



# Mitochondrial Eve

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## A Comparative Analysis of the Iwa-Akwa Festival in Uboma, Imo State of Nigeria and the Rites of Christian Initiation in the Catholic Church

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### Abstract

The crux of this paper is: A Comparative analysis of the Iwa-Akwa Festival in Uboma, Imo state of Nigeria and the Rites of Christian Initiation in the Catholic Church. The proper ordering of things in any given society is very important. For some time now, Iwa Akwa in Uboma has not been as orderly as it is meant to be. In addition, some indigenes of Uboma still regard Iwa-Akwa as a devilish festival when it is not. Therefore, this study aims at presenting a comparative study of Iwa-Akwa in Uboma and Catholic Initiation Rites with the intention of encouraging the people of Uboma to be as steadfast as possible in appreciating and enriching this culture of theirs by maintaining the intricacies involved in its rightful celebration and also by perceiving it as a God-given culture. The research employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection which were applied in the use of historical, phenomenological, sociological and participant observation methodologies. The research discovered that this very culture has certain procedures just like Catholic Initiation Rites. Procedures which when maintained, brings out the profound richness of the culture. In addition, it equally found out that Iwa-Akwa is quite a decent culture having nothing to do with any kind of devilish ritual. The result of this research suggests that there is need for the Church to encourage pastors in-charge of Christ's faithful in Uboma to look closely into the Iwa-Akwa festival so that they can adequately instruct the faithful on the areas of convergence between the festival and the Sacraments of initiation. When this is done, the people of Uboma will definitely stand a better chance of appreciating Iwa-Akwa festival as God-given, and this in turn will not only help in the maturity of their Christian faith, but also, it will enhance the celebration of Iwa-Akwa in Uboma.

**Key Words:** Iwa-Akwa, Culture, Festival, Rite, Ritual.

### Introduction

Culture is an indispensable aspect of human

existence. Culture is ordinary: that is the first

fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, and its own meanings. Every human society expresses these in institutions and in arts and learning. In fact it is “the whole of a people’s way of life” (Eliot 1961 as cited in Nwachukwu 2017, p. 15). It is central to the being of man. In all ramifications including education, culture is very much identical with the nature of man. Mondin (1985, p. 146) lends credence to the above assertion as follows:

In the pedagogical sense culture indicates the education, formation and cultivation of man: it is the *paideia* of the Greeks – that is, the process through which man (the child, the youth and the adult) comes to the full maturation and realization of his own personality.

Culture is essential for shaping social relationships, maintaining and challenging social order, setting out how we evaluate the world and our place in it, and in shaping our every day actions and experiences in society. It is made up of non-material and material things. Founded on the idea of classical

French sociologist Emile Durkheim, material and non-material aspects of culture are all valuable in that they keep society together. The values, beliefs, morals, communication, and practices that we share in common furnish us with a shared sense of aim and a precious collective identity. Durkheim made known through his research that when people come collectively to take part in rituals, they uphold once again the culture they have in common, and by so doing; strengthen the social ties that bind them together.

The people of Uboma over the years have ever continued to practice some kind of culture for which they are till today indented with. This culture of theirs did not fall from above, in the sense that when one looks at their surrounding neighbouring clans, one gets to understand that with regard to culture, Uboma greatly has some certain things in common with these other clans.

As a religious people, Uboma is majorly populated by Catholics. The Catholic Church

on the other hand has been known over the centuries for having rich traditional celebrations. Chief among these Catholic practices are the celebration of her sacraments. The Catholic Church has a very rich sacramental culture in the sense that each of her seven sacraments has a well developed body of rites and rituals. On the other hand, among these seven sacraments, three of them are referred to as Sacraments of Initiation, namely: the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. Just as *Iwa-Akwa* is the major mode through which young men truly become members of the elders forum in Uboma, so too in the Catholic Church, the only way through which one becomes, not only a member of the Church, but also a full-fledged member of the Church is simply through the reception of these sacraments.

Going by the facts stated above, it is no doubt to say that there is a connection between Uboma and the Catholic Church since a good

number of Uboma sons and daughters are equally Catholics. In like manner, there is at the same time, some sort of connection between *Iwa-Akwa* Cultural Festival and the Catholic Initiation Rites, in the sense that, among the people of Uboma, the men folk who are Catholics only became members of the Elders' forum through the initiation that takes place at the celebration of *Iwa-Akwa*, and on the other hand, in an attempt to manifest their religious inclinations became members of the Catholic Church through that very initiation that takes place at the celebration of the Catholic Initiation Rites.

### ***Iwa-Akwa Cultural Festival In Uboma And Rites Of Christian Initiation In The Catholic Church***

In this section, this paper will try its best to present *Iwa-Akwa* Cultural Festival in Uboma and Catholic Initiation Rites the way they are in themselves, in other words from a phenomenological or objective point of view.

## **The History of Iwa-Akwa**

According to Onyebuchi Nwosu (interviewed: 23/7/2021), as he was growing up he learnt that what led to the emergence of *Iwa-Akwa* Cultural Festival was that; in the olden days there were inter-tribal wars and equally there was the need to incorporate young men into the body of tax payers to enhance community development. Nicholas Obiakaraije (interviewed: 24/7/2021) indirectly supported the idea of seeing inter-tribal wars as a possible contributing factor to what led to the emergence of the festival when he opined that the festival not only gives male members of the community that public recognition of having become fully-fledged men, but also that through the festival they become tax payers and eligible candidates for the local army should there be the emergence of a war. In the same vein, Kevin Nwosu (interviewed: 23/7/2021) made it clear that during the Nigeria/Biafra Civil war, it was only men who had already been

initiated into manhood through *Iwa-Akwa* that were mobilized to join the Biafra army. In other words, through this festival, young men are set aside to stand ready to defend their fatherland whenever the need arises, and take up all other adult-male responsibilities in the community which include getting married and taking care of their family, airing their views during village meetings etc.

## **Rituals in Iwa-Akwa Festival**

Raymond Okonkwo (interviewed: 15/12/2022) clearly maintained that as long as *Iwa-Akwa* is concerned there are certain rituals traditionally connected with it. However, he did not waste time to make it known that some of the rituals are no longer practiced, while some others that are still practiced till today have been modernized. According to him, they include: *Isonye na Ebiri*, *Ishi Nri Nwam-Akwa*, *Ututuru Egbe*, *Imaburu ike nkwu*, *Iwufe Owa-mmiri*, *Nri Ndupu Ahia* and *Itee Uri-Ede*.

### **How *Iwa-Akwa* is celebrated on the D-day (*Ihoo-Ahia*)**

*Ihoo-Ahia* literally means parading in and out of the market square, while on the other hand, *Iga-Ahia* means ‘going to the market.’ In any case, outside the literal meaning, when an Uboma indigene talks about *Ihoo-Ahia*, he or she means the actual action of an initiate that involves joining his fellow initiates in the *Iwa-Akwa* cultural procession to the market square. It is a well known fact especially in the recent times that not all the supposed initiates join in the *Iwa-Akwa* cultural procession. Some prefer to stay at home and wait for those who went for the procession to return before they begin to play their music and serve their visitors food and drinks. The reason behind waiting for them to return is no other than the fact that the end of the procession signals that it is now time for the merriment to begin.

Having made the above point, the researcher will now focus on describing the proper

celebration of *Iwa-Akwa*. Now, all the initiates haven been properly vested by their elder kinsmen will now be waiting to hear the sound of the *mpkonala* (local war bomb). Once the sound goes, each of the candidates begins to match to the village square. Nevertheless, according to the level of individual financial involvement made, some of the initiates are not only accompanied by some members of their family, but also by one musical troupe or the other. When they have all gathered at the village square, their immediate seniors begin to arrange the line. There are certain traditional customs that guide this arrangement. Someone from the eldest kindred must be at the fore-front. According to Chidiebere Nwosu (interviewed: 28/11/2021), the eldest kindred in the village presents the eldest initiate among them who then occupies the position, he is followed by the eldest initiate from the next kindred in the order of seniority. It goes this way until it gets to the most junior

kindred in the village. The position of staying in the fore-front in the line of *Iwa-Akwa* procession is known as *Ipoo ihu ahia*. If this is not done objectively, it brings about some kind of misunderstanding among the elders.

After the arrangement of the line, the procession begins. Meanwhile *Ndi na Ado-Udoo* by now must have formed a U-shape with their strong rope, using it to stop the crowd from coming very close to the initiates and their elders. As the procession is moving, intermittently after a while, it is halted and the initiates are asked to lie on the ground facing the sun. Most often, before they are asked to lie down they are first of all asked to release their wrapper from their body and the wrapper all goes to their left hand side being held by one or more of their relatives. While their relatives are holding the wrappers, the initiates will be busy blowing their whistles because the blowing of whistle is a continuous one; just as much as the candidate can blow it. As this is going on, some of the

initiates may be dancing the *Odumodu* cultural music as well. The *Odumodu* cultural music is a very interesting one with a special melodious sound, and it is traditionally the music that is used to accompany the initiates to the market square. It is beaten and sang by a group among the elders. Having observed this moment, the immediate seniors of the initiates will ask the relatives to allow the wrappers to fall to the ground, and then ask the initiates to lie on the ground facing the sun. Then each of the immediate seniors coming from the rear front; in other words from the position of the first person, begins to match his feet on their wrappers. Some of the immediate seniors may rob some sand on their uniform T-shirts or pour some water on them or even the alcoholic drink they are drinking. When they are through with this exercise, they ask the initiates to stand up.

Also, at some point the initiates are asked to shot their den guns. With regard to the den gun, prior to the *Iwa-Akwa*, each of the

initiate must have gotten someone whom he will saddle with the responsibility of making sure that the den gun is always ready. At some point again, the initiates are carried shoulders-high as the procession is still moving on and after awhile, they are taken down. This is one of the most joyous moments for the initiates for they are carried like kings. As regards this, each initiate equally sets aside someone to carry him shoulders-high whenever it is time for that. These are what happen intermittently as the procession progresses. However, behind the initiates, are the parents of those of them who did not come back for the initiation. The parents are also vested with the Age Grade's uniform T-shirt. A mother may decide to carry an enlarged picture frame of her son. She can equally decide to bear a big sized stock fish (*okporoko*) in her hand. With regard to this, she may be assisted by one of her relatives. Some of their female age grade members follow behind also, wearing the T-

shirt of the Age Grade and hanging their wrappers over their body, but they neither receive the initiating gesture from the immediate seniors nor carried shoulders high nor are they allowed to enter into the *ogba*. All those things are strictly for the boys who are becoming men – the initiates. Now once the procession gets to the market square, the initiates are carried shoulders-high again and taken round the market square. When each of the persons carrying an initiate shoulders-high gets close to the entrance of the *ogba*, he takes the initiate down. Then, at this point, the initiate takes his den gun from his attendant and enters into the *ogba*. His aim is to shoot down one of the strings of the *ogba* which are all hanging from bamboo pegs constructed in the form of a semi-circle up to a very tall bamboo stick at the centre. While they are individually making efforts to shoot the strings down, any initiate that eventually hits the target by shooting down one of the strings is hurriedly and joyously carried

shoulders-high once again, while the crowd jubilates so joyously about what he has done. Gradually, the initiates will eventually shoot down all the strings of the *ogba*, although not every initiate hits the target. According to Kevin Nwosu (interviewed: 23/7/2021), it is a taboo that is booed by the gathered crowd, for an initiate to shoot his den gun with his two hands. Adding that, the initiate must shoot his den gun with only one hand. According to him, if he does it with one hand, he is indirectly telling the crowd that he has come of age as a man indeed, but if he does it with both of his hands, he is as well telling the crowd that he has not yet attained maturity. In other words that he is still a boy. The initiation process ends with the passage out from the *ogba*. Once an initiate having shut his den gun inside the *ogba* targeting any of the strings, leaves the *ogba*, whether he got his target or not, it is taken that he has been fully initiated into the men folk/elders' forum of the village.

Onyebuchi Nwosu (interviewed: 28/11/2021) hinted that when the now initiated full-fledged man is done with the *ogba*, whether he was able to hit the target or not, he is carried shoulders-high back to his family compound. As it is, nowadays on account of the availability of cars, it is now normal to see some of the initiated men sitting or standing on top of a car as they are going back to their respective homes.

### **Rites of Christian Initiation in the Catholic Church**

As long as the Catholic Church is concerned Catholic Initiation Rites or the Sacraments of Christian Initiation can be likened to the organic process of human growth and development. The Church expresses this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1212 as follows:

The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the foundations of every Christian life. "The sharing in the divine nature given to men



through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.”

So for the Church, everyone needs to receive these sacraments just as everyone needs constant in-take of food. So while food in the ordinary sense of the word will lead to the nourishment of the body, everyone needs these sacraments in order to be nourished spiritually.

#### **a. The Sacrament of Baptism**

Baptism is rightly the gateway or avenue through which one gets to the other sacraments. So without holy baptism one cannot receive any of the other sacraments, be it Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Matrimony and Holy Orders (Ordination to the Priesthood).

The Catechism hints on this in CCC no. 1213 with the following words:

#### **b. The Sacrament of Confirmation**

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1285 “Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded.” Furthermore, it makes it clear that it must be explained to the faithful that Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are as such enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are certainly, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.

#### **c. The Sacrament of the Eucharist**

At this juncture, the focus is on the holy Eucharist which is the third and last Sacrament of Christian Initiation. It is

pertinent to point out here that the One Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church sees the holy Eucharist as the sacrament that completes Christian initiation.

### **Comparative Analysis**

Here this paper is not just comparing and contrasting, rather, using the technical terms (*termini technici*) of the academic discipline of Comparative Religion, this paper is interested in sieving out (i) the areas of convergence, (ii) the areas of divergence and (iii) the areas of dialogue between this duo; *Iwa-Akwa* Cultural Festival in Uboma on one side and then Catholic Initiation Rites on the other side.

#### **1. Areas of Convergence**

In the Comparative Study of Religion, areas of convergence refer to those areas found in the two phenomena, religion etc that can be said to be similar to each other.

##### **a. Announcement**

Those who own the *Iwa-Akwa* festival see the shooting of den guns at the market square which is known as *Ututuru Egbe* as a means of awakening and announcing to the deity of the shrine that initiation into manhood is about to take place, while for the neighbouring villages/towns it is an announcement about the imminent *Iwa-Akwa* festival. So the announcement thesis is correct. How? The earlier meaning is for the deity of the shrine while the later is for the neighbouring villages/towns. On the other hand in the celebration of Catholic Initiation Rites, announcements are made about their celebration.

##### **b. Initiation**

At the ordinary level, *Iwa-Akwa* is seen as 'Wearing Cloth Ceremony' which marks the attainment of age of manhood in one's village but for the owners of the festival, it is a very powerful initiation exercise. An initiation that involves awakening the deity of the shrine located at the market square with gun

shots and which is also associated with the imbuing of manly strength, brevity, readiness to fight and defend the land whenever the need arises and so on. However, whether you are talking about *Iwa-Akwa* or you are talking about Catholic Initiation Rites, initiation is no doubt involved in the both of them.

### c. Festival

Going by the definitions earlier given in the Chapter two of this work concerning the meaning of ‘festival’, *Iwa-Akwa* and Catholic Initiation Rites both qualify to be regarded as festivals because they involve one form of religious holiday or the other. *Iwa-Akwa* by its very nature is already a very serious religious holiday involving different days. At least officially, we have the *Ishi Nri Nwam-Akwa* day and the usual much later *Iwa-Akwa* day proper. For each of the villages, the kindred and individual families, these two separate days are very important to them. This is because, for *Ishi Nri-Nwam Akwa*, the sisters of the initiate usually come home in

order to help out with the chores/preparations. For example; as regards the Sacrament of Confirmation, whenever a parish is paying host to the diocesan bishop for the celebration of this sacrament, it is usually a great one. This is usually celebrated on Sunday and this very point lends more credence to the fact that it is already a religious holiday. Even if any of these sacraments is celebrated on a ferial day, the faithful do observe a kind of holiday. The parish will be in a festive mood, but if not at the parish level, at least at the individual family level. The researcher recalls what happened in his home when his junior sister was baptized. A sizeable fowl was slaughtered that very night for a proper celebration the next day. They are indeed, special days.

### d. The Elders as the Ministers

In both *Iwa-Akwa* and Catholic Initiation Rites., those who administer the initiation are the elders. In *Iwa-Akwa*, the immediate

seniors together with the rest of the elders do that. In the Catholic Church, another name for priests is presbyters, and they are the ones that administer the Initiation Rites to Christ's faithful. However, the word Presbyter, going by its origin in the Greek Language implies 'elder.'

#### **e. Bath**

There is a point of convergence between *Iwa-Akwa* and Catholic Initiation Rites with regard to the idea of bathing or washing someone. CCC. 1216 referred to holy baptism as a bath. In other words it washes away Original sin. So too, in like manner, in the course of the ritual referred to as *Ishi Nri Ndupu Ahia*, there is equally a kind of bath. It could be said to be a bath that washes away *mgbaramaoto* (the state of playing around unclad). Since it is the belief that the *Iwa-Akwa* initiates hitherto have been *umu mgbaramaoto* (children playing around unclad) and then water is poured on them on the Eve of *Iwa-Akwa*, it could be said that in

their nakedness they are being bathed in order that they might be clothed the next afternoon. It is clear that *Iwa-Akwa* literally implies 'wearing cloth.'

## **2. Areas of Divergence**

In the Comparative Study of Religion, areas of divergence refer to those areas found in the two phenomena, religion etc that can be said to be different from each other. However, from a phenomenological point of view, all that will be said about *Iwa-Akwa* here are from the perspective of the owners of the festival.

#### **a. Manly Strength**

The *Iwa-Akwa* candidates pass through different physical test or challenge like *Imaburu Ike Nkwu*, *Iwufe Owa-mmiri*, the task of handling the den gun with only one hand and so on. All these are aimed at bringing out the best of manly strength in them. There is no Catholic Initiation Rite that requires such. Rather what is required of the

Christian is firmness in his or her faith in Christ which is aided through things like reading the Bible and the Catechism book.

### **b. Endurance**

The candidate for *Iwa-Akwa* is expected to be a man of endurance. That is why on the eve of *Iwa-Akwa* at around 1am in the morning, cold water is being poured on him by his immediate seniors. Nevertheless, on the other side, there is a Christian approach to endurance which is quite different from that of *Iwa-Akwa*. With regard to Catholic Initiation Rites, on the contrary the Christian receives an inward grace that enables him or her to stand firm in his or her faith in God during moments of trials and temptation.

### **c. Local Army versus Soldiers of Christ**

All the marshal training given to the candidates for *Iwa-Akwa* is meant to give them that consciousness of the reality that they are as a matter of fact a standing army for the village should there the emergence of

a physical war. Hence, according to the local custom, the major weapons each of them has for that is; the den gun and the sheathe sword (*obo mma*). On the other hand, the catechetical training given to catechumens for the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation have nothing to do with being prepared as members of the local army in-case there emerges a physical war. Rather it aims at setting the candidates aside as soldiers of Christ. Through the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, being soldiers of Christ implies they have received a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross. So the training basically entails a spiritual training, formation or fortification through received from the Church.

### **d. Boldness and Resoluteness**

According to Patrick Ajaero (interviewed: 23/7/2021), once a person has been initiated

into manhood through *Iwa-Akwa* he is seen even by his elders as highly respectable. In addition, he can boldly stand in their assembly and talk to them. He emphasized this by saying that if he threatens to do anything, the elders will express the need for paying attention to him and taking his words seriously by saying; “*Owadala akwa, geenu ya nti. Ihena o si o ga eme, o ga emedi ya.*” Which means: ‘he has become a fully fledged man, listen to him. That which he said he will do, he will do it.’ When Christians are celebrating their Rites of Initiation, they are not thinking about this kind of boldness and resoluteness.

#### **e. Eligible to take a Wife**

According to Kevin Nwosu (interviewed: 23/7/2022) it was almost a law in times past in the community that before a young man begins to consider taking a wife he must have successfully passed through *Iwa-Akwa*. While Stephen Okoroafor (interviewed: 24/11/2022) asserted that in times past also,

if it is confirmed that a man who has been initiated into manhood at *Iwa-Akwa* is having sexual affair with a married woman, he is not fined, but if it is a male member of the community who is still *mgbaramaoto* (meaning that he is yet to be recognized as a full-fledged man through *Iwa-Akwa*) he is fined. If this point is juxtaposed with the earlier point, the major point that is accruable is that; ‘man is in need of woman.’ He who has been initiated into manhood at *Iwa-Akwa* is a full-fledged man therefore he should go and marry a woman as his wife. Contrarily, as regards Catholic Initiation Rites, there is no such thing.

#### **f. Tax payers**

One of the importance of *Iwa-Akwa* according to Nicholas Obiakaraije (interviewed: 24/7/2022) is that through it the community begets tax payers because they are now seen as young men who have one source of livelihood or the other. So, they are now old enough to collectively look after the

financial needs of the community. This is not so at all with regard to the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

#### **g. Protector of the Family**

Anyone who has been initiated into manhood through *Iwa-Akwa* is seen as a protector to his family. Family in this case connotes both his immediate and conjugal family. This also throws some light on the significance of the sheath sword which the *Iwa-Akwa* candidates handles at the celebration of *Iwa-Akwa*. In accordance with the local custom of Uboma, outside being one of the weapons for war, it is also a sign of protection for one's family. Hence, once a family has begotten someone who has passed through this initiation into manhood, it is taken for granted that the young man has the task of protecting his family from all sorts of external aggression or intrusion. It is noteworthy to mention here that in Uboma, if you are chasing someone and the person runs to an elderly person, you dare not lay your finger on that person until a

time he or she is alone. If you act otherwise, it will be taken that you have done that to the person he or she has ran to. And whatever reaction you receive from the person who was ran to, you have yourself for blame. On the other way round, those who receive Catholic Rites of Initiation are usually infants. So they cannot protect their families that way.

#### **h. Consecrated Water versus Un-consecrated Water**

CCC. 1238 stated that "the baptismal water is consecrated by a prayer of epiclesis. Contrarily in *Iwa-Akwa* on the other hand, there is no prayer at all said over the water that is poured on the initiates during the time of performing the *Nri Ndupu Ahia* ritual.

#### **i. State of Grace**

For the proper reception of the Catholic Initiation Rites, the Church emphasizes on the need of being in the state of grace (CCC

1310), but there is nothing like that when it comes to *Iwa-Akwa*.

#### **j. Unisex versus Bi-sex Criterion of Qualification**

*Iwa-Akwa* is actually a masculine celebration where young men demonstrate that they have actually attained the age of manhood. So the primary qualification for being an initiate is that the person must be a male indigene of the village involved. But this is not so with Catholic Initiation Rites, rather they are administered to both male and female persons alike.

#### **k. In Pericolo Mortis (in danger of death)**

As long as *Iwa-Akwa* in Uboma is co there is nothing like emergency. *Iwa-Akwa* or rather making sure that a male indigene who is about to pass away is initiated into manhood through *Iwa-Akwa* before he eventually passes away. So, in other words, *Iwa-Akwa* is for the healthy and not at all for the dying. Nevertheless, that is contrary to how things

are with regard to Catholic Initiation Rites for the Church stated in CCC. 1256 and 1314 that in case of necessity, anyone can baptize provided the person has the intention to do what the Church does when she baptizes. And that if a Christian is in danger of death any priest can give him or her Confirmation, because she does not wish that any of her children should leave this world without being perfected by the Holy Spirit with the gift of Christ's fullness.

### **3. Areas of Dialogue**

In the Comparative Study of Religion, areas of dialogue refer to those areas found in the two phenomena, religion etc where they can tolerate each other. These are the points or areas where what the two are aiming to achieve is the same objective or at least similar to each other in that regard, though with different (*modus operandi*) mode of operation.

Now, from the foregoing it is clear that some *Iwa-Akwa* rituals are no longer practiced,



while some that are still practiced till today have been modified. Therefore there is no longer any need to shun the festival. We can begin to pair some elements of Catholic Initiation Rites side by side with those of *Iwa-Akwa*. In the opinion of the researcher, considering how it is being celebrated today, it can dialogue with the Christian Religion. The following are the points where they can possibly dialogue.

#### **a. Initiation**

Whether *Iwa-Akwa* or Catholic Initiation Rites, what each of them is aiming at achieving is initiation of new members. But then, it is also very clear that their processes and mode of operation differ greatly.

#### **b. Baptism**

According to Donnelly (2014, p. 2), “Baptism is the formal beginning of the Christian life and (at least in adults and children of catechetical age) the culmination of a process of conversion to Christ.” Just as

baptism is among the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, so too, in *Iwa-Akwa*, there is a kind of baptism. Also, just as in the Catholic Church, Holy Baptism is the gateway to the other Sacraments of Christian Initiation (cf. CCC. 1306), which is why it is said to be a second birth that leads to reception into the Catholic Church (Thompson as cited in Meconi, 1997, p. 505), so too, in *Iwa-Akwa*, unless an initiate successfully passes through the *Ishi Nri Ndupu Ahia* ritual performed on the eve of the D-day, he cannot join the *Iwa-Akwa* procession.

#### **c. Concluding Ritual and Concluding Prayer**

The most important thing here is that both of them are concluded in a certain way. *Iwa-Akwa* in Abueke and Catholic Initiation Rites should be able to understand each other at this juncture at least from the angle of the very reality that whether one is talking about concluding rite or concluding prayer; they all

involve actions taken before it could be said that the initiation has been completed or administered.

#### **d. Faith**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1253 referred to Baptism as “the sacrament of faith.” And of course the two other sacraments of Christian Initiation that is; Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist are equally sacraments of faith for without faith in the efficacy of these sacraments, their celebration would make no meaning to the worshippers gathered. In any case, as regards *Iwa-Akwa*, the people of Uboma do not talk about faith but rather there is some kind of hope and expectancy both on the side of the initiates and also on the side of their parents and other relations. This hope and expectancy is rooted in the new and higher level of responsibility the new social status to be acquired carries with it. At this juncture, the researcher is of the opinion that both *Iwa-Akwa* and the Catholic Initiation Rites can

tolerate and understand each other here. They can equally give and take something from each other. In other words they can enrich each other. Pope Benedict XVI declared in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* that “faith is hope.” Furthermore, “in several passages in the Bible the pope finds the words “faith’ and “hope” interchangeable.” This assertion by the Roman Pontiff in any case suggests that the duo is a kind of complementarities.

#### **Conclusion**

Culture is a very powerful element that cuts across all civilizations of the world. As a matter of fact, in any given human society there is some sort of culture to be found there. As long as the people of Uboma are involved, *Iwa-Akwa* remains a quintessential cultural celebration despite all the recent negative developments militating against it. On the ground of the necessity of maintaining one’s cultural identity, there comes an awakening interest at least on the part of the author of this paper. An awakening interest that

involves raising the consciousness of not just the people of Uboma, but also and at least indirectly, that of other Igbo clans. However, it should also be noted here that this undertaking has a Christian background and approach. This is so because this paper is totally convinced that God Almighty is the Giver of culture but not the author of any inhumane or devilish aspect of any given culture; hence his conviction that the light of the Gospel of Christ should be allowed to penetrate through any given culture. It is quite unpleasant that some indigenes of Uboma are yet to begin to see *Iwa-Akwa* as a God-given festival. In any case, the comparative analysis of this paper showed that *Iwa-Akwa* Cultural Festival in Uboma and Catholic Initiation Rites rightly have points of convergence. Hence, this alone should help the people of Uboma to better appreciate *Iwa-Akwa* Cultural Festival since they are equally mostly Catholics.

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