

**A Philosophy of Wholeness, Shared Praxis,
Pedagogies and Curriculum Implementation
For Christian Religious Education of Ndi Igbo
and Africans**

By

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Abstract

The Holy Ghost Missionaries, along with European explorers, merchants, colonialists and Protestant bodies introduced Church Missionary Education (CME) in Africa especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Holy Ghost Missionaries, especially, propagated CME among *ndi Igbo* of southeastern Nigeria. Their educational philosophy and methods promoted colonial and church influences that are insensitive to the educational customs and traditions of the people, thus leading to calls for reforms. This article proposes a philosophy of wholeness to address the inadequacies in the educational and religious curriculum the people inherited. Thomas Groome's shared praxis

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pedagogies and methods are described and presented in this article as having potentials for tackling the socio-cultural, political, religious, and educational challenges facing *ndi Igbo* and Africans in post-colonial and post-missionary Africa.

Key words: Missionary, Education, Neo-colonial, Reforms, Philosophy, Curriculum, Methods, Religious.

Introduction

*Ndi Igbo*² are among the ethnic peoples of southeastern Nigeria who embraced the educational innovations promoted by European colonialists and church missionaries especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Holy Ghost missionaries, who mainly evangelized *ndi Igbo* promoted church missionary education among them. *Ndi Igbo* have emigrated in their numbers overseas, and like other Africans in the diaspora, have retained the limitations of the educational legacy they inherited from their European colonial and church missionary forebears.

The historical method of research, understood as recalling the memory of past events and sources to understand current issues was adopted in this article. Attempts are made here to evaluate and interpret historical evidence, to reconstruct and describe the past. The aim is to understand how the past has shaped the present, and to highlight how insights from the past might help shed light on contemporary problems, providing the impetus to envision an alternative future.

² *Ndi Igbo* is the original and plural word for *Igbo* people. This original form is used throughout this article to avoid anglicizing the name.

An Igbo African tone is adopted in this article to show that its subject matter applies equally to all Africans. The universalizing “African” tone or language derives from Laurenti Magesa’s claim that despite differences in beliefs and experiences, there subsists a unified African spirituality.³ And although their colonial and missionary experiences may differ, “there exists an underlying similarity of spirit and intention” as evidenced by the colonialists in perpetuating their exploitation of Africa, as well as evidenced in Africans’ united resolve in confronting and resisting European oppression.⁴ Albert Memmi’s contention that the fate of the colonized across the world “has much in common” because “all the oppressed are alike in some way,”⁵ applies in this article.

Modern scholarship acknowledges that educational philosophies and methods are intentional choices designed to achieve specific goals relevant to a society’s way of life.⁶ School curricula have been used to achieve specific national goals. American scholarship, for example, contributed immensely to the success of American space technology. The landing of humans on the moon, “before the end of this decade,” as promised by President Kennedy in 1960, is proof of this claim. “In July 1969, the first men stood on the moon. And while they talked of having

³ Laurenti Magesa, *What is not Sacred? African Spirituality*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 5.

⁴ Okonkwo Remigius Nwabichie, *Reclaiming Traditions of Igbo Education and the Legacy of the Holy Ghost Missionaries*, (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing Co, 2024), xii.

⁵ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) ix.

⁶ Nathan R. Kollar, “Methods and Theologies in Religious Education.” *Religious Education* (Vol. LXVII Nov – Dec. 1972), 440-448.

come on behalf of all mankind, their shoulder patches read, USA.”

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Philosophies and methods for contemporary education adhere to the same principle. Hence, the philosophy and the shared praxis pedagogies discussed in this article are value-driven propositions that align with Africans’ problem-solving traditions, as well as with those aspects of Christian Religious education that focus on social justice, liberation and empowerment etc.

Bernard Bailyn, in his book, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, highlighted the role of education as “the entire process by which culture transmits itself across generations.”⁸ Bailyn identifies the family, school, church, and apprenticeship as the four basic institutions of education through which society transmits its values. But education, as understood in this article, goes beyond transmission and includes transformation of society’s values. The jury is still out on how the colonial and church missionary educational legacy has positively transformed Igbo African values and traditions.

This article will describe how shared praxis pedagogies can enhance curriculum changes for *ndi Igbo* and Africans in practicing their faith post-colonialism and post-missionaries. The article also suggests shifting to an era of Christian religious education that embodies the gospels’ principles of freedom, emancipation, and empowerment.

⁷ Spanier in Nwabichie, *Religion for Morality in Education*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 2000), 46.

⁸ Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, (New York: Vintage Press, 1960).

What is Church Missionary Education?

Church Missionary Education (CME) is defined variously. In this article, however, CME is described as the **type** of education introduced by missionaries and colonialists where all subjects, including the Bible, are used to promote European culture and church influences. Its origins in Africa date back to colonial times. But John Elias traces the origins of this type of education to an earlier time, describing it as “a principal component of the Renaissance humanism that shaped education in Europe and in those parts of the world where Europe colonized - the Americas, Africa and Asia.”⁹ Suggested in this article are some ways for *ndi Igbo* and Africans to advance a Christian religious educational era suitable to their needs, without neo-colonial influences and tendencies.

Apologists often highlight the positive achievements of European colonialists and missionaries in Africa and counter any criticisms to the contrary. At the 1985 centennial celebration of the Holy Ghost missionaries' arrival in eastern Nigeria, for example, Celestine Obi praised these "under-equipped soldiers of Christ" for the growth of Christianity in the twelve dioceses of the region.¹⁰ Against accusations of cultural and educational insensitivity, apologists counter by claiming that the missionaries acted according to the norms and knowledge of their time.¹¹ While

⁹ John Elias, *A History of Christian Education: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Perspectives*, (Florida, Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, 2002), xii.

¹⁰ Celestine Obi (Ed), *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*. (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Limited. 1985), xiii.

¹¹ Charles Ebelebe, *Africa and the New Face of Mission*, (Maryland: University Press of America, Inc. 2009), xiv.

one can understand their viewpoint, it is important not to become overly influenced by their justifications.

Charles Ebelebe believes that the Spiritans who evangelized *ndi Igbo* had enough resources for a culturally more sensitive mission, but their Irish background likely influenced their mission theology differently.¹² Ebelebe cites pre-Vatican II papal pronouncements on missions whose relevance “are as current today as when they were first made,” and argues that “if missionaries failed to implement these teachings, it was not because they knew no better but because they lacked the will to implement them. And if anyone insists it was ignorance, then it was culpable ignorance.”¹³

Both Leon Lejeune and Alexander Le-Roy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries protested the popular but unsound philosophy of education adopted by their contemporaries and compatriots in Africa. In a letter to *Propaganda Fide* in 1904, for example, Lejeune spoke of the 1,200 school pupils “as our only hope” in education in southeastern Nigeria. But only if it is quality education capable of competing “in English territories where Protestant establishments have the advantage.”¹⁴ Rather than frame their religious and educational blueprint on sentimental and prejudicial assumptions about Africans, Le-Roy argued that only by focusing on data and accurate facts can his European confreres

¹² *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁴ Nicholas Omenka, *The School in the service of Evangelization*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 48.

“reduce exoticism and errors in the inaccurate naming and mapping” of reality as were attributed to Africans.¹⁵

Later in the twentieth century, Father Leen rails against the inadequacies of the catechism teaching method, observing that...

[the Igbo] grasp of Christianity will be in direct proportion to the power of the catechism itself to yield up from its own expression a thorough understanding of the Catholic religion [and] as such...it is not an understatement of fact to say that ... the approved catechisms in use [among *ndi Igbo*] are powerless to impart a knowledge of essential Catholicity.¹⁶

This was *typical* of the modern educational legacy (whether religious or not) bequeathed to *ndi Igbo* and Africans by the colonialists and missionaries. One must admit, as Ali Mazurai asserts, that “colonialism did bring some sort of positive effect, even if it were by default or by the iron law of unintended consequences.”¹⁷ But it is also relevant to point to the not-so-good effects of the colonialists’ and missionaries’ accomplishments.

Francis Arinze articulated the perspective of the apologists and others when he noted that the

School served in many ways. It made the children literate, and literacy opened many doors – political, cultural and

¹⁵ Nwabichie, *Reclaiming Traditions of Igbo Education*, 79; Elochukwu Uzukwu, “Spiritan Missionary Project and the God Question- Indigenous Mediations of the Sacred and the Challenges of Evangelism.” *African Journal of Contextual Theology*, (Enugu: SIST. Vol. 4, 2013), 149-178.

¹⁶ Augustine S. O. Okwu. *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions 1857-1957*, (Maryland: University Press of America, Inc. 2010), 186.

¹⁷ Mazurai in Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, (N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996), 5.

religious. The young people learned about Christ, but they also acquired a literary education, which made it possible for them to become teachers, to become clerks, to become engineers. We can say that the school, at least in Nigeria, but also in many other parts of Africa, is one of the most powerful instruments of integral development.¹⁸

In addition to the modern infrastructural amenities like paved roads, hospitals, schools and churches built by the missionaries and colonialists, perhaps the most outstanding is the enlightenment which led to the abandonment of certain cultural customs of the locals like “cannibalism, the killing of twins, human sacrifices and the willful destruction of prisoners... which had superstition and ignorance at their bases.”¹⁹

Nicholas Omenka opines that...

... the killing of twins was a phenomenon which no official compulsion would have succeeded in eradicating has such an action not been accompanied by a peaceful enlightenment of the people. Many African societies regarded the issue of twins as a disruption in the normal rhythm of nature. To kill the twins was to appease the gods, and, by so doing, to bring nature, in the interest of the whole community, back to harmony.²⁰

¹⁸ Francis Arinze, *God's Invisible Hand*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 17.

¹⁹ Nicholas i. Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 116.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116. Father Lena's experience in the Calabar area of southeastern Nigeria eviscerated the superstitious foundation of this practice. When in 1912 he “picked up and nursed abandoned twins, ... he noticed that the natives

The abandonment of practices like the above was a noteworthy accomplishment by the Europeans.

For critics, however, the school also was or is also a potent instrument for promoting colonial ideas, and that must be considered a blemish to their accomplishments. The Senegalese novelist, Hamidou Kane, captures the view of the critics when he describes the school as a weapon in the hands of colonialists. “Better than the cannon,” he writes, “it [the school] makes conquest permanent. The cannon compels the body; the school bewitches the soul.”²¹

But this article is not a blanket condemnation of the work of the missionaries. On the contrary, it highlights the colonialists’ and missionaries’ heroism as well. It depicts the significant hardships and losses of life experienced by especially the missionaries, who, despite their high death toll at the time when the West Africa region was called “the white man’s grave ... where many go in but very few come out”²² still volunteered for missions in the region. It was heroic when Father Bessieux petitioned Father Libermann urging him not to abandon Africa because of these deaths.

It cannot be overstated that the origins of modern educational innovations among *ndi Igbo* and Africans belong to the missionaries and colonialists. As Augustine Akubue asserts, “irrespective of whether the beginning was humble, the progress slow, the curriculum shallow, the system colonial and heavily

were stupefied when nothing like a general calamity descended on the town. This extraordinary event was worth more than a thousand sermons and a thousand Christian teachings.”

²¹ Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, (New York: Walker and Company, 1963) 49.

²² Celestine Obi, (Ed). *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885 – 1985*, (Onitsha: Africana-Feb Publishers, 1985), 5.

religion-based, the fact still remains that the credit for pioneering the educational enterprise goes to the missions”²³

This article seeks to address and rectify any factual inaccuracies implicated in both the critics’ and apologists’ defenses. This article examines the actions, inactions, and experiences of both parties. Key questions asked in this write-up include how the church that started as an outstation of Gabon in 1885, grew to millions of Christians within a century and began sending missionaries worldwide. Obi noted that, “at this stage, Onitsha was what could be called an outstation or quasi-parish run from Gabon.”²⁴

Other questions that interest this writer include how Christian evangelization connected to the slave trade and colonization could have led to such significant impacts in the region. How could the Christian Gospels have reached West Africa amidst European influences? How could one honestly collaborate with the institutional Church with such dark history for a lifetime of personal career growth?

While these questions fall outside the scope of this current work, they nonetheless drive the central proposition of this article: the burden of history, which, as Kevin O’Meara suggests, obligates one to acknowledge “the atrocities of one’s past in order to come to a more robust understanding of oneself and one’s historically situated social position.” [We must accept] “responsibility for the continued repercussions of our ancestors’

²³ Augustine U. Akubue, *Effective Teaching of CRK & BK in Secondary Schools*, (Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Company, 1992), 11.

²⁴ Recall that in 1857, the Vicariate of the two Guineas was split into the Vicariate of Sierra Leone (Upper Guinea), and the Vicariate of Gabon (Lower Guinea). And Onitsha was part of the Lower Guinea. See Obi, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria*, 9.

actions, [and allow them to challenge our conventional narratives] ... and national myths....”²⁵ O’Meara concludes.

Missionaries must, therefore, account to themselves for what they thought, taught, and did, and must also account, as Ogbu Kalu upholds, “for what the people perceive and how they respond, and what the institutional church exudes or even prescribes as ideals to guide the missionary.”²⁶ The challenges inherent in the above position are significant for the effective promotion of a Christian religious education envisioned especially for *ndi Igbo* and African peoples.

Because the church missionary educational legacy bequeathed to *ndi Igbo* and Africans incorporated a European colonial agenda, a call is being made in this article for Africans to transition to a Christian religious educational era without such blemish. The call is for a CRE of the gospels which embodies the gospels principles for emancipation and empowerment.

Christian Religious Education of the Gospels and its Importance for *Igbo* Africans

Christian Religious Education (CRE) espoused in this article is a **field** of study within the science of education that teaches about the Christian religion without necessarily, as Groome asserts, imposing it on people.²⁷ CRE promotes the perspective that the child is central to being educated in the message of the gospels as emphasized in the New Testament.²⁸ As part of the modern

²⁵ Kevin O’Meara “Marie del’Incarnation: Theological Justification for Colonial Atrocities.” <https://medium.com/@kevinomeara>).

²⁶ Kalu in Ebelebe, *Africa and the New Face of Mission*, viii.

²⁷ Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), xii.

²⁸ Mark 9:36; Matthew 18:2.

educational movement especially of the twentieth century, CRE supports the idea that understanding the child's mind provides guidance for educating them, including guidance for methods and materials selection.²⁹

George Albert Coe believes that because religion is an inherent aspect of human nature, it must be incorporated into the general educational curricula. Coe writes,

If, for any reason, the state does not impart religious training, then the home and the church must assume the whole task. This task is no mere appendix to general education, but an essential part thereof. It is not a special or professional matter, which, like training in the fine arts, may be left to individual taste or ambition. Religious education must be provided for all children, and institutions that provide it for any children are organs of the general education system.³⁰

CME uses languages rooted in liturgy, preaching, and faith acceptance, while in contrast, CRE employs the languages of resistance, persistence, persuasion, protest, confrontation, logic, critical thinking, questioning assumptions, analyzing conclusions, and sometimes rejecting them. While CME belongs in church or liturgy, CRE fits in the home, classroom, and various professional fields like business, commerce, and politics.

As an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, CRE can examine the effects of European presence in Africa and assess its impact on their educational and religious traditions. It can assess and

²⁹ George Albert Coe, "Religious Education as a Part of General Education" Proceedings of the First Convention of Religious Education Association, *Religious Education* (Chicago: 1903, 44-52).

³⁰ Coe, *Religious Education*, 1903, 44-52.

evaluate the damage done to the psyche of Africans by the European missionaries; it can help reclaim the indigenous values and institutions that barely survived the European subversion and integrate them with modern innovations. CRE aims to hybridize the new educational approaches; and to overcome their limitations, align them with African values and traditions to better their effectiveness among the people. To be good news to *Igbo* Africans, the gospels must be seen and felt to address the spiritual and material needs of the people.

One of the keyways *Igbo* Africans can benefit from the gospels is when they are assisted to recover their sense of self-worth and pride in their cultural heritage damaged by European colonialism and missionary influences. Like Lazarus raised from the dead, the gospels must raise to a new life *ndi Igbo* and Africans who daily bear the transgenerational trauma of enslavement and colonization. As Martha failed to stop Jesus from raising Lazarus from the dead because “already there is a stench,”³¹ so too must nothing stop Africans’ resistance and rise from the socio-political, educational, psychological and religious enslavement colonialism and European influences have imposed on them.

Christian Religious Education and the Philosophy of Wholeness

Meeting the needs for this new dispensation of modern educational innovations in Africa would require means and a different educational philosophy to propose those means, methods, innovations, and policies. A change of philosophy is essential because, without it, a change of means and methods would fail or be limited in their reform effectiveness.

³¹ John 11:38

A philosophy of wholeness is recommended for addressing the various tasks facing humanity. For Africans, however, this overarching philosophy would, among other things, imply moving away from the current binary "either-or" philosophical framework to embrace a "both-and" approach in their ways of solving problems.

A philosophy of wholeness would challenge the European colonial view that denied equal humanity and rationality to Africans and non-white races. It would reject the "either-or" perspective, which creates tensions disruptive of the interrelationships and interdependence the world needs for peaceful co-existence.³² Among other things, a philosophy of wholeness would make its motto the resistance against the assumptions of a superior white Caucasian class and an inferior black African class— a class hierarchy that is based solely on skin color.

A philosophy of wholeness would foster peace by encouraging diverse perspectives in relationships. (And relationships, whether with the “divine” or other humans, are central to the meaning of religion underscored in the field of Christian religious education). Elochukwu Uzukwu characterizes this philosophy as a perspective on reality that acknowledges the fundamental plurality and multiplicity, and therefore, relational nature of existence. Uzukwu asserts that "what is not multiple does not exist," emphasizing that the ideas of twinning, duality, relatedness, multiplicity, ambiguity, and ambivalence prevalent in religion and anthropology are ontological concepts.

Rather than undermining universal order, (as some might suggest), a system that advances such principles secures and

³² Nwabichie, *Reclaiming Traditions of Igbo Education*, 120.

consecrates order, relationality and flexibility. Such a system invites the world to adopt a new interpretive framework which recognizes that the world is never simply given but is always subject to interpretation.³³

The missionary and educational systems *ndi Igbo* and Africans inherited from their colonial and church missionary forebears unfortunately failed to adopt such a philosophy. Instead, it instilled a narrow view of reality in their graduates, limiting them to binary thinking rather than to a holistic understanding. This view may sound controversial because it raises questions such as whether those generations of *Igbo* African engineers, scientists, technologists, medical personnel, and other professionals who graduated from church missionary schools and institutions are lacking in critical and wholistic view of reality.

Is this not the central issue with the educational and missionary systems inherited from colonial and church influences across Africa and elsewhere? Compared to their ancestors, graduates of modern educational systems, especially in Africa, have been described as ill-equipped to navigate with competence the challenges of their immediate surroundings. And this is not a hyperbole. Omenka observes how graduates of our schools are estranged from their immediate socio-cultural environments. It is not unusual to find CME graduates who know “the names of major European cities, and who could quote freely from Shakespeare and the Bible but had no knowledge of the geography, history, and cultural backgrounds of their own country.”³⁴

³³ Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012, 5).

³⁴ Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization*, 176.

Omenka describes such graduates as “educational aberrations” and Anthony Njoku describes them as “*usu*” (the bat), “useless to their contexts and hardly fitting other contexts as confident leaders, except as second-rate consumers of knowledge generated by others.”³⁵ A more comprehensive curriculum of education is necessary for *Igbo* Africans because the narrow status quo is not competently addressing the political, social, economic, and religious struggles in Africa today.

Nic Cheeseman and Jonathan Fisher in their book, *Authoritarian Africa: Repression, Resistance, and the Power of Ideas*, argue that colonialism has profound impact on the inherited African political systems, for example. They state that...

... the unstable authoritarian pathway that so many states followed after colonial rule was no accident. It was facilitated by the ways in which European empires undermined democratic elements within African societies. ... this involved funding and arming willing collaborators to enable them to exert greater control over their communities. These leaders were expected to manage their communities and prevent a rebellion against colonial rule.³⁶

The absence of a comprehensive curriculum essential for Africans to effectively navigate the nascent inherited challenges of their environments has repercussions beyond the political sphere. The shortcoming is observed in the religious and psychological

³⁵ Njoku in Okere and Njoku, (Eds). *Towards Indigenization of Education in Africa* (Proceedings of the International Symposia organized by Whelan Research Academy). (Owerri, Nigeria: Vol. 1, Number 5, 2006), 4.

³⁶ Nic Cheeseman and Jonathan Fisher, “How colonial rule predisposed Africa to fragile authoritarianism” in <http://flip.it/.zoTqd> (updated November 4, 2019).

spheres as well. Leo Amafilé notes that upon examining Christian practices critically, one may observe inherent contradictions. During crises moments, individuals often abandon their Christian beliefs and seek solutions within the cultural traditions they were previously encouraged to forsake in favor of Christianity. Alternatively, some join independent churches where they feel their cultural identity is acknowledged and respected.³⁷

The above scenarios underscore what Mary Boys describes as the “foot-loose-ness” of “new generations” unexposed to complexity and paradox in their education. Such generations often immerse themselves solely in their fields of endeavor, and fail to transform their socio-cultural, political, religious, psychological, philosophical, technological and educational milieu. This is unhealthy. The ambition of CRE is to raise generations of people who are alive to their religious commitments while embracing ambiguity and adaptability. Anything short of this is mediocrity.

Boys admits that embracing ambiguity and adaptability might sound anomalous or threatening to the status quo. But to the contrary. Ambiguity, which derives from the Latin *ambigere* (to drive both ways), suggests that we resist what Stephen Brookfield terms “premature absolutes” lest we close off “on the mystery of religious experience and confuse the poetry of religious language with the prosaic renderings of propositions.”³⁸ This claim applies analogically to every field of endeavor we inherited from our colonial and erstwhile missionary forebears.

³⁷ Leo Amafilé, *The Meanders of the Inculturation of Christian Faith*, (Umuahia: Lumen Publications, 1998) 1.

³⁸ Mary C. Boys, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: One Woman's Experience*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 9

The *Igbo* African philosophy of wholeness which rejects colonial European either/or absolutes equips individuals with the skills necessary to communicate, confront, and resolve ambiguities. This philosophy allows for adaptability which stems from rootedness in own foundations, “foundations that allow for movements, just as the tree with deep roots can survive a violent storm and a building engineered with the proper degree of oscillation can withstand an earthquake” as Boys asserts.³⁹

Igbo African worldview is akin to a harmonious dance, or a symphony, as encapsulated in their proverb: “Whenever something stands, something else will stand beside it.” The implication is that nothing is absolute, as exemplified by their saying, as Chinua Achebe reminds us, “one may worship *Ogwugwu* to perfection and yet be killed by *Udo*.”⁴⁰ It is, therefore, sensible for *Igbo*/Africans to hold on to their world view on reality which embraces multiplicity and promote it as a valid philosophy for educating themselves and others in the Christian faith.”⁴¹

Are Alternative Pedagogies necessary for Christian Religious Education among *Ndi Igbo*?

The complexities of the historical, religious, and educational legacies in sub-Saharan Africa have become increasingly apparent over recent decades. These challenges underscore the necessity for approaches that differ from those employed by former colonialists and missionaries in the region. Additionally, there is a growing need for Africans to disinvest in the current colonial and church

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9

⁴⁰ Achebe in Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 12.

⁴¹ Nwabichie, *Reclaiming Traditions of Igbo Education*, 119.

missionary educational status quo that tends to be paternalistic, patronizing and neo-colonizing. Africans need to focus on Christian values based on the gospel lessons that are liberating and supportive of human flourishing.

Gospel stories present a complex set of images of Jesus. Jaroslav Pelikan identifies about fifteen images, including those that highlight Jesus's confrontation and resistance against the socio-cultural, political, and religious norms of his time.⁴² These stories show God's love for Jesus and the movement that followed him, healing and uplifting humanity until his return. The images of Jesus also indicate the goals of Christian religious education to include removing barriers to a fulfilling life. The essence of the gospel message is to promote goodness spiritually, materially, symbolically and metaphorically.⁴³

In a continent with so much bad news, the Christian religious educator must demonstrate how the Christian message is “Good news” for the people. “In the midst of all-pervading despair,” Stephen Ukpong asks, “where are the hope and optimism which the Gospel brings?”⁴⁴ *Ndi Igbo* and Africans must no longer just listen to Bible stories and memorize them catechism style. Nor accept the narrative of a helpless and effeminate Christianity capitulating to the negative forces in society. No. Bible stories must be good news to the African context, challenging Africans to be their best selves spiritually and materially.

⁴² Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, (Yale University, 1985).

⁴³ John 10:10.

⁴⁴ Oguejiofor and Innocent Enwe (Eds), *Ecclesia in Africa: The Nigerian Response*. Proceedings of the 11th Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria. (Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Company, 1997).

Christian Religious Education and Modern Research

Research in educational theory and leadership emphasizes the role of intentionality in teaching and learning contexts. Maria Harris, for example, emphasizes intentionality in designing educational spaces because they inherently teach.⁴⁵ Elliot Eisner's framework of explicit, implicit, and null curricula illustrates this concept's relevance in arts education and beyond. Educators, especially in religious contexts, therefore, must consider the multiple ways meanings interact and intersect in teaching and learning. They must be mindful of how their language, architectural designs and choices, and even the arts impact the intended and unintended lessons conveyed.⁴⁶

Educators can learn valuable lessons from Eisner when he teaches that:

- Problems can have multiple solutions.
- The form of an object is part of its content.
- Fixed objectives and clear-cut methods aren't always rational.
- Arts express meanings that other forms cannot and help students discover their capacity to feel and imagine.⁴⁷

The colonialists, missionaries, and their successors, overlooked such details as above. Their oversight of these details makes their pedagogical bequests inadequate to support robust Christian faith

⁴⁵ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

⁴⁶ Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design of School Programs*. (New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company, 1979).

⁴⁷ Elliot Eisner "The Misunderstood Role of the Arts in Human Development." *The Phi Delta Kappa*, (1992 73 (8): 591-595).

practices. Many *Igbo* Africans fail to carefully and critically identify the invaluable worth of the Christian message while recognizing the limitations of its human messengers.

In his book, *Not for Ourselves Alone* Bob Buckle depicts the mission school atmosphere among *nd'Igbo* of the late 1950s. Sadly, his depiction remains typical of schooling sessions in the region today. He observes...

The children chant and sing their spelling lessons and addition tables. They learn by mimicking the teachers, and somehow, they learn to read, write, and figure, though not very well. They learn geography, good health habits, and the parts of a flower. But the most important subject, so far as their parents are concerned, is English. Many are already secretly ambitious, thinking of how they might convince their fathers to pay for one more year of school, then another, and how they might go to a grammar school, and even to the United Kingdom or to the United States, returning to be a great politician or civil servant, to lead and ride in a very mighty car.⁴⁸

But how can a characterization of over half a century ago remain a typical portraiture of classroom sessions in most elementary and primary schools among *ndi Igbo* today?

Surprisingly, the children learnt and learn through this method. But sadly again, the curriculum continues to expose them to the extravagant, exaggerated, and extroverted agenda of their colonial and missionary forebears. This must be troubling for any conscientious educator who observes how the curriculum in use

⁴⁸ Buckle in David Koren, *Far Away in the Sky: A Memoir of the Biafran Airlift*. (An Imprint of the Royal Ota Heritage Trust, 2017), 143-4.

today in the region continues to mirror the prevailing influences of the past century. Must education, including education in churches and schools, not consistently convey lessons that preclude external influences of manipulation, exploitation and oppression? CRE must focus on changing this situation.

Shared Praxis Pedagogies and African Palaver Methods

The shared praxis pedagogies described in this article showcase how reducing exposure to external influences, resisting oppression, propaganda and exploitation are central to good education. These methods, inspired by Groome closely resemble *Igbo* African problem-solving techniques. The dynamics or movements of these pedagogies are like the “dance” of African Palaver methods, which focus on reconciliation through dialogue and discussion. They also strongly echo *Igbo* customs and traditions which emphasize consensus and unanimity through discussion and dialogue.

Francis Oborji highlights these methods as crucial for addressing missiological issues both in the African continent and globally. Oborji refers to African Palaver method as the “interactive dialogue that animates many African communities” with which the people seek “holistic interventions on issues of life... [while] “maintaining relationships within the hierarchy of existence.”⁴⁹ That Africans’ use dialogue and conversation to build relationships is a concept that is baked into their palaver customs.

⁴⁹Francis Oborji, “The African Palaver Reconciliation Model and Mission.” *International Review of Mission*, (Vol. 109: Issue 2, November 2020), 222-235. See <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12330>

Igbo people's love for dialogue reflects African palaver customs that promote reconciliation and social cohesion as seen in the 1995 South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁵⁰ Their maxim, "*Egbe bere; Ugo bere*" (let the kite perch and let the hawk perch) embodies their philosophy of fairness in interpersonal matters. As Theophilus Okere opines, the maxim reflects the *Igbo* people's will "to use balance, equity, and fair measure to gauge and order human relations, to have them reconciled, balanced and fair; to base them on justice."⁵¹

Because Groome's shared praxis methods emphasize solving problems through dialogue and participation, they align well with these traditional African methods. By integrating Groome's insights that resemble the *Igbo* customs of dialogue and African palaver practices that emphasize reconciliation, this article advances alternative pedagogical approaches that might immensely benefit the *Igbo* African peoples. These combined methods provide a strong foundation to address the contemporary needs and aspirations of *Igbo* African communities in contemporary times

The meaning of shared praxis methods ought to be clear because they involve, as Groome upholds, "mutual partnership, active participation, and dialogue with oneself, others, God, and the Christian faith's Story/Vision."⁵² Groome highlights their pedagogical value when describing education as a shared process,

⁵⁰ Oborji, "The African Palaver Reconciliation Model", 222-235.

⁵¹ Theophilus Okere. *Egbe Bere Ugo Bere: An African Concept of Justice and Peace*, (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 2015), 15.

⁵² Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education & Pastoral Ministry*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 142.

even in a society marked by individualism and competition.⁵³ Education as a shared process lends itself naturally to shared praxis pedagogies.

The European colonial and missionary presence led to a shift in the educational processes of *ndi Igbo*. And Groome's argument to restore education as a collective process significantly reclaims education as a tool for empowerment, an argument that highly resonates with *ndi Igbo*. The argument aligns with the *Igbo* African philosophy of education as a communal participation process. His view that education must move away from a system where teachers solely dictate knowledge, and students passively receive it, also aligns with their traditional perspective of education as a collaborative process.

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian philosopher of education, who in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, criticizes the "banking" educational method where students are considered passive learners without creative freedom or critical thinking is a useful resource for this article and its goals. This "banking" mindset which emerged in the twentieth century and was unfortunately popularized during that period of Africa's colonization holds steady today in most places in the continent. Isn't it time to challenge this system of authoritarian control of teachers and traditions that marginalizes students' contributions?⁵⁴

Groome's disaffirmation of this system highlights the challenge for educators, especially educators in Africa, to revisit their philosophy or theology concerning individuals. His proposition that educators must scrutinize their assumptions about learners and evaluate how their assumptions influence educational

⁵³ Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 142.

⁵⁴ <https://helpfulprofessor.com/banking-model>

outcomes is also well made. To conduct a thorough examination of their consciences, therefore, Groome advises educators to reflect on how they address the following questions:

...Do we see people as being capable of participating in teaching/learning events as agents of their own knowledge, as active contributors to the educational process? Do we assume they can personally receive, construct, and reconstruct knowledge as their own? Or do we think that people should be treated as dependent and passive recipients of knowledge from those who already know better [teachers]?⁵⁵

Shared praxis pedagogies positively address such questions and remind Christian educators that they foster a communal faith identity within the body of Christ. Christian religious educators, especially Christian religious educators in Africa, must show that Christian identity involves being part of an inclusive community of equals within the Body of Christ.⁵⁶ Paul would insist, "Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ, and no one is less a member. You, then, are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member." "You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a member."⁵⁷ Other New Testament references emphasizing community and equality include: "We are one body in Christ, individually members of one another."⁵⁸ "In one Spirit, all were

⁵⁵ Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 52.

⁵⁶ Groome, *Will There Be Faith*, 52.

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians. 12: 27.

⁵⁸ Romans 12:5.

baptized into one body.”⁵⁹ “There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.”⁶⁰

Hence, Groome asserts,

Christians cannot view such statements as empty rhetoric or eschatological promises. They should be at the foundation of Christian communities now, and how they educate must be radically communal. Only a “shared” process in which the voices of all are welcomed and heard can fully satisfy the purpose of Christian religious education.⁶¹

Participation and collaboration among all members of the Christian community must define the pedagogy and environment for nurturing Christian life and faith. A collaborative environment is essential to the framework of effective Christian religious education. Furthermore, an effective Christian pedagogical ecosystem must be inclusive and welcoming to everyone. With their strong sense of moral outrage against certain behaviors their society considers taboo (*aru*), abominations, the challenges such present for a philosophy of inclusion is not lost on this writer.

Shared Praxis Methods and Curriculum Implementation

Some scholars believe that by baptism Christians have pastoral and educational roles. Such scholars cite Jesus’ Great Commission: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” as the impetus for those roles⁶² Accordingly, they

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:13.

⁶⁰ Galatians 3:28.

⁶¹ Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 1991, 143.

⁶² Matthew 28:19.

argue, baptism affords the theological basis for Christian preaching and catechesis whose aim is "the presentation of the Christian faith in its entirety." ⁶³

Scholars like Harris and Groome also believe that the educational and pastoral duties of Christians are inherent in their roles as Christians and human beings.⁶⁴ Groome argues that the great commission amplifies those roles, requiring Christians in families, parishes, and schools to actively practice their faith.⁶⁵ How can Christians demonstrate their faith today, and how can the shared praxis pedagogies help them do so?

Christian Life and Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is crucial for the effectiveness of educational and pastoral roles. As understood in this article curriculum implementation is the experiences through which Christians achieve their educational and pastoral goals. Eisner's theory of the three curricula—explicit, implicit, and null—make effective teaching and learning include more than what is immediately apparent.⁶⁶ Educators, including religious educators, therefore, must demonstrate in their curriculum development an understanding of education as a process that encompasses elements beyond school, church, work, or home settings etc.

⁶³ *General Catechetical Directory*, (Washington D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1971), # 2.

⁶⁴ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, (Louisvill, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 81.

⁶⁵ Groome in Horell (Ed) "Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A vision for Now and Always." *Horizons & Hope, The Future of Religious Education*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 19.

⁶⁶ Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 1994; 1979.

Adopted for this book is Harris' and Gabriel Moran's description of education as the promotion of all forms of life.⁶⁷ Their description of education as "the fashioning and re-fashioning of life forms" allows one to envision curriculum implementation as the sharing of a people's experiences to support and shape all life forms including life in the family, church, school, and work etc.

A curriculum development and implementation that can secure the goals of an adequate Christian religious education must, therefore, promote, as Margaret Evening opines,

- The insistence on the infinite worth and importance of everyone.
- A preference for the values that upset the religious folks of Jesus' day.
- A preference for sinner rather than the self-righteous of society.
- An emphasis that the sins of the mind are as culpable as the sins of [the] body.
- An insistence that motive and action must both come under the same condemnation.
- And insistence that in God's Kingdom "the creed and be colour and the name don't matter."⁶⁸

How the shared praxis methods can support *ndi Igbo* and Africans on these insistences and preferences are demonstrable in various ways that space fails us to include in this article. However, some

⁶⁷ Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education*, (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998), 18.

⁶⁸ Margaret Evening, *Approaches to Religious Education*, (London: University Press, 1972), 141.

of the demonstrable ways *ndi Igbo* and Africans might benefit from the dynamism of the shared praxis pedagogies include

- how to educate for community and communion,
- how to educate for justice and peace and development,
- how to learn and teach the Christian religion, and
- how to educate for worship in spirit and truth guided by the message of the gospels.

Conclusion

This article discusses the need for *ndi Igbo* and Africans to find alternatives to the philosophy and educational methods inherited from colonialists and missionaries. A philosophy of wholeness and Groome's shared praxis pedagogies were recommended in this article for Christian religious education of the gospels because they engender the gospel principles for human flourishing. These approaches align well with *Igbo* African traditions, particularly their Palaver method, which values dialogue. This philosophy and methods could help *ndi Igbo* and other Africans transition to a post-colonial and post-missionary Church education.

The shared praxis methods emphasize that education is a collaborative process that must encourage community building and community identity formation. With their community-oriented and problem-solving aspects, these methods align well with the communal traditions of *Igbo* culture and the African Palaver system. This makes them suitable for general education as well as suitable for deepening in *Igbo* Africans the commitment of educating in their values of community and cooperation.

The shared praxis pedagogies, comparable to dance steps or a musical symphony, align with the *Igbo* view of education as a graceful dance refined with age. Couldn't these similarities make these methods better suited to meet the religious and educational needs and aspirations of *Igbo* Africans now and in the future?