

RE-ENCOUNTERING AFRICAN CULTURE

In living Christianity in my father's home

by Alozie Oliver Onwubiko

ABSTRACT. This essay is an exploration into the possibility of going beyond the usual juxtaposition between African traditional culture, and cultural imports from Europe in the colonial context and after. A pivotal place in the argument is occupied by Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and, like in that book, the emblematic situation in the argument is that of the Nigerian Igbo, 19th-20th century CE. While admitting the hegemonic racism inherent in colonial cultural imperialism, to respond, on the African side, with an equally race-based anti-colonial counter-culture is no solution. Instead, we should be proceeding from cultural monologue to dialogue. The author argues that African Christianity, even though initially burdened with hegemonic Eurocentrism and racism, may develop into such a dialogical situation. This requires both mental decolonisation and a reassessment of African traditional religion, and in fact implies a form of biculturalism, leading on to transculturalism. In the dialogical strategies advocated, the author identifies, as a hurdle, the paradigmatic Igbo stance of the *dimaragana*, whom built-in inhibitions prevent from doing what he knows to be the right thing. The author extends this emblem to universalist critics of African identity positions including ethnicity, such as Howe and Appiah, but nevertheless finds considerable truth in the latter's work.

KEY WORDS: Achebe, Africa, Appiah, biculturalism, Christianity, colonialism, counter-culture, cultural imperialism, dialogue, *dimaragana*, ethnicity, Europe, Howe, identity, Igbo, racism, *Things Fall Apart*, traditional religion, transculturalism, universalism

'Africa does occupy a unique place in global cultural history.' – Wim van Binsbergen¹

Introduction

Defining *culture* today is just as problematic as it is *political*. Not even the

¹ Wim van Binsbergen, 2004, 'Challenges for the sociology of religion in the African context: Prospects for the next fifty years', *Social Compass: International Review of Sociology of Religion*, 51, 1 (2004, March): 85-98.

simple definition – ‘a people’s “way of life”, often influenced by their religion’ – is accepted today. More problematic is identifying the relationship between *culture* and *civilization* vis-à-vis religion. Not long ago civilization was understood *against* culture. And to be *civilized*,² implied to be “acculturated.” A working concept for this article connects culture and civilization as *related* and understands acculturation in human intercultural interaction as and an experience that always works both ways (so that when A and B, while each identifying with different cultures, are interacting, A and B are always, up to a certain degree, acculturating to each other, while it is never the case that, e.g., A is acculturated to B whilst B not to A). This working concept sees civilization *as* culture *at the export level*. With this, it is driven home that intercultural, crosscultural, bicultural and transcultural studies are aspects of the type of multicultural education that is so very much stressed today. Multiculturalism defends “religio-cultural pluralism” as facts of the world today. Its aim is to help people – especially young people – to operate well in two or more different cultures. It is committed to bridging the gap between the “home culture” and the “school culture” – the native and the foreign. It believes that cultural differences ought no longer be permanent factors of tension between peoples; and that cultural similarities, just like cultural differences, should be constructively and effectively exploited, not denied.

European colonialism, especially from the 19th century CE onwards, justified itself on the *civilizational import*³ of its own ‘civilization (deemed to be superior) to native peoples and cultures. “Civilization” became anti-culture to justify the racism inherent in *La mission civilisatrice*.⁴ And⁵

“Racism is what it always was; an opinion that recognizes real civilizational differences and attributes them to biology.”

² Matthew Arnold in the 19th century used the term “culture” in contrast with “civilization.” But he advocated a kind of education that focused on the development of universal standards of reason to identify “the best which has been thought and said in the world”.

³ D’Souza, D.; *The End of Racism*, New York: The Free Press, 1995, p. 146 – 147.

⁴ Ibid. p. 533; Ahmad, E.; *Culture of Imperialism*.

⁵ Ibid. p. 537.

By the end of the 19th century, Rudyard Kipling, the British imperial poet captured this well as the “White Man’s Burden” in the Americas. Its other version – *La mission civilisatrice* developed from the European experience in Africa. Both made Christianity a European religion whose colonial vehicle of expression became European civilization. Thus justifying the relationship between colonialism, Christianity and civilisation developed into the politics still best described as the “White man’s burden”/ *mission civilisatrice*!

European colonialism, Melville Herskovits observed, in the bid to achieve political control, imposed the insidious and demoralizing assumption of cultural superiority in the name of civilization. In 1958, He lamented that it was difficult for Euro-Americans *not* to do what he termed “thinking colonially”, by applying to peoples of other cultures words like “primitive,” “savage” or any of “the rest of the dreary vocabulary of inferiority” that they had developed.⁶ This was to justify their directed culture change through the specific educational programmes that they claimed, directed people to “higher cultures.” The “White Man’s Burden” accepted the Indian as “Noble Savage.”⁷ “*La Mission Civilisatrice*” saw the African as “beastly savage.”⁸ Savagery was a common denominator and it this instituted opposition known as counter-culture.

I must admit that colonialism has been a feature of human experience not peculiar to Africa. And it may be an illusion, for instance, to think that the British Empire has come to an end – people are still being bestowed with Order of the British Empire, Commander of the British Empire, etc. The African elite must realize that other colonized peoples have been able to outgrow the negative effects of colonialism; made constructive use of them and integrated its positive contribution to their human development.⁹ But it

⁶ Onwubiko, Alozie, *African thought Religion and culture*, Enugu Nigernia: Snaap Press, 1991.

⁷ D’Souza D.; *The End of Racism*, p. 58.

⁸ Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa*, p. 20.

⁹ According to the Bible, Moses was born at the time when a most dangerous edict was made against the Jews; as a result he was educated under the very roof that seemed most inimical to the Jewish people. Liberation Theology’s appeal to this fact made considerable expression as illustration of a more widespread ‘dialectics of liberation’.

undergoes *transformative localization*. Christopher Dawson (1959) said that what was then happening in Africa and Asia, was an indirect expansion of colonialism, through a type of reaction that did not directly derive from any African and Asian cultural genius in its own right, but from a counter-culture attitude, in which, in other words, the superiority of the colonizing culture was still implicitly recognised even if defied. Dawson recognized that resisting European “civilization,” by that fact, did not and could not promote African or Asian cultures. Racism in civilization provoked such reactions.

Beyond Racist Counter-Culture

Some Africans tried to halt European expansionism but did so in a way that could not help develop Africa. This introduced Euro-/ Afro-centricism. Racist counter-culture became a burden in a dual sense. The “White man’s” burden was to prove that the Indian was subhuman to impose his culture. He had some nobility to be realized through European civilization. “*La mission civilisatrice*” saw the African as non-human and as in need of being humanized.¹⁰ The African’s burden was to prove the inhumanity of the European and reject his culture. Euro-centricism as a racist concept induced Afro-centricism also as a racist concept born as a reaction against it. This has been described as anti-racist racism.¹¹ This phrase does not in itself condemn “racism.” It pushed the argument into the Euro-centric domain. I am aware that

“antiracist racism is a path to the ‘final unity... the abolition of differences of race’.”¹²

This “final unity” recognizes the unity of the human race.

Students of African Thought, Religion and Culture are aware of how Euro-centricism in its three forms: colonialism, civilization and Christianity,

¹⁰ Cf. *End of Racism*, p. 59.

¹¹ Achebe, C. *Hopes and Impediments*, 1990, NY: Anchor, p. 45.

¹² Appiah, K. *In My Father’s House*, fn.11, p. 195.

is affecting the notion of culture in general and African culture in particular. *Things Fall Apart* published in 1958 with the anti-racist racism counter-culture *spirit of the age* illustrates this. Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad's influence on Achebe provoked counteraction. Achebe says that he would have written about Igbo life and culture even if he had not read *Mister Johnson* or *The Heart of Darkness*.¹³ That is not the issue. The issue is whether he would have written the way he did without reading them? Certainly not! Unfortunately what we have in *Things Fall Apart* is a reaction against European intrusion into a culture. This approach – a form of racist counter culture – and its consequences made it difficult for Achebe to present, in that book, the real African cultural face to the world. Many of its readers get the impression Achebe got from reading *Mister Johnson*.

The Okonkwo style of reacting against forces of change in his community, in my opinion, is typically counter-cultural. The African resisted this and still resist this in the neo-colonial form. Conflicts, for example, have become their ideological path. Their characters present African Studies as “victimology”, giving the impression that African culture crisis is a natural given, inescapably. They recycle “victimhood.” There is the need to go beyond these. They psychologically impact negatively the present and future Africans and build in them the sense of cultural homelessness! Realized today is the need to “re-educate” the Igbo youth because of the anti-culture education the Igbo received.¹⁴ My teaching experience – teaching African Thought, Religion and Culture and Theology (1987-2000) –is that students get almost the same message from *Things Fall Apart* – desperation, antagonism against our past and against our ancestors, and the obnoxious complicity between Colonialism and Christianity.¹⁵ And this easily develops into intra-cultural manipulation to achieve specific aims that do not exclude self-destruction.

¹³ Achebe, C. *Home and Exile*, 2001.

¹⁴ The now famous *Ahiajoku* lectures had as its maiden title: *Ahamefula*, a matter of identity. We have come a long way from the anti-colonial projects based on *Ikemefuna*, to the constructive search for balanced education based on bi-cultural projects of *Ahamefula*. But to achieve this, the principle of *Olumefule* must integrate the practice of *Ucheakolam*.

¹⁵ Cf. Onwubiko, O.A., *African Thought Religion and Culture*, 1991.

We must go beyond that *counter* spirit and age. A way to do this is to re-present Igbo traditional religion and culture, through textual criticism and extra textual information, to the world. Many of Achebe's readers miss part of his message because they do not understand "the cosmological fear of anarchy that burden the characters" of his novels and so fail to see why Umuofia,¹⁶ the location where *Things Fall Apart* is situated, moved from *order* into *chaos*. To reverse this requires the will and orientation to move Igbo people from *chaos* back to *order*. This new orientation is imperative for African Studies and for re-reading the *African Writers Series*. It sees African Studies in this century beyond imposed concepts, images, and stereotypes and addresses issues beyond politico-historical clichés.

That, for example, the Igbo, among the Nigerian peoples, have changed most while changing least may be paradoxical. But if it is true, it is time to ask whether this change is real or artificial? If it is real what can we do to deepen and develop it; if it is artificial what can we do to make it real? This presupposes the re-examination of the relationship between Christianity and colonialism to see how, today, Christianity, "civilization" and colonialism can still claim a higher morality. It is understandable, for instance, that both the African and the European colluded in the infamous transatlantic slave trade. What was the Christian influence on the slave dealer who claimed a higher and revealed morality?¹⁷

Beyond Racism Of Civilization In Christianity

Interculturalism presupposes "cultural parity." This makes possible for "culture at the export level" recognize that vehicles of its exportation are elements of a culture, its products, and not the culture itself. This reduces the force of racism in culture-conquering *mission civilisatrice* and facilitates "dialogue as charity." Dialogue implies biculturality – interlocution. In this sense it implies inter- and intraculturality. And "dialogue as charity" presupposes that interlocutors can communicate *inter se*. But what we have today,

¹⁶ Referred to bush, backward, primitive, etc. Igbo people.

¹⁷ Achebe, *Morning Yet*, p. 119.

in the name of dialogue, is mediated “monologue” through simultaneous translations. And real communication is not happening. Dialogue, in Christian mission, is no longer be talking *to* but *with* people and their cultures. Racism of civilization is recent. Coming to light today is that “no concept truly equivalent to that of ‘race’ can be dictated in the thought of the Greeks, Romans and early Christians.”¹⁸

Inter-religious Dialogue and *Religious Freedom* accept “religious pluralism” as a fact of human experience. Christian Mission has been redirected from its previous “church-centeredness” to “Christ-centeredness”, that is, “God-centeredness.” Church-centeredness was responsible for the debate as whether Christian mission was “Church planting” – *plantatio ecclesiae* – the building of the Church in the European fashion with its structures in mission lands or the Preaching of the Gospel (*proclamatio evangelii*) through which the Church would come into being.¹⁹ The debate did not envisage religious freedom, which was to come with Vatican II.

Religious freedom, though, does not envisage a state where one is free from religion, nor does it envisage the forceful imposition of a religion. The mission of the church becomes *proposing*, and, not *imposing* concepts, beliefs, practice and cultures in the name of civilization. This presupposes that those involved in dialogue are aware of intracultural self-examination that makes interculturalism a feasible project, resulting eventually in freedom of the other to willing accept another religion.

“Understanding traditional religion”,

in Africa, writes Appiah,

“is so central to the conceptual issues that modernization raises that philosophical discussion of the status of traditional religion has been so central in recent African philosophy.”²⁰

And, I would add, theology.

¹⁸ Frederickson, G. M. *Racism*, NJ Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 53-54.

¹⁹ Onwubiko, O.A., *Theory and Practice of Inculturation*, 1992.

²⁰ Appiah, K., op. cit.

Cross-Culture Dialogue

The study of Igbo religion today demands critical examination and reflection on how its “contents and nature,” related to Igbo worldview, constitute important elements of an Igbo theodicy which are aspects of Igbo philosophy and theology. Scholars (some of them Igbo) have affirmed that Igboland belongs to the communities described as “sacred” which are resistant to change. Emmanuel Obiechina insisted that there was scope for change in traditional Igbo society and that

“it had to be in areas outside those made sacrosanct by the religious and ritual order.”²¹

Therefore he argues that changes could only be peripheral and would not touch the process of securing the core values of the Igbo culture. These are the values made

“sacrosanct by religious and ritual order.”

This is not very true. And with such a view one can hardly contribute meaningfully to dialogue as such in a cross-cultural sense. Obiechina’s affirmations bring me to the issue of *dimaragana* education. *Dimaragana* is a figure in Igbo language and culture. It refers to one who knows what to do, can do it, has the means to do it, but refuses to do it or chooses the wrong means because of self-imposed inhibitions.²² Some African elites have become *dimaragana*. They were there in the traditional Igbo society, just as they abound today. Most of them have not been equipped for cross-cultural dialogue.

Changes that, simultaneously, affect religion, culture and society are realized through a process of secularisation that, however, does not necessarily lead to secularism. The effect of secularisation of thought is gradual and often difficult. The demythologisation of religious concepts and beliefs in-

²¹ Obiechina, E.

²² Achebe introduced this figure in connection with internally induced culture change in *Things Fall Apart*.

volves the use of myth and counter-myth.²³ The “killing” of deities and the installation of new ones in their stead demonstrates the occurrence, in Igbo-land, of changes that involve an entire cult and belief system concerning a particular deity. People adopt new cultural meanings very slowly, because such changes eventually lead to change in the sacrosanct areas of religion.²⁴

For effective cross cultural dialogue the influence of European education on the *dimaragana* requires “de-colonization.” Most of those advocating this de-colonization are products of the system, and have found out that they are “encumbered with extensive western education.”²⁵ Others, in spite of themselves, are perpetuating that type of education. What, really, is more cumbersome for them is how to identify the effects of this education. And I ask: why was the de-colonization project in Africa not part of the original struggle for Independence? What values did those involved in that struggle acquire (or lose, as the case may be), that daily the question is posed: Why is it that today as yesterday?, – in other words, why is it through Africa’s own children and leaders, statesmen, priests and prophets, etc. (the very people who most loudly professed to work for Africa’s interests) that the continent’s subjection occurs, and may continue to occur? And what precisely, in the context of the “decolonization” which they are demanding, is Western, Christian, European and American education? Does it mean any or all of these?

Biculturalism

Biculturalism results from meaningful participation in cross culture dialogue. And cross-cultural dialogue, not translated information, implies bilingualism in education as an instrument – *information/ inquiry, instruction/ correction* – for culture change. Biculturalism addresses the problem of

²³ A counter-myth corrects a previous myth and thus purifies religious beliefs and opinions.

²⁴ Igbo cosmological beliefs and religio-cultural practices, for instance, are central in Achebe’s exploration of the theme of culture-contact and change in his writings.

²⁵ In the words of K. Appiah.

ethnophilosophy and ethnotheology raised in the African context. Biculturalism involves “acculturation” as a process in two directions. When not this two-directional nature is not sufficiently acknowledged, biculturalism produces typically complex changes because of the interplay of different cultural factors and especially the foreign personnel and other elements of culture exportation, did not want to acculturate.

British (or, by extension, Western) education was very well calculated to teach the new Africans that in order to rise on the ladder of the new culture and acquire the exalted status it promised, they must be alienated, ideologically and physically, from their roots – from their cultural past. Biculturality was not envisaged. Basden puts it forcefully when he writes:

“ancient native law and custom cannot exist side by side nor intermingle with the principles of the British Government.”²⁶

This was in 1937, eight years after Igbo women rose and challenged effectively the basis of British administration and its conceptions of Igbo people and culture. This event aroused curiosity and interest in previous colonial reports. It questioned their assertions of those who *knew their natives!* And “knowing their natives” in this sense meant they were in control of them.²⁷ The Igbo women disproved of this logic.

Basden, in self-defence, complained that

“what is not realized as it should be” [sc., by those sympathetic to Igbo culture] “is that Native Law and Custom received its death-blow when the British administration became operative in the Ibo Country.”²⁸

He advised:

“To contemplate conserving native law and custom is to concern ourselves very largely with a corpse. It will not respond as anticipated, because life has ceased to animate it. The deed is done and, unless Europeans abandon the country altogether, and so provide the opportunity for ancient law and custom to be resuscitated, it may

²⁶ Basden, G.T., *Niger Ibos*, pxii.

²⁷ *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, p. 6.

²⁸ P. xiii.

just as well be counted as dead, for it has no future under modern conditions.”²⁹

The importance of traditional religion and culture today disproves Basden. Those who embraced the European education under this policy were not equipped with the necessary information to enable them to engage in the constructive criticism of the African cultures vis-à-vis the acquisition of elements of the British cultural package (which in itself was in some respects internally divided so as to include English, Scottish, Irish etc. cultural orientations). They lacked the stability to evaluate constructively the bi-cultural validity of those acquired. This hampered their ability to see things beyond their professional formations as influenced by the historical circumstances of their age.

The advance of bi-culturalism is strengthening the intellectual stability of the “de-colonized” African. Cultural knowledge is interrelated – there is a link between literature and philosophy, theology etc. Reaction against colonialism, Christianity etc., was at the roots of many *African Writings*. Through them struggle was transposed into the individual. It became a struggle within and between the same person and his culture. Conflict continues to resurface on the individual’s psyche.³⁰ Igbo intellectuals are today looking at the cultural issues raised by the overall message of *Things Fall Apart*, and are asking: “how could someone like Okonkwo who began life from “nowhere” be a good defender of the culture in which everything was against him?” Was he not looking for a new beginning based on individualism – in other words, the real source of his conflict? What was the difference between he who committed suicide fighting a foreign culture, and a Christian convert in Umuofia who denounced his past as bad, and opted for a fresh new beginning from nowhere, in pursuit of becoming “a new creation”. The latter was meant to justify the acquisition of a foreign culture, as if the Christian meaning of becoming “a new creation” was indissolubly tied to a culture!

²⁹ P. xv.

³⁰ Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, was struggling first with himself and inheritance –his father and ancestors, chi, natural environment, society.

Transculturalism – An Answer!

European education produced more *dimaraganas* by diverting their attention from their real problems and away from their cultural homelands. This made it difficult for them to realize the authenticity of what makes things African to be genuinely human.³¹

“The cultural and intellectual achievements commonly claimed as exclusive to the European continent,”

some forget,

“are a concoction of transcultural intercontinental borrowings such as one may only expect in a small peninsula attached to the Asian land mass and due north of the African land mass, both continents several times the size of Europe. What makes things European to be European, and things African to be African, for that matter, is primarily the *transformative localisation* after diffusion.”

What is not realized as much as it should, is that this

“Transformative localisation gave rise to unmistakably, unique and genially Greek myths, philosophy, mathematics, politics, although virtually all the ingredients of these domains of Greek achievement had been borrowed from Phoenicia, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Egypt (and so by implication from Africa), Thracia, and the Danube lands. And a similar argument could be made for many splendid kingdoms and cultures of post-Neolithic Africa.”³²

Those who talk of African cultural homelessness are ignorant of the above facts. This ignorance shows what is happening in some sectors of the academic and intellectual world concerning Africa. Can one talk of “Africans” without admitting the reality that is Africa?

“Whatever Africans share,” insists Appiah, “we do not have a common traditional culture, common language, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary.”

It seems Appiah does not see anything common to Africans that can be a basis of their solidarity. He believes:

³¹ Onwubiko, O. A.; *African Thought Religion and Culture*, 1991.

³² van Binsbergen, W, ‘African spirituality’, *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy*, 4, 2004 (English and Spanish versions), at: <http://them.polylog.org/4/fbw-en.htm> .

“we do not even belong to a common race.”³³

This, of course, is true. But it depends on the meaning of “share”, “have” and “common” in this assertion; and also depending on whether we can really *have* what we *share* and *share* what we *have* as Africans. Let me mention that those who equate *race* with complexion quickly speak of the “Black race” and, in this sense, Africa unmistakably belongs to a common race. By belonging to Africa as a “common race” they imply that in being African, I must, for instance, cease to be Igbo and metamorphose into a Nigerian that must also disappear into their African construct! But what does Africa, for instance, mean for Appiah? We know – a home of problems!

“Africans”, he says, “share too many problems and projects to be distracted by a bogus basis for solidarity.”³⁴

This is a typical *dimaragana* opinion.

Stephen Howe attacked ethnophilosophy. He cites many “African philosophers themselves” who also attacked it.³⁵ Yes, many “African philosophers” – if they accept that designation of themselves – have criticised ethnophilosophy to deny African ethno spiritual, theological, philosophical make-up, without telling us of any philosophy that is *Ethno Neuter* in content, author, problem, method, audience, etc. Howe informs us:

“the most powerful attack on ethnophilosophy and associated assumptions has been made by the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah.”³⁶

One can understand the concerns of Appiah – ethnophilosophers never go beyond the descriptive stage of African traditional religious and cultural beliefs. I insist it is “a stage” and an important one for that matter. It should not become the final stage. It is *a*, not *the* foundation of African philosophy, based on African *ethnos*.³⁷ But what makes it difficult, if not impossible, for

³³ Appiah, K. p. 26.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 26.

³⁵ Howe, S. *Afrocentricism: Mythical Pasts And Imagined Homes*, p. 158.

³⁶ Appiah, K. op. cit. p. 160.

³⁷ *Ethnos* here means people/ nation/ race.

Appiah, and for those of his intellectual colony, not to build and improve on this stage is what baffles me. And I must remark that even Howe does not dismiss this stage. He accepts its validity as

“where serious thought must start.”³⁸

To ignore this starting point – the description, no matter how good or bad, true or false our traditional beliefs are – “where serious thought must start,” we must forever be confronted with the question: “where did you come from originally” in our philosophical thinking! Howe tells his readers:

“The critics of ethnophilosophy – Hountondji, Appiah, Wiredu, Towa, Masolo, and the rest – seem to me to adhere to generally higher standards of argument than their opponents. Their views are expressed in more lucid form (with partial exception of the Althusserian jargon disfiguring Hountondji’s early work!), they proceed more often by reasoned arguments as opposed to mere assertion or description, their work is more coherent. To some, no doubt, that view simply shows that I have an irredeemably eurocentric conception of coherence.”³⁹

The problem I see in their attacks is that in the attempt to “destroy” ethnicism in African Studies they enthrone Euro-American ethnocentrism. For Wiredu, the African philosopher has no choice but to be a loudspeaker of the Eurocentric philosophy.⁴⁰ His type of study cannot contribute to the healthy development of *African Philosophy*. And the inability to tell the world on whose “traditional beliefs” that Appiah and his types’ adherence “to generally higher standard of argument” depend is what makes Howe’s type of scholarship a consolidation of *racism* generating *antiracist racism*.

Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji, with reference to ethnophilosophy – and Anthony Appiah though criticising them – have carefully reformulated Eurocentricism and racism, up to the point of effectively disguising their own Ethnocentrism under these reformulations. Appiah accepts that:

“...every culture has had views about what it is to have something like a mind and of its relationship to the body; almost every culture has had a concept that plays some of the roles of concepts of divinity. And even if there were human cultures where noth-

³⁸ Howe, S. op. cit. p. 160.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 161.

⁴⁰ *End of Racism*, p. 368-369.

ing like any of these concepts was present, it is hard to make sense of the idea of a culture that did not have *any* crucial organizing concepts.”⁴¹

The connection Appiah makes between culture and its “crucial organizing concepts” is important. But more important is our obligation to find and defend these “crucial organizing concepts” in our culture. They preserve our core values. If we do this it would not be difficult to see the truth in Appiah’s affirmation.

“There is, then, in every culture a folk philosophy, and implicit in that folk philosophy are all (or many) of the concepts that academic philosophers have made central to their study in the West.”

By implication, therefore, in Igbo culture there are many of the concepts academic philosophers can make central to their study in the same way “folk philosophy” was the starting point of European thought. Appiah admits,

“Of course, there might not be in every society people who pursued a systematic critical conceptual inquiry, but at least in every culture there is work for a philosopher, should one come along, to do.”⁴²

Appiah deserves praise for this admission. But the question remains will this philosopher be made or born within or without the culture area and background? How, of what background and from where “should one come along?” Western philosophical Tradition, opines Appiah.

Appiah’s phrase, “should [a philosopher] come along”, shows the *di-maragana* thinking that the philosopher must come from outside. This type of thinking kept African philosophy and theology “en route” for long. The idea of “route” whether metaphorical or real has been facing the dilemma between its *a quo* and *ad quem*. Could this route continue into another as a connecting or an intersecting one? And whether those who travel along this “route” even believe that they have or can even arrive philosophically and theologically is yet to be proved! The problems of their people have become very inconceivable for them. So as if to be pointing at this route from some safe distance many authors are comfortable with writing: *Towards...*, or

⁴¹ Appiah, K. op. cit. p. 87.

⁴² *Loc. cit.*

Introduction to... African Theology, etc.

Conclusion

African scholars need to develop more intellectual intra-, inter-, bi-, cross- and trans-culturality for fruitful academic dialogue in the 21st century. By intellectual here, I mean the mental ability to undertake the scrutiny of other's and one's cultures. It is the ability to admit that a new missio-theological equation has evolved. It states: to evangelize Africa is to strengthen her. This began before the Second Vatican Council, but that Council promulgated it.⁴³ That equation was the guiding principle of the African Synod.⁴⁴ And strengthening Africa presupposes an end to colonialism in all its forms; as well as it presupposes that to colonize, to civilize and to evangelize are not interchangeable. Their interrelation even had dangerous consequences leading to the belief that the end of colonialism would lead to the end of Christianity in Africa.⁴⁵

The African Synod was a *Synod of Hope*; a hope that Africa will come to stand on her feet in the third millennium. As the Pope said in his opening address on the Synod,

“We would like this to be a thoroughly African synod that goes to the very roots of what makes the Church in Africa African and, at the same time, universal.”

If these “roots” include the very African human nature, religious and cultural values, etc then I think it should go to strengthen the roots of Afri-

⁴³ Church Teachings, from Leo XIII who inaugurated the 20th century to John Paul II who inaugurated the 21st have emphasized “unity of the human race.” Pius XII [1939 - 1958] insisted that “civilization” does not break this unity of the human race. He condemned polygenesis in 1950. John XXIII (1958–1963) made human and Christian unity central themes of his pontificate. They became core issues at Vatican II. Paul VI laid the foundation of “dialogue as charity” in religion, culture, politics, communication, [mass media], economics, technology, theology, philosophy, literature, etc. LG spoke of the unity of the human race.

⁴⁴ *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995.

⁴⁵ Achebe, M.Y. p. 118.

can culture in Christianity and the roots of Christianity in African Church. Elimination of the socio-psychological, religio-political etc impediments to this project was anticipated. *Memory and Purification and Faults of the Past* was an expression, whether understood as a realistic or symbolic of guilt, the truth remains the Church asked pardon for “past faults.”⁴⁶ One thing was established, the good will to promote “dialogue as charity.” The current dispute between the Vatican and Europe over the “Christian roots” of European culture demanding a distinction between “Christian roots” of European culture and the “European roots” of the Christian culture is instructive. It presents us with alternatives: can a culture sustain two or more religions and retain its unity in diversity? Yes! And can the same religion develop two or more cultures – in a diversified unity and retain its uniqueness as a religion? This is the heart of the present debate of the role of Christianity in the formation of a global culture –multiculturalism. And from here re-encountering culture becomes indispensable for living Christianity in my father's home beyond racism!

⁴⁶ What specifically these were, is not the focus of this article.

