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**Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, SDB, PhD
Philip Edema, PhD**

A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF ILO-UWA AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL REALITY: A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THE IGBO AND CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGICAL SCHEMES

ADIMIKE, John Owen E.

Abstract

I shall in this paper, assume three basic moments. My principal objective is to show that belief in reincarnation from the Igbo narrative is logically coherent with continuous subsistence in the ancestral realm. In the first, I engage the question of metaphysics from a socio-hermeneutic perspective to decipher its position as characteristically Igbo; in the second, I propose a scale of eschatology and juxtapose it with the Christian schema such that I exploit my provision of an Igbo anthroposophy to show how a unique individual exists that is still, the reincarnation of an ancestor. In the final analysis, I demonstrate the uniqueness of the eschatological schemes of the Igbos and Christians, in an effort to interpretatively spell out the fundamental differences and apparent similarities. With this in mind, I am pledged by intellectual truth to portraying the coexistence of individual haecceity and reincarnation, making use of Igbo anthroposophy as an operative argumentary ledger.

Keywords: Reincarnation, Religio-Cultural, *Ilo-Uwa*, Metaphysical Philosophy, Igbo, Christianity

General Introduction

Metaphysics, as described by an intellectual, Marcel N. Ezenwa, is "drama of reality".¹ Thus, as a drama of reality, it is the portrayal of characters and events through dialogue and action in a series of interesting events or conflicts. It is against such that this paper discusses a poignant metaphysical question, addressing as an enquiry, the Igbo concept of reincarnation as a descendant of philosophic socio-hermeneutics. We enter this hermeneutic because it is an approach worried with not only the interpretation of texts and ideas, but also of social and cultural categories.

¹ Marcel N. Ezenwa, in discussion with the author, December 22, 2018.

in a bid to understand the derived meaning as pertaining to the experience of the select social group.

The argument of this paper is to show how the Igbo version of reincarnation—*Ilo-Uwa*, is logically coherent with the idea of the subsistence of the living-dead, i.e., the demised person, in a spiritual world of the ancestors and how this demised still maintains this cherished position and still 'reincarnates' [or, in Igbo, *loghachi uwa*] in the form of a neonate in the world—most often, in the bereft family of the demise. The advanced venture of this argument is to juxtapose the schemes of the Christian eschatology and what the author brands as 'Igbo eschatology'. The objective pursued in this is the portrayal of the inimitability of both as well as the superficiality of similarity existing among them.

To achieve this aim, the work has been divided and structured as a whole, into two sections. The first addresses the question of reincarnation, seeking to understand as a fundamental step, deciphering what should be adopted as the fundamental premise of reincarnation among the dominant theses of reincarnation. Finding interest in the African accounts as the conclusion of the first section, the second section of the work delves into the socio-hermeneutic discourse of reincarnation in the Igbo instantiation. This section treats contextual eschatological issues in Igbo outlook and how their anthroposophy helps advance this contrastive inspection of the Christian take and the Igbo position. The conclusion reached is that various African contexts have worthy contributions to make to a general understanding of eschatological consciousness and that these systems of thought are unique, and conceptually distinct from the Christian eschatology. However, it is suspicioned that each is but a one-sided representation; thus, openness to mature ecumenical discussion is appraised.

Introducing the Question of 'Reincarnation'

African cultures tend to accept the belief in reincarnation as a fact. For the Igbo man, the concept of reincarnation is a reality and he familiarizes himself with it through the designative expression of *Ilo-Uwa*, meaning 'a return to the world'². This chapter begins by tracing the arguments of reincarnation and where the terminus a quo is situated. To fully

² Innocent C. Onyewuenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation: A Philosophical Reappraisal* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1996), 20.

understand the perspective from which we intend to proceed, the paper presents varied citations of reincarnation and that which is accepted by the paper in posing its argument. Thus, the final piecemeal of this paper is to present the notions of reincarnation in the African weltanschauung.

Tracing the Thread of Arguments

The entire train of arguments on the idea of reincarnation can be said to have been significantly enkindled by Innocent Onyewuenyi, in a paper of his titled *African Belief in Reincarnation: A Philosophical Reappraisal* (1982; 1996). Onyewuenyi's argument, appearing in 1982 and 1996, sparked serious arguments about whether or not Africans believe in reincarnation. It was Onyewuenyi's position that 'educated Africans' have interiorized and accepted the imposition that Africans believe in reincarnation and that it is erroneous to not only accept such a belief or to inform deliberate actions and choices by it, but also to affect one's life by it through the teaching and preaching of it.³ In fact, he bewails this deviance thusly: "this is an example of how abjectly a people can be caused to become complicit in their own degradation, by accepting uncritically a foreign imposition and thereby undermining their cultural identity".⁴ Thus, in tracing this thread of arguments delivered as protestations or contestations, there shall be heavy recourse to Onyewuenyi's argument in evaluation that we may be determinate and inexpugnable in our progression.

While reincarnation is generally believed to be a worldwide motif, Onyewuenyi narrows down the theme to an African perimeter, arguing that the motif is a misinterpretation of African philosophies and traditional notions and that the concept of reincarnation is besieged by Western misconstruing which manifest in the incorrect label of 'reincarnation'.⁵ He thus incitingly provokes the African scholar to inspect and scrutinize the notion of 'reincarnation' in African thought, assessing its correctness and significance. It is well-founded that the precise and genuine way of executing this scrutiny of the "question of reincarnation in contemporary African Philosophy",⁶ is not so much in determining the propriety of

³ Onyewuenyi, x.

⁴ Onyewuenyi, x.

⁵ Onyewuenyi, x.

⁶ Mesembe Ita Edet, "Innocent Onyewuenyi's 'Philosophical Re-appraisal of the African Belief in Reincarnation': A Conversational Study", in

Onyewuenyi's submission as in guaranteeing the correctitude of the African's belief in the idea of reincarnation.

Onyewuenyi is definitely not the only philosopher who has adduced surmises typical of his submissions; albeit he stands out among many like Umezurike Grace,⁷ for reason of the date and character of his argument. There is a great many point in Onyewuenyi's argument [as well as that of Umezurike] and it will be foully unseasonable to pass a verdict on Onyewuenyi's thought simply informed by his preliminary adductions, without first ascertaining his argument against the backdrop of the field of an African outlook to reincarnation.

As with Onyewuenyi's views, the concerns raised *contra* reincarnation chiefly constitute "semantic, metaphysical, ideological, psychological and ethno-philosophical dimensions",⁸ omitting the perspective of socio-hermeneutics which is as vital as the bone of contention itself. Hence, the focus of this paper, in addressing the 'question of reincarnation in contemporary African Philosophy',⁹ is to slant heavily towards the descant of socio-hermeneutics. Rather than drop entirely the idea/concept of reincarnation as Onyewuenyi permits,¹⁰ this paper consents to a proper definition of the concept of reincarnation and one that disambiguates unnecessary contents within the scope of the notion. Also, it is a laudable propriety of conduct to apportion the concept [of reincarnation] its rightful parastatal and pedestal in African metaphysics. It thus becomes our objective in this chapter to refine and assess the reasons/justifications for the belief in reincarnation in the African perspective and order its subsequent presentation; it is not a matter to be taken for granted the entailment perceived, for believing in the concept—we examine the structures that support such thinking, so as to test their soundness.¹¹ More

Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions (2016), 5, no. 1: 78.

⁷ Umezurike Grace, "A Philosophical/Critical Analysis of the Idea of Reincarnation", in *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (2017), 5, no. 9: 88-92.

⁸ Edet, "Innocent Onyewuenyi's 'Philosophical Re-appraisal of the African Belief in Reincarnation'", 79.

⁹ Edet, 78.

¹⁰ Onyewuenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation*, 13.

¹¹ Edet, "Innocent Onyewuenyi's 'Philosophical Re-appraisal of the African Belief in Reincarnation'", 79.

so, there is no intention whatsoever to completely discard the concept either.

Etymological Analysis of 'Reincarnation'

To commence the task of examining the question of reincarnation in contemporary African philosophical thought, one must first understand the meaning entrenched in the word, 'reincarnation' and then compare and contrast with the various African lexemes that portray wholly or partially, the same idea intended by the English or any other derivative language. The difficulty of the task we embark on is twofold: we are limited by length in venturing too further afield and; as Anthony Okonkwo points out, names/terms limit the reality designated.¹² This is to say that we cannot be legitimately assured that the names we may encounter, adequately and sufficiently depict the reality the culture that employs them wants us to know (which can only be discovered by an ethnological survey carried out within the perimeter of the particular culture).

What is it that is called reincarnation? A burgeoning thinker and [a] *discipulus* of the African metaphysician and Igbo personalist, Anthony E. Okonkwo—Anselm Chukwuemezugo Obialor, traces the word 'reincarnation', back to 1858 when the term first appeared in an English script with the intent to display some kind of rebirth.¹³ While Obialor simply puts reincarnation as "to come back to life",¹⁴ Polycarp Chikaodili Nwite states that reincarnation "means a 're-infleshment' and refers to the *surviving soul* or some other *spiritually significant aspect* of a deceased being assuming [a new] 'un-souled' body and hence having another life"¹⁵ [the italicized emphasis here is mine]. As regards the etymology of the

¹² Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, *Science Queen: An Introduction to Metaphysics and African Metaphysics* (unpublished material), 10.

¹³ Anselm Chukwuemezugo Obialor, "The Metaphysics of Reincarnation in the Human Person: Seeking Reconciliation of Western and African Stand-Points", in *Cultural Wisdoms of Africa: From the Ethno-cultural and Anthro-po-existential Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Emeka Okonkwo (Ibadan: Don Bosco Institute Publications, 2021), 213.

¹⁴ Obialor, 213.

¹⁵ Polycarp Chikaodili Nwite, "The Whyness of Re-incarnation: Its Reality, Effects, and Possible Existence in Igbo Cultural Belief", in *Cultural Wisdoms of Africa: From the Ethno-cultural and Anthro-po-existential Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Emeka Okonkwo (Ibadan: Don Bosco Institute Publications, 2021), 282.

concept, both authors agree upon a Latin provenance of the term (as self-evident) and proffer that the word is a coinage of three syllables (again, anew) + *in* (into, inside) + *caro/carnis* (flesh/of the flesh).¹⁶ This a great argument begun and the frantic definitive banter of the etymological constituents will be sure to drift us to a position asked our terminus a quo. Far be it from our noetic endeavor to relent at only a provision of etymological constituents; we must have to analyze the etymology of the terms we employ. The reason behind the cashiering of the proposition of Obialor is that his giving pursues no further etymological insight; the question of what 'comes back to life' is not answered explicitly, though he provides surmises that clarify his initial pronouncement.¹⁷

Indeed, the whole bone of contention lies in the query, 'what comes back to life?'¹⁸ Surely, 'something' comes 'back to life', even though we do not—as of now—have any clear intuition about the nature/character of that 'thing'; we are only informed that there is such a thing. Onyewuenyi returns and defines reincarnation simply as a theory animated by the belief that at death, the soul which is now separated from the body, informs another body for another lifespan.¹⁹ Onyewuenyi's definition archetypically exemplifies the classical understanding of reincarnation which Obialor depicts in his essay.²⁰ It is expedient to take note of the key term Onyewuenyi employs in his postulation; the reference to the 'returning thing' is to the soul—specifically the human soul. As Mesembe Edet excogitates, "to incarnate is usually in respect of human persons whose souls after death, return into this world to live again in a new body and continue...earthly existence".²¹ But does reincarnation convey an objective concept?²² Surely, the answer is in the negative. Hence, the outlook to reincarnation is normally relative, as cultural settings conce

¹⁶ Obialor, "The Metaphysics of Re-incarnation in the Human Perspective", 213.

¹⁷ Obialor, 213-214.

¹⁸ Edet, "Innocent Onyewuenyi's 'Philosophical Re-appraisal of African Belief in Reincarnation'", 81.

¹⁹ Onyewuenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation*, 14.

²⁰ Obialor, "The Metaphysics of Re-incarnation in the Human Perspective", 214-216.

²¹ Edet, "Innocent Onyewuenyi's 'Philosophical Re-appraisal of African Belief in Reincarnation'", 81.

²² Onyewuenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation*, 14.

of the minutest details in diverse manners. This is the chief suspect for the various accounts of reincarnation.

Various Accounts of Reincarnation

The erudite Catholic philosopher, Battista Mondin, in his *Philosophical Anthropology* distinguished death into two kinds. The former, clinical death, Mondin associates with the definite termination of corporeal function; the latter, absolute death, is what Mondin describes as the final separation of the soul from the body.²³ As a Catholic priest, Mondin may have nothing to say in respect to the phenomenon of reincarnation as the Catholic Church does not avow such a thought. Albeit, Obialor and other thinkers of the African faction, uphold the belief in reincarnation. Nevertheless, the accounts of these vary materially; this is what we examine.

Reincarnation as Metempsychosis

There are some who think that reincarnation is nothing more than a change in the properties of the soul; i.e., a particular soul, after death, occupies a different body. The intriguing detail of this thought is that the new host body is not of necessity, strictly human but can be that of a lower animal.²⁴ The distinguishing feature between metempsychosis (from the Greek: 'meta' + 'psukhe')²⁵ and reincarnation (as perceived in this work) is that while the former permits manifold embodiments—human and animal—of a disembodied soul and entails a succession of several bodies (human and animal), the latter [reincarnation perceived herein] does not.²⁶

Reincarnation as Transmigration

This term, transmigration or circular birth, first appeared in 1557 to designate the renewal of a singular life instance of a person in either animal or human embodiment.²⁷ Transmigration, as Norman McClelland writes, can be of two forms: the transmigration 'progressive' and the

²³ Battista Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology: Man, An Impossible Project* (Bangalore: Pontificia Universita Urbana, 2011), 261-263.

²⁴ Obialor, "The Metaphysics of Re-incarnation in the Human Perspective", 212.

²⁵ Obialor, 212.

²⁶ Norman C. McClelland, *Encyclopedia of Reincarnation and Karma* (California: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010), 171.

²⁷ Obialor, "The Metaphysics of Re-incarnation in the Human Perspective", 212.

transmigration 'regressive'.²⁸ The transmigration progressive is simply the belief that an animal soul can be reborn into a human body. However, it does not really inform about the eventual animation of this embodied character. The transmigration regressive holds that a human soul can be reborn into a non-human body. Similarly, we are not apprised adequately, as to whether or not this reincarnate will be typically sentient or will possess some iota of advanced activity.²⁹ The difference between this view and that of metempsychosis is that while the latter holds the human soul as the reincarnating agent capable of informing any sort of sentient body, the former holds that any sentient being can reincarnate and not necessarily the human soul.

True, the whole discourse on reincarnation seems rather problematic and Obialor thinks that this is because "the 'why-ness of reincarnation' is yet to be answered".³⁰ Throughout the world, statistics show that quite a number of people believe in reincarnation. In Europe for example, reincarnation is seen as the possession of similar traits of a deceased in a living person.³¹ The Africans conceive differently of reincarnation and some of them employ the belief as a tool in explaining genealogy and common lineage; it is held to be a good phenomenon and a show of love towards the surviving family.³² We now examine generically, the African notion of reincarnation.

African Notions of Reincarnation

As a matter of deduction, the presence of a philosophical idea of reincarnation in the African scheme of thought serves as a rational portent to the presence of such a thought to particular African settlements even though these settlements may have particularly fitted frames of thought regarding the idea of reincarnation. This is to say that contrary to what is thought by a number of people based on evidence from Egyptian

²⁸ McClelland, *Encyclopedia of Reincarnation and Karma*, 270.

²⁹ McClelland, 270.

³⁰ Obialor, "The Metaphysics of Re-incarnation in the Human Perspective", 213.

³¹ Erlendur Haraldsson, "Popular Psychology, Belief in Life After Death and Reincarnation in the Nordic Countries, Western and Eastern Europe", *Nordic Psychology*, 58, (2006), 171-180.

³² McClelland, *Encyclopedia of Reincarnation and Karma*, 11.

thought,³³ Africans do believe in a reincarnation. Thus, we do not as much as endeavor to explore whether or not there is such a belief in African philosophy and the rationality or otherwise of such a belief if it does exist³⁴ as the exploration of selected themes of how this exactly occurs in diverse plots. In this attempt, we acknowledge that there are some who only profess a thesis of 'partial reincarnation' of which thinkers as Bolaji Idowu³⁵ and John S. Mbiti³⁶ are prominent in such an extraction.

There are three main thoughts conceived of when we speak of reincarnation: (i) the return of the spirit of an ancestor through clear features in a baby born to a member of the bereft family; (ii) the repeated return of a particular child to a particular couple until it is forced to remain in the family [the concept of *ogbanje*] and; (iii) the return of the soul of a living-dead who was not able to qualify to abide in the residence of ancestors and hence, wants to compensate by another earthly sojourn.³⁷ However, of the aforementioned, I shall only concentrate on the first. Here, the thesis of partial reincarnation is that a baby that is believed to be the reincarnation of an 'ancestor' may possess features that are clearly vestiges of the ancestor but not necessarily that of the soul of the neonate. Those who hold the belief in partial reincarnation justify this belief on the grounds that a 'complete reincarnation' contradicts the African belief in the perpetual subsistence [of the soul of the ancestor] in the spiritual realm of the dead.³⁸ Thus, only dominant characteristics infiltrate into the baby. However, H.M. Majeed has reservations regarding this thesis. His logic is depicted thusly:

Although the idea of the continual existence of the living-dead in the spirit world is true, it is not quite clear...to determine character traits and influences because such children as observed...do not always grow up to live like the living-dead whose core earthly identities they allegedly bear. The determination by a spiritualist of the 'returned'

³³ Hasskei Mohammed Majeed, *An Examination of the Concept of Reincarnation in African Philosophy* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2012), 130.

³⁴ Majeed, 128.

³⁵ Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1973), 187.

³⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford Heinemann, 1989), 85.

³⁷ Nwite, "The Whyness of Re-incarnation", 281.

³⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 159.

person cannot also suggest that the baby in question is, at that moment, exhibiting any reasoned behaviours reminiscent of the supposed living dead. For, the baby is just too young to exhibit those characteristics.³⁹

Furthermore, he excogitates that, if the recognition of the reincarnated is based on dispositions supposedly exhibited during infancy, there would be no substantial link between the reincarnated person and the ancestor.⁴⁰ Also, if we claim partial reincarnation on the grounds of future dispositions of the growing child, we can still not guarantee the link between the two persons, since the 'reincarnated' may grow up to be ostensibly averse in character from the ancestor. These difficulties may lead one to conclude that the opposite, i.e. 'complete reincarnation' [the complete return of a person who once lived] is the case in African thought. Still, the conclusion we have presumably reached is not concordant with the belief in the perpetual subsistence of the departed ancestor in the spirit realm. It must be admitted that there is indeed a conflict in attempting a resolution of the polar dissonance between the thesis of partial reincarnation and the compromise of complete reincarnation. It seems apposite to both discretion and instinct to review this dilemma from the perspective of individual African cultures. Noting the vastness of cultural hegemony and context in Africa, we narrow the inductive specification to the Igbo culture, investigating their concept of reincarnation.

A famous Igbo thinker, Emeka Ikenga-Metuh notes that in funeral rites of the Igbos, prayers are offered for the safe arrival of the deceased in the spirit world and his "quick reincarnation with even greater prosperity and success".⁴¹ Thus, the Igbo people anticipate the comparison of the lot of the one that returns to the world (*ilo uwa*)⁴² and the former self of the same. This then is the proof of the prayers offered at the funeral

³⁹ Majeed, *An Examination of the Concept of Reincarnation in African Philosophy*, 142.

⁴⁰ Majeed, 143.

⁴¹ Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, "The Concept of Man in African Traditional Religion: With Particular Reference to the Igbo of Nigeria", in *Readings African Traditional Religion: Structure, Meaning, Relevance, Future*, ed. E. Uka (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1991), 63.

⁴² Nwite, "The Whyness of Re-incarnation", 281.

rites.⁴³Reincarnation in African thought is a unique phenomenon whose character is undetermined by popular Western conceptions. However, it is difficult to categorically state what the nature of reincarnation is like; we only make allusions similar to the sort Kant uses in his epistemology—the *noumena* and the *phenomena*. Hence, we only attempt to decipher the phenomenon of reincarnation as it appears to be, a task as herculean as its valuation. Why hermeneutics? There is some major point in the surmises of Chris Akpan, who thinks that hermeneutics is an approach concerned with not only the interpretation of texts and ideas but also of social and cultural categories in a bid to understand the derived meaning [of the texts, ideas, etc.] as pertaining to the life experience of the affected people or person involved.⁴⁴

Socio-Hermeneutic Approach to the Igbo Concept of Reincarnation

This section delivers the poignance of the discourse; it situates the socio-hermeneutic approach to reincarnation in Igbo burette and conducts its litmus test using the specimen of the Igbo conceptual titrates of *Ilo-Uwa*. Examining the cosmology of the Igbos, the section proceeds to proffer an outline of Igbo eschatology as against which we give tentative abutment via a comparative analysis with the four 'last things' of the Christian eschatological scheme. This effort is preceded by a discussion on Igbo anthroposophy and philosophic socio-hermeneutics, as a bid for arriving at the conclusion of the contrast of Igbo eschatology and that of the Christian extraction.

An Outline of Igbo Cosmology

The Igbos profess a great cosmological perception that is not easily compeered in respect to the Western civilities. This cosmological concept of the Igbos is in scope, connotation and orbicular resiliency, very much profound; it has a larger extension than what appears *prima facie*. This

⁴³ Ikenga-Metuh, "The Concept of Man in African Traditional Religion," 63-64.

⁴⁴ Chris O. Akpan, "The Hermeneutical Approach to African Philosophy", in *From Footmarks to Landmarks on African Philosophy*; Andrew F. Uduigwomen (Lagos: O.O.P. Limited, 2009), 76-81.

the concept of *Uwa*.⁴⁵ Pantaleon Iroegbu, a great Igbo thinker, proffers a satisfactory definition of this concept of *uwa*, when he states that:

The entirety of existence from God, the highest Being to inanimate beings of our own cosmos, can be summarized in the en-globing concept of the term *Uwa*. *Uwa* is all inclusive. It mirrors being existence, entity, all reality. It en-globes all that is animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal and global. It is transcendent and immanent in scope as well as explicative and prospective elasticity.⁴⁶

Uwa comprises of both perceptible and imperceptible components; *Uwa* stands as the aggregate of inanimate, vegetative, sentient, rational and intelligent life forms: all that is palpable and that which is impalpable.⁴⁷ The concept of *Uwa* is a very dynamic one, in contrast to the general West opinion; this is why Chinyere Emedo argues that “whatever...is in Igbo world-view is *Uwa matrix-force*”⁴⁸ (the italicized emphasis here is mine). In establishing that *Uwa* is a spectrum containing palpable and impalpable entities, it is important to note that in Igbo cosmology, spiritual/impalpable/immaterial existence is superior to the physical world; the physical world is an exemplar of the immaterial. Emmanuel recognized this when he says of the material realm of existence “whatever obtains here in the physical has its replica in the world of the unseen”⁴⁹. The elements of this unique cosmology are: (i) *Uwa Chukwu*; (ii) *Uwa umu chi nta*; (iii) *ndi nna anyi ha* or, *ndi ichie* [translated in English as “ancestors”]; (iv) *Uwa mmadu*; (v) *Uwa anumanu na ihe ndi ozo nwere na ihe ndi eweghi ndu*; this is the realm of animate and inanimate entities and lastly, (vi) the sphere of infra-being.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Chinyere Christian Emedo, “A Hermeneutical Discourse of Reality in Igbo Ontology”, in *Odezuruigbo Journal* 3, no.1 (2019): 238.

⁴⁶ Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy* (New York: International University Press, 1995), 339.

⁴⁷ Emedo, “A Hermeneutical Discourse of Reality in Igbo Ontology”, 238.

⁴⁸ Emedo, 239.

⁴⁹ Emmanuel M.P. Ede, *Towards the Igbo Metaphysics* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1985), 77.

⁵⁰ Emedo, 239-240.

The first demesne, the *Uwa Chukwu*, or what is sometimes called the Godian world, is the ultimate of realms and is the source of all other realms and the beings that fall under them. It is independent and self-subsistent.⁵¹ The world of the gods is the realm of the sub-powers of divinity; these gods are the messengers of *Chukwu* and oversee certain domains of reality as entrusted to them by *Chukwu*. Then, the ancestral realm, *Uwa ndiichie, ndi nna anyi ha*, is that of the forebears; this world entails some technicalities and it is particularly with respect to this realm that we engage in inspection, since reincarnation can only occur from this level.

This zone is usually said to be of two levels; the first are what we refer to as spirits, for they are long dead. "The long dead are usually tagged the ghost, because their passage has reached up to the fifth...generation, the people that recognized them no longer exist, hence they can be used to perform both benevolent and malevolent activities";⁵² the recent ancestors are those whose death are of recent timing and their memories are still fresh within their family. They may make apparitions for various purposes which include advice, warning, prophecy, etc.

For some like Kingsley Okoro, the classification of the Godian, divine and ancestral worlds make up what is called *Uwa mmuo*; this *Uwa mmuo* is reaching in content than those presented in the segregated classes of *Uwa Chukwu*, the realm of the spirits and the ancestral zone. In his thinking, *Uwa mmuo* is the abode of divine beings—*Chukwu*, attendant gods, various lesser sub-divinities, —ancestors, the unborn souls.⁵³ For clarification, Okoro provides a division within this immaterial sphere bifurcation into *Eluigwe* and *Ani mmuo*; the former is the abode of *Chukwu* as well as his chief deputies and other primary beings like *Anyanwu* [Sun god], *Amadioha* [the Thunder god], and *Igwe* [the Sky god],⁵⁴ whence they superintend reality. The latter, *Ani mmuo*, is the habitation of the spirits. Here, we also have the ancestors who await their reentry into the human world.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Emedo, 239.

⁵² Emedo, 239.

⁵³ Kingsley Okoro, "A Socio-Hermeneutical Discourse on the Igbo Concept of Reincarnation", in *International Journal of Modern African Studies*, 15, no. 1 (2019): 2.

⁵⁴ Okoro, 2.

⁵⁵ Okoro, 2.

The next in this order is the human world: *ala mmadu*; it comprises the physical *terra* which we encounter and for those who asperse Okoro's proposal of the unborn cohabiting with the spirits, the *ala mmuo* is often said to comprise both the living and the unborn. The chief characteristic or observable feature of this world is that it is ordered in families, kindreds, villages, communities, towns, etc.; and the human person is central to all operations—both with the spiritual and the material.⁵⁶

Following immediately is the animate and inanimate world. This is what Chinyere Emedo calls *Uwa umu anumanu na ihe ndi ozo nwere ndu di ka osisi na kwa ihe ndi enweghi ndu di ka mmiri n'okwute*.⁵⁷ She as well notes that there are some things which are beings but, in relation to the concrete beings that the traditional Igbo man would conduct metaphysical inquiry upon, are infra-statutory owing to their status as *res cogitans*. To this she describes the realm of infra-being as *ihe ndi na-enweghi ihe ha bu mana uche mere ka aghato na ha di; di ka okwuonu*.⁵⁸

It is precisely this cosmology that sustains the Igbo ideal of reincarnation. Death is seen as a transition to the spiritual realm, the land of the dead. The Igbos see no divisor between the physical and the spiritual; thus, any event that occurs, does so either in one realm or the other. Life in this earthly hemisphere is but a pilgrimage that transcends to a permanent existence with the event of death.⁵⁹ Igbo cosmology throws support behind the view of life after death. In fact, death is a birth into a new community, a community of ancestors. Everyone experiences this new birth into a transformed kind of living; however, the afterlife is largely determined by terrestrial life. The Igbo people believe that a good life leads to a good death and the attainment of ancestor-hood, which is the requisite for a possibility of reincarnation, a return to the world: *ilo-uwa*.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Emedo, "A Hermeneutical Discourse of Reality in Igbo Ontology" 240.

⁵⁷ Emedo, 240.

⁵⁸ Emedo, 240.

⁵⁹ Okoro, "A Socio-Hermeneutical Discourse on the African Igbo Concept of Reincarnation", 5.

⁶⁰ M. U. Ushe, "God, Divinities and Ancestors in African Tradition Religious Thought", in *An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 3, no. (2017): 163.

Similarly, a bad life results in a bad death and an eternal wander of the vagabond soul, where it is excommunicated from both the living and the living-dead (i.e., ancestors).⁶¹

Regarding the ancestors [the focus of this work], socio-hermeneutics of Igbo cosmology shows that the ancestors are alive albeit, existent in another realm of invisible nature. By and large, the ancestors are the human spirits or souls of deceased members of the community who have lived worthy lives. They are involved in practically every sphere of human endeavour as they still partake in the affairs of the community; indeed, from the Igbo perspective, there is not any issue that does not bother the ancestor in some way. The ancestor, plainly stated, is one who died a good death and was decently buried, faithfully living and transmitting the laws of the community; the ancestor is as well one who left a lineage to survive and who was peaceful and righteous.⁶² Hence, any elder of correct moral standing as of the time of death is seen to have undergone the rite of passage into ancestor-hood. Therefore, as in the opinion of Kingsley Okoro, the belief in ancestor-hood is key for understanding the eschatology of the Igbo folk,⁶³ a view which shall be assessed immediately.

Issues in Contextual Igbo Eschatology

In speaking of eschatology, one conversant with some theological eschatological terminology will immediately conceive of the Roman Catholic eschatology: the four 'last things' which comprise of death, judgment, heaven and hell; to some degree, the author may add that the Igbo eschatology is some sort of quintupled spiral rather than a Christian linear sequence. It is argued that Igbo eschatology is a quintuple spiral for obvious reasons. First, the 'last things' of Igbo cosmology are five: ancestor-hood, vagabondage, pure spirituality and reincarnation. One reason for excluding 'judgment' from this scheme is that the quality of one's life, death and even funerary honours already judge the person. There is no spectacular or grandly dramatic event where Chukwu summons all the dead to some magnificent hall to judge them, nor is there any formal interview between the deceased soul and the Supreme Being regarding the quality of the terrestrial lifespan of the deceased.

⁶¹ Okoro, "A Socio-Hermeneutical Discourse on the African Concept of Reincarnation", 5.

⁶² Okoro, 6.

⁶³ Okoro, 6.

concluded.⁶⁴ Also, the very status of ancestor-hood is a portent of a worthy life; those who do not meet up to these standards [i.e., good life, death and proper burial] are sentenced to vagabondage. This status of vagabondage is of either a transitory or permanent level. If ancestor-hood is achieved through a good life, a good death and a worthy burial, then one who has not achieved all three is likely to be a restless vagabond soul. Nevertheless, in some cases, this situation can be placated; in most cases where the hindrance to the admittance of a deceased to the ancestral realm is due to funerary rites, the vagabond soul can be redeemed through the proper performance of the rites. However, should the denial be based on the quality and character of one's life, then the deceased becomes perpetually sentenced to eternal, or subtly put, indefinite vagabondage. It is the soul in this state that we refer to as *ajo mmuo*—i.e., [a] bad spirit.⁶⁵

Unlike the Christian eschatology that prescribes a formula in which after death and immediate judgment, the soul inevitably proceeds to heaven or hell [or is purified shortly in the penitentiary of purgatory before proceeding heavenward] and abides therein perpetually, Igbo eschatology is a spiral with a retrograde loop that almost connects with the beginning of the spiral. This is because, for the Igbo, after death and once one is an ancestor, one can be reincarnated and regain another earthly cycle before dying again. The departed soul may reincarnate severally before eventually transcending to a state of pure spirituality. Pure spirituality is that state which a departed soul—specifically the living dead (i.e., the ancestor) becomes a spiritual essence that lacks the ability to inform another earthly corporeal vessel for an earthly cycle, usually put to occur around the fifth generation since the demise of the living-dead.⁶⁶ At this level, the living-dead is properly said to be a spirit; *o buru go mmuo*⁶⁷ and cannot be as immanent to the bereft family as previously experienced. Thence, it can be succinctly stated that the experience of immanence between the bereft family and the deceased/living-dead ceases with the status of pure

⁶⁴ As to this proposition, I refer to the popular conception of the Last Judgment which shall be examined at a later moment.

⁶⁵ Joachim Okoro, in discussion with the author, December 9, 2021.

⁶⁶ Emedo, "A Hermeneutical Discourse on Reality in Igbo Ontology" 239.

⁶⁷ Mr Callistus Adimike, in discussion with the author, December 4, 2021.

spirituality of the living-dead, at which point a sort of divine transcendence succeeds.

The danger in asserting a cyclic nature in Igbo eschatology is that we create the avenue for the dilution of certain ranks of eschatological status of eternity, to an abject temporality. Instantiated, the ranks of pure spirituality and infinite vagabondage are eternal statuses, which would definitely suffer grave substantial change should the eschatology of Igbo weltanschauung assume a cyclic nature. It would then mean that man is hopelessly condemned to both earthly and divine sojourn without rest, nor permanence in either.

With this framework that the author provides, the *miraculum* of Igbo eschatology. It is a spiral because there is the possibility of certain leaps and returns [for example, an ancestor can be reincarnated and later on, return back and proceed towards pure spirituality]. At this juncture, we intend to understand reincarnation; despite the contact with Christianity and Western civility, the belief in reincarnation still endures remarkably among the Igbo. There are some incidents of child prodigy witnessed among the Igbos, referred to as *ebibi uwa* [(pre)existence in the world] where a child exhibits some exceptional ingenuity and gumption unusual for her age; this phenomenon is oftentimes cited as a proof of reincarnation.⁶⁸ Indeed what we examine as this reincarnation is in Igbo lexicon, *Ilo-Uwa*; it is this that we now investigate scrupulously.

***Ilo-Uwa* as the Igbo Experience of Reincarnation**

In beginning such a discourse, it is apt to clarify terms. Reincarnation in Igbo is called *Ilo-Uwa*. It is derived from two Igbo words: 'ilo' and 'uwa' the literal translation of *ilo* is to come back—i.e., to return and *uwa*, mean the world.⁶⁹ However, following from a piecemeal above, we understand that *uwa* as world is quite vast since the word itself [i.e., *uwa* as world] taken to mean a matrix of existence. Hence, what is meant here is *ummadu*, mostly applied in quotidian reference as *uwa*; hence, *Ilo-U* means a return back to the world: to come back to the earthly world. At this point, following a clear explanation of the term, there shall be a sharp immediate disuse of the term, reincarnation and a consequential adopt

⁶⁸. Onyewuenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation*, 36.

⁶⁹. Nwite, "The Whyness of Re-Incarnation", 281.

of the term *Ilo-Uwa*. The author shall only use the word reincarnation, stringently as when there is need to allude to any such conception of the phenomenon, other than that professed by the Igbos. The author begins this passage of discussion with those very endeared words of the legendary Chinua Achebe, where he sets out very much archetypally, the concept of the Igbos with regard to *Ilo-Uwa*:

Ezeudu! He called in his guttural voice. If you had been poor in your last life, I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been a coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young, I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long. So, I shall ask you to come again the way you came before.⁷⁰

Ilo-Uwa as the Igbo variant of renaissance is subject to various interpretations by differing scholars, scholars, scholastics, and religionists from diverse historical, cultural and ideological backgrounds; this is understandable as each interprets this phenomenon according to her philosophic interests. By and large, among the Igbo, and African scholarly faction, *Ilo-Uwa* has been pursued from two models of which one seems quite traditional and the other, 'modern', so to speak. The traditional model presents a physico-cyclic module that interprets *Ilo-Uwa* as a repeated return of a deceased into a neonate.⁷¹ While the approaches of John S. Mbiti, Ikenga Emefie-Metuh, and Bolaji Idowu are quite dissimilar, it is readily noted that these philosophers subscribed to this traditional model.

In the second demesne, we find as chiefly representative, the model of A. N. O. Ekwunife, who developed a mystic-psychic module which interprets *Ilo-Uwa* as the exercise of "a mystical influence of the spirit on the body which neither diminishes the status of the dead in the spirit world nor does it destroy or supplant the unique personality and individuality of

⁷⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Pearson Educational Books Ltd, 2008), 98.

⁷¹ C. N. Ibenwa, C. O. Okwor and P. C. Ukeachusim, "Death Reincarnation and Ancestorhood: Issues in After-Life in Traditional Igbo Context", in *International Journal Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3, no. 1 (2014): 17.

the new born child".⁷² This move from the traditional position argues that the case in point should be viewed from the religio-cultural background of the specimen folk "and not from its English transliteration".⁷³

There is reason to justify further curiosity at this preliminary stage. The coinage, *Ilo-Uwa*, means 'to come back to the world'; the natural question that one asks is wherefrom the return is made. The answer to this is that the terminus a quo of the returnee is the ancestral realm and the terminus ad quem is *Uwa mmadu*. A very enormous metaphysical probe that confronts us now is none other than "Why must a living-dead *lo ta Uwa* [come back to the physical world]?" Nwite Polycarp attempts a proposal which this author tags as the 'continuity argument'.

Nwite argues that deathlessness of the soul is a form of existence and with that, there is some sort of *omenaani* [tradition, custom, norm] that this imperishable being must assume. From premises bordering on a potential botheration of vitality, and a concatenation of matter, non-matter and life-force, Nwite proposes that the undying soul⁷⁴ is charged with the task of transmitting life from one physical human body to the other for the purpose of continuing existence.⁷⁵ The 'continuity argument' is surely rooted on the belief in afterlife and the soul in the thereafter must ensure that this vital force it has is passed onto other material corporeality. Nwite puts his argument thusly: "So, for the sake of the human existence, there must be continuous occurrence of reincarnation, the presence of the essential and the necessary composites of the human being; the body, the soul, the mind and the spirit, to manifest life".⁷⁶

While the 'continuity argument' seems very much plausible, the author finds it very much problematic. In the first instance of its problematization we are confronted with the question of the creation of souls; in Nwite's words, we read that "the immortal soul keeps on passing life from one

⁷² A. N. O. Ekwunife, *Meaning and Function of INO UWA in Igb Traditional Religious Culture* (Onitsha: Spiritan, 2000), 11.

⁷³ Ibenwa, Okwor and Ukeachusim, "Death, Reincarnation and Ancestorhood", 17.

⁷⁴ Here, soul is used to refer to a deceased living-dead and not son component of the human person.

⁷⁵ Nwite, "The Whyness of Re-Incarnation", 282.

⁷⁶ Nwite, 283.

physical body of human being to another for the purpose of existence...⁷⁷ now, the probe here is to know whether or not multiple souls exists. If there is but one soul that keeps on passing life to the progeny of humankind, how does it do this? Is this immortal soul tasked with the animation of every human being that there is? In the case of twins and multiple offspring, how does this 'immortal soul' inform their material body with life? As well, it raises the question of whether or not this immortal soul is the principle of life or if it only deposits some vitality in the body to enable it live for a finite duration; one could as well ask if this soul is capable of informing more than one body at the same time and over wide distances of space. Nwite opens up a wide aperture as he fails to clarify his position adequately. His 'continuity argument' contains a lot of ambiguities which one may argue, are unwarrantable; how does the material, or in his words, 'physical' body preexist the breath of life? How possible is it to procreate a material body devoid of life? Many criticisms are sure to be levelled out at this juncture; however, the aforementioned may suffice in order to stall any deviance from the focus.

Secondly, if there are multiple souls in existence—i.e., if more than one soul exists—how do we explain for the creation of those souls themselves? Or is it safe to conclude that what the soul deposits in the 'physical human body' is a soul, albeit a germinating one? And can we say that there are different originator immortal souls for each clan, kindred and other groups of human socialization? If averred, how were these souls created and if disaffirmed, how do we account for the differences across kindred, clans, communities and races?

The problem in Nwite's 'continuity argument', leads to the Platonic and Cartesian affirmations of dualism, i.e., the body and soul are two disparate principles of life. On the contrary, the Igbos believe in the wholesome integration of all the faculties and principles of man such that the human being is integrally, body, soul and spirit.⁷⁸ Thus, at the event of death, it is an occasion affecting the entire person and not some part; consequently, the status of immortality affects the whole person and not some part. This is explained by Innocent Onyewuenyi as he clarifies that "When a person dies, the traditional [Igbo] African does not say that the 'soul' of the dead

⁷⁷ Nwite, 282.

⁷⁸ Douglas DeLong, *Past Life, A Guide to Reincarnation and Techniques to Improve Your Life* (London: Llewellyn Publications, 2013), 3.

has gone to the spiritual world. It is not the 'soul' or 'part of man' that has gone to the world of the spirits but the whole man though not in a visible but invisible state".⁷⁹ This monist, or integrationist perception that obtains in Igbo worldview as *Ilo-Uwa* is often recognized through patterns of living, 'integral' with the demised ancestor who has been said to *iloghachi uwa* in a descendant. To properly understand *Ilo-Uwa*, we must understand its fundamental underlying premises and that is what we turn to.

Fundamental Underlying Premises of *Ilo-Uwa*

The concept of *Ilo-Uwa* is remarkably peculiar to Igbo folks and surrounding cultural plots; this in no way negates the presence of the phenomenon in various places across the world. The problem that we meet is to address shortly is if it is right to equate the phenomenon that is experiential worldwide to/with the concept of *Ilo-Uwa*, peculiar to African—Igbo specifically—worldview. The solution is to present the basic assumptions of *Ilo-Uwa* and not digress further into the equation of 'reincarnation' and *Ilo-Uwa*. There are at least three underlying presuppositions and they are presented below.

The very first of these underlying premises is the presupposition of integrated personality. Igbo anthropology abhors and finds repugnant, some form of dualism of the human person: of the complete separation of body and soul, with the consequent autonomy of the soul.⁸⁰ C. N. Ogbujah presents this beautifully when he says that "The Igbos generally do not speak of the survival of the soul after death, but the person. Man is a living person. The living-dead are also living persons, though in a 'superior' plane of existence".⁸¹ In *Ilo-Uwa*, what comes back is distinct from the 'returning ancestor or 'living-dead'. 'Reincarnation', on the other hand, encompasses a presupposition of the dualism of body and soul; this body is material and hence, perishes at death while the immortal soul survives and comes back to animate a new body. Hence, the soul of the demised is of the same identity with the reincarnate; this cannot avail for *Ilo-Uwa*.⁸²

⁷⁹ Onyewuenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation*, 37.

⁸⁰ J. J. Obilor, *The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead and the Igbo Belief in the "Reincarnation"* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994), 138.

⁸¹ C. N. Ogbujah, "The Idea of Human Destiny in Africa: The Igbos' Experience", in *Melintas*, 23, no. 3 (2008): 426.

⁸² Ogbujah, 426.

Secondly, as against widespread views of classical reincarnation, *Ilo-Uwa* rejects the opportunity for all demised but rather, for only 'qualified' persons. In stringent regard to *Ilo-Uwa*, children cannot *loghachi uwa*; only adult individuals who have attained some recognized social status can 'return' to the world: the uninitiated (*efulefu*) fellow is believed to have no hope of returning after death.⁸³ Personhood is not an automatic guarantee of 'return'; rather, among all the qualities that make one eligible for *Ilo-Uwa* (marrying and begetting of a male child, living a good *Ilo-Uwa* life to an old age, and receiving proper burial at death),⁸⁴ personhood is core. This means that only humans can experience *Ilo-Uwa*. Without a ritual initiation into statuses only possible for beings in personhood, it is not possible to acquire any of these qualities. "For the Igbos then, *Ilo-Uwa* is not a rule, but an *Ilo-Uwa* exception. Only individuals who have attained personhood in Igbo culture have the chance to 'return' to mother earth"⁸⁵

The third of the underlying premises is that of the commonly held distinctive proof of *Ilo-Uwa*; this means that there must needs be physiological semblances between the *nná onye ochie* [i.e., ancestor] and the returned child. The punctilious assertion of *Ilo-Uwa* in most cases, is the reappearance of fleshly marks, facial scarifications, vocal and oratorical powers, behavior patterns and intellectual acumen which are taken as evident proofs of the return of the living-dead.⁸⁶

Thus, these three underlying premises prove indubitably that *Ilo-Uwa* and other accounts of 'reincarnation' cannot be equaled—not as a question of being, instigated by parameters of the 'terms of being' nor as a primary 'antinomy of being'⁸⁷ regards the unicity and plurality of being. The false identification of the two belief systems is a 'language of accommodation' employed by Western and Western-trained anthropologists to explain away some ununderstood phenomenon. Nonetheless it is a mysterious

⁸³. Ogbujah, 426.

⁸⁴. Ogbujah, 427.

⁸⁵. Ogbujah, 427.

⁸⁶. Ogbujah, 427.

⁸⁷ I see this as a clear rhetoric antithesis having semblance to the antinomies of reason posited by Immanuel Kant as well as bearing some similitude, irrespective of the degree, to the rhetoric of continuity and discontinuity. I have no intention to allude to Karsten Harries' views in his recent publication, *The Antinomy of Being*.

happening which will never cease to puzzle the rational mind. It is indeed part of the things in the religio-cultural belief systems of mankind, which defy accurate philosophical probing. Notwithstanding the unresolved issues pertaining it, *Ilo-Uwa* is, for the Igbos, a phenomenon, which characterizes their outlook, their own means *appropinquare ens* (to approach/approaching the being).⁸⁸

Philosophic Socio-Hermeneutics

Following the exposition of the underlying premises of *Ilo-Uwa*, we may very well say that we have provided a preliminary groundwork on which to proceed. What confronts us now, after affirming that only a qualified person is permitted to return, is a twin question: is it all of the qualified person that returns and, if not, what returns and in what manner does it? In response to the first question, the Igbos are undivided with their position that only 'qualified persons', that is, members who attained 'social status', perhaps, married and begot at least a male child, lived a good life [to a ripe old age], and were properly buried by performing all the ritual ceremonies, can return to earth through *Ilo-Uwa*. This description precludes two positions. We must discard the notion that some people hold, namely that only the male ancestors do return⁸⁹ as it is very restrictive and since instances of women coming back in terms of reincarnating, have been established. Also, the idea of *Ilo-Uwa* as a complete and unmitigated expression of the will of the departed personality is soured by the concluding phrase: 'can return to earth'. Using 'can' here shows an either/or situation.⁹⁰ Hence, the mere accomplishment of the prerequisite qualities in the departed is not enough to bring him/her back *iloghachi n'uwa*. *Ilo-Uwa*, cannot be conceived of in isolation from the superintendence of *Chukwu*. Thus, the return is only possible because *Chukwu* permits such.⁹¹ This is to say that, *Chukwu* has already permitted reincarnation.

The second probe appears more poignant. The Igbos are invincibly convinced that their dead exist as individuals in the spirit world. From the

⁸⁸ Ekwunife, *Meaning and Function of "INO UWA" in Igbo Traditional Religious Culture*, 45.

⁸⁹ Ekwunife, 34.

⁹⁰ Ogbujah, "The Idea of Human Destiny in Africa: The Igbos' Experience", 424.

⁹¹ Ogbujah, 424.

spirit world, the ancestors continually watch over their living children and increase their families with new arrivals, while the living descendants reciprocate by offering sacrifices and prayers which in turn enhance the 'vital force' of the ancestors.⁹² The big question is: Is it possible for the Igbos to sincerely and truly believe in the complete 'return' while at the same time recognizing the personal individual existence in the spirit world of the living-dead who are believed to have come back?

Various authors, after careful examination of the issues involved, point to the resurgence of character traits in the descendants of an ancestor as the principle of *Ilo-Uwa*. Particularly, Onyewuenyi enjoins that what one sees in the new born is only a portion of the 'vital force' or 'vital power/influence' of the living-dead, as the ancestor who is now 'pure dynamic force', can influence and effect many births without draining his personality.⁹³ This vital force of the ancestor is such that it can be emitted into a returned baby without diminishing/relinquishing his cherished place in the spirit world, in the manner as the number and extent of the rays the sun do not diminish it. Thus, instead of seeing a new born as a complete return of a departed personality, it is seen as a vital influence 'personal ray' or a 'living-perpetuation' of the living-dead.⁹⁴

In response to 'the big question', this paper presents a framework against which we measure such a probability. First, as with African philosophy the author believes in the partial thesis of 'reincarnation'. In explaining that a particular living-dead may *loghachi Uwa* [i.e., come back to the world] this author thinks it apposite to begin with a discourse on African anthropology as a basis of explaining the phenomenon of *Ilo-Uwa*.

⁹² Christopher U. M. Ezekwugo, *Chi, The True God in Igbo Religion* (Wien: Innsbruck: Austria, 1973), 156.

⁹³ Onyewuenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation*, 14.

⁹⁴ Onyewuenyi, 38-40.

Igbo Anthroposophy: *Ahu*, *Mkpuruobi* and *Mmuo*

Speaking of anthroposophy, we refer to a religious system grown out of theosophy [views of God and the world based on mystical insight] and centred on human development. The reason for the choice of anthroposophy is for the rascally conspicuous evidence of the interweave of Igbo religion, philosophy and culture; everything about Igbo identity—anthropology, theology and general weltanschauung, cannot be approached outside the background of this idea of the 'interweave'.

The anthroposophy envisioned here is on the integral relationship of the components of the human being in Igbo perspective. In Igbo thought, the composition of the human being is tripartite: the *ahu* (body), *mkpuruobi* (soul) and *mmuo* (spirit).⁹⁵ The *ahu* is the material part of the human being, the *corpus* [body]; it could also mean the whole man. *Ahu* is thus, the material body sensibly perceptible and spatially situated.⁹⁶ The explanation of *mkpuruobi* and *mmuo* seems quite problematic as various thinkers ascribe varying definitions and functions to them. To this, the paper turns to proffering its own. The *mkpuruobi* is a coinage of two Igbo words: *mkpuru* [seed] and *obi* [heart]; as a conjunction, this *mkpuruobi* is called the 'soul'. This soul is "the very essence of the individual person".⁹⁷ Literally translated, *mmuo* means spirit; at this juncture, we shall pause further discussion on what sort of 'spirit' *mmuo* is, for even the *mkpuruobi* is a spirit, for virtue of its immaterial nature.

Mkpuruobi, as the soul is an immaterial composition [the abstinence from a reference to the soul as a 'substance' is to avoid a Cartesian dualistic fallacy]; it is the animating principle of the person. This is evident in the meaning itself: *mkupuru-obi*; it is the seed that vitalizes the whole person, and characteristically informs its life. Taken literally, if the soul is a seed, then it must, in Aristotelian metaphysics, have an entelechial form; in this case, the entelechial form of the seed is the tree. Hence, the entelechy of the *mkpuruobi* is full, perpetual spiritual subsistence in the afterlife; before actualizing that form, it remains the actuating cause of any individual life. Thus, of the *mkpuruobi*, we can say that it is the ethereal principle

⁹⁵ Nwite, "The Whyness of Re-incarnation", 282.

⁹⁶ Emmanuel Nweke Okafor, "The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of the Person", in *Prajna Vihara*, 21, no. 2 (2020): 71.

⁹⁷ Chuka A. Okoye, "'Onwe': An Inquiry into the Igbo Concept of the Self", in *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies*, 8, (2011): 54.

embodied in individuals; that any individual possesses a markedly distinct haecceity is because of the presence of the *mkpuruobi*.

As aforesaid that the realized entelechy of the *mkpuruobi* is its perpetual subsistence in the hereafter, we are faced with some evident questions. First, the author points out that as a principle, it influences every aspect of the individual person. Also, the *mkpuruobi* does not substitute for the entire person. In fact, the *ahu* is the material face of the *mkpuruobi* and the *mkpuruobi* at death, still maintains the stature, facial and corporal features of the individual person. Since the *mkpuruobi* is the animating principle of the individual, we aver that at death, it is the 'entire person' that departs. When we say that it is the 'entire person', we do not mean that even the now corruptible '*ahu*' as well departs to the immaterial realm, for materiality cannot belong to immateriality and as well, the '*ilieye*' [to commit to the earth] of the body is a requirement for the status of ancestor-hood. As the actuating principle of life of an individual, the *mkpuruobi* is the principle of haecceity of every individual.

From what has been posited above, we encounter another probe: what leaves during death? Straightforwardly, the *mkpuruobi* and *mmuo* depart. Also, why do we say *ala mmuo* and not *ala mkpuruobi*, as the realm of where the individual moves to after the cessation of terrestrial lifespan, if *mkpuruobi* refers to the individual spiritual essence-identity of the person? This is because the term, *mmuo*, encompasses pure spirits and essence-identities. Said otherwise, *mmuo* is used to generally refer to all unperceivable mystical spirits.⁹⁸

What then is the *mmuo*? Polycarp Nwite, puts it in his submission that the *mmuo*, is a 'universal energy'; of it, he says that "This Universal Energy is everywhere. It is in the air we breathe, the water we drink and in all living things...without it, we and our world would not exist. It exists in heaven as well, and works its way down into our physical realm".⁹⁹ Just like the *mkpuruobi*, the *mmuo* is eternal.¹⁰⁰ The author of this paper agrees to call *mmuo* something of universal nature. It may be called a dynamic quality, a positive spiritual force. Mayhap, an exposition from etymology may assist in clarifying the meaning of *mmuo*. We may break down *mmuo* to give:

⁹⁸ Okoye, "Onwe", 57.

⁹⁹ Nwite, "The Whyness of Re-incarnation", 282.

¹⁰⁰ Okoye, "Onwe", 62.

mma + *uo*; the first conjunct, *mma*, means 'goodness', or 'beauty'. The author suspects that the eventual coinage maybe as a result of some phonological interference in the word, *u[w]a*. thus, we have: *mma* + *uwa* as the foundation of a shortened: *mma* + *ua*. With time, we arrived at the term: *mma* + *uo*. Thus, *mmuo* is the nominal of the beauty of the *Uwa*-matrix force. However, this *mmuo* must be concretized in every human instance. Thus, the *mmuo*, in the case of human beings, is the expression of the dynamic quality of universal good.

In the above paragraph, we have said that the *mmuo* must be concretized in every human instance. Just as the early Greeks believed that every person is a manifestation of some primordial element (i.e., fire, earth, water and air),¹⁰¹ so also the *mmuo* of the person is some representation of the positive spiritual dynamic force of Universal Good/Beauty. However, just as in early Greek anthroposophy where some elements, though collectively representing the harmony of the world, do not perfectly match well with each other, so also, the *mmuo* of some persons or family units do not harmoniously coagulate. Hence, we can hear expressions such as *mmuo m anabataghi ya* [my spirit rejects this]; some certain things or persons also are congruent with the *mmuo* and bolster it, leading to such expressions as: *mmuo m gbwalitere elu* [that is, my spirit has been heightened].¹⁰²

In most cases, just as with Greek anthroposophy, the dynamic positive spiritual current of *mmuo* is consanguine [i.e., flows through family blood-line]. As evidence of such, we find such expressions as *omume na di na obara* [i.e., actions and dispositions flow through the blood].¹⁰³ In some Igbo thought, we find an introduction to explain this patrimony of *mmuo*, and this is called the *Eke*.¹⁰⁴ The translation of the *Eke* is usually given as an "ancestral guardian which links...to the family".¹⁰⁵ This serves as a strongpoint that highlights the take of T. U. Nwala when he says that the best way to conceive of the Igbos is to conceive of the "community of

¹⁰¹ Anthony E. Okonkwo, in lecture series at the Don Bosco Institute of Philosophy, November 2020.

¹⁰² Okoye, "Onwe", 58.

¹⁰³ Okoye, 60.

¹⁰⁴ Okafor, "The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of Person", 72.

¹⁰⁵ Okafor, 72.

people".¹⁰⁶ Thus, any autonomous self must have these three elements in harmony.

An Analytic Juxtaposition of the Igbo and Christian Eschatological Schemes

In Christian eschatology, the four last things of man [Latin: *quattuor novissima*] are: death, judgment, heaven and hell.¹⁰⁷ The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1909) states that "The eschatological summary which speaks of the 'four last things' (death, judgment, heaven, and hell) is popular rather than scientific".¹⁰⁸ What the author concentrates on in this partition is to analyze both eschatological schemes: that of the Igbos and that of the Christians, nowhere else more elegantly defined save in Catholicism. The eschatology of Igbo outlook that is reckoned here is that which the author already laid out in a previous heading, i.e., the quintuple spiral comprising of death, ancestor-hood, vagabondage, pure spirituality and reincarnation. The Christian eschatology is taken to be the generally understood Christian stand of the four 'last things': death, judgment, heaven and hell. What we try to extract is a coin composed on the one face, of apparent similarities; and on the other, of fundamental differences.

Firstly, both viewpoints accept death as the basic step in proceeding with eschatology, and so, we find less of a problem. The both eschatological frames are informed by the belief that death is not the end of life as there is an immaterial Hereafter to which the demised is headed. The various ideas surrounding death is what makes for a problem. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [afterwards, the *Catechism*] while admitting the naturalness of death, executively states that "for faith it is in fact 'the wages of sin'".¹⁰⁹ The *Catechism* explains that death is God's call of man to himself. The Igbos have an entirely different conception. The Igbos also

19. ¹⁰⁶ T. Uzodinma Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy* (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1985).

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Pohle, *Eschatology: or, The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise* (New York: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 2.

¹⁰⁸ Charles G. Herberman et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline and History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 6 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, s.v. "Eschatology").

¹⁰⁹ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), no. 1006.

recognize death to be something natural and hence, inevitable. However, for the Igbos, two things make the conception of death fundamentally different. The first is that death is not the call of *Chukwu* in that *Chukwu* is a 'withdrawn God' and cannot call man, a mortal creature, to himself. *Chukwu* is therefore, inaccessible to man—on earth and in the Hereafter. Secondly, the Igbos are of the opinion that while death is man's ultimate destiny, it can be made to occur before the 'appointed time' maneuvered by malevolent persons through the aid of extraterrestrial powers.¹¹⁰

Two points are entailed in the second fundament. The Igbos consider death as a destiny and, they consider death to be appointed for each person at a certain spatiotemporal instant. These entailments, while they seem to be paradoxical in that they seemingly embrace the same features said to be absent, are well representative of the Igbo *weltanschauung*. The fact that death, which is already fated for a person can be thwarted, reveals a whole lot. It must be conceded that the Igbos uphold strongly, that *Chukwu* [the author and sustainer of life: *Oliseburuwa*] designs that humans live to a ripe old age before death; any death before old age is considered untimely or premature and is perceived as a taboo. The Igbos significantly differ from the Catholic outlook when they aver that a person can employ supernatural power to kill another person. This raises the question of whether *Chukwu* is aware of the exact time a person is to die. As earlier stated, *Chukwu* is a withdrawn God who does not meddle in human affairs but rather, delegates sub-powers of divinity to superintend various aspects of creation. These sub-powers are in turn, suggestible and vulnerable to man's bidding, thus affording man the opportunity to manipulate them to his will.¹¹¹

The next item is that of judgment. The reason why judgment was excluded from the eschatology of the Igbos is because, the fundamenta

¹¹⁰ Benjamin Chimezie Okoye, "Death and Burial Rituals in Ekwulobi Community—Igbo Ancient Setting", in *Culture, Our Heritage and Identity Exploring the Rich Values in Some African Practices*, ed. Anthony Emek Okonkwo (Ibadan: Don Bosco Institute Publication, 2022), 232-3.

¹¹¹ John Owen Adimike, "A Philosophical Reflection on *Afia O* Festival: History and Significance in Awka-Etiti of Anambra State", in *Culture Our Heritage and Identity: Exploring the Rich Values in Some African Practices*, ed. Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, Don Bosco Institute of Philosophy: Student Academic Series 3 (Ibadan: Don Bosco Institute Publications, 2022), 14.

requirement for any state of being in the hereafter is the quality of one's life, death and funerary honours; these in themselves already constitute a judgment so that it is redundant for some aggrandized event of judgment or a personal interview between the demised and *Chukwu*. Thus, judgment from the perspective of the Igbos is a lifelong event: beginning from one's birth right up to her commitment to the earth—the whole of one's life is a process of judgment. In Christian eschatology, judgment has another interpretation and takes another form. Following the rich intellectual tradition of the Church, two types of judgment have been proposed: the 'particular' judgment and the 'last' judgment. John Paul II also, says that the item of judgment is both particular and general.¹¹² Simply put, the former—particular judgment—is the retribution pertinent to each man "in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death...that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately, —or immediate and everlasting damnation".¹¹³

This view of particular judgment has had a turbulent history over time, only resolved through the intervention of Benedict XII with his papal bull, *Benedictus Deus* where he confirmed that the demised souls receive immediately after death, their reward or punishment.¹¹⁴ Prior to the *Benedictus Deus*, some early Church Fathers held the belief that the demised did not enter heaven until the Judgment Day; for these patristics, the righteous demised dwelt temporarily in a delightful abode for the interval between their death and the Judgment Day. They however provided exceptions for some classes of saints and martyrs who were admitted directly to the supreme joys of heaven.¹¹⁵

¹¹² John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, post synodal apostolic exhortation on reconciliation and penance in the mission of the church today. 2 December 1984

¹¹³ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1022.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Pohle, *Eschatology: or, The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise* (New York: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 46.

¹¹⁵ Charles G. Herberman et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 12 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913), s.v. "Particular Judgment".

The second, the Last Judgment, is preceded by the resurrection of all the dead: of the righteous and the unrighteous. The *Catechism* says that at this time, "In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man's relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life..."¹¹⁶ The Church teaches that this judgment will occur at the time when Christ returns in glory. In keeping with the words of Holy Writ, the position of the Church is that the knowledge of this *Kairos* is the sole property of the Father as he determines the moment of its coming; through the Son, he will pronounce the final verdict on all history. The Church believes that the final judgment will reveal that God's justice prevails over the injustices committed by his creatures. We shall then know the ultimate meaning of the work of creation and of the entire 'economy of salvation'; we shall comprehend the wonderful ways by which God's Providence directed everything towards its ultimate end.¹¹⁷ One will observe that while the Particular Judgment makes reference to a particular subject, characterized by the definite article 'the', the Last Judgment speaks to the entirety of the human race. In doing so, the Last Judgment makes reference to the truth of each man's relationship with God being laid bare. One is led to think that the Last Judgment makes public what was the private affair of the Particular Judgment. However, the particular makes no explicit mention of the methodology of the judgment; we are only told that the judgment is in man's immortal soul at the very moment of death. Thus, we can infer that the particular judgment is without delay and is immediate upon death.

Similarly, the Last Judgment is dependent upon the idea of the resurrection of the dead. The latter, the 'resurrection of the dead', is grounded upon the idea that the material world will end.¹¹⁸ Also, the belief is held that the body will become reunited with the soul; the body will become glorious and incorruptible. The very natural question is whether or not the body will also be judged since the soul, at the time of the particular judgment, had already been judged. It makes judgment seemingly superfluous in this case. This is a very different core information

¹¹⁶ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1039.

¹¹⁷ United States Catholic Conference, no. 1040.

¹¹⁸ Martin von Cochem, *The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Hell, Heaven* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1988), 40-5.

from that experienced in the case of the Igbo perception. The Igbos have no such profession in the belief in the imminent end of the world. Similarly, the Igbos deny the claim that at some undetermined future, the corruptible body will be reunited to the immaterial spiritual essences. The Igbos altogether deny the item of judgment as an eschatological reality. The resurrection of the dead does not appeal to the Igbo eschatology since it conceives the proper commitment of the body to the earth as a determinant of the state of being in the Hereafter of the demised. Thus, we see sharp differences between the two eschatological schemes.

The next eschatological item is that of heaven. To this, we shall evaluate in concomitance, the Igbo view of ancestor-hood. Similarly, we shall consider the idea of 'ezumikenkemkpuruobi' to assess whether it is properly representative of the Igbo idea of ancestor-hood. The *Catechism* explains heaven, apart from referring to the firmament, to be God's own 'place' and as a consequence, the eschatological glory. This is the abode also, of the saints and other spiritual creatures that appear before the face of God.¹¹⁹ When Christianity talks of heaven as in the expression: "Who art in heaven", it does not mean an actual space but a mode of being; it connotes God's majesty rather than his remoteness. It goes on to say that the 'heaven' that God dwells in, is the heart of the just as well as his holy temple. Heaven is thus conceived as those hearts in which God dwells and tarries.¹²⁰ For those who died in a worthy state and have a favourable individual judgment, where do they proceed? The Church teaches that they live forever with God, seeing him 'as he truly is', without the mediation of any creature. Thus, life in heaven is typically, union with Christ; it is "the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ".¹²¹ This contemplation of God in his glory is tagged the 'beatific vision'. In sharp and striking contrast, the Igbos do not have a beatific conception of heaven as ecstatic as that of Christianity. For the Igbos, the one who lived a morally upright life, died a good death, and was accorded proper funerary honours, is deemed worthy. These worthy souls are admitted into the ancestral realm where they supervise the goings-on in their bereft families. Ancestor-hood is not a permanent state of being although, the state of being worthy souls or *ezimmuo* [i.e., good spirits] is.

¹¹⁹ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 326.

¹²⁰ United States Catholic Conference, no. 2794.

¹²¹ United States Catholic Conference, no. 1026.

At death, the spirit-essence of the individual leaves the corruptible body. This spirit-essence is the *mkpuruobi* and the *mmuo*; it is what resides in the ancestral realm. The spirit essence however, is better put as the *mkpuruobi* since the *mmuo* is harmoniously integrated with the *mkpuruobi* of individuality in every person. The *mkpuruobi* does not see *Chukwu* and is not resident in the same sphere of existence as *Chukwu*. As we shall soon see, the *mkpuruobi* that subsists in this ancestral realm, will later on fade into another state of being—pure spirituality.

We shall treat some certain themes together. Hell and purgatory are captured in the idea of the eschatological item of vagabondage. As stated above, those who do not meet up to these standards [i.e., good life, death and proper burial] are sentenced to vagabondage. To repeat what has been aforesaid, if ancestor-hood is achieved through a good life—a good death and a worthy burial—then one who has not achieved all three is likely to be a restless vagabond soul. Nevertheless, in some cases, this situation can be placated; in most cases where the hindrance to the admittance of a deceased to the ancestral realm is due to funerary rites, the vagabond soul can be redeemed through the proper performance of the rites. However, should the denial be based on the quality and character of one's life, then the deceased becomes perpetually sentenced to unending, or subtly put, indefinite vagabondage. It is the soul in this state that we refer to as *ajommuo*—i.e, [a] bad spirit.¹²²

From the above, one can decipher that vagabondage is either temporary or permanent. In the former, there is hope that the vagabond soul may earn rest in the abode of the ancestors; in the latter, there is no such hope. Can we comfortably argue that this fits into the idea of purgatory and hell respectively? The *Catechism* gives that those who undergo a purgation after death are "All those who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven".¹²³ While the classic definition of purgatory involved a place of purifying fire,¹²⁴ it is now mitigated to mean the purification of the

¹²² Joachim Okoro, in discussion with the author, December 9, 2021.

¹²³ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1030.

¹²⁴ 1 *Cor* 3:15; 1 *Pet* 1:7 (KJB)

unhealthy attachments to creatures, without any reference to the fires.¹²⁵ For the Igbos, the transitory vagabondage does not involve any fiery torture of any sort. Thus, while there could be some apparent similarity between the two—that vagabondage could be transitory, just as the penitentiary of purgatory and that after due requirements that are met by those living on earth, the soul is now permitted to behold the 'beatific vision'—there is a clear difference between them. However, there is a simmer of compatibility with the Christian teaching, since those in purgatory and transitory vagabondage cannot help themselves but rely on the prayers of the living. Also, the reason for their tarry in their state is a defect in conduct while on earth. For the Igbos, the reason extends even to funerary rites which the Christian scheme does not account for.

Hell is quite problematic. Some thinkers in the Christian camp no longer believe in hell and much more, think of it as a social construct for moral purposes and backed up by an imposition from religious authority. Edwin and Jennifer Woodruff Tait, Chris Armstrong and Jennifer Trafton at the Christian History Institute attempt to show that Hell is a developed idea from the time of the patristics; similarly, they provide the various schools of thought that have emerged from this evolutionary process: the Traditional view, Annihilationism [or Conditional Immortality], and Restorationism [or Universalism].¹²⁶

The Christian eschatology acknowledges that hell is characteristically marked by unending separation from God. As the *Catechism* says, "The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire'".¹²⁷ The understanding of hell and permanent vagabondage are fundamentally different. The Christian understanding of hell is that it is an everlasting separation 'from God'—a reference to the central idea of

¹²⁵ Denzinger Schonmetzer, ed., *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de Rebus fidei et morum*, trans. Denzinger Schonmetzer (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), nos. 1712-3.

¹²⁶ Edwin Woodruff Tait, Chris R. Armstrong and Jennifer Trafton, *The History of Hell: A Brief Survey and Resource Guide* (Worcester: Christian History Institute, 2011), i.

¹²⁷ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1035.

Christian teaching about man's teleology: everlasting union with God. For the Igbos, man has nothing to do with *Chukwu* as long as expectations, sacrifices, or communication are concerned; at death, he does not coexist with *Chukwu*. Permanent vagabondage is the result of the 'bad' life that a demised led and as such, causes a permanent separation from the good spirits who reside in the ancestral realm. They are perpetually restless; they are what the Igbos call *ndiajommuo*.

We have looked at the areas that appear to have mutual similarities in both eschatological schemes. The aspects of pure spirituality and reincarnation are very much peculiar to Igbo eschatology and find no parity in the Christian provision; hence, we treat them individually. Pure spirituality is the state of being of the ancestor who has faded from the ancestral realm—brought about by the loss of the ancestor's memory by the living. Reincarnation, is the return of the demised to the realm of the living. However, as earlier mentioned, we examine the brand of the Igbos under the label, *Ilo-Uwa*. For reason of smooth transition, we shall look at *Ilo-Uwa* first. The ancestor exists in the ancestral world as a spiritual being. The ancestor's spiritual essence is manifested as an everlastingly existing *mkpuruobi* [that subsumes the *mmuo*]. The view that is sustained in this paper is that the ancestor can exist in the ancestral realm and still reincarnate [understood as *iloghachiuwa*] as a neonate. To understand this the author explains that the ancestor shares of his or her *mkpuruobi* to the neonate. This distribution is not of the form of 'one-to-one' relation but rather, 'one-to-many' relation in that, the ancestor can reincarnate in multiple instances. *Exemplia gratia*, the ancestor can reincarnate simultaneously in the family of Mr A, Mrs B, etc. This is because the ancestor gives vestiges and not the entirety of the *mkpuruobi*. The vestige of the *mkpuruobi* donated by the ancestor is the '*mmuo*'. Recall that in the discussion on Igbo anthroposophy, it was mentioned that the human person is consisted of the *ahu*, *mkpuruobi*, and the *mmuo*. The obvious implication of this submission is that the *mmuo* is the vestige of the ancestor's *mkpuruobi*, and that every Igbo person is literally a reincarnated ancestor. The author is quick to affirm this as a cultural assertion of the Igbos. It is customary among Igbos to divine the identity of a neonate to decipher which ancestor has returned in the person of the neonate. When this view implies that every person is a reincarnate, it does not negate the inimitability of the individual; the fact that the *mmuo* of the neonate is given by some ancestor, the *mkpuruobi* is unique, and distinct.

The next question is to ask the provenance of the *mmuo*—in other words, the 'original *mmuo*'. To this, the author offers a hypothetical conjecture of the case of the first man and woman.¹²⁸ The author points out that the Igbos are wont to trace their provenance to some certain individual male and female; these individuals were created by *Chukwu*. The elements of their personality were all original: they had an original *mkpuruobi*, *mmuo*, and *ahu*. It is in this sense that we qualify the *mmuo* as a universal dynamism of Good or Beauty. The continuous experience these individuals gathered over the course of their sojourn helped build their personality such that the harmony of their *mkpuruobi* and *mmuo* became consolidated. These individuals—i.e., the first male and female—birthed offspring with equally unique elements of integral personality. During this period, there was no room for reincarnation because the first people were still alive. However, when the first of these 'forefathers' died, the room for reincarnation was created. At the death of the first human, the creation of unique *mmuo* ceased. Thus, from that time till the present, we can sustain the Igbo assertion that every person is a reincarnation of some demised ancestor—the said ancestor can share of his or her *mkpuruobi* to a number of neonates.

The Igbo diviners know how to detect which ancestor is reincarnated in a neonate. Inopportunely, the author is neither a diviner nor in acquaintance with any of such folks so, the manner of such divination shall be left unexplored. Nevertheless, the *mmuo* is very much dynamic such that as it is distributed across generations, it mingles with the *mkpuruobi* of the neonate to which it is given, to adapt. Thus, the *mmuo* is never static; the divination process thus requires an exactitude in deciphering when the *mmuo* has completely adapted so as to become the vestige of a new individual rather than the original donor. The donating *mkpuruobi* [of an ancestor] continues to reside in the ancestral realm. It is this subsisting *mkpuruobi* that passes on to the stage of pure spirituality. As earlier mentioned in an earlier segment, pure spirituality is that state which the soul of the living-dead—i.e., the ancestor—becomes a spiritual essence that lacks the ability to inform another earthly corporeal vessel for an earthly cycle, usually put to occur around the fifth generation since the

¹²⁸ I am very grateful to Joachim Okoro for pointing out this to me and for seeing that the conjecture contained the right elements. The review process for this conjecture owes it content and form to his criticality.

demise of the living-dead.¹²⁹ At this level, the living-dead is properly said to be a spirit and cannot be as immanent to the bereft family as previously experienced. Thence, it can be succinctly stated that the experience of immanence between the bereft family and the deceased/living-dead ceases with the status of pure spirituality of the living-dead, at which point a sort of divine transcendence succeeds.

The poignant question is the following: "Are both eschatological schemes—that of the Igbos and that of Christians [specifically, Catholics]—compatible? Are they mutually companionable? Do the evidences and analyses prove them to be well-matched to any degree?" To this, the author answers that while there be apparent similarities, the differences are largely fundamental. In a word, it is impossible to equate the Igbo eschatological outlook with that of the Christians; they are sponsored by significantly differing notional information.

The author suspects that the greatest problem of all is in situating *Ilo-Uwa* in a manner that seems acceptable to the Christian faction. This is because the Church has dogmatically declared her disbelief in the phenomenon; hence to advocate middle grounds is quite problematic. This paper offers some assumptions why this may be so probably because the atmosphere of the intellectual community as of the time of this stand did not believe so, was hostile to such or was a threat to the promulgation of such. It could also have been that the Church found it hard to adequately provide an explanation that would be fail-proof in the sense that it would resist the barter of strong intellectual encounter, so that she took to a position of disbelief. Lastly, it could be also that the Church has misunderstood the positions of the apostles and early Church fathers [or that these Churchmen misunderstood the apostles or even did not clearly spell out what they held in such a case] as regarding a possible return of the soul. May as well, that the Church so believed that accepting 'reincarnation' would destroy her doctrine of the uniqueness of every soul or that of the eternal persistence of the soul in heaven.¹³⁰ Clearly, the *Ilo-Uwa* account,

¹²⁹ Emedo, "A Hermeneutical Discourse on Reality in Igbo Ontology", 19.

¹³⁰ Anthony Aleakwe Odior, (Founder and General Coordinator of the *Correct Connect Africa Foundation*) in discussion with the author, December 9, 21.

in its own regard, does no harm to this—i.e., the unrepeatability of individual souls.

Ilo-Uwa certainly, asserts that the soul occupies a cherished position in the *ancestral realm*, which it does not give up even in the case of another terrestrial cycle. However, from this state of being in the ancestral realm, it moves on to pure spirituality when memory of the particular ancestor has been lost by the living.¹³¹ As well, from what was posited in the discourse of Igbo anthroposophy, we find it affirmed that the Igbos as well do not tamper with the idea that every human person is unique; for the Igbo person, the *mkpuruobi* present in every individual is the actuating principle of life and individual haecceity. The author proposes the *mmuo*, which we have seen to be the positive spiritual dynamic force of Universal Good/Beauty and which is apparently consanguine, as the principle of/for *Ilo-Uwa*. Thus, by virtue of the *mkpuruobi*, the returnee child is a unique individual and through the donation of the *mmuo* from an *Ilo-Uwa* living-dead, the returnee child *lotarauwaonyennannaya* [literally, 'is her ancestor's return to the world']. However, despite attempts to create correspondence between *Ilo-Uwa* and Christian views, they are unarguably, incompatible; regardless of conciliatory efforts, the difference between the both will always remain fundamental.

Speaking of the *mmuo*, as earlier argued, it respects some affinity in the same way Greek anthroposophy and mythology agrees that persons of the same elemental force attract to each other. Thus, even if an ancestor decides to *loghachiuwa* in another family other than hers, there must be the compatibility of the *mmuo* as well as prior deeply intimate cords of familiarity between the intending *Ilo-Uwa* ancestor and the host family. Thus, the *mmuo*, is the principle or basis of *Ilo-Uwa*. It should as well not seem strange that the Igbos see the ancestors as closely connected with every sphere of the family, clan, kindred and community. Even if a living-dead reincarnates in another family belonging to another clan other than hers, that living-dead is not the ancestor of that family or clan. It might be argued that Catholicism as well, accommodates such perception under a different heading. Thus, we talk of sainthood and patronage of human events; do we not implore the saints to interfere with human reality?

¹³¹ This implies that as long as there is some living person or group still keeps the memory of a particular ancestor, the said ancestor cannot fade into pure spirituality.

we not encourage faithful to have patron saints that help to mediate between these human events and God? Are these 'saints' not our 'ancestors' in the Christian family? Why is it problematic when we say that the ancestors do same too in family, kindred, clan and community? What is problematic is the fact that the saints are acclaimed as 'ancestors' of a *faith* and not of a kindred or clan; the saints are not thought of as capable of reincarnation nor are they believed to be restricted to any particular consanguinity [even though they may be entrusted with the intercession for a particular human event, which does not imply that they are tied down to but one particular function]. The author concludes this submission by averring rather emphatically that the Igbo scheme of eschatology and that of Christianity are superficially identical but fundamentally different and mismatching. The author also considers efforts to advocate middle grounds between them as essentially futile because the Church has assertively declared her disbelief in and rejection of the phenomenon/conception. We must concede therefore, that the two eschatological schemes must be content with their adherents and their jurisdiction without being ambitious for mutual companionship. As with Hegel's dialecticism, every thesis and antithesis results in a synthesis which in itself, is a thesis to be conjoined with another to infinitely produce syntheses that eventually result in a fuller understanding of reality. It is this understanding of reality that we have embarked on in this chapter, trying to see what makes for the possibility of *Ilo-Uwa* as well as the rationality in affirming its reality as a verified phenomenon. Thus, as a component of a wider eschatological scheme, *Ilo-Uwa*, and the Igbo eschatology is compatible with Christian thought. The argument to be pursued further after the elementary thesis of this essay is how the African zeitgeist will have mutual dialogue with the positions of the Christian eschatological realities.

General Conclusion

This work as we have seen so far, attempted a reconciliation of Igbo eschatology and Christian eschatology, after dilation on the presuppositions of *Ilo-Uwa* as the Igbo variant of reincarnation. In achieving this, we premised the anthroposophy of the Igbo where we explained the integral humanity of the individual person as perceived in the personal philosophy of the Igbos. Thus, every individual man must be a composite of *ahu*, *mkpuruobi* and *mmuo* where the last is the principle of reincarnation, the middle, the principle of individual identity, leaving

foremost as a material accident to confront better, the spiritual identity of the person. The anthroposophy of the Igbo is one such that it accounts properly for individual haecceity and reincarnation process. While the proposal in this work cannot be said to be definitive as an authoritative resolution, it seems very much logical to say that it has proposed an appreciable contribution to what has been a long-standing dilemma. However, suffice it to say that what has been proposed as well, flouts some certain perspectives; some thinkers would argue that the *mkpuruobi* and the *mmuo* are synonymous and hence, Igbo anthroposophy is more of a dual composition than a tripartite one. Others may as well say that the *mkpuruobi* is nothing more than the faculty of intellection and volition in man. Thus, the stand of this paper definitively respects its own perspective, as there is no general consensus as to what is the Igbo anthroposophical stand. The factual significance of this paper is that it exposes the fundamental premises of *Ilo-Uwa* that distinguish it from any other kind of reincarnation and as well it suggests the dismissal of the idea that only males can be ancestors, if ancestors alone can reincarnate. However, within the rank of ancestors, there should be accommodation of both sexes even if there will be differing roles assigned to each. If this does not obtain, it raises grave problems if we are to explain the experiences where women have reincarnated. Also, this paper explains an eschatology that is congruent with that of the Christians. The position of the distinct character of the *mkpuruobi* and the *mmuo* means that a male ancestor may become a female when he returns and vice versa. As well this paper calls for a fuller comprehension of Igbo anthropology and anthroposophy.

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