

**MONSIGNOR MADUKA'S CULTURAL APPROACH TOWARDS
IGBO CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

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Abstract

The Catholic brand of christian gospel that the Europeans brought to Africa came in European garb. The Africans were made to abandon their culture in place of European culture. Thus, Africans abandoned there culture and embraced western culture, even to the point of calling most of there rich cultural heritage evil and accepting whatever name given to their culture by the Europeans. It was at this point that Africans who engaged in traditional religious worship were referred to as 'heathens' and 'idol worshippers'. Among the African/Igbo indigenous priests, Late Msgr. Martin Maduka Okeke saw the need to bring back our rich cultural heritage into Christianity with the understanding that the people whom this gospel was brought to will understand and accept it more if the gospel is to be immersed in Igbo culture. This paper therefore studies the efforts of Late Msgr. Martin Maduka Okeke towards Igbo Catholic christian religion. It was discovered that the culture approach of Late. Msgr. Martin Maduka Okeke brought about inculturation/acculturation, and the quest for African/Igbo identity in Christian religion. This paper suggests and recommends that Igbo Catholic Christians should continue to adopt and practice in Christianity there cultures that are good, as it paves way for better understanding of the Gospel of Christ.

Keywords: Culture, approach, Igbo, Christian, Religion

Introduction

In the salvific mission, Jesus Christ chose to make himself known through the vehicle of the Jewish culture. Before He returned to heaven, He commissioned His disciples to continue to expand on this mission which He started. After many centuries of evangelism, this message reached Igboland through missionaries like Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Simon Jonas etc. Sadly, it was passed on to them under the cloak of western culture. For this reason the message was looked upon with contempt as one without lustre, one that lacks content and irrelevant to the daily lives of the people.

The Catholic brand of Christianity been passed on to the Igbo under the cloak of western culture obviously did not have much expected impact on the people as a result of forced acceptance of Western culture against the native culture. According to Cletus (2014), the present state of the church is such that if there is a major challenge that confronts her, she will loose its members in droves or even go out of existence. To strengthen Christianity in Igboland, there is absolute need to integrate and inculturate people's culture into the religion which they adhere to, especially foreign religion that the indigenious people accept its doctrines and beliefs that guide their day to day activities. This was the major message of Late Msgr. Martin Maduka Okeke, which he fought and stood for throughout his missionary existence in Igboland. Late Msgr. Martin Maduka Okeke who was born in the year 1920, was a pure lover and advocate of Igbo culture, who even as a priest against all odds stood for the Igbo culture to be embedded in the Catholic church.

On this basis, this paper stresses the importance of culture in the spreading of God's message. It argues that if the gospel is adequately inculturated, it will stand the test of time even when it is buffeted by the trappings of modernity. In dealing with this aim, this paper examines culture and its importance, the meaning of inculturation. It also discussed briefly, the history of Monsignor Martin Maduka Okeke to understand his cultural approach towards Igbo Catholic Christian religion. It also looked at the level of inculturation that has taken place in Igbo Catholic Christian religion through his effort. Lastly, it points out the areas of further inculturation.

Brief History of Monsignor Martin Okeke Maduka

Rt. Rev. Msgr. Martin Okeke Maduka, also known as Nnadiesube (1920-1995) was born to a distinguished traditional family and of humble parents: Chief Ezemmaduka Ilo and Mrs. Udum Ezenwosu (of a royal family), both of Ekwulobia, Aguata L.G.A, Anambra State, in the wake of 1920 (Asiegbu & Umezina, 1994). His parents, by occupation were farmers in various kinds of agricultural produce. As a first born to a distinguished and devoted parents, it was an onus on him to thread the footsteps of his father; to be about his religion but it was not so. He was converted as a young boy to Protestantism through his enrollment in the protestant missionary education school. According to Okafor and Onebunne (1996);

He recalled that at that period Catholicism at Ekwulobia was just taking root, clearing their site while the Protestants (CMS) had already

beautified their church premises which attracted many individuals. But as God would have it, the opening of Catholic primary school in his own village known today as Agu Nwa Agba Primary School Agba Ekwulobia, made his mother pressurize him even with threats of refusing to give him school fees, to change his school and as a consequence, his faith. This Martin did but with much foot dragging because he was indignant at this mandate which he saw was just to make sure he went to the same school with his cousin Mr. Muolokwu from Agba Village Ekwulobia who had already transferred to that Catholic School. (p. 4).

With the same zeal, Martin made a complete turn around from Protestantism to Catholicism and was christened Martin upon baptism during the course of his primary education. His primary is considered the preparatory ground for his heroic adventure into the priesthood. Martin had his secondary education at Christ the king college (CKC), Onitsha (1940 – 1943). He did his probationary work for two years at the same CKC (1944-1946). He was ordained a catholic priest on 20th December, 1953 at St. Peters Basilica, Rome by Cardinal Prefect of propaganda Fidei: Pietro Fummasoni Bondi. He has master's degree in canon law (J.C.L) from Pontifical Urbaniana Universitas. His motto "That they may know thee," embraces this mission of grass root evangelization and catechism.

Martin is a sage and a protagonist of inculturation as the christian's contextualization of faith and culture. He is a great ancestor on how to be Igbo and a true Christian. According to Asiegbu & Umezina (1994), by his sublime teaching as a pastor and profound practice of inculturation, he became the forerunner of Vatican II council adaptations and renewal, hence, a precursor of African synod and avant - garde of authentic Igbo Christianity. He was also a member of the papal Chamberlin. After his ordination in Rome, he served in these different places according to Okafor and Onebunne (1996); St. Mary's Presbytery North Wales, St. Patrick's Ogbete (1956-1957), St. Theresa's Parish Mmaku (1957-1958), Achina (1959-1961), Nteje (1961-1970), Akpu Parish (1970-1976), Enugwu-Ukwu (1977-1978), Nnokwa (1977), St. Joseph's parish Ekwulobia (1978-1986).

Martin died on Friday 15th September, 1995 after a brief illness. He was buried on Monday 18th day of September 1995 at St. Joseph Catholic Church premises, Ekwulobia.

Culture and Its Importance

Popularly, culture is said to be the people's way of life. Culture involves shared human patterns or models for living. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism (Damen, 1987).

According to Ibeabuchi (2017), culture etymologically, is from a latin word "*cultura*" meaning "to cultivate". He defines culture as the cultivation of character. Hofstede (1984), in his view defines culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another. Still on what culture is, Taylor cited in Obiakor (2013) views culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

The above insights to what culture is clearly shows its importance to man's day to day activities. Gilmore (2014) states that culture is a means of expressing creativity, forging an individual identity and enhancing or preserving a community's sense of place. Cultural experiences are opportunities for leisure, entertainment, learning and sharing experiences with others.

It is not an exaggeration to say that culture is the soul of every human society, to separate a society from its culture is like separating a body from the soul which when done, the society probably may stop existing. It is culture that sustains and preserves our language, norms, values etc. Culture is symbiotically connected to the society.

The symbiosis of culture and an ethnic group can be further appreciated with the illustration of Aristotle's teaching on matter and form. Something comes into existence when both are consigned (Hugh, 1997). When either the form or the matter separates from something that is in existence, the form is not and the matter is not. Metaphorically an ethnic group is not and culture is not when both are severed from one another. An ethnic group subsists because of culture and culture exists because of an ethnic group. However, according to Umezina (2014);

That a particular culture of a society is symbiotically connected does not imply that society cannot 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 reason of every culture is to improve the quality of life and the welfare of a society. That is why culture ought to be dynamic as any

society that closes itself and her culture up completely to the external influences suffocates itself and is destined to remain stunted in growth. So culture-contact is very necessary; it is important because it makes provision for the optima response to the challenges of nature, a response which ultimately brings about the maximum comfort to man. (pp.200- 201).

Culture is therefore a child of necessity. Its various aspects include politics, language, morality, clothing, food, religion etc. These are different initiatives which man has put in place to ensure a happy and comfortable life for himself, a life which ordinarily would be impossible if he were to live simply like other objects in nature.

Inculturation

Inculturation is a rare dictionary word that gained popularity after the second Vatican council. It is the incarnation of the Christian message in particular cultural context. Inculturation is a term used in Christianity, especially in the Roman Catholic Church referring to the adaptation of the way church teachings are presented to non-Christian cultures and to the influence of those cultures on the evolution of these teachings.

According to Onwubiko (1997), inculturation is a new vision of an old problem in the church or a new approach to a solution of an old problem. Metuh (1996) views the origin of the concept of inculturation from a secular perspective. He maintains that the term is borrowed from cultural anthropology where it denotes the process by which a person is inserted into his culture. According to Wallingo (1986);

Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his gospel of salvation even more understood by people of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people....It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity “truly feel at home” in the cultures of each people. (p.11).

Crollus (1986) states that inculturation is the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people in such a way that the experience not only express itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the church universal.

Late Msgr. Martin Okeke Maduka's Cultural Approach towards Igbo Catholic Christian Religion

If Jesus spoke the language of his people, ate their food and wore their cloths, culture becomes by this very fact, the way food becomes to man and vice versa. Monsignor was very convinced that there is something sacred and special in every human culture. He wanted our temporal existentiality to be fully linked in that which is truly Igbo and truly Christian; fully Igbo and fully Christian hence his intense fight towards inculturating the Igbo Catholic Christian religion. He understood inculturation as the Christian contextualization of the faith and worship within the local culture, and correspondingly it is the Christians evangelical immersion or insertion of his local culture in Christ and his church.

Fr. Martin, after his deep and somehow frightening experience in Rome, returned to Nigeria a happy man with a mission that must be accomplished. The first of his major battle was his fight against oppression in the priesthood. He fought against cultural invasion. In this phenomenon the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group and ignoring the potential of the latter, they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. This is what the Europeans had done and that is what Fr. Martin fought against. He recognized that the expatriate priests were violating the rights of the indigenous priests and stood out boldly against this colonialism. Thus, Fr. Martin's move to liberate his own oppressed brother priests was seen as a threat to freedom itself, hence he was cajoled and calumniated. Notwithstanding, he emerged victorious. His victory became the encouragement he needed to fight further.

For Martin, the missionaries that brought the message of Christ did their best but they stifled the good cultural heritage of the people thereby making Christianity a foreign religion instead of a foundational one. For him, inculturation following after the mind of Christ should be on three aspect of any culture and those aspects are language, food and dress, hence he courageously continued his crusade for Igbo Catholic Church based on these three cultural traits:

Language

Language is an indispensable aspect of culture. It is the identity of a particular group of people. Fr. Martin saw the need and importance of

evangelizing using Igbo language. Preaching the gospel using the people's mother tongue creates a homely feeling, and as such, message passed across is easily assimilated. Fr. Martin talked and preached to the people in Igbo language. Hardly will one hear him speak in English except when it is absolutely necessary. He celebrated mass in Igbo language. Long before this time, the celebration of mass was in English language. He brought a change into this and celebrated the Mass with the language the people can easily understand. He did this behaviour because of his believe that God hears every language and Igbo language inclusive. This is why he was one of the brains behind the translation of Latin-English Mass Missal into Igbo language. It was not easy for him then to convince the appropriate authorities on the necessity of this. The use of Igbo songs by Catholic choir originated from him. He made the yearly November Corpus Christi procession look like *ofala* festival for Christ by the use of local instruments and Igbo Songs. Fr. Martin's model in this his crusade; when Christ was on earth, he was just like men in everything except sin. He rightly pointed out that Jesus ,

“did not bring the language he used from
Heaven. He did not bring the material food
He ate as man from heaven, nor did he
Wear material habit from heaven”.

Fr. Martin argues that it is lack of understanding that made some Europeanized Bishops to persecute African Priests who are out really to serve the church in our land by real African adaptation.

Dress

Fr. Martin waged a great war against the continued wearing of soutane and other western mass vestments by the Nigerian clergy, seminarians and religious. He was baffled to see that the church's authorities in Nigeria still rigidly adhere to the European style and manner of doing things to the utter neglect of their own. He was grateful to the church for at least recognizing the people's language but more still need to be done in the area of dress and vestment.

He argues that there is nothing wrong in wearing an African wrapper and Danshiki to celebrate mass, all in trying to Africanise the church, that the Europeans wear soutane because of their weather hence the Igbo should also dress to suite there weather. This is the reason he

dressed ordinarily just like any traditional Igbo man. Fr. Martin was the one who popularized the wearing of the Isi-agu attire in Igbo land. According to Salamone and Mbabu (1994), a Nigerian Catholic Priest Rev. Fr. Maduka from Ekwulobia in particular has come to be regarded as the vanguard and pioneer of this local attire and as from that point it “became an integral part of civilized behaviour” (p. 215). This was borne out of a strong conviction that one can be both Christian and Igbo.

Till his death he has not understood the rationale behind the continued insistence of Nigerian Bishops in retaining the clerical soutane which barricades and obstructs the priestly ministry in Nigeria. Definitely our people’s dress is not soutane. According to Mgbemena (2016), the aim of Late Msgr. Martin Okeke Maduka’s cultural approach towards Igbo Catholic Christianity is basically to recognize sympathetically the Igbo culture and then fit it into the Gospel of Christ. This is part of the reason why presently Catholic churches conduct masses in Igbo language and clerics wear traditional attires during celebration of mass.

Food

Ethnic groups are identified by the type of food they eat. Food is an integral part of culture, Fr. Martin made people believe that being a priest doesn’t make him an extraordinary being. He ate the normal food people eat. He is extremely courageous and ambitious, yet, humble and obedient. Fr. Martin is remarkably the first Indigenous priest that has spent his annual holidays (leave) in his very father’s house. What a courageous initiative. The indigenous priests then have been ignorantly spending their annual vacation in the parish house forgetting entirely their homes. All the while he was on leave in his father’s house, he ate the normal food that people eat.

Cultural Institutions

Previously, it was seen as a taboo for a Christian to be involved in masquerading, dancing, taking *ozo* title etc. The missionaries never saw anything good in our culture. Thanks to Fr. Martin who brought inculturation towards that dimension. Late Msgr. Martin Maduka Okeke enrolled into the masquerade society and played a vital role in the formation of *Achukwu* Masquerade for the Christians (Catholics) at Ekwulobia. He participated in the formation as a means of entertaining the members of Christ. According to Mgbemena (2016), he sees masquerade as a thing of joy and Africa’s pride which is in contrast

with the Western missionaries view that saw masquerade as something that has to do with pagan worship. When Sacred Heart Catholic Church Nteje parish status was later restored, Umezina (2014) elucidates that Fr. Martin, an *ozo* title holder and a great champion of inculturation movement was appointed as a parish priest. As soon as he took canonical possession of the parish, he lifted the ban placed on dancing, masquerading and other cultural values not opposed to Christianity. When he did this, those who had left the church returned back to faith. Fr. Martin did a lot to evangelize through culture and won many souls as the people felt that Christianity was embedded in their culture. He Christianized most traditional practices of the people like *nze na ozo* group, *umuada* and so on. He also introduced masquerade group for Christians.

Fr. Martin's cultural approach to the spread of the gospel is a legacy that some Igbo priests are following as they celebrate mass in their various parishes. Their chasuble now have a touch of our native cloth, the use of vernacular in homily, use of local musical instrument in the church, use of indigenous/native songs during service. His musical prowess is evident particularly in composition of Igbo song. These Igbo songs were used in place of the western hymns. This is a way of projecting African culture and also a means of showing that the Igbo can actually worship God in African way. That is to say that they can actually be Igbo and as well Christian. Fr. Martin as the father of inculturation of church in Igboland is the reason corpus Christi procession looks like *ofala* festival today. Africans use dance to worship God, hence his introduction of cultural dance into Catholic church which made so many people to enter the church. His inculturation programme yielded tremendous fruits in Igbo Catholic Christian religion. He made conscious and conscientious effort to help his people be converted to the very roots of their culture.

Conclusion and Areas of Further Inculturation

i. It is a compulsory ritual for every Christian to be baptized and adopt a new name, English name. The question then is, why an English name? Aren't our native name good enough? Is it compulsory to bear an English name for our sins to be washed away? It is now bad that most catholic priests reject it when an Igbo name is presented for baptism. Maybe they do not understand the importance of inculturation. Our Igbo names are unique and embedded with

deep rooted meanings. It is high time we looked this area of Igbo Christian religion and inculturize it.

ii. Also, looking at the naming of parishes in the Catholic church in Igbo land, they are being named just like the Europeans. They bear the European names of saints, and saints are people who throughout their life time lived an exemplary Christ life worthy of emulation. There are also Africans/Igbo who also while alive lived a good life. There are Igbo priests who lived their lives to spreading the gospel of Christ to the people. Immortalizing them from the perspective they lived their lives won't be bad at all. "Monsignor Maduka's Catholic church Ekwulobia "wouldn't be such a bad idea.

iii. When looking at areas of further inculturation, sacrament of matrimony come to mind. Today many people do not come to the church to assist at the nuptial mass of their relatives but they turn out in masses for the traditional wedding. Efforts have been made to address this problem evolving a rite that brings the traditional and Christian wedding together Chibuko (2003). This effort in the right direction will not only reduce the cost of wedding, but also minimize the inconveniences associated with marriage ceremonies.

Conclusion

Monsignor Martin Okeke Maduka's cultural approach toward Igbo Christian religion is really an eye opener to Christians. It brought enlightenment to other Igbo ministries of God that adopting valuable cultural practice of Indigenous people into the church is not a sin rather it gives the Igbo people sense of belonging hence they find meaning in the gospel. The church authorities should welcome genuine initiatives and values embedded in Igbo culture into Igbo Christian religion so that the gospel will be fully appreciated by the Igbo converts, as well, be able to stand the test of time. Late Msgr. Martin Okeke Maduka has clearly shown that to be a Christian has strictly nothing to do with European models. He can be described as a great ancestor of how to be Igbo and truly a Christian, and a chosen instrument to reveal to the Igbo that God too has incarnated and spoken in them.

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