations as solutions to the marriage problems in Igboland and Africa in general. People like Cyriacus. S. Mba proposed that the ceremony should take place at the home of the bride, and the eldest man in the family is to preside. As the custodian of tradition, and after performing all his roles, the eldest man invites the priest who is present at the occasion [and his team: Catechist and the official witnesses] to formally ask and receive the verbal consent of the parties (Mba, 1994, pp. 23-24). Making the eldest man of the family the president of the marriage ceremony, virtually makes the Church’s position as that of a spectator. Moreover, the nuptial blessing – one of the essentials of Christian marriage, is not accommodated. In his own proposal for a fusion of the customary rite and the Church service, Ndiokwere supports the celebration to be held at the bride’s compound or any other convenient place. He said: “The place may not necessarily be in the Church. For convenience purposes, the place where the celebration of the customary rite takes place may have to be preferred. Not all marriages are celebrated within Mass and so the priest should be available at the venue and at the fixed time to join the couple together in Christian wedlock, using the existing canonical formula” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 138). This sounds welcome but, the details of when and who does what especially on the side of the traditionalists are presumed. Also, Patrick Chibuko is another theologian who developed an integrated marriage rite between Christian and traditional marriages. He recommended a ceremony that will take place within Holy Mass but at the home of the bride. He also proposed that the verbal and non-verbal expressions of consent be received by the priest and the head of the family respectively (Chibuko, 1999, pp. 12-14). As much as this is plausible, the Eucharistic decorum at *igba nkwu* ceremony is not guaranteeable. Not only that the crowd is a very mixed one [age grade, club, company or business associates – some of whom may be adherents of other confessions that are not Christianity and ATR], it cannot be easily determined. Again, groups, especially the groom’s community, sing and dance into the compound as a way of announcing their presence. This is usual, and the time of their arrival is not strictly known and

as such, can obstruct the Holy Mass. Whereas, the Church building commands, to an extent, a specific decorum to any crowd. And the catechetical aspect of this model would have done more good in this regard. In the same vein, Amadi-Azuogu recommended that the Church, in the person of her minister, should go down to the *igba nkwu* ceremony to receive the consent of the couples. In his words, “the phenomenon of *Igba-Nkwu Nwanyi* [...] represents a valid Igbo marriage. All that is needed is to confirm it in the presence of a delegated Church official, who receives the exchange of consent on that very day within this ceremony” (Amadi-Azuogu, 2000, p. 204). This recommendation sees the Church wedding as extra, and it is on this ground that he gave the Church a kind of guest attention. In his own proposal, Ibeka supports the motion that the celebration should be done in “the bride’s compound or village square [...] but not inside the church building” (Ibeka, n.d., p. 10). He further insists that though “the priest would act as the ecclesiastical witness and personnel for the Eucharistic celebration, he should ostensibly take an insignificant position in such celebration” (Ibeka, n.d., p. 11). If there will be Eucharistic celebration, then the priest’s position is not insignificant. Otherwise, he is suggesting a sequential celebration of Holy Mass and *igba nkwu* ceremony at the same place. This is already in vogue because some people move from Church wedding in the Church to the venue of *igba nkwu* – except that the movement from one place to the another is absent. And like we said of Chibuko’s proposal above, there is nothing to assure a reasonable dignity for the Eucharistic celebration. Finally, Nnabugwu is another scholar in our consideration that thinks that an integrated marriage rite between Christian and customary marriage should be done at the home of the bride and without Holy Mass. In his words, “the ordinary canonical form of marriage to be used, such that it is the parish priest or a priest or deacon delegated by him, who is to ask for and receive the verbal consent of the parties [...] A liturgy of the Word with nuptial blessing, and not the Mass, to be adequately incorporated into the traditional marriage ceremony [...] The customary role of the eldest man in the family of the bride with regard to the payment of the dowry or bride price and the expression of non-verbal consent of the parties to be respected” (Nnabugwu, 2016, p. 87). This could be considerable but it seems too imposing or strict by ruling out any possible choice for Holy Mass by couples.

One glaring characteristic that runs through the above recommendations is the choice of venue outside the Church. In most of the arrangements, the Church is made a passive participant. In the opinion of this research, ecclesiastical passivity poses a substantial risk to the spirit of mission. Thus, we argue that any recommendation where the Church is put as an observer will be a less option. And care should be taken not to make the Church a stranger in her own very

project and adventure. Granted that these theologians are promoters of the mission model of inculturation, they were working to give credence and value to the traditional marriage rite in the name of incarnating and indigenizing the gospel of Christ. According to Ndiokwere, “making the gospel message more meaningful to the Africans seems to be the central message of inculturation, enculturation, incarnation, acculturation, indigenization or adaptation” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 12). This is what made the proposals more emphatic of the customary marriage and its actors than the Church who is the initiator of the project for the integration of the two marriage ceremonies of Christianity and African traditional religion. The irony is that the work of inculturating the Christian message is given the priority while the worker [Church] is left behind. And this could explain why these proposals have had little or no impact in terms of acceptance by the bishops. It was Hilary Okeke, the bishop of Nnewi diocese in Nigeria who explains why the search has not stopped for a suitable marriage arrangement that incorporates the Christian and African traditional marriage rites. He said: “The truth is that the attempts to have a marriage rite that effectively integrates Catholic and traditional marriage rites have not yielded sustainable result. They have not satisfactorily met the canonical as well as statutory requirements” (Okeke, 2014, n. 36).

In this research, interculturalism is the mission model employed in the task of integrating the two rituals of Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage. Here, the Church is given rightful position, while the Church building is the venue recommended for the ceremony. It is good to state that instead of demeaning the Church or her position, it only behooves on Missionaries as “intercultural mediators” to “protest when cultural traditions are misused” (Wijzen, 2015, p. 177). It is even more supportive for the ceremony to take place in the Church because the number that attends to witness the marriage ceremony in the Church compared to that seen at the *igba nkwu* ceremony or wedding reception [bridal party] is very scandalous. Umezinwa shares the same regrets. He said: “Today many people do not come to the church to assist at the nuptial mass of their relatives. But they turn out in their numbers for the traditional wedding” (Umezinwa, 2014, p. 212). To conduct the celebration in the Church will be more advantageous because it will make a lot of people to be present in the Church to witness the ceremony. Undoubtedly, there are bound to be initial sentiments of bias, suspicion and coldness towards the innovation. Although, the services of catechesis will handle the sentiments, they are inter-culture challenges of which the missionary has “an important role to play in promoting this bridge-building process and reconciliation” (Phan, 2015, p. 154). Since no culture or religion exists in isolation of interaction with other cultures and religions, we are resolute that

the relevance of missiology will come to light more with the solution to Church marriage decline in Igboland.

1.2.3. The Research Issue

The era of the European missionaries in Igboland witnessed an overwhelming transformation of Igbo traditional life and culture. Actually, there was a swift movement of Igbo traditional religionists to Christianity (Ikenga-Metuh, 1991, p. 9). The area of marriage is outstanding because Christian marriage became not only the validation of the Igbo traditional marriage but also a cherished and dignifying celebration. The scenario was such that couples without Church marriage were virtually unknown. The implication was that the Igbo Christians perform two marriage celebrations – Igbo traditional and Christian marriages. It also became a challenge in the sense that the people began to live in dual worlds. According to Schineller, “marriage is celebrated in the home in the traditional manner, and then the couple comes to Church for the church wedding. Thus, many African Christians continue to live in two different religious worlds, that of their traditional religions and that of Christianity” (Schineller, 1996, p. 109). Consequently, some began to nurture the impression that both the Christian and the traditional marriages are one and the same thing. In fact, some feel that Church marriage is an unnecessary duplication. Ndiokwere observed that some couples operate on the principle “that Church marriage is less important than the traditional marriage. The former is seen as only a blessing of an already existing marriage and therefore unnecessary” (Ndiokwere, 1994, pp. 134-135). Observing this same attitude from another perspective, Burke expressed that most Catholics think that “marriage or wedding is just a more solemn celebration. Many looks upon such a celebration as being no more than another social convention” (Burke, *Catholic Marriage*, 1992, p. 19). At a time, some couples who have performed the traditional marriage rite, defer Church marriage to an indefinite time. Possibly because the Church lacks civil and cultural enforcing powers, some couples “postpone or delay the Church marriage” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 136). Comparatively, people take on the traditional marriage as a matter of obligation because there is no place for couples without traditional marriage. According to Ndiokwere, “under no circumstances would they be left free without fulfilling the important and most crucial marriage obligation” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 132). As it stands, some Igbo Christians wed traditionally and go on to cohabit and raise children without qualms of Church’s disapproval. Yet, they do not withdraw their regular attendance to Mass and other Church activities. A closer look reveals some allied issues underneath Church marriage decline. They span from wavering faith,

cultural issues about infertility and undue materialism. In fact, it is a multi-dimensional issue that needs to be addressed as such.

Be it as it may, when something considered as treasure begins to lose value in the hands of its owner, then, it is either the owner or the treasure itself has a problem. Christian marriage was a happily desired and well celebrated event during the time of the missionaries in Igboland. Substantially, the Christian marriage rite has not changed. For some couples to delay the Church wedding after their traditional marriage, makes us think that the issue emanates from a loss or shallowness of faith among Igbo Christians. And it is on this note that Akpunonu sounds a caution, saying: “Many Churches in Africa are often deceived by the crowds seen in the Church on Sundays and the number of penitents crowding the confessionals. It makes the pastors lose sight of a very important factor that the faith is only skin deep and when the going is good, all is well” (Akpunonu, 1993, p. 106). The faith issue of African Christians makes catechesis more emphatic. This is well remarked by Ikenga-Metuh. Thus: “In spite of the evident success of missionary work in Africa seen in the teeming numbers of Africans who have embraced Christianity, missionaries complain of lack of depth in the faith and commitment of their converts” (Ikenga-Metuh, 1993, p. 9). The problem of faith is correlated to the impression that traditional marriage is equal or equivalent to Christian marriage. The dilemma, according to Nnabugwu, is that “while for the Catholic Church, the Church marriage is the ‘real marriage,’ in the minds of most Nigerians who marry according to the traditional rites of marriage, it is the customary marriage that is the ‘real marriage’” (Nnabugwu, 2016, p. 70). In fact, the issue borders on both the Christian doctrine of marriage and the celebration itself. Therefore, it calls for deeper catechesis as Okonkwo rightly postulates: “Unless the faith is incarnated in the culture of the people, they will never come to see it as truly their own, but as a foreign importation, ever remaining marginal to their life” (Okonkwo, 2003, p. 1).

Moreover, Church marriage decline also has a connection to the friction between the Church’s stand on monogamy and indissolubility of marriage, and the Igbo cultural openness to polygamy. Some couples, after their traditional marriage, allow a testing period for fecundity or popularly referred to as ‘trial marriage.’ In the observation of Ndiokwere, some traditionally wedded couples purposely delay the Christian rite counterpart just to “prove that they can have children before embarking on the Church marriage” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 146). Because children are the essence of marriage in the Igbo cultural setting, polygamy becomes “the kindest solution in the case of the first wife’s infertility” (Shorter, 1973, p. 173). Also, the notion that marriage in Christian religion is indissoluble (Mba, 1996, p. 36), makes such

couples to wait until the children start coming before they tie themselves permanently in the Church. This warranted Hastings to say that “the chief reason behind the wide spread reluctance to marry in Church is indeed the desire not to tie oneself too absolutely, at least at first. People have heard it stressed that so much that a Church marriage is indissoluble and this may actually strengthen them in the conclusion that a tribal marriage is not” (Hastings, 1967, pp. 178-179). Again, the celebration of marriage in Igboland has grown to become flamboyant and materially competitive. This is so much so that show of affluence has dominated the social stage of marriage celebrations in Igboland. This is evident in most YouTube videos of Igbo traditional marriages. There, one sees a public show of affluence (Agu, 2017). It has become money orientated that the average person, who intends to marry, finds it difficult. The difficulty is a consequence of the material show and gain by the groom’s side and bride’s side respectively. This is to say that the financial pressure originates from the groom’s family or the bride’s family, and most often, both are responsible. The situation is such that a lot of couples go bankrupt after their traditional marriage. If you question them, they simply tell you that “they do not have enough money to embark on the Christian marriage” (Umezina, 2014, p. 213). Nevertheless, it is good to clarify that when people complain of financial constraints to Church marriage, they really refer to the couple’s reception after Church marriage and the cost of hosting the party.

Another issue which this research is keen to address, with an interculturated marriage arrangement is the duplicity of matrimonial consent. Ordinarily, Igbo Catholics progress from the traditional celebration of marriage to the ecclesiastical. But the scenario leaves a wrong perception of the Christian marriage as something extra or mere formality. To this end, some Catholic hierarchy like the emeritus bishop of Nsukka [Bishop Francis Okobo] directed that intending couples must first celebrate Christian marriage before the traditional (Aba, 2016, p. 228). The legislation is so strong in some Igbo dioceses that it was “promulgated together with an ecclesiastical penalty attached for its defaulters” (Ibeka, n.d., p. 1). On the other way round, the precedence of Christian marriage to traditional marriage seemed to worsen the situation because at the *‘igba nkwu’* ceremony the bride begins to search for the husband – giving the wrong impression that she has not seen him earlier (Ibeka, n.d., p. 6). Again, the Church finds this ‘fancy and fun’ as scandalous and unacceptable.

Considering the picture described above about the problem facing Church wedding, we are poised in this research to investigate how the Christian marriage could be made more pastorally

enriching to the Igbo Christians? And to what extent would it be a solution to the problems of Church marriage decline? These are the questions that will occupy us in this research.

1.2.4. Definition of Concept

This segment is the explication of some key concepts occurring in this paper such as Christian marriage, Igbo traditional marriage, missiology and intercultural theology.

1.2.4.1. Christian Marriage

Marriage is therefore a mutual bond of love that is open to fecundity. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], Christian marriage is a covenant of union of life and love between a man and a woman, naturally for the good of the spouses, for fecundity and education of their children (CCC, n. 1601). By this definition, our context of Christian marriage is Catholic. Hence, the proposed intercultured marriage will be between the Catholic liturgical rite of marriage and Igbo traditional marriage. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council elucidate that the conjugal life and love between husband and wife has been put forward by God. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48). This defines one of the qualities of Christian marriage as a vocation. So, it is the ritual practice by which Christians answer the solemn invitation of God to be His co-creator for the continuous human population of the world. And not just for procreation, but most importantly, it is a vocation to the task of mutual love and goodness of the spouses themselves. This is well expressed by Pope Francis when he said that the sacrament of matrimony is a vocation. He said: “Marriage is a vocation, in as much as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church” (Pope Francis, 2016, n. 72). It is also good to say that this vocational life of union is paddled by the couple’s faith in Christ for their salvation. In fact, Christ is the reason that distinguishes Christian marriage from Igbo traditional marriage and any other religious cultures. According to Burke, “it is Christ who makes all the difference in Christian marriage. Christ gives Christian marriage its unique flavor, its essential goodness, its ability to be self-sacrificing” (Burke, 1992, p. 58). The sacramentality of Christian marriage comes to reality when couples align the love between them to Christ in whom is their hope of eternal glory. Thus, “the spouses’ love for each other becomes the vehicle through which the faithful and irrevocable love of God in Jesus Christ becomes visible and tangible” (Beal, Coriden, & Green, 2004, p. 1246).

1.2.4.2. Igbo Traditional Marriage

Igbo traditional marriage is a rite of passage into the family-hood and is gorgeously celebrated by the family and the entire community. This is buttressed by Ogbeide in his statement that “marriage is a veritable rite of passage whereby a man and woman come together from different families for the purpose of living together, procreation and to ensure the continuity of community life” (Ogbeide, 2011, p. 103). In Igboland, marriage is beyond the nuclear family system – not just in principle but practically real. The concept has more to do with the entire community and its existential survival. This makes the difference between Western and African notions of family as Okeke rightly noted: “Concept of the family is wider than the Western idea of the family as a nuclear family. It agrees with the African concept of the family as extended family. The family is open-ended and integrates every person related by blood or marital bonds” (Okeke, 2014, n. 39). The Igbo family system regards all that are connected to the family either by blood or by marriage as members. Udoye reveals that common ancestry makes all family connections more intelligible. Thus, family bond “comprises consanguineous relations living within or outside the four walls of the family and the entire community or autonomous body, which traces its ancestral root and interrelatedness to an ancestor” (Udoye, 2011, p. 23). Therefore, the whole community gets involved when their member family is hosting *igba nkwu* ceremony. To support this claim, Ogbeide remarked: “Marriage is often a serious business that usually involves virtually all the members of the village” (Ogbeide, 2011, p. 109). Another point to note about Igbo traditional marriage is that it goes beyond the physical existence of family. There is a spiritual relationship, at least with the ancestors. Mbiti summarized it thus: “Marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born” (Mbiti, 1990, p. 130). In any case, Igbo traditional marriage is extensively a communal event and celebration, and it comes to successful end with *igba nkwu* ceremony. *Igba nkwu* ceremony is a major concept in Igbo traditional marriage which will be recurrent in this research. It defies proper English translation. Some Igbo localities express it as: *Ivu mmaya* or *ivu mmaya ukwu*. ‘Wine carrying’ or ‘big wine carrying’ would be the transliteration in English. And for want of better English expression and for consistency, we shall be using the term *igba nkwu* throughout this study.

1.2.4.3. Missiology

Missiology is variously understood as the science of mission, theology of mission, mission studies, and so on. For Wijzen, the use of the terms missiology and mission studies are synonymous. (Wijzen, 2015, p. 17). Thus, at the core of this theological discipline called missiology is the concept ‘mission’ which comes from the Latin word *missio*. Kollman placed God at the center of mission by describing mission as “the sending of the Son and Spirit in Trinitarian theology” (Kollman, 2010, p. 426). Identifying the *missio Dei* in the evangelizing mandate of the Church, Mcconville elaborates that mission is everything done by the Church for the salvation of all humanity (Mcconville, 2003, p. 664). This makes it easier to understand the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council when they said that naturally the Church is missionary (*Ad Gentes Divinitus.*, n. 2). An interesting import is the understanding of Church’s missionary task as one that promotes interpersonal and intercultural relationship. According to Nissen, “the Church, through its missionary concern, renders a service to the human world. It can help to turn human existence into human coexistence. In a world in which people go their own way [...] through the missionary vehicles of encounter and dialogue, they discover the grace of becoming co-travelers” (Nissen, 2002, p. 3). More so is the understanding of missiology as intercultural or ‘inter-missionary’ practice. This is captured by Phan when he said: “Mission is not something done by one group, i.e., Christian missionaries, to and for another [...] but rather something carried by both groups to and for each other” (Phan, 2015, p. 150). Finally, for the purposes of our research which deals with pastoral bridge making between the marriage boundaries of Christianity and Igbo traditional religion, our usage of the term missiology will be characterized by the emphasis expressed by Wijzen. For him, missiology is “the study of the church’s boundary crossing activity – meaning boundaries in both a temporal and a geographical sense” (Wijzen, 2015, p. 47).

1.2.4.4. Intercultural Theology

The mission model of Interculturation denotes a two-way traffic between two or more cultures. According to Wijzen, interculturation is coined by Joseph Blomjous [Dutch Missionary of Africa] in 1980 to signify a partnership between cultures (Wijzen, 2015, p. 171). This implies, for instance, that the Church’s relationship with other religions and cultures should be such that “one may remain Christian while at the same time recognizing the full integrity and values of other religions” (Uzukwu, 1999, p. 140). It is in this context that Dueck and Johnson defined culture as something that generates life. In their words, “culture is viewed in terms of the common beliefs, attitudes, and practices of a particular society, group, place, or time. In our

model, culture includes that which creates vitality” (Dueck & Johnson, 2016, p. 303). The mutual enrichment of cultural vitality is what is aspired in the intercultural model of mission as it concerns the fusion of Christian and Igbo traditional marriages.

Meanwhile, the ‘inter’ in interculturalisation plays a strategic role. Shreiter remarked that interculturalisation is at its best when the ‘inter’ [inter-zone] in intercultural encounter stand for some neutral zone of collaboration (Schreiter, 2015, p. 35). The ‘inter’ in interculturalisation, according to Wijzen, means ‘between,’ ‘from one to the other’ (Wijzen, 2015, pp. 34-35). It is good to mention that beyond the ordinary give and take relationship, the preposition ‘inter’ “establishes fundamental interdependence and equal relationship between the two groups” (Phan, 2015, p. 158). Not only that dialogue is the fundamental and most effective modality of intercultural relationship, it “engenders transformative and healthy space and time for identity formation” (David & Ogbu, 2006, p. 40). It is in this light that we apply the message of John Paul II during his visit to Nigeria in 1982 where he emphasized due respect to individual cultures. While reiterating the fact that the Christian gospel does not destroy nor abolish what is good and beautiful in any culture, he encouraged the enrichment of the liturgy with valuable elements of a people’s customs (Pope John Paul II, 1982). Uzukwu, presents us with a typical example of interculturalisation in practice. Thus: “Practitioners of African traditional religion (for example among the Igbo) sometimes conclude their prayers ‘through Christ our Lord’ when Christians are present. This is a fruitful encounter and a way the culture develops without losing its original core” (Uzukwu, 1999, p. 141). Flexibility and receptibility are qualities that enables a socio-cultural and religious enhancement. The worth of interculturalisation in use in this research is the understanding expressed by Wijzen that the universalization of cultures, on the ground of cultural interaction, does not make cultures to lose their particularities (Wijzen, 2015, p. 177). This elucidation should be a veritable tool in the hands of culturalists and interculturalists respectively. This is the type of meaning, according to Dames, that theological interculturalisation guarantees. He said: “The task of theological intercultural education is basically to transform the conceptual and operational system (worldview) of any given culture towards meaningful, transformational and hopeful living.” (Dames, 2012, p. 242). Theological interculturalisation as a mission model deals with dialogical and mutual enrichment of interacting cultures – geared towards meaningful relationship of people in the society. Particularly, it is preferred because of its dialogical orientation and foundation. That is to say that the interaction or interculturalisation between Christian and Igbo religious cultures can enliven the celebration of Christian marriage and address some Church marriage issues in Igboland. Other mission models such as

translation, adaptation, incarnation and inculturation do not facilitate dialogue (Wijsen, 2015, p. 174). Finally, our choice of interculturalism is made vivifying by Wijsen when he said that interculturalism “is neither a fragmented particularism nor a stifling universalism [...] Intercultural hermeneutics balances between universality and particularity. In this regard, missiology safeguards the differentness of people” (Wijsen, 2015, p. 48).

1.3. The Technical Design

1.3.1. The Research Strategy

An intercultural theology between Christian and Igbo traditional marriages is basically aimed at addressing the declining trend of couples to Church wedding in Igboland and Africa in general. As a theory oriented practice, our attention is particularly focused on integrating the exchange of consent in Igbo traditional marriage into the Christian marriage celebration in the Church. The Igbo marriage consent is publicly expressed by the ‘inter-drinking’ of palm wine between the groom and the bride during the *igba nkwu* ceremony. Actually, it is the inter-drinking ritual that makes *igba nkwu* the high point of Igbo traditional marriage. Ordinarily, guests make sure not to miss this segment. We think that when the two ritual actions of Christian and traditional marriages are performed in one ceremony, Church marriage decline would have been resolved. And because of the multi-dimensional factors underlying the Church marriage decline, we opt for an exploratory study using the strategy of desk research. A project of this sort, which is poised in contributing solution to Church marriage decline among Igbo Christians, would have been fit for a case study; but, because of the cost regarding time and space in realizing a project of this kind within few months, we opt for a desk research in which we buildup the principles and concepts that will serve as working material.

1.3.2. The Research Sources

To accomplish our objectives in this research, we shall utilize scholarly works bordering on mission studies, Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage and culture. Some theological and ecclesiastical journals and articles that are critically important to our subject matter will be harnessed. Other relevant sources on both Christian and Igbo traditional marriage will include papal documents, YouTube, newspapers, etc.

1.3.3. The Research Method

As a literary based research, we shall take cognizance of our research strategy and sources. Thus, in our literature review, we shall employ scissor and sort technique. According to Ryan and Russell “cutting and sorting involves identifying quotes or expressions that seem somehow important and then arranging the quotes/expressions” (Ryan & Russell, 2003, p. 94). This cutting and pasting or selection of relevant texts from our studied source materials will be guided or determined by our research questions. Also, in order to identify and generate more overarching themes and expressions, there will be some kind of maximization or minimization of the differences and similarities between passages and themes of a text(s) (Ryan & Russell, 2003, p. 95). Therefore, by our use and synthetic analysis of textual data, we will be able to achieve our desired objective in this research.

1.3.4. The Research Plan

This research work will be carried out in five chapters accordingly. Chapter one is the general introduction that describes the context of this research and as well as the conceptual and technical designs. Chapter two will be a panoramic presentation of the rites of Christian and traditional marriages respectively. Here, we shall evaluate the two marriage ritual celebrations with the intention of highlighting their docility for intercultural relationship and enrichment. Chapter three will be the development of an intercultural theology of marriage between the Christian and Igbo traditional marriage rites. Here, we shall show an intercultural rapport between the two religious cultures. In chapter four, we shall present the prospects of the intercultural theology of marriage in addressing the problems of Church marriage decline; and as well as the positive impacts of the marriage arrangement upon the Igbo Christians and Africa in general. The last chapter will embody the general conclusion and some issues for further discussion.

CHAPTER TWO: CHRISTIAN AND IGBO MARRIAGE CELEBRATIONS

2.1. Introduction

Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage have been celebrated in Igboland since the Christianization of Africa. With Catholic rite as the point of reference, we shall make a description of the two marriage rituals respectively. This is necessary to enable the reader to be abreast with both the rudiments of Catholic marriage ritual and the Igbo traditional marriage counterpart. This is in view of the intercultural theology of marriage proposed in chapter three for Igbo Christians especially.

2.2. The Rite of Christian Marriage

The rite of Christian marriage has continued to experience transformation both in its theological, pastoral, sacramental and liturgical celebration – especially as it continues to encounter other religious cultures. In African traditional religion, it has met with some conflicts. For instance, the Igbo traditional marriage ideal or value of procreation whose absence usually gives room for polygamy conflicts with the exclusive mutual love and fidelity of Christian marriage. This is noted by Okonkwo who writes: “In Igbo traditional society, childlessness is a lack, a disappointment and a deprivation of an important fulfillment in life [...] It is not a true marriage and most often leads to polygamy or divorce [...] This affects in a serious way the personal aspect of marriage – the mutual love of the partners” (Okonkwo, 2003, p. 197). Despite the level of growth of Christianity, Igbo Christians are still grappling with the issue of childlessness. In fact, blessings for offspring dominate the prayers of parents to their newly wedded children. According to Izekwe, “When a man gives out his daughter in marriage, one of the major blessings he gives her and her husband is that of numerous offspring” (Izekwe, 2015, p. 21). Therefore, not only science and modernity, childless marriage [which is correlational to polygamy in Igboland] has widened the intercultural consciousness of Christians regarding Christian marriage in its contact with African traditional religion. That is why the custodians and leadership of the civil and traditional society have their roles to play regarding marriage as rightly considered by Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. For them, it should be the sacred duty of the civil authorities to accord marriage and the family their proper status. It should be protected and encouraged. And the rights of parents especially for the education of their children should not be compromised (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 52). They furthered to recognize that “Experts in other sciences, particularly biology, medicine, social sciences and psychology, can be of service to the welfare of marriage and the family and the

peace of mind of people” [Gaudium et Spes n. 52]. This is the springboard from which Thomas sees the Vatican II as the setter of a new paradigm in understanding Christian marriage. For him, this growth “moved from viewing marriage primarily as a biological and juridical union to one which is more interpersonal, spiritual and existential” (Thomas, 2003, p. 264). As it stands, it is this interpersonal and spiritual undertone of Christian marriage that highlights the universalness of its monogamy. For Udoe, “monogamy as a kind of marriage system has a well-established claim of universality [...] It provides the couples the opportunity of living out one of the essential elements of marriage, which is unity based on conjugal love” (Udoe, 2011, p. 231). Nevertheless, it suffices to say that the preliminary requirements before marriage celebration are designed to serve the prospective transformations both in understanding and practice, and at the same time to contend possible excesses.

2.2.1. Preliminaries to Marriage Contract

The Preliminaries to Christian marriage are basically the spiritual and juridical requirements. Generally, the preliminaries play significant role toward solidifying the union of life and love between the couple. Cyriacus Mba vouchsafed that “everything possible must be done to assure a successful take off and the eventual maturation and stabilization of the union” (Mba, 1996, p. 44). Among the requirements are the pre-marriage instructions [spiritual] and banns of marriage [juridical] which are of paramount importance for the intercultural orientation of this research. Pre-marriage instruction or course is obligatory before the marriage celebration. In fact, the Church enjoins the pastors to ensure the maintenance of the matrimonial state in their different Christian communities. The Code of Canon Law harkens on the immediate assistance to couples intending to enter marriage (c. 1063, para. 2). Burke recommends that the course should be extensive to include other professional areas. Apart from the theme of marriage as a sacrament and all its roundabouts where the priest should feature, “all other lectures to be given by the laity, for example; the doctor on family health; the lawyer on family legal matters; the psychological counsellor on how to avoid crisis in marriage” (Burke, 1992, p. 14). These are intended to impress on the candidates the vocation and sacredness of marriage, mutual obligations to one another, responsibility towards offspring and so on. Judged satisfactory, the candidates are awarded certificates each. On the other hand, banns of marriage are originated from the parish where the wedding is intended to take place and sent out to the parishes of origin and residence of the candidates. The yardstick in Nigeria and in line with the recommendations of Canon 1067, banns are publicized for three consecutive Sundays in the

parish Church orally and in the bulletin. The publication and the replies form major part of evidence to pre-marriage investigations.

2.2.2. Celebration of Matrimony within Holy Mass

The celebration of wedding within Holy Mass or what is popularly called ‘wedding Mass’ is the incorporation of marriage ritual within a Eucharistic celebration. And the distinctive aspect and high point of marriage ritual within Mass is the exchange of consent between the bride and the groom. Another is the nuptial blessing. Thus, the wedding Mass comprises the introductory rite, liturgy of the word, exchange of matrimonial consent, liturgy of the Eucharist, nuptial blessing, reception of Holy Communion and concluding rite.

The reception of the bride and bridegroom into the Church and the procession to the altar marks the beginning of the wedding Mass. At the sanctuary, the presiding priest welcomes the entire congregation – followed by some introductory remarks regarding the celebration. The Gloria and the opening prayer take their turns as in normal Eucharistic celebration. Next is the liturgy of the Word wherein Scriptural texts for marriage from the Old and New Testaments are read. After the homily, the rite of matrimonial consent commences with the invitation of the priest to the bride and bridegroom to come forward. Meanwhile, the Code of Canon Law states that Matrimonial consent is an act of the will given and accepted freely between a man and a woman through a binding agreement for the sake of marriage (c. 1057, par. 2). It is good to mention that matrimonial consent is indispensable in Christian marriage. To this end, the candidates declare the words of consent themselves or respond, ‘I do’ to the questions by the priest. Exchange of consent is the couples’ symbolic way of total giving and receiving of each other. It is the high point of the sacrament of matrimony, and so essential that it cannot be displaced nor omitted (CCC. n. 1626). After the verbal expression of consent by the parties, the priest receives their consent and seals the marriage. Then, he proceeds to bless the wedding rings which the couple gives to each other as a sign of their love and fidelity. At this juncture, the priest prays for them, and there and then proclaims them husband and wife. When the couple goes back to their seat where they sit together, the prayer of the faithful is taken followed by offertory collections. Next is the liturgy of the Eucharist. In fact, it is the Catholic belief that the exchange of consent between couples is what makes marriage, and which in turn, is made permanent by God (CCC. n. 1639). The participation in and eventual reception of Holy Communion could be rightly seen as the liturgical symbolism of God’s sealing action. After the consecration proper, and before the Lord’s prayer, the nuptial blessing takes place which is

a special blessing for the newly married couple. There is also the ‘sign of peace’ and then reception of Holy Communion. The Solemn Blessing of the newly married couple and the entire congregation draws the wedding Mass to a conclusion. And procession out takes its normal course.

From the foregoing, one can deduce that Christian marriage is not an exclusive commitment for the intending couples. Beginning from the professional pre-marriage course teachers and one’s current parish community to the parish of origin or residence where banns have been sent, there is wider involvement for the good of the sacrament, the individual candidates and the Church community, all spurred by the same love and faith in God. This is rightly noted in the New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law. Thus, marriage is not just an exclusive affair between two individuals. It is a vow made in the presence of God and the Church for the good of the community (Beal, Coriden, & Green, 2004, p. 1262). The truth of this is buttressed in the opening statement of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis. Thus: “The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church” (Pope Francis, 2016, n. 1).

2.3. Igbo Traditional Marriage Rite

The rite of Igbo traditional marriage takes months and stages to be concluded. This is mainly because of the observance of the marriage timetable that stipulates when and what to be done. Generally speaking, the first step is *iku aka n’uzo* – knocking at the door literally, otherwise, it means the first visit of the man to prospective in-law’s place with a bottle of Gin. The man goes with one or two friends to air his intention, but usually considered unofficial. That is why some Igbo communities call this step *mmaya ekwughi okwu* [wine that does not talk in the literal sense, but means unofficial mission]. The next step is considered official when the young man goes with his father and one or two other community men. In all the journeys or visits, some stipulated bottles of Whisky are involved. Of course, palm wine must be there. Actually, the processes and requirements are several and cannot all be contained here, but it suffices to say that *igba nkwu* ceremony [paying of bride prize in some cases] is the apex and concluding step in Igbo traditional marriage. For Ibeka in his elucidation, Igbo traditional marriage has “stages and processes that are undergone before a marriage is said to be fully contracted [...] *Igba-Nkwu* is generally accepted to be the last of them all, since it is most often at this point that the payment of the bride-price is completed” (Ibeka, n.d., p. 6). Equally, it is pertinent to mention that apart from the so-called first and second step, the dowry and *igba nkwu*, the other

in-between processes are less pronounced. The material requirements, which carry the emphasis, have become monetized. In fact, economic interest has come to occupy the social stage (Edike, Ujumadu, Okoli, & Okutu, 2014). This is mainly because “increasing education, urban migration, and employment have created new courtship patterns that emphasize individual choice; these patterns, in turn, provide women with relative equality in the arena of sexuality and mate selection” (Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003, p. 169).

Nevertheless, an aspect that is pertinent for interculturalization is *iju ase* [ask about] – which is virtually equivalent to pre-marriage investigation. Normally, the two families, through the parents, investigate each other secretly. In the words of Ogbeide, “Parents normally carry out a thorough back ground investigation before deciding on whether their child would choose the suitor as a marriage partner. The parents would like to know if there is any genetic inheritable disease like sickle cell anemia or insanity” (Ogbeide, 2011, p. 109). Okeke emphasized that the pre-marriage inquiry is a diligent task by the families. He said: “The families undertake quiet but detailed inquiry about the prospective spouses. The family of the man carries out initial inquiry about the woman whom their son wants to marry. The areas of investigation include the girl’s parentage, her family background and especially the purity of the family, the reputation of the girl and similar issues” (Okeke, 2014, n. 52). If one family has a history of abominable crimes such as biologically related murder, the other party will diplomatically discontinue the process. This investigation goes on until the paying and acceptance of dowry is performed or ritualized. Secondly, the pre-marriage formation is done by the family in its extended nature. Unlike in Church marriage which is a timely course, the marriage formation starts as the child grows. In fact, the formation is holistic. It goes beyond marriage spheres to the education of societal and religious values. This buttresses the statement of Ekeopara. Thus: “The extended family performs the function of educating and teaching the members of its unit the correct customs and tradition or omenala of the society. It guides every member through a well-articulated practical system of traditional education to become good and obedient citizens of the society” (Ekeopara, 2012, p. 263). In the family where a teenager or adolescent is present, it is recurrent to hear such cautions to the girl: ‘is this how you will take care of your husband and children?’ or to the boy: ‘will you be able to feed your family with this lazy attitude?’

2.3.1. *Igba Nkwu* Ceremony

As aforementioned, *igba nkwu* ceremony is the apex and grand ritual in the Igbo traditional marriage. This is celebrated in a grand style and always a free-for-all banquet ceremony.

Meanwhile, the ritual act of *igba nkwu*, which is the exchange of vow, is signified by inter-drinking of palm wine between the bride and the bridegroom. For Ndiokwere, “the highlight of the traditional wedding rite is the final consent made publicly by the girl by way of handing over a cup of wine to the prospective husband” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 132). This drinking of palm wine by the groom and the bride simultaneously during the ceremony is the public expression and exchange of consent by the couple. The prayer of blessing by the bride’s father crowns the *igba nkwu* ritual act and indeed the Igbo traditional marriage. As a matter of elucidation, the bride receives the cup of palm wine from her father while kneeling and in a glamorous funfair escorted by her maidens, the bride goes to search around for her suitor. The traditional wedding video clip of Emeka and Odichi buttresses all these (MeetTheEkehs, 2016). When she finds the suitor, she gives the palm wine to him to drink. After drinking, he gives it back to the bride who also drinks. As the form of Igbo traditional marriage, “the bride publicly declares that she has accepted her suitor to be her lawful husband through a symbolic give and take of palm-wine” (Ibeka, n.d., p. 6). This is exactly the key ritual gathered by the public to witness. What follows afterwards is the entertainment, side attractions, band music, and serving of food and drinks to all and sundry.

2.3.2. Marriage as a Socio-Cultural Celebration

From the antecedence in *igba nkwu* ceremony, it is obvious that Igbo traditional marriage is a community and social affair. This is so because the entire family in its extended nature, the entire members of the community are involved and actively participates. In fact, the community is an extension of the families. According to Ekeopara, “The Extended family system is one of the popular and important socio-cultural and ethical institutions of Igbo traditional society” (Ekeopara, 2012, p. 262). Through marriage, families develop ties with other families of other communities. And as often as it happens, the family grows bigger. It is also one of the major dreams and joys of Igbos. In the words of Ogbeide, “the marriage system among the Igbo dictates that women marry into different villages from the one in which they were born thus creating a system of affiliations and communication larger than that of autonomous village” (Ogbeide, 2011, p. 104). Apart from the communal commendation of the couples to the loving favor of their deity, one major religious significance is that the bridegroom includes, perchance, the dead parent(s) of the bride in the list of those he will favor with presents. However, these have been suppressed by Christianity.

2.4. Conclusion

The discussions in this chapter have created an enabling ground to present our model of interculturated marriage ceremony between Christian and Igbo traditional marriages. It is our opinion that missiology has a task to build avenues of missionary successes. Intercultural mission strategy ranks high in the choice of this research. Rightly put, Dames said: “Theological intercultural education is basically to transform the conceptual and operational system (worldview) of any given culture towards meaningful, transformational and hopeful living” (Dames, 2012, p. 242).

CHAPTER THREE: CHRISTIAN AND IGBO MARRIAGE CELEBRATIONS: AN INTERCULTURAL THEOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The harmonization of the enriching values of the two religious cultures of Christianity and African traditional religion is imperative as far as interaction between cultures and religions is unstoppable. The integration of Christian and Igbo marriage rituals is the task undertaken in this research to affect “the life of the contemporary African in a complementary and progressive way” (Obinna, 1999, p. 10). It is quite needful because Igbo Christians “are still left with no other choice than to celebrate differently the traditional marriage (Igba Nkwu) and the Christian marriage” (Nnabugwu, 2016, p. 69). It is an issue that seeks resolution – considering the challenges arising from Church marriage decline. The recommendations of scholars discussed above are efforts towards this venture. And from their approach and proposals, one can deduce the different ways people view the issue. There is much recommendation for the celebration to hold at the home of the bride, but ours is from an intercultural point of view. Therefore, as a theological mission model, it is not like others that are virtually done for their sake – liberation for liberation sake and inculturation for inculturation sake. As an academic discipline that is theory oriented (Wijsen, 2015, p. 47), missiology investigates prospects and/or problems of mission. In this segment, we shall present the two-pillared model of intercultural theology of marriage: interculturated marriage rite and catechesis. Prior to these, we shall explore some notable interculturated practices in Igboland between Christianity and Igbo socio-religious culture. Using the valuable instances of peoples’ culture to communicate to and with them is solidifying and has always had a dialectical enrichment. Umezina counts the blessings of interculturation in Igbo experience and traced it after the exit of the European missionaries in 1970s (Umezina, 2014, p. 209). Let us now look at two of those instances of symmetry between Christian and African traditional religious rituals as to assure the interests of the reader and to keep the hope of Igbo Christians aglow towards the interculturated marriage rite proposed in this research.

3.2. Notable Interculterated Practices in Igboland Between Christianity and Igbo Socio-Religious Culture

Notable ritual elements and practices in Igbo socio-religious tradition have been weaved into some Christian celebrations. Some elements of Igbo socio-religious rituals interculturated with that of Christianity – making Christianity more lively and homely to the Igbo Christians, and

in turn become more dignified and loved. In fact, the intercultural relationships are overly inspiring. With his missionary experiences in Nigeria and Ghana, Schineller optimized that “liturgical dance, based upon traditional dances, adds life and celebration to the entrance rite, offertory procession and recessional procession. Liturgical music is based upon traditional patterns, with refrains and active participation by the whole congregation” (Schineller, 1996, p. 109). We recognize the intercultural strides in integrating certain cultural elements of the people into the liturgical worship. Abundant liturgical songs in the native language, use of local musical instruments, clapping and dancing are now parts and parcel of Igbo liturgical life. The synergy is so glaring that, nowadays, they look more Christian than traditional. Oduyoye is right in her observation that: “African musical instruments, lyrics and dances once said to be incompatible to a profession of Christianity have been dissociated from African Traditional Religion” (Oduyoye, 2003, p. 90).

From the foregoing, two notable ritual ceremonies of childbirth and funeral will be considered briefly. Firstly, the naming ceremony of a child in Igbo traditional culture is an event of remarkable celebration. Between twenty-one and thirty days after the birth of a child, a ritual sacrifice is made to the ancestral spirits in thanksgiving to God for reproduction. It is usually an elaborate ritual ceremony. As a caveat, the sacrifice is also meant to consult the oracle to know which ancestor has reincarnated in the child (Stevenson, 1985, p. 15). After the sacrifice, the family picks a date on their own volition to host the community in a sumptuous celebration. Arinze noted that “a big feast is made and if the father of the child is generous and grateful, he will not hesitate to kill a goat in honor of the ancestors” (Arinze, 1970, p. 29). In this occasion, the significant name given to the child is made public. For most of the names, the significance lies in their reference to the concept of God. For Ndiokwere, “these names are meaningful and their theological significance points to the root of the African (or in our case), Igbo concept of God. They are simply Christian names in their native and universal meaning” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 100). Mbefo provides us with such names that tallies with the Christian doctrine of God. He said: “The Christian doctrine of God has at its disposal a vast array of names which speak of those qualities which Igbos discovered of God in their natural state, that is, their state independent of positive revelation. For example, Chukwudi (God exists); Chukwuebuka (God is immense); Chukwuemeka (God is magnanimous)” (Mbefo, 1999, p. 48). Although, such God related names are in vogue prior to Christianization, they are dominant nowadays in Igboland in such a way that other categories of names are virtually no more – names which emphasize spirits, particular deities, creatures [viewed magnificent or mysterious], natural and

social events and occurrences, such as Agbarakwe [If the malignant spirit – Agbara permits], Agu [Lion], Okonkwo [Man born on nkwo market day] and so on. Again, with the advent of Christianity, those practices like the ancestors-bound sacrifices were stopped. Nevertheless, the gift items associated with the ritual sacrifice and the celebration that follows are now done in the Church way. After the baptism of the child, the family picks any Sunday of their choice and books a thanksgiving Mass for child presentation. On the D-day, the child is presented in the temple, gift items are offered to God. And after the Mass, members and friends journey with the family to their home for dining and wining, and other merriments. According to Umezina, “It is this practice that has been reformulated and is now known as churching” (Umezina, 2014, p. 211). Only that it has put on a Christian outlook, understanding and theology.

Another traditional practice that has been christened is the funeral ceremony. Basically, Igbos, in their cosmology of spirit world and material world, believe that life is not finished by death, and that death is not a barrier to the relationship between ancestors and their families. In their daily endeavors, family heads commune with the ancestors on behalf of the entire family. Succinctly put, “the dead continue their lineage system” and “there is a constant interaction between the dead and the living” (Uchendu, 1965, p. 12). This accounts why people are buried within their family compounds. Apart from the sacrifices that take place [which involves killing of animals in an uncanny way], it is offensive to the deceased to be buried outside his or her compound. And this will mean intermittent horrific experiences in the family caused by the deceased ancestor. Generally, during burial ceremonies in Igboland, as Arinze rightly put “the corpse is buried amidst sacrifices, other killings, and singing [...] series of ceremonies must be performed to enable the departed soul to reach the spirit land: Otherwise he would wander homeless and return to make life unpleasant for his relatives” (Arinze, 1970, p. 17). And partly to rid the people of ‘pagan’ funeral practices the Christian missionaries established cemeteries around the parishes. But this was received with little or no fancy. In fact, owing to the cosmology, it is believed that just as the family system is here on earth so also it is in the spirit world. Igbos find it abnormal to bury their deceased family member outside their compounds. So, ‘burial ground’ is less patronized. Nevertheless, anyone whose death is ‘mysterious’ [when the cause of sickness and eventual death is not determined, like in the case of a man who died out of heavily swollen stomach] or who died without proper reparation of his or her abominable act – is buried in the ‘evil forest’ or away inside the bush.

Whereas today, the heinous sacrifices are discontinued. And not only that Church members are given full Christian burial irrespective of the ‘mysteries’ that may surround their death, they are buried in their compounds. In the words of Umezina, “the celebration of the sacrifice of the Eucharist has replaced these pagan sacrifices. The Christian burial takes place immediately after the mass in the family of the deceased as it was done in the traditional setting” (Umezina, 2014, p. 210). Again, there is a ‘second burial’ ceremony in Igbo socio-religious culture which takes place normally within a year after the actual burial. It could also extend to ten years and more especially when the family members interpret their hardships and misfortunes to be the consequences of displeasure and anger of their ancestor. Hence, it is performed to help the deceased ancestor to achieve tranquility and satisfactory position in the spirit world (Stevenson, 1985, p. 16). This warrants a big celebration and feasting of community members, and friends. In place of this, Church members perform what is called ‘memorial service’ which is a thanksgiving Mass on a Sunday. After the memorial sacrificial offerings and prayers which are incorporated in the Mass, Church members who are also members of the community and friends will gather at the family compound to be entertained with music, food and drinks.

At a glance, the above narrated instances may suggest a smooth interculturalization. These ritual ceremonies as we have them today were not given firsthand welcome by especially the Church. But their consideration or trial period allowed these interculturalized practices of churching and funeral rite to eventually become the known model of their celebration today in Igboland. To the growing population of our time, these are the norm. Essentially, this is the expectation of the intercultural theology of marriage presented below.

3.3. An Interculturalized Marriage Rite Between Christian Marriage and Igbo Traditional Marriage

Enlightened by the above endearing intercultural practices, our interculturalized marriage rite between Christian and Igbo traditional marriages is a ceremony that integrates some enriching elements of Igbo traditional marriage into the Christian marriage celebration within Holy Mass. This comes as a utilization of practical demonstration of the hopes and encouragement of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in their prompting to the local Churches to borrow from the customs and traditions of their people everything that glorifies God and manifest the grace of Jesus Christ [Ad Gentes Divinitus, n. 22]. Like the instance of naming ceremony and churching, this interculturalized marriage rite is expected to become a norm after periods of practice. The choice of place for the celebration is Church building. Without prejudice to the

concessions and the privilege given to the bishop to authorize another suitable place, Canon law [c. 1118, par. 1] prescribes that the celebration of Christian marriage should be performed in the parish Church. Without delving into the preliminaries to both marriages as discussed in chapter two, we shall dwell on the celebration proper in the Church within Mass. The celebration has the following parts: introductory part, liturgy of the Word, rite of inter-drinking [non-verbal expression of consent], canonical rite of vow [verbal expression of consent], liturgy of the Eucharist, nuptial blessing, Communion, and then the concluding part.

Forthwith, the bride and the bridegroom are to be in their *igba nkwu* [traditional] attire. At the entrance of the Church, they are to be received into the Church by the priest. This is followed by the entrance procession while the choir sings. The procession is solemn, just like in a normal Eucharistic celebration. It is led by the altar servers – the cross bearer and two acolytes, followed by the bride and her bridal train, the bridegroom and the men of honor, two official witnesses and then the priest. This could be said to be the usual but it is only at the discretion of the priest. Because some priests also operate a different system whereby the couple, after their reception at the entrance of the Church, are left to locate their seats. Then the priest starts the procession with the altar servers alone. Therefore, not only expanding the list of personalities that will make up the entrance procession, it is put as a norm in this model. Hence, we recommend the inclusion of some key personalities in the procession. They join in after the two official witnesses, while the priest closes the roll. They are: the parents and siblings of the intending couple. The respective family heads, community heads, leaders of the men and women folks and traditional rulers of the two communities of the bride and bridegroom. Then comes the catechist or the catechizer. It is good to emphasize that these personalities will also form the procession out at the end of the ceremony. Inside the Church, the bridegroom sits at a different place among few members of his community including his father, family and community heads, the traditional ruler and men of honor, but at full view from the sanctuary. While the bridal train sits behind the bride who is sitting at the first pew from the sanctuary. The rest of the personalities in the procession, mainly from the side of the bride [her parents, family and community heads, traditional ruler] and the official witnesses should be given seats after the bridal train. The priest starts the introductory part of the Mass with the sign of the cross as usual. He welcomes all; and while mentioning the names of the bride and the groom, announces the obvious intention of the Mass. For the liturgy of the Word, the lectors for first and second readings, should come from the respective extended families of the intending couple but chosen by the candidates themselves. After the gospel reading, we propose two

options for the homily. Either the priest gives the reflection as usual or three persons among the congregation, who are living their married life. And from the wealth of their experience, give some practical reflections bordering on different perspectives of marriage. The second option is highly recommended and it should form part of the preliminary arrangements between the priest and the candidates.

The next part is the marriage rite proper or the matrimonial exchange of consent. Here lies the heart of this intercultural theology. Because the exchange of matrimonial consent in both Christian and Igbo traditional marriage rites is interculturated. At this juncture, the priest calls for the symbolic ‘husband-seeking’ by the bride which key-starts the ritual act of inter-drinking. Then, the bride goes directly to her father for a cup of palm wine. The father fills a small cup with palm wine and hands it to his daughter – telling her to show them who is to marry her. With the wine, the bride dances, amid fun and fancy, at a melodious interlude of local music. The bridal train escorts the bride – while dancing along and behind her. When she finds her suitor, she hands the palm wine to him and immediately an ‘inter-drinking’ between them, which is the Igbo matrimonial exchange of consent [nonverbal] takes place. From there, instead of proceeding to the bride’s father, the two proceed to the sanctuary. Then, the parents of the bride are invited to the sanctuary. The parents of the bridegroom and the two official witnesses are invited as well. Here, the bride’s father receives the consent of the couple and seals the marriage solely by his speech and prayers of blessings upon the couple [Just as he would do at a normally *igba nkwu* ceremony]. Precisely, it is this speech and prayer of blessings that we designate as the reception and sealing of the marriage. This indicates that the family is fully in support of their daughter’s marriage to Mr. X family. And to the in-laws, the bride’s father expresses their hopes and expectations regarding the wellbeing of their daughter and fruitful bond between their two families. After that, he dramatically hands the daughter to the in-law [groom’s father]. On receiving the woman [bride], the father of the bridegroom assures the family’s determination to take good care of their ‘wife.’ At the end of this colorful interlude, the priest continues with the canonical rite of consent which is the verbal exchange of consent. Just as described in chapter two, the priest starts by questioning the candidates. Afterwards, the candidates are requested to state their intentions for the marriage followed by the promise of love and fidelity between the couple and to each other. At this instance, the priest receives their consent and blesses the couple. Next is the blessing of rings. And the inter-giving and receiving of rings by the couple to each other encapsulates the expression of vows. After this, the priest

declares them husband and wife; and they proceed to sit together at the first pew with a brief interlude of traditional music. This is followed by prayer of the faithful.

Meanwhile, it is worthful to state that we are not oblivious of the Church's regulation on Eucharistic fast as stated in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. According to the Code, whoever wishes to receive the Holy Eucharist should fast for at least one hour earlier from food and drinks. Nevertheless, the law does not include water and medicine (c. 919, para. 1). However, for pastoral advantage, the diocesan bishop or the conference of bishops, from the privilege accorded them by the law (c. 1120), can grant dispensation specifically for the interculturated marriage ceremony. Again, since the law borders on discipline other than faith and morality, dispensation would be a perfect solution. Even, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council encouraged the local Churches to incorporate certain cultural elements of the people into the liturgy to enrich the worshipping community – so long as it has no connection to superstition. They went further to stress the fact that the Church is never rigid nor insists on uniformity in areas outside faith and the common good. Instead, she respects and fosters values in peoples' culture and religion (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 37). However, in the absence of such waiver of dispensation, water is recommended in place of palm wine for the inter-drinking ritual in the traditional exchange of consent. The celebration of the interculturated marriage without Holy Mass is another integral option. The nitty-gritties and possible agitation against the alternative of water is to be taken care of by catechesis.

Prayer of the faithful is another moment where the communal life and culture of the people can enrich the marriage liturgy and make it more participatory. Thus, we propose seven spontaneous prayers to be said by the following: two persons from the communities of the bride and the groom respectively [either the community head or the women leader]; two persons each from within the extended families of the couple; the chief bridesmaid, the best man, and then the catechist or catechizer. By this way, the deep sentiments and wishes of the families, communities and the Church for the couple and for all are captured in the prayers. This is expected to impress some positive impact on the couple and as well as the entire community. The next is offertory collection which is followed by the liturgy of the Eucharist. After the consecration and before the Lord's prayer, the couple is invited to the sanctuary. There, the priest gives the nuptial blessing. The couple maintains this position till they receive Holy Communion and thereafter, moves back to their seat. The rest of the rubrics in the Christian marriage take their normal course till the end of the Mass. For the recessional procession, those persons that formed the entrance procession will also process out.

3.4. Education and Catechesis

The importance of education for the holistic development of the human person is obvious. By establishing schools, the European missionaries maximized the tools of education to the advantage of planting the Church in Igboland. Because teachers doubled as educators and catechists, education of the people and conversion through evangelization went hand in hand. Rightly put by Anyanwu, “teachers in the institutions were also instructors on the faith, both within and outside the schools. Many served as catechists and lay readers in their Churches. It was unusual to have a teacher who was not also a formal agent of evangelization” (Anyanwu, 2003, p. 82). Although the government forcefully took over the mission schools after the Biafra/Nigeria civil war in 1970, newer Primary and Secondary schools have been established. Nowadays, half of the number of parishes in Owerri Archdiocese, for instance, own Primary schools, and about half of the number have Secondary schools. On the diocesan level, some model Secondary schools have been opened (Okonkwo T. , 2018). Also, there are few tertiary institutions established by individual priests and Congregations respectively. Therefore, this paper advocates that these institutional resources be utilized in an incalculable way to inculcate the higher values of interculturalism between Christian religion and African traditional religion. By so doing, such celebrations as interculturated marriage will become familiar and intellectually appealing. More so, we need some biblical catechesis to interpolate the academic knowledge to practical Christian religious life. Nevertheless, we allow the space for the options: the dispensation from Eucharistic fast law, the celebration without Holy Mass, and the alternative use of water for inter-drinking. Wherever the favor falls, it still behooves on the Church to maximize the tool of education and catechesis. In the absence of dispensation, the celebration outside Mass is a good alternative. But, it should be flexible enough to accommodate the choice of candidates for a marriage celebration within Holy Mass. That is why the alternative use of water for the inter-drinking between the groom and the bride is another option. Advocating for cultural dynamism and holistic growth, there are good reasons to make water a variable. Surely, personal choice or disposition, intoxication, medical situation and other warrants like the pastoral need of our current discussion can make water imperative. In fact, the rigidity in the use of palm wine is called to question. Because one of the clarion calls and ethos of interculturalism is cultural, ritual and religious flexibility. Nevertheless, the intricacies of the options are to be addressed and made good by catechesis. Highlighting the immeasurable success of the catechetical strategy used by the European missionaries, Udoe opined: “The missionaries were sandaled with heroic enthusiasm for proselytization and

making converts through direct evangelization. To achieve this, the missionaries used catechetical method. It meant a direct or face-to-face teaching of Christian doctrines, instructions and catechism” (Udoye, 2011, p. 182). Marriage issues are one aspect out of the many issues arising from the Christianity’s contact with African socio-religious culture. To move forward, according to Oduyoye, “we must engage the many forms of Christianity in Africa, and above all initiate conversations with scholars of African Religion” (Oduyoye, 2003, p. 106). It is our opinion that education and effective catechesis will win the convictions of the people and deepen their faith in the values of this intercultural marriage arrangement and all other models of interpenetrations between Christianity and African traditional religion. For the purposes of enhancing and deepening the faith and love for Church marriage among Igbo Christians, Christian and Igbo traditional marriage rites have to be harmonized. For Nnabuwgu, “an aspect of deepening the faith of our people that is still calling for urgent attention is the area of marriage, especially with regard to harmonizing or integrating the traditional and Christian marriage rites” (Nnabugwu, 2016, p. 66). Therefore, the need for the Church in Igboland to pay crucial attention to Church marriage decline and its multi-dimensional factors have become unavoidable.

3.5. Conclusion

We have endeavored in this chapter to present a two-footed intercultural theology of marriage: an interculturated marriage rite [between Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage] and catechesis. We argue that this proposal or recommendation is both a pastoral response and a catechetical challenge. A response to the complexity of Church marriage decline in Igboland, and a challenge for the Church to assume her catechetical mandate in deepening the faith and commitment of the Igbo and African Christians in general. So, for the good of the faith, we call on the Bishops, especially in Igboland, to continue to be pastors who bear the interest and good of their flock at heart. This is because, according to Akpunonu, “the Bishop is sometimes caught between being a pastor and a ruler. Even when he wants to be a pastor, constraints and pressures sometimes from his confidants try to make a ruler of him” (Akpunonu, 1993, p. 105). It is our opinion that the interculturated marriage model will give a long-lasting succor to the yearnings for a two-in-one marriage ritual celebration among Igbo Christians. Characteristically, this intercultural marriage arrangement gives the Church her prominent position and role as the advocate and principal actor in the celebration of interculturated marriage in Igboland and African in general. The motivation to interculturalize the two ritual celebrations of Christian and Igbo marriages is to make the liturgy of Christian marriage

culturally inspiring and endearing to the people. While at the same time undertaken to address some proximate marriage issues in Igboland.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROSPECTS OF INTERCULTURATED MARRIAGE RITE IN IGBOLAND

4.1. Introduction

It is an obvious fact that Christianity is a flourishing religion in Igboland and has impacted immeasurably to the overall development of the people. It is so much so that Igboland is seen as the cradle of Christian faith and practice in Nigeria. According to Anyanwu, Igboland or Eastern Nigeria is “the vanguard for the defense and perpetuation of Christianity” (Anyanwu, 2003, p. 70). Therefore, we argue that the interculturated marriage rite is a sure bet to vouchsafe for the landmark successes of Christianity in Igboland and its continuous globality. With it, the marriage related challenges under discussion would be addressed squally. The optimism is derived from the fact that no religious culture is static nor exists in seclusion. For Dueck and Johnson, “religious traditions do not exist in isolation but in the context of one or more other religious traditions and a larger host culture. Religious traditions develop perspectives on the host culture” (Dueck & Johnson, 2016, p. 323). Therefore, it is expected that this interculturated marriage will address marriage challenges such as Church marriage decline, excessive materialism involved in marriage celebrations, childlessness and the concern about the duplicity of matrimonial consent. Apart from the above impending challenges, there are also some envisaged positive impact of the interculturated marriage model on the people. They include: active participation of couples in liturgical celebrations, dialectical enrichment of the two religious cultures of Christianity and African traditional religion, and the quest for world Christianity.

4.2. Church Marriage Decline

The fact that couples wed traditionally and refrain or postpone the Christian marriage to an uncertain time could have much to do with lack of true or impaired faith. Although, according to Ngundu, “Africans have continued to look upon traditional marriage as a full, valid and legitimate marriage, and the required registration at the magistrates’ court or the subsequent solemnization of marriage in Church, as just the means of satisfying the civil or church law” (Ngundu, 2011, p. 37). However, if Christian faith is fervent during the planning of the traditional marriage, Church wedding will become the summit of the marriage celebrations as it was during the time of the European missionaries. Decrying Church marriage decline among Igbo Christians, Bishop Hilary Okeke, in his Pastoral Letter no. 36, said that faith is paramount for the celebration of marriage; thus: “What is required above all is faith commitment.

Catholics, who profess their Christian faith without due commitment to the demands of that faith, fall into the pit of living in traditional marriage without the Church marriage” (Okeke, 2014). In fact, the ideals and values of Christian marriage are so rich to make the traditionally wedded couple in Africa to celebrate Church marriage immediately after fulfilling the necessary traditional requirements. These ideals of Christian marriage are reiterated by the African Synod of Bishops as having eternal values. For them, marriage is a life of Christian holiness, a special vocation that leads to the glorious resurrection and the Kingdom of God (Pope John Paul II, 1995, n. 83). According to The Catechism of the Catholic Church, the grace of the sacrament of marriage sustains and completes the love existent between couples. It also strengthens their oneness and fidelity (CCC, n. 1641). Christian family depicts a community of love and faith, and which is made vivifying through the sacrament of matrimony. To foster this union of faith and love, according to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the couples need the grace of sacramental marriage in their journey towards the attainment of holiness in their married life. The same matrimonial grace enables them to welcome and educate their children (Lumen Gentium, n. 11). Following from above, it is absurd for a well-informed Christian to demean the values of Christian marriage. We argue that interculturalization, in the African context and practice, will stabilize Church marriage union by making it more community centered and oriented. Onwubiko captured it rightly in his writing: “Marriage stability in traditional Africa was based on the communal orientation of the family itself. This orientation was life-centered, people-centered, and therefore community-centered” (Onwubiko, 1999, p. 92). Therefore, the importance of in-depth catechesis which we emphasized is not to be compromised. It is worthwhile to mention that Church marriage decline implicates the European missionization in Africa. That is to say, the method of Christianization which was predominantly denigrating and condemnatory of African traditional religion and its adherents may not be dissociated from the current marriage issues. Ikenga-Metuh puts it skillfully, thus: “A century’s preaching of the Gospel in Africa has produced the paradoxal results of being simultaneously both a resounding success and a failure [...] From all over the continent persistent reports are received of African Christians who live double lives. They mix traditional and Christian beliefs, or syncretize the two sets of beliefs. Missionaries accuse Africans of a half-hearted response. Africans accuse missionaries of misunderstanding their cultures, and traditions. Both are correct, and none is to blame” (Ikenga-Metuh, 1991, p. 21). Be it as it may, catechesis is remedial and can be at its best only where there is a practical remedy to navigate towards. In this case, interculturalization which is dialectical and mutual in its giving and receiving between cultures is a mission model that will take care of such tensions

whereby the missionaries, on the one hand, were accused of misunderstanding African cultures and on the other hand, Africans are accused of half-hearted response or faith. Therefore, we assert that thorough catechesis on the current interculturated marriage rite and its consequent implementation will virtually bid bye-bye to Church marriage decline.

4.3. Materialism in Marriage Celebrations

On the face level, lack of finance has been given as the major reason for Church marriage decline. Yes, there is no doubt that emphasis on wealth – and its extravagance has taken the center stage of especially *igba nkwu* ceremony in Igboland. In fact, the benchmark of marriage is placed on finance nowadays (Anokam, 2014). The situation is better witnessed than just narrated. The scenario suggests that most people do not consider or care that traditional marriage is not the be-all or the only marriage rite as Christians in Igboland. Many people invest big money in traditional marriage as if the Christian obligation to Church marriage does not apply to them or that they are oblivious of it. This impression is well captured by Ndiokwere when he said: “Many young couples and their families spend life’s fortunes on the traditional wedding ceremonies while the Church wedding is relegated to the background” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 132). Granted that the preliminaries in traditional marriage are also money oriented, but it is the *igba nkwu* ceremony that drains financial resources as exemplified in the traditional marriage video between Jeff and Nonye (Agu, 2017). Okonkwo elucidates that a good number of couples borrow and spend themselves off during *igba nkwu* ceremony, and afterwards become bankrupt and unable to celebrate the Christian marriage (Okonkwo, 2003, p. 69). Ewherdo identified the reason why people go bankrupt after the celebration of marriage. For him, it is because some people want to ‘show off to tell the world that they belonged or are rich.’ This is funny, and that is why Ewherdo sounds a caution: “Do not plan your wedding to show off [...] Showing off is one of the reasons people borrow or engage in unnecessary expenditure” (Ewherido, 2014). Oduyoye directed the caution and advice to the socio-cultural institution. For her, some cultural amendments that will cut down material requirements, promote some level of simplicity in dress code and wise budgeting and spending will not only improve couples’ economic standing but will lessen their financial burden (Oduyoye, 2003, p. 100).

The above citations support the general view that lack of fund is responsible for not performing the Church marriage immediately after the traditional marriage. However, this is contestable because many of such couples who present finance as the reason for having not wedded in the

Church have also rescinded Church's offer to foot the bills both for the marriage token, administrative services and their reception after Mass. For instance, in St Peter Catholic Church Egbeada of Owerri Archdiocese Nigeria where I served as the pastor for four years [2011-2015], the parish organized 'Mass Wedding' twice – Dec. 2011 and Nov. 2012 respectively. The parish took care of virtually everything monetary about the wedding from the marriage ceremony in the Church to the reception hall for the bridal party. Yet, some traditionally wedded members of the Church, upon visitations and consultations by certain Church officers as well, refused to avail themselves of both first and second opportunities in the parish. Though, such people usually and easily present money as the cause of their Church marriage decline, but it becomes obvious that the problem is beyond financial predicament. Indeed, it borders more on faith as discussed above. Be it as it may, their status as non-wedded members and their refusal to 'mass wedding' opportunities do not make them to stop their participation from Church activities. Therefore, there are chances that the reason for their Church marriage decline is something more in addition to lack of genuine faith in Christian marriage. Reasonably, by the time this intercultural marriage model comes into operation, wanton materialism is expected to be cut halfway at least. The logic is simple – instead of hosting two separate money-gulping ceremonies of igba nkwu and bridal party [wedding reception], one ceremony will be hosted. Instead of feasting virtually the same guests twice, one gathering will be catered for. Instead of worrying to spend almost the same amount of money and other resources at two different occasions, the headache will be reduced to one occasion. This will be the feat of the interculturated marriage arrangement in this research regarding the undue inclination to materialism.

4.4. Childlessness

Ordinarily, one of the cardinal ends of marriage for average Igbo person is offspring. This is made clear by Izekwe in his statement, thus: "Marriage for the Igbo is solely for the purpose of procreation. The Igbo see sex as a process of making children [...] Marriage is valued greatly because of the children that are hoped will follow the marriage. A marriage that has no children has, thus, lost its value among the Igbo" (Izekwe, 2015, p. 21). That is why the absence of children in marriage, in the face of monogamy and indissolubility of Christian marriage, is found distasteful among the Igbo Christians. To boycott or avoid such an unwanted experience, some Igbo Christians resorted to trial marriage. 'Trial marriage' is a term that describes a situation where a man, after the traditional wedding, consciously allows a time to test the fecundity of their union. According to Izekwe, "many Igbo engage in trial marriages [...]"

aim is to make sure the woman conceives or had some children before contracting Christian marriage which is an irrevocable union” (Izekwe, 2015, p. 72). Nevertheless, it is good to remark that childlessness is never given by any man as the reason for placing the Church marriage on hold. Instead, such men usually push reasons as this to bear on financial constraints. And like we stated above, this is far from pecuniary impediment for most of them. Nevertheless, the clear cause of this phenomenon could be the tension highlighted above between the indissolubility of monogamous union in Christian marriage and the problem of childlessness in Igbo traditional setting. Emphatically, “Childlessness is a terrible misfortune for an Igbo person – because children are taken not only as life wire of ancestral community but also as socio-economic investment” (Udoye, 2011, p. 231). The fulcrum of the matter is because children are the essence of marriage. And for this reason, Okeke reveals: “Some delay the Church marriage until they are sure of one another and also about the fruitfulness of the marriage before committing themselves to life-long union which they believe Church marriage entails” (Okeke, 2014, n. 35). Ordinarily, childlessness was never a big problem since the Igbo culture accommodates or even encourages more than one wife. The monogamous doctrine of Christianity on marriage becomes a major factor that plays down the enthusiasm of such category of couples to celebrate Church marriage immediately after their traditional marriage. It is on this kind of friction between the values of Christianity and other religious cultures that Pope Francis insists that the impasse should be investigated and rectified. In his words: “Different communities will have to devise more practical and effective initiatives that respect both the Church’s teaching and local problems and needs.” (Pope Francis, 2016, n. 199). This is one of the motives envisaged in the marriage model of this research.

As we mentioned earlier, more issues may be responsible for Church marriage decline. Not only lack of faith and extravagancy but also this underground mentality of trial marriage due to childlessness. It is worthwhile to observe that the perceived utter indissolubility in Christian marriage made some couples to remain non-Church wedded. For such couples, it is a safer option. According to Ndiokwere, “for both the young couples and their families, it is a ‘lesser evil’ to break the pre-marital relationship rule than to suffer the calamity of childless marriage” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 133). Thus, together with catechesis, this two-in-one marriage rite as recommendation in this research is expected to address the mentality of deferring or skipping Church marriage because of the phobia of childlessness. This is the reason why strong faith in Christian marriage is fundamental. Because fear of childlessness in marriage is a substantial sign of a one-sided view of life and marriage in particular. Otherwise, the Church teaches that

through the sacrament of matrimony, Christian couples receive the grace of Christ. And by so doing, Christ becomes the center of their married life to strengthen them especially in times of affliction. Christ is also the reason of their unflinching love for each other (CCC., n. 1642). Moreover, it should be catechetically impressed upon the Igbo Christians that childlessness is a possible outcome in life, and as such, not a problem as far as faith in Christianity is concerned. As a fact of life, Izekwe made it an imperative upon the mission agents and pastoral care givers to be dutiful in proper education of their communities about Christian marriage and childlessness. He said: “We must have to come to terms with the fact that not all can bear children. It is never the right of any one, any couple to have children. Children must be seen and appreciated as gift, gift from God the creator of man and woman” (Izekwe, 2015, p. 254). In this respect, Shorter rightly said: “Christian marriage ideal includes a readiness to accept barrenness as well as fruitfulness from his hand” (Shorter, 1973, p. 182). Therefore, we argue that the theology of interculturalism will also affect some socio-cultural and religious assumptions. For instance, the interaction of the two marriage rituals of Christianity and African traditional religion as presented in this research will be able to address the cultural assumptions regarding childlessness as a reason for Church marriage decline.

4.5. Duplicity of Matrimonial Consent

Apart from the issue of faith, materialism and childlessness, it is also factual that the whole idea of going through the ordeal of double matrimonial rites of Igbo marriage and later Christian marriage is tiresome and time consuming. Ngundu points out the danger of allowing two separate marriage rites to subsist among African Christians. He said: “The modern Church in sub-Saharan Africa needs to reconcile the two marriage systems. A consequence of the current approach [...] is that the wedding is regarded by most African participants as a duplication of an earlier marriage ceremony” (Ngundu, 2011, p. 46). Whereas, the irony is that “most Igbo Christians do not understand that the Catholic Church recognizes the traditional marriage as only a preparation and a prerequisite for the real marriage which is Church marriage” (Okeke, 2014, n. 35). For the advocates of unification, it has become expedient for the two marriage rituals of Christian and traditional marriages to be done in one ceremony, and at the same place and time (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 133).

On another note, the precedence of *igba nkwu* ceremony to Church marriage which is normally regarded as a necessary prelude to Christian marriage came under question. Ordinarily, Christian marriage is held, since the early missionaries, as validating and encapsulating

marriage among Igbo Christians. But the contending impression that traditional marriage is more important, portray Church marriage as mere formality. The public exchange of consent at *igba nkwu* ceremony, marked by the inter-drinking of palm wine between the groom and the bride, and the follow-up prayer of bride's father, validates, seals and legalizes the union. For the Catholics who belong to this school of thought, Church marriage is celebrated in order not to be denied full Christian rights such as Holy Communion and burial. This is clearly stated in the words of Ndiokwere: "Often the motive in contracting the Church marriage is the desire to receive the other Sacraments, particularly the Holy Eucharist [...] Otherwise for the majority who plan Church ceremony, the real marriage has already taken place" (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 143). Some practical measures are to be taken against this type of perception by the Church hierarchy. Taking the bull by the horn, the bishop of Nsukka diocese in Nigeria gave instructions mandating his priests to celebrate the Christian marriage before the traditional *igba nkwu* ceremony. This directive was carried by the Sunday bulletin of 28th February 2008, and emphasized in their 2009 priests' postings. Aba, who followed the development, quoted the 2009 Priests Postings [n. 5] of the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka. It reads: "Remember that Sacramental wedding should be celebrated first before *igba nkwu* (Traditional marriage) and no priest is authorized to officiate over the wedding of any couple that has earlier celebrated the *igba nkwu* (Traditional marriage)" (Aba, 2016, pp. 228-229). Surely, the reactions were many and varied. Among the affirmative comments were the commendation that the bishop has acted well. For such opinions, the Christian marriage is the only rite that can declare Christian man and woman as husband and wife officially. Multiple exchange of consent or vows creates the need for its precedence (Aba, 2016, p. 232).

However, the idea of celebrating Christian marriage before the traditional, instead of the other way round, did not go down well. With this arrangement, the traditional marriage becomes the validator of Christian marriage. Ibeka, who narrates this impression, said that the new protocol "presents a scenario whereby the church unites a couple matrimonially, and then the traditional community confirms, certifies and ratifies the union with the *Igba-Nkwu* ceremony" (Ibeka, n.d., p. 1). Moreover, at *igba nkwu* ceremony, the bride searches for her suitor in a colorful fun – insinuating that she has not seen or known him earlier. This 'stage pretense' carries a wrong perception against the Christian marriage which has been celebrated earlier. Following from the above, it means that the procedure of traditional marriage before Church marriage or the reverse, is not accommodating the marriage ideals and values of both Christian and Igbo

religious cultures. Thus, duplicity of matrimonial consent is one of the marriage ills in Igboland that the interculturated marriage rite presented in this research is expected to be a solution.

4.6. Active Participation of Couples in Liturgical Celebrations

Christianity has been deeply rooted in Igboland. In fact, the name Christian has become a synonym to any Igbo person in Nigeria. In the words of Udoye, “Christianity surely has come to stay in Igbo land and Africa in general [...] Christianity is growing every day in number and new Churches are springing up” (Udoye, 2011, p. 263). The emphasis is that variant or disintegrating conditions should not be allowed to persist among Igbo Christians. Time is due to bridge the gap between the two marriage ritual ceremonies of Christian and Igbo traditional religions. Marriage related mutual exclusions has done more harm to especially Christianity which professes love as part of its foundational principle. Ngundu described an abusive situation. He said: “Many an African Christian couple has been subjected to unnecessary and humiliating public discipline for having consummated their marriage after the customary marriage celebration but before a Church wedding” (Ngundu, 2011, p. 51). In Isuikwuato of Abia State, Southeast Nigeria, there was an issue where some women were mutually excluded in the very group they legitimately belong. This is particularly challenging because it is a socio-cultural association that is not linked to Church affairs. It is comprised of Catholics, Protestants and traditional religionists. Whether wedded in the Church or not, so long as a woman is duly marriage customarily, she is ipso facto a member. Since they were in the majority, the Christian wedded among them distinguished themselves as *Ndi Ezinne* [Good mothers] – insinuating that those who were not wedded in the Church have lower status. They translated this attitude into the activities of the association, such that at social celebrations, preferential treatments in the likes of first class food, drinks and other privileges were accorded to them; and yet the financial obligations were equal. The verbal torture was even worst. The Catholics and other Christians in the group who were not wedded in the Church endured all this and more until there was an open revolt. This is only an eye opener to the magnitude trauma, humiliation and inhumanity meted out against those without Church wedding especially among the women folk. Not only that such behaviors are a contempt to human rights, they are grossly unchristian.

Within the Church circle, especially in the Catholic Church, couples without Church marriage are object of discrimination. Not only that they are excluded from receiving Holy Communion, they are denied befitting Christian burial at death. These are some of the yawning conditions that an interculturated marriage model of our type will address – one that will interculturally

satisfy the canonical and liturgical requirements of the Church. When the hierarchy considers the implementation of this marriage recommendation, it will, according to Nnabugwu, “eliminate the dichotomy and duplication of marriage rites and allow Nigerian Christians to celebrate their marriage in a meaningful culturally relevant ceremony that is compatible with Christian doctrine and discipline” (Nnabugwu, 2016, p. 66).

4.7. Mutual Enrichment of the Two Religious Cultures

The fruits of a socio-cultural and religious interaction between Christianity and African traditional religion cannot be exhaustive. Such mutual and dialogical encounter will enrich both religious cultures. A two-way traffic or dialectical give and take of socially enriching and interhuman relational values is deemed one of the needs of modern society. Therefore, borrowing between cultures is not only a fact of history but also a necessary and wholesome adventure. This is rightly orchestrated by Umezina in his point that inter-borrowing between cultures improves the quality of human life. He said: a cultural group should “borrow from other cultures to enrich its own culture. In fact, it is imperative for it to do so since the ultimate aim and indeed the *raison d’être* of every culture is to improve the quality of life and the welfare of a cultural group. That is why culture ought to be dynamic. Any cultural group that closes itself up completely to the external influences suffocates itself” (Umezina, 2014, p. 201). Marriage is an aspect of social life – the celebration of which enhances human life. Pastorally, this is the end target of the interculturated marriage model for Igbo Christians and Africa in general as inspired by the mission theology of interculturalism. And it is projected to make marriage celebration in Igboland interculturally treasurable, simpler and enriching. The landmark intercultural achievements in funeral and childbirth rites among others, as discussed above, are results of intercultural dialogical relationship. That is why Maluleke opined that “African Christianity exists in dialogue, in comparison and in exchange” (Maluleke, 2011, p. 112). Putting it as an imperative, Jansen recommends that missiology should inflame the desire among people the possibility of equal dialogical comparison and reciprocity in relationship among cultures (Jansen, 2010, p. 53). Every culture has something valuable to offer to and receive from other cultures since no culture is unilateral nor comprehensive. In fact, the principle of reciprocity, according to Wijzen, has a wide range acceptance in the theory of interculturalism. It is on this benchmark, he continued, that “missionaries who have learnt from the errors of the past are increasingly emphasizing that communication between Africans and Europeans is a two-way traffic, not propaganda but dialogue” (Wijzen, 2015, p. 188). Such dialogical and healthy comparison and enrichment between cultures is what makes intercultural

theology not only the default mission method in this research but also the missionary option for the 21st century Africa.

Remarkably, we recognize that there are bound to be challenges in intercultural arrangement of this sort. But, it is insightful to get the position of Dames about tensions against cultural growth. He said that in the face of cultural pluralism, theological learning will experience enormous challenges. He further postulated that interculturality would be the preferable answer which will vouchsafe for a dynamic interaction and communication between cultures (Dames, 2012, p. 239). David and Kalu highlighted that interculturality envisages a mutual give and take. Thus: “An intercultural approach is a shift toward a multicultural engagement that facilitates the possibility of various cultures [...] of negotiating values, practices, and even identities in order to live a more sustainable shared [teaching and learning] life” (David & Ogbu, 2006, p. 30). Whereas, the collaborative importance of mission theology is emphasized by Phan while writing on the perspective of mission in Asia. He said: “Implicit in this theology of mission is the notion that mission is a collaborative enterprise in which both Christian missionaries and the *gentes Asiae* are engaged and which they help each other carry out” (Phan, 2015, p. 158). Therefore, the mutuality and complementarity between Christian and Igbo traditional marriage cultures will, in no small way, touch, reflect and transform the socio-cultural and religious sentiments of Igbo Christians about marriage. It will deepen faith in Christianity among Igbos and ensure better internalization of the ideals and values of Christian marriage. It will encourage better liturgical participation and impact. Pertinently, Christian marriage, under the Marriage Act 2004 [Sections 21 and 42] of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, enjoys no legal status and consequently, its officiating ministers are not recognized by law. But the Marriage Act maintains due recognition and legality to customary marriage. Therefore, the celebration of the interculturated marriage rite will accord Church marriage a legal status. On the other hand, Christian marriage will upgrade and dignify traditional marriage and discharged it of syncretic elements and tendencies. Thus, the interculturated marriage rite will enhance and beautify communal life of the people and add the taste of Igbo religious culture to the celebration of marriage in the global Christianity.

As a matter of fact, the relationship we envision between Christian and Igbo traditional marriages is adequately portrayed in the adage: *Aka nri kwoo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwoo aka nri* [When the right hand washes the left hand, the left hand in turn will wash the right hand]. The message is not just the dialectical washing of hands, but that it takes the two to achieve the goal of clean hands. This is a picture of interculturalization at its best. Therefore, it takes the two

religious cultures, or better, the custodians of the Catholic Church in Igboland and the counterparts in Igbo cultural society to realize the objective goals of unified marriage rite among Igbo Christians to begin with. Actually, “the synthesis of faith and cultural elements enriches the Church and makes it strong” (Umezina, 2014, p. 203). We state that the combined action of the custodians will drastically cut down materialism in marriage celebrations. Concern over double marriage consent or rite will automatically be evaporated. The religious and socio-cultural belongings will be all inclusive. And at the end of the journey, we would be able to say practically that Church marriage “would not only be Igbo, but also Catholic and Christian” (Ibeka, n.d., p. 9).

4.8. Interculturated Marriage and Global Christianity

The more a culture interacts with other cultures, the more multicultural it becomes, and in the same trend, more global. That is why the interculturated marriage model between Christian and Igbo marriages is a right step in the right direction of globality. It positions Igbo traditional and religious culture in the global sphere of Christianity from the perspective of marriage. In support of this point, Dueck and Johnson elucidated that “religious transformation is then construed as an individual or group moving toward, adopting, or adhering to a normative culture or dimension of culture different from the one the individual or group was socialized into” (Dueck & Johnson, 2016, p. 307). Today, we hear about the popular Zairean Eucharistic liturgy which was born out of the Roman Missal, the Zairean model of assembly and the role of the Zairean native king (Chase, 2013, p. 31). Thus, it is a product of interculturalization – intercultural dialogue between Christianity and the indigenous Zairean culture. Irrespective of the possible issues arising from the fusion of Christian and Igbo traditional marriages, profound catechesis remains strategic to dialogue and better understanding. On the Zairean Eucharistic liturgy, Chase was right to remark that “while the Zaire Usage has its own problems, it reminds us of the beauty of unity in diversity, and how the Church is able to accommodate much more diversity” (Chase, 2013, p. 36). Showing his favor for interculturalization, Udoye emphasized that “it adds to the beauty of inherent diversity-in-unity, which does not even delimit the universality of the Church but rather enriches its versatility” (Udoye, 2011, p. 269). Hence, down at the foundation of this interculturalization is the prospect of globality to Igbo traditional marriage. Oduyoye talks about social media as maximal instrument of cultural development or globalization of culture. Thus: “Globalization of electronic media has introduced elements from Euro-American and Asian culture into Africa. There is a dynamism in cultural development” (Oduyoye, 2003, p. 90). Dynamism is the key to globalism. And it involves not

only a dialectical or mutual contribution but also mutual relinquishment of some inessential aspects of the two religious cultures respectively. It is on this ground that Umezina placed a clarion call on the Church: “The Church needs to be dynamic; it needs to grow; it needs to enter into dialogue with Igbo culture in order to be relevant to the people” (Umezina, 2014, p. 203).

Remarkably, there is the sentiment especially among the inculturalists who have continued to express their unpopular vote towards the Christianity that was brought to Africa. For them, it was vested in European or Western outfits. Ngundu thinks that the Christian marriage-making that was brought to Africa was Western and so should be changed (Ngundu, 2011, p. 44). Schineller emphasized that Christianity in Africa “remains heavily westernized” (Schineller, 1996, p. 109). With the lens of interculturalism, we do not subscribe to this insinuation or resort to blaming the global West for their hard-earned interculturated Christianity. Instead, we see it from the encouraging angle upon which to challenge other cultures to open up and communicate their cultural sentiments to the world of Christianity. In his discussion on inculturation, Orji postulates that Christianity “must be inculturated in all cultures of the world if it is to be a world Church” (Orji, 2012, p. 293). Therefore, this is a challenge to Igbo and Africans in general to contribute to the beauty of global Christianity with their cultures.

4.9. Conclusion

We endeavored in this chapter to present the prospects of our recommendation with the interculturated marriage rite. We also expressed how this marriage model will be a long-lasting succor to the yearnings for a two-in-one marriage rite in Igboland – which is the celebration of Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage in one ceremony. The interculturated marriage model did not only address existing problems, but also made some projections that will make marriage celebration in Igboland a happy welcome. Therefore, we have no doubt that this effort will be considered and eventually implemented.

CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DISCUSSION

5.1. General Conclusion

The need to have a single marriage rite from the existing duple marriage ceremonies of Christianity and Igbo traditional religion is overdue. The cost of hosting virtually the same crowd or guests during the traditional marriage and the Christian marriage respectively by the same couple and family has become unattractive and odious. Not only money but also time, energy [mental and physical] and other resources are at stake (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 134). The ordeal of spreading marriage invitation cards alone is a task people, ordinarily, will not hope to undertake the second time. As a communal society, it is incumbent upon the intending couple to visit people in their homes especially the ‘VIP’ [Very Important Persons] just to invite them. To some others, the candidates had to trail them along the road, at gatherings and other opportunities. For those who are distant, pains are taken by the candidates to reach them. While the candidates virtually embark on the same job of spreading cards differently, both parents of the bride and the groom are busy giving invitations to their respective friends and well-wishers. Yet, this frivolous burden of spreading invitation cards has no effect on attendance because it is always a communal and free-for-all ceremony. In the event of the Christian marriage, the same process is inevitable. This is a tip of the iceberg. As we elucidated in this research, the Church is at the receiving end with Church marriage decline and its multi-dimensional factors. We recognize that the factors are not limited to those discussed above. Exhaustion [not just money] incurred at the fulfillment of the traditional marriage rite, affects the enthusiasm for Church marriage rite. Nonetheless, while it remains a pastoral challenge to the Church, the values of Christian marriage are seemingly not perceived [at least by those without Church wedding] as enriching, gratifying and inspiring. It is good to bring to limelight that marriage forms the nucleus of the family. According to the Fathers of the African Synod, “not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, it is also the fundamental cell of society. In Africa in particular, the family is the foundation on which the social edifice is built” (Pope John Paul II, 1995, n. 80).

To this end, the recommendation of our intercultural theology of marriage between Christian and Igbo traditional marriages becomes expedient. The interculturated marriage rite presented in this research will satisfy the expectations of the bishop(s). This is because the Church is recognized as the architect of this intercultural or inter-ritual relationship between Christian marriage and Igbo traditional marriage. But, unlike most recommendations considered above,

the recommendation of this research gave prominent role and position to the Church. This is coupled with the choice of Church building as the venue or place for the celebration of the proposed interculturated marriage rite. Moreover, it will be pastorally enriching to the Igbo Christians and beyond. The integration of *igba nkwu* ceremony into the Christian marriage celebration within Mass and inside the Church will be a happy welcome. In addition to the relief accorded to the intending couples from going through marriage processes and celebrations twice, our interculturated marriage model will upgrade and update the Igbo marriage ritual ceremony to the tune of modern needs and towards global appraisal. With these and the maximal employment of catechesis, our interculturated marriage rite will make marriage celebrations among Igbo Christians more pastorally enriching and enduring – even better than the time of the European missionaries.

On another note, the issue of Church marriage decline and its multi-dimensional factors cannot be denied nor wished away in the Igbo Church and Africa in general. However, they will be effectively addressed by the intercultural theology of marriage presented in this research. The envisaged enthusiasm by couples to celebrate, at one time, the separate marriage ceremonies of Igbo traditional and Christian marriages will be an aid to catechesis to reinvigorate and deepen the faith of the people towards Christian marriage, impress upon the people the need to plan simple or less materialistic in their marriage celebration. Already, the one ceremony of this interculturated marriage rite preclude duple monetary expenses of celebrating and hosting two marriage events – especially the *igba nkwu* ceremony and marriage reception [bridal party]. With this marriage arrangement, the guests, or usually the crowd, can only eat and drink from the purse of the couple ones instead of twice. This is just an aspect of marriage that is dually financial gulping. There are a lot of other areas such as hall decoration, bridesmaids' wears, photographer, video coverage, music, transportation of some groups and so on. Also, since the traditional marriage rite is necessarily performed by couples before they could begin to raise children, interculturated marriage of this kind will automatically abrogate the so-called testing time for fecundity [trial marriage]. Furthermore, the concern about the duplicity of matrimonial consent will as well be settled since the two expressions of consent will happen within the same interculturated marriage rite. Following from these elucidations, we are optimistic that this two-pillared intercultural theology of marriage: interculturated marriage rite and catechesis, will be considered, studied and implemented by the Church in Igboland.

In our concluding remarks, we extol the immeasurable impact Christianity has had in the life and worldview of Igbos. It is the desire of this research that interactions of this sort should be

continuous between Christianity and African traditional religion. This is because it will open new ways of addressing other issues of tension between the two religious cultures. This is orchestrated by Ndiokwere when he said: “Christianity has played a key role in the development of Africa and that role has not diminished. Rather new areas of development and responsibilities have widened up. And Africans have been called to join in the new discoveries and research” (Ndiokwere, 1994, p. 16). We think that those new areas needing development will maximize the enduring principles of interculturalism. In that case, we expect that the Church’s message on marriage and family should emphasize not only interpersonal but also intercultural love, communion and unity. Using the words of Pope Francis, “the Church’s message on marriage and the family does not clearly reflect the preaching and attitudes of Jesus, who set forth a demanding ideal yet never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals” (Pope Francis, 2016, n. 38). This is a challenge to the pastoral care givers in Igboland to redress from being judgmental to couples or families with one pastoral predicament or the other. It will end the dichotomies against couples without Church marriage. It is true that they are never chased out of the Church, but they have always been stopped from receiving Holy Communion and denied befitting Christian burial at death. The Pope reiterates that unless mercy and love are emphasized, the pastoral ministry will come under question. For him, when the doctrine on marriage and the family are not inspired by the message of love, it becomes a dry and lifeless doctrine (Pope Francis, 2016, n. 59).

Finally, the distinction of this intercultural theology of marriage is its recommendation for the interculturated marriage ceremony to be held in the Church building. This is variant, as mentioned above, to previous inculturation arrangements that virtually put the celebration outside the Church building. We think that non-implementation of the previous recommendations by the bishops in Igboland border on this option. Because the Church is virtually given an insignificant role to play in a project undertaken by her. We also gave premium to a celebration within Holy Mass to maintain the tempo of which the people are always desirous and at home with. To this time, Church marriage without Mass is received with mix feelings in Igboland. Understandably, previous recommendations seem to view inculturation as an exercise to be done. Whereas, our model has a research problem it addressed. All these aiding points give confidence that this current interculturated marriage rite will win the choice of both the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the traditional custodians of Igbo culture and the generality of Igbo Christians.

5.2. Further Discussions

During this project, we dabbled into issues that cannot be contained in the present research. But, they are put in view here for further discussions. Prominent among them is the statement that this research is open to more development. Although, we used desk research method in this exploratory study, we shall employ quantitative research method and field work in the further discussion and development of this topic. Others include:

1. The issue of childlessness in marriage. In Igbo traditional marriage, offspring is the primary condition. Izekwe made it more elucidating when he said: “In the Igbo traditional setting, marriage and procreation are synonymous; procreation is implied in the very concept of marriage. Going by this stance, childless marriage is no marriage among the Igbo. Childlessness therefore, becomes a very big problem for the traditional Igbo” (Izekwe, 2015, p. 3). It is one of the thorny challenges in the experience of Igbo Christians. As we noted above, this issue is affecting adversely the Christian marriage in Igboland. While Christian marriage emphasizes love, Igbo traditional marriage lays emphasis on procreation.

2. More lay men and women should be encouraged to study theology in Africa. Theology is not offered in the Nigerian universities and unfortunately, it is viewed as an unemployable academic discipline. We are moved by the need for people to have a formal education in theology and become equipped to think constructively in the discussions bordering on Christian and African traditional religions. Their relationship to each other is so important to prevent people from being laid astray by prosperity Christianity. It will make the majority of the people to be proactive in intercultural relationship and dialogue between Christianity and African traditional religion as in the case of the interculturated marriage rite presented in this research.

3. Nigeria is advantaged in film business [Nollywood]. It will be wise to harness the advantages of the film industry to portray the values and riches of this intercultural theology of marriage between Christianity and African traditional religion. The film industry, just as the social media, are veritable means of communication and catechesis. And just as the values, the communicative and catechetical impact on the populace cannot be estimated or quantified. Then, it is understandable for the African Synod of Bishops to lay much emphasis on the use of social media for the propagation of faith. For them, the most modern forms of media have a wide-ranging impact and advantage for catechesis and faith building across Africa especially. While in collaboration and solidarity with sister Churches across the world, the Bishops reiterates necessity for the African Church to establish closer cooperation in the areas of

professional training, structures of radio and television production (Pope John Paul II, 1995, n. 126). While the relevance of film industry and the social media attracts further discussion, we state that their benefits will be of great importance to the Igbo Church. This is more expedient as some Nigerian dioceses have embarked on opening radio and Television stations like Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri, Nigeria.

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