

Chapter One

Chapter One Definition of Terms

Introduction

This part of the work will present the definition of various terms used in the work and how relevant they are to the entire work.

The need for the value of human dignity is for all times a true assignment of all. It must neither be considered to be relevant only for a time in the life of a people nor only for a select group of individuals. Thus special attention should be given to this idea especially in the modern day Igbo society. My concern with the concept stems from a conviction that this important aspect of Igbo existence at this time needs profound attention and consideration. The definition of terms will focus on only few core-terminologies that demand elaborate explanations while other ones will come within the body of the work.

1.1 The Term Igbo

The term `Igbo` refers to both the aborigines of this territory, their language and their culture. It can be used as a noun or as an adjective depending on the context in which the user applies it. Hence one can speak of Igboland, Igbo people, the Igbo or Igbos as well as Igbo language etc.¹⁴

The term is spelt as "I-g-b-o". The term Ibo, as found in some literatures, was an adaptation by foreigners and non-Igbo authors who could not adequately pronounce the double consonants "gb." There are other corrupt forms of the term which gives room for the differences in orthography in Igbo literatures. In this work I shall be adopting the correct term I-g-b-o. But for the sake of faithfulness to original

¹⁴ Ochulor, H. O., *The Function of Dialogue in the Process of Evangelisation*, Edu-Edy Pub., Owerri, 2006, p. 23

texts and works, I shall abide by the authors designation in my various citations as they appear in the original work.

1.2 Crisis of Values: It's Meaning in the Work

I have frequently employed the expression "crisis of values" in the general introduction of this work to explain the motive of the thesis as well as find the reason for this crisis on the value of human dignity. In the same vein also one sees the meaning of crisis in relation to the value and dignity of the human person in Igbo society today. Crisis means, "a stage, or sequence of events at which the trend of all future events especially for better or for worse is determined; a condition of instability, leading to a decisive change."¹⁵ It indicates a moment of danger, difficulty and uncertainty. Crisis implies a distortion, a perversion, a misrepresentation, a misconception in ones idea of something. Using crisis of value, reference is made to the distortion, misplacement or wrong ordering of one's value system.¹⁶ These meanings and clarifications lead to the topic at hand, which is the crisis of value of human dignity as a threat to the contemporary Igbo.

1.3 The Notion Value

Every people and society have values that are largely cherished and shared by their members. The term value is more frequently used in economics, where it means the power of a commodity to command other commodities in exchange. Broadly it refers to the process of weighing relative considerations and the motivations for arriving at a decision.¹⁷ However, it is also applied to other aspects of life. Accord-

¹⁵ Webster Encyclopedia ,Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, Gramercy Books, New

York/Avenel, 1974, p. 334

¹⁶ Adani, C., Crisis of Value and Violation of Human Rights in Nigeria: In Asogwa, C., (ed.), *Human Rights in*

Nigeria, op. cit., p. 40

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 36

ing to the Encyclopaedia of Religion, it serves as “the utility of objects for human purposes and their capacity to satisfy a desire or serve a purpose.”¹⁸ They are precious items in human life which form the essential ingredients that make up life’s joys and inspirations. It means “what appeals to us which may supply a need, satisfy a desire, arouse an interest, stimulate an emotion, provoke a response, motivate a deed or merely draw an approval.”¹⁹ From this perspective, it is seen as the broad preference concerning appropriate cause of action or otherwise, which reflect the individual’s sense of right or wrong, or what ought to be. It is therefore that which makes something to be cherished and a special type of property, rank, dignity and character of something.²⁰ As a property, value can influence attitudes and behavioural patterns, like the life pattern one cherishes and serves as an influence on the individual. It can serve as a changing and challenging factor in one’s life. It positively expresses what is good, beneficial, important, and constructive. It also answers the question of why people do what they do and relate to things the way they do. It deals with what is of relevance to people.

For the Igbo, what is of value is usually described as, “*ihe di mma*” what is good or, “*ihe oma*” what is beautiful. Corroborating the above use of the term, Edmund Ilogu explained value as, “the quality of a thing that makes it more or less desirable or useful. It expresses the significance, which is ascribed to a particular experience, activity or life in general.”²¹ This significance serves as a guide in relation to the decisions the human person makes in daily life and activities and relationship with fellow human beings. From this background, value can be seen from two perspectives, objective value and subjective value. According to Edmund Ilogu, “value is objective when it is guided by laws and customs, but subjective when it is guided by individual whims and caprices”.²² This implies that objective value has the laws and customs of the society as guiding principles. Similarly, it relates more to communal significance and interest than personal significance, whereas subjective value is guided by personal interest

¹⁸ Hastings, J., Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. XII, Charles Schibners Sons Edinburgh, 1954, p. 529

¹⁹ Fagothey, A., Ethics in Theory and Practice, CVM. , Company, St. Louis, 1959, p. 72

²⁰ Ukagba, G., In: Iroegbu P. and Echekwube E., (Eds.), *Kpim of Morality, Ethics*, op.cit. p.183

²¹ Ilogu, C., Christianity and Igbo Culture, op. cit., p. 119

²² *ibid.*, p. 119

and significance. Hence, value serves as a communal/societal and personal property at the same time.

The essence of value in relationship with the human person and the society is an important factor, in that “they reflect the personality of individuals and they are the expressions of cultural tone, affection, social and spiritual, marked by family, school, the institutions and the human society”.²³ This indicates that values showcase the ideals of the individual expressed in cultural patterns, but communicated through sub-social institutions such as the communities, families, and schools. It means that they are transmitted through the process of socialization and education. This argument can be logical if there is agreement about the meaning of socialization, which according to Pat Hutcheon, “is a process by which people acquire habits, intuitions, attitudes, standards, values, concepts, and beliefs of their species in general...It provides for all encompassing humanization without which members of our species are incapable of functioning in civilized society ...”²⁴ Values therefore are incorporated and inculcated into communities for the good of the human person and the society at large. Their resultant effect is that, they are meant to build a human society with common interests that are of benefit to every person. This is in agreement with the idea of Peter Worsley that “values hold the society together because they are shared in common.”²⁵ As a matter of fact, this brings to light the precise importance of values to humanity and the society.

Since values are operative in and on human persons and find expression in human acts and embodiment in human institutions, it has a lot, therefore, to do with people, their culture and society.²⁶ This observation highlights the socio-cultural values to be seen in the next chapter, which deals with the people’s life and culture in the society given that people and society give meaning to values. Values, therefore, cannot stand alone; they need the human person and the society. They are the two elements that make value relevant and functional, evidenced by the human person’s quality as an entity with rationali-

²³ Ukaegbu, J. O., *Igbo Identity and Personality*: In Adibe, G. E., *Igbo Issues*, Mid-Field publishers Ltd., Onitsha, 2009, p. 8

²⁴ Hutcheon, P.D., *Building Character and Culture*, London, Praeger Publishers, 1999, p. 115

²⁵ Worsley, P., *Introducing Sociology*, Maryland, Penguin Books, 1973, p. 362

²⁶ Hastings, J., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, op. cit., p. 587

ty. The human person possesses rationality as well as sensitive and instinctive knowledge. His rationality endows him with cognitive knowledge, which other entities do not have; marking him out as a relevant and valuable entity. When an entity/object lacks value, its dignity, regard and respect are diminished. Hence, the value of the human person's dignity remains dominant in this work.

1.4 The Notion: Dignity

The term dignity derives from the Latin word *dignitas*, which means virtue or worthiness, or alternatively, honourable. Dignity and value are related and juxtapose each other. Dignity is observed as "an intrinsic value which expresses the worth of something in relation to something else."²⁷ To have dignity, therefore, is to have value that makes one (something) priceless, or without equivalent. It also refers both to a kind of deserving and to something deserved.

This work discusses human dignity (HD), not just dignity as a word. The emphasis is on the value and worth of the human being (man) in Igbo world view (*Weltanschauung*). As a way of explanation, the "expression human dignity seems to emerge rather slowly from a context where the term dignity is used in appreciation of the importance of human individuals."²⁸ The fact of their being human earns them respect. Humanity is an intrinsic value which affects them at all levels. As an attribute dignity refers to the authentic nature of a human being. It embraces any activity or concept that brings out the true nature of the human person and distinguishes mankind from all other beings in the universe. Similarly, dignity refers to that which in a being or a person induces or ought to induce respect.²⁹ Human dignity as an attribute places the individual in the position of one who deserves to be treated with respect. Hence, the dignity attached to the

²⁷ Shell S., Kant on Human Dignity: In Kraynak, P. etal (eds.), *in Defense of Human Dignity*, op.cit. p. 58

²⁸ Correa, V., and Segreccia, (eds.), *Towards a Definition of Human Dignity: Article in La cultura della vita:*

Fondamenti e dimensioni, Supplemento al volume degli Atti della VII Assemblea Generale 1-4 Marzo 2001

(Citta de Vaticano:Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2002), pp. 87-101

²⁹ Readers Digest Creative Illustrated Dictionary. Readers Digest Asso., Ltd., Guinness Pub. Ltd., London, 1990

human person indicates the value, worth and respect attached to him/her and because of the higher value humanity has against other beings. In a similar sense, dignity is the quality of being worthy of esteem or honour and importance. Rahner Kahrl defined it as “the fact that a being has of its very nature a determined objective position within the manifoldness and heterogeneity of being which demands respect and protection as well as realization both in its relations to others and itself.”³⁰

The term, “human dignity” indicates an expression of appreciation of the importance of the individual which as an attribute is meant to be inherent in every human person, and in essence, a fundamental value of every human being. The concept had general acceptability as a basic ethical and legal principle drawing upon the universal experience of the dynamics of recognitions. It is clearly in everyone’s interest to be respected as having human dignity.³¹

The inalienability of human dignity in the life of the human person lies on the fact that it is an essential part of their being, an intrinsic quality that can never be separated from other essential aspects of their existence. As a result of this natural awareness of the sense of dignity, its abuse is normally met with resistance, whether intended or as a reflex action. Affirming this general position, the father of the Second Vatican Council, in *Dignitatis Humanae* affirm that “at the same time, however, there is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of the human person, who stands above all things and whose rights are universal and inviolable. He ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life...”³² This indicates therefore that the awareness of the dignity attached to one’s existence as a human being is natural and general to all. Corroborating this idea of the inalienability of human dignity, the Virginia Bill of Rights (1776, VI.1) asserts that, all people are born equal, free and have certain inborn rights that, as soon as individuals accept the status of society, may not be taken away by any later

³⁰ Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations Vol. II*: London; Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975, p. 236

³¹ Correa, V., and Segreccia, (eds), *Towards a Definition of Human Dignity*, Article in *La cultura della vita*: op.cit., pp. 87-101

³² Vatican 11 Document: *Gaudium et Spes*, Art., 26, p. 927

agreements made by their descendants.³³ The respect for human dignity can in no way be separated from obedience to this principle. It is therefore pertinent to “consider each neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.”³⁴ From this perspective then the respect for human dignity cannot be realized in a vacuum as it is all about the basic good of collective and individual life which involves people and a system of doing things. This way of doing things has to do with the norms and patterns of living where human dignity and value are expressed in a system which is found in the culture of the people.

1.5 Culture and Human Dignity

The term culture refers to the pattern of living in a given environment. It is one of the properties of the human person by which one can achieve true and full humanity. The Second Vatican Council explains culture as “all those things which go to the refining and developing of man’s diverse mental and physical endowments. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and his labour; he humanises social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions, he expresses through his works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of men throughout the ages; he communicates and preserves them to be an inspiration for the progress of many, even of all mankind.”³⁵ Culture here is described as a medium through which an individual or a group of individuals become developed and directed on the way to live, especially in their relation to other human beings. Culture contributes toward the shaping and forming of humans to be conscious of what they ought to be and do in society. In line with this conceptualization, Joseph Ratzinger explains culture as “the social form of expression, as it has grown up in history, of those experiences and evaluations that have left their mark on a community and have

³³ Virginia Bill of Rights, 1776, VL.1, Art., 1

³⁴ Vatican II, *op. cit.*, Art., 27, p. 928

³⁵ *ibid.*, art., 53, p. 958

shaped it.”³⁶ This implies that culture serves as a trade mark by which the community is known, identified and formed. Reiterating its social effects, Ratzinger further explains that “culture as a social form of expression has to do with perception, which opens the way for practical action... This suggests that culture, which has in itself a historical character, has to be docile and assimilative, but not ejective and exclusive.”³⁷ Culture in this form is open and serves as the totality of a people’s way of life and conduct. It creates the environment necessary for perceiving and accepting people for practical life purposes.

In a broader perspective, culture embraces other things in relation to humanity, like expression of life, a mode of becoming oneself, a way of relating to one another and to nature. From this perspective, Gerhard Droesser views culture as the “interaction of individuals based on common socio-cultural practices and historical antecedents.”³⁸ It serves as a bond and one of the properties that unites the human person to achieve true and full humanity. For the Igbo people it serves as a way of life which aids in their maintenance of the value and dignity of the human person. From the above setting, Toyin Falola indicates that in Africa, “culture shapes the perception of self and the interaction between people and their environment. It explains habits such as why people respect old age, have many children, and take care of their children.”³⁹ In the same vein, according to Chibueze Udeani,

³⁶ Ratzinger, J., *Truth and Tolerance, Christian Belief and world Religions*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2004,

p. 60

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 63

³⁸ Droesser, G. and Schirm, S., *Ethischen Moderieren- Bestimmung demokratischer Lebensformen*; in

Ojoajogwu, N., *Social and Cultural Identity of an African Society*, op. cit., p.197: Das Individuum nimmt die

Beziehungen, von denen es Material gebunden ist, in seine Lebenspraxis auf. Es engagiert sich an Orten und

in Rollen, in die es durch die Zufälle der Geburt und der Biographie geraten ist, in je verschiedenen

Handlungskonstellationen“,

³⁹ Falola, T., *The Power of African Culture*, University of Rochester Press, New York, 2003, p. 50

culture is conceived as “the totality of the answers of which human beings give to the questions of life.”⁴⁰

In line with this perspective of the answers to the questions of life, culture is the people’s way of life derived from the dynamic relationship between man and his environment. It embraces language, tradition, beliefs, institutions and customs that bind peoples and communities together. According to Ray Ofoegbu, “it represents the pool of ideas, goals, means, and products of man in society. It serves as man’s social conscience, and represents the basis of consensus within a given human community or social order”.⁴¹ This refers to the dignity by which people conceive themselves and likewise are conceived by others within their environment. In this line of thought, Edward Taylor sights culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits, acquired by man as a means of society.”⁴² It similarly establishes man in his environment with his fellow human beings, thus Eugene Azorji describes culture as “a transmitter that aids man to understand and comprehend his or her environment. Culture here, therefore, serves as a means of man’s self-realization of himself in the world, with others and among others”.⁴³ Considering the various ideas expressed above, culture serves as a helper of the individual in realizing one’s value and dignity in relation to other humans in the society. It creates social order and transmits knowledge and other ideas in relation to life.

As a transmitter of knowledge, culture is acquired or learned by individuals as members of a society. It influences their perception of reality and offers them a system of meaning in several ways. It shapes the individuals’ understanding, feelings and behaviour and

⁴⁰ Udeani, C., *Inculturation as Dialogue, Igbo Culture and the Message of Christ*, International Society for

Intercultural Theology and Study of Religions, Rodopi B. V. Amsterdam- New York, 2007, p. 2

⁴¹ Ofoegbu, R., *The Contribution of Igbo Culture in Nigeria Political Culture*: In *Igbo Language and culture*

Vol.11, University Press, Ibadan, 1982, p. 23

⁴² Taylor E. B., *Primitive Culture*, SCM., Press Ltd., London, 1971, p. 4

⁴³ Azorji, E., *Faith and Culture in Dialogue: The Recurrent Issues of Inculturation*, Vol. 1, IBTHO printing Press

Enugu, 1988, p. 4

gives them a group identity.⁴⁴ This identity is realized in respect of the value they have for each other as an entity with dignity. In the course of identifying the individuals, culture deals with the natural environment which greatly affects the lifestyle of the people and shapes their way of perceiving realities. From this perspective culture can be viewed from the pattern of human activities and the symbols which give significance to their lives.

Given that culture embraces human activities in every given environment, one may ask how it came about. Chukwuemeka Umeh gives his perspective to the question by explaining that “culture is not a product of nature but manmade, brought about by both mental and physical exertion. It involves things seen, heard, touched and felt. Culture is not static, complete and fulfilled. It develops with time, dynamic and open for interaction with other cultures, and with the honest willingness to accept what is good in other cultures”.⁴⁵ In this regard, culture could be described as a manmade structure always in search of what is good and dignifying for the individual and the society through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. As a product of man, culture is transmitted from generation to generation through tradition; otherwise it can easily be forgotten or cast aside. On this note, the ultimate concern of any human culture should be the sanctification and preservation of human dignity in the society. Hence, culture should ascend beyond the behavioural pattern to the objective spirit and motive of the society. This objective spirit should aim mainly at the protection of the integrity of the human person which is essential to human living.

For the Igbo people, their culture and life are intimately interrelated; their life is their culture, and invariably, their culture is their life. This idea accords with the words of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council that “whenever therefore there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together.”⁴⁶ Hence, nature and culture adds value to life which, in turn, is viewed as the highest

⁴⁴ Aylward, S., *Inculturation; Win or Lose the Future*: in Scherer, J. and Bevans, S.B. (eds.) *New Direction in*

Mission and Evangelization, Orbis books, Maryknoll, 1999, p. 51

⁴⁵ Umeh, E.C., *The Promotion of Human Rights and Social justice; A Call for Liberation Theology for the*

Church in Nigeria, Peter Lang, 2004, p. 112

⁴⁶ Vat. 11 Document, *Gaudium et Spes*, N.53

gift of nature. Value for the dignity of the human person is a natural part of Igbo ontology that gives room for the respect of human life. The Igbo people have a culture that values the dignity of the human person; a dignity that implies a new humanism, where man is defined before all else by his/her responsibility to his/her brothers/sisters. Thus the human person is at the centre of every activity, and the maintenance of this value of his/her dignity is that which should interest all. It serves as a common bond that brings the people together and unites them as an entity for the maintenance and progress of each other. This value and the dignity attached to it is enshrined within the cultural setting of the people, becoming part and parcel of the people's cultural norms and providing the setting for effective realization of each other.

As a shared concept in Igbo culture, human dignity serves as a bond that ties people and their community together. It serves as a channel through which human value is expressed and the bond of unity that is manifested through the regard they have for each other as well as their cultural ties. A particular relevance of culture noted by John Mbiti includes "the fact that it is the foundation of effective socialization and citizenship training and education. It is a means of inculcating preferences and inducting members into the mainstream of the society's shared ways of life and conduct. On a wider view culture constitutes a model of norms which can be internalized and accepted as higher reference points or guiding standards in a society."⁴⁷ Culture then becomes a means through which honour and respect are maintained in relation to the sustenance of life through tradition. For example, killing a human being is a taboo in Igboland because of the value and importance attached to human life. On this note, culture serves as a way of social control where values like life are protected and preserved with dignity.

Furthermore, culture links people and their value systems for the further development of self. As observed by Damian Ezeh, "the integral development of the human person is the test for the broader meaning of culture. A culture is relevant to the extent that it promotes the perfection of the human person, that is, the attainment of

⁴⁷ Mbiti, J. S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi, 1982, p. 23