# PSYCHOLOGICAL REALITIES IN IGBO THEOLOGICAL BELIEF IN RE-INCARNATION

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to God Almighty, for the wisdom, strength, knowledge and understanding given to me throughout my course of study. This dissertation is also dedicated to my late brother Mr. Ebenje Loveday Chidiebere.

**REG. NO: 19/402CRSJ/001**

**MARCH, 2023**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a product of my own original research work conducted by me. Undertaken under the supervision of Prof. Charles Ogundu Nnaji and Dr. Kehinde Adeola, and has not been presented for the award of any certificate in any university. All sources have been distinguished and appropriately acknowledged.

……

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## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this M.A thesis by CHRIS IJEOMA CHARLOTTE, (Mat. No. 19/402CRSJ/001) was carried out under our supervision

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**ABSTRACT**

*Clearly noted is the fact that Christianity currently suppresses the Igbo belief in re-incarnation. This gives us this study's objective, which is to investigate Psychological realities in Igbo Theological belief in Re-incarnation. The method of study was qualitative and experiential, since relevant texts were consulted and corroborated by experiential field work of administering questionnaires, these which gave us research finding that Igbo believe in re-incarnation is not mere psychology or constructed in the human mind, but that re-incarnation among the Igbo of South East Nigeria is a physical reality backed up with historical and Names, Linguistic proofs. The study recommends further studies on this topics; particularly suggesting more oral interviews of very elderly people in the interior of our village; since such experienced elderly citizens can make greater eye witness contributions to this topic called "Re-incarnation". This elderly and interior experienced persons can identify birth marks, family resemblances and statement from the supposed re-incarnated ones. These suggestions for further studies clearly points to the fact that data collected by the researcher indicates that re-incarnation among the Igbos is not mere psychological and religious belief but a physical reality.*

# CHAPTER ONE

# GENERAL INTRODUCTON

## 1.1 Background of the Study

The concept of re-incarnation seems to offer one of the most attractive explanations of humanity's origin and destiny. It is accepted not only by adherents of Eastern religions or New Age spirituality, but also by many who do not share such esoteric interests and convictions. To know that you have lived many lives before this one, and that there are many more to come is a very attractive perspective from which to judge the meaning of life. On the one hand, re-incarnation is a source of great comfort, especially for those who seek liberation on the exclusive basis of their inner resources. It gives assurance for continuing one's existence in further lives, thus having a renewed chance to attain liberation. On the other hand, re-incarnation is a way of rejecting the monotheistic teaching of the final judgement by a holy God, with the possible result of being eternally condemned to suffer in hell or enjoy eternally in heaven.

Another major reason for accepting re-incarnation by so many people today, is that it seems to explain the differences that exist among people. Some are healthy; others are tormented throughout their whole life by physical handicaps; Some are rich, others are at the brink of starvation; Some have success without being religious; others are constant losers despite their religious dedication. Eastern religion explains these differences as a result of previous lives, good or bad, which bear their fruits in the present one through the law of Karma. Therefore re-incarnation seems to be a perfect way of punishing or rewarding one's deeds, without the need of accepting a personal God as Ultimate Reality. Hence, re-incarnation could well be Judgement before Judgement (Nnaji C.O, 2023: Lecture Note)

The doctrine of re-incarnation derives from antiquity, originating in the east, but also found in ancient Greece.It teaches that the soul enters this life, not as a fresh creation, but after a long course of previous existence on this earth and elsewhere… and that it is on its way to future transformations which it's now shaping for itself. (Greg,1998 :21)

The Eastern concept of re-incarnation is that man depends on his deeds in his previous existence, hence can come back in any type of life form, including various animals, as well as human form. Re-incarnationists in the West, however, generally hold that men and women can

be re-incarnated only as human beings. Western Re-incarnationists often refer to the Eastern view as "transmigration" and to the Western view as "re-incarnation". Traditionally, though, the terms "transmigration", "re-incarnation" and "metempsychosis" have been used as synonyms. On the other hand, re-incarnation is to be distinguished from pre-existence of souls. While all those who believe in re-incarnation believe that the reincarnated souls pre- existed, not all who adhere to pre-existence of souls accept re-incarnation.

The underlying, often unspoken assumption of re-incarnation is "monism" the belief that only one reality exists. Since this means that all things are part of one essential reality, there is no real distinction between God, the world, and the people– they are all "one". In this system of thought "God" is regarded, not as a personal Creator, but as an impersonal force or consciousness of which we are all part. Thus, Shirley (54) states that:

God is the word we use for a concept of incredible complex spiritual energies, and suggests that the tragedy of the human race was that we had forgotten that we were each Divine. A soul's re-incarnations, then, have classics ally been understood as a journey from God to God, the global being re-absorption into the one.

As an introductory part, and given the huge interest in this topic today, the concept of re-incarnation will be given a detailed touch in the subsequent chapters.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the uncompromising position of the unorthodox against traditional belief in "Ino Uwa" (Re-incarnation); the negative attitudes towards the phenomenon, as well as its rejection by Christians, keeps the specter staring in the faces and psyches of Christians and other protesters. Names like Nnamdi (My Father is Alive), Nnenna (My Father's Mother), Nnanna (my Father's Father), Nnamani (My Ancestral Father) and so on, keep agitating the conscious minds of Christian bearers. With regard to the subject of this work, Ino Uwa (re-incarnation), we speculatively assume that Africans with their deep religious sense evolved and developed it in their various religious cultural contexts (Ekwunife, 2002:26). Drawing from the assertion above, it is also worthy to note that the concept of re-incarnation has been traditionally observed for long; and as one of the oldest men in Nru- Nsukka, once submitted on this issue:

> "anyi aputala uwa, kwadoya. O bu omenani anyi, kwelu naya(we were born into it. It is our customary belief, we firmly belief in it) (Odonwagbo, personal communication, 11th September, 2013,).

This traditional Igbo religious belief has persisted till this day, despite the incursion of Christianity, western education and modern technology. Our concern will be to unearth the nature and consequences of that belief in modern society and its environs.

Considering the ugly attitudes from some of the contemporary Christians, it could be summed as "unimaginable and biased". This is because it sometimes looked as religious discrimination without acclaiming that the belief practice was handed down from the forefathers down to the people. African belief systems have been dented with some irritating words such as idol, fetish, witches, etc which retard the quality of people's belief system. Indeed, re-incarnation in African/Igbo context has been in unconformity with the notion of Christians, Moslems, and some Western philosophers. However, these uncompromising non-adherents of traditional religion should view the phenomenon (re-incarnation) from their perspective as committed insiders and never as biased outsiders. They have to be objectively converted to the traditionalists' view on the issue to make valid conclusions. How would this be a reality?

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

i. To identify the position of the Igbo tribe of South East Nigeria, on re-incarnation as compared to how it affects the Igbo Christian

ii. To identify problems resulting from misconception of the phenomenon of re-incarnation.

iii. To suggest methods of possible dialogue between traditionalists and their Christian counterparts on believe, or non-believe, in re-incarnation.

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

The significances of the study are as follows:

i. This work will enable the believers of traditional religion on their belief in some other traditional tenets.

ii. It will also help to argue the fact that life is endless.

iii. This work will also assist some of the scholars in traditional study in carrying out their research.

iv. It will serve as a yardstick for preserving African belief system.

## 1.5 Scope of the Study

This study generally looks at the psychological believe pattern behind re-incarnation among the Igbo, and the practice among African traditionists.

### 1.5.1 Limitations of the Study

The limitation of this study is that it dwells only on the Igbo and oriental traditional religious beliefs system on re-incarnation, since they share similarities in possible re-incarnation of the human soul after death. However other African belief systems are not focused based on the fact that their re-incarnation belief systems are not clearly stated, though future studies can be conducted on that.

## 1.6 Operational Definition of Terms

**Psychological**

The word psychological is used to describe things that are primarily mental or emotional, but it can also be used when referring to the field of psychology. You might be interested in studying the psychological issues of teen and childhood in college. Watch out if someone uses psychological warfare on you. He or she uses your own emotions to attack you as when someone tries to goad you into doing something. Hawkins (1996) defined psychology as a mental or behavioral process. The word psychology is from the Greek “Psuxe” which means “soul” or the inner man.(Nnaji:2023: on the Hebrew Old Testament  Origins of Economy, Sociology and Psychology: Enugu and Abuja Theometry) p1.

Psychological is concerned with a person's mind and thoughts, it’s also pertaining to the mind or to mental phenomena as the subject matter of psychology;Pertaining to, dealing with, or affecting the mind, especially as a function of awareness, feeling, or motivation.

**Reality**

Metzger (2001) defined the Greek New Testament “Ontos” as reality or “Being” Reality is thus the sum or aggregate of all that is real or existent within a system, as opposed to that which is only imaginary. The term is also used to refer to the ontological status of things, indicating their existence. In physical terms, reality is the totality of a system, known and unknown. Philosophical questions about the nature of reality or existence or being are considered under the rubric of ontology, which is a major branch of metaphysics in the Western philosophical tradition. Ontological questions also feature in diverse branches of philosophy, including the philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, philosophy of mathematics, and philosophical logic. These include questions about whether only physical objects are real (i.e., Physicalism), whether reality is fundamentally immaterial (e.g., Idealism), whether hypothetical unobservable entities posited by scientific theories exist, whether God exists, whether numbers and other abstract objects exist, and whether possible worlds exist. (Okonji 1970) See also Bruce Metzgeri 2001: Greek New Testament Lexicon (Illinois: Baker).

Hence, reality is the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them. A thing that exists in fact, having previously only existed in one's mind or place.

**Igbo**

The Igbo people (also spelled Ibo) and formerly also Iboe, Ebo, Eboe, Eboans, Heebo; etc are also natively Ṇdị Ìgbò(In South East Nigeria,) Igbos are indigenous to various states. Igbos are majorly found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. Good populations of Igbos are found in Delta and Rivers States while Igbos are a minority in Akwa ibom, Benue, Cross River, Edo and Kogi states. Large ethnic Igbo populations are found in Cameroon, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea, as well as outside Africa. (Nwala 1985) There has been much speculations about the origins of the Igbo people, as it is unknown how exactly the group emerged. Geographically, the Igbo homeland is divided into two unequal sections by the Niger River – an eastern (which is the larger of the two) and a western section. The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa.(Metu, 1981)

**Theological**

Mairi et al (2007) state that Theology is the study of God from (Greek-Theos), Hence Theological is of, relating to, or based on theology. Theology is the systematic study of the nature of the divine and, more broadly, of religious belief. It is taught as an academic discipline, typically in Universities and Seminaries.[1] It occupies itself with the unique content of analyzing the supernatural, but also deals with religious epistemology, asks and seeks to answer the question of revelation. Revelation pertains to the acceptance of God, gods, or deities, as not only transcendent or above the natural world, but also willing and able to interact with the natural world and, in particular, to reveal themselves to humankind. While theology has turned into a secular field, religious adherents still consider theology to be a discipline that helps them live and understand concepts such as life and love and that helps them lead lives of obedience to the deities they follow or worship.(Please note Mairi, Robinson et al (2007) Chambers 21st century Dictionary: Edinburgh: Chambers)

**Belief**

Belief is a mental attitude of acceptance or assent towards a proposition without the full intellectual knowledge required to guarantee its truth. Believing is either an intellectual judgment or, as the 18th-century Scottish Skeptic David Hume (1700s) maintained, a special sort of feeling with overtones that differ from those of disbelief. Beliefs have been distinguished according to their degree of certainty: a surmise or suspicion, an opinion, or a conviction. Belief becomes knowledge only when the truth of a proposition becomes evident to the believer. Belief in someone or something is basically different from belief that a proposition is true.

**Re-incarnation**

Re-incarnation, also known as rebirth or transmigration, is the philosophical or religious concept that the non-physical essence of a living being begins a new life in a different physical form or body after biological death. (Gale, 2006) Resurrection is a similar process hypothesized by some religions, in which a soul comes back to life in the same body. In most beliefs involving re-incarnation, the soul is seen as immortal and the only thing that becomes perishable is the body. Upon death, the soul becomes transmigrated into a new infant (or animal) to live again. The term transmigration means passing of soul from one body to another after death.

## CHAPTER TWO

# 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

All over the world, we find a firm belief in a spiritual reality behind the confusions of daily existence, though understanding of the exact nature of the relationship between the spheres of spirit and matter varies enormously. Most societies postulate a stream of consciousness connecting the two principles. In many religions and philosophies, this connecting stream has been expressed in terms of a constant ebb and flow of manifestation, "birth" in one world being "death" in the other with the principle of continuing eternally.

Marwinza (1975:68), stated the following, "This belief in periodic re-embodiment or re-incarnation is, of course, a central theme of many Eastern religions. In the temples of India and among the people it is accepted as one of nature's "eternal ways".

In China and Japan, the Taoist and Zen masters speak of it in their esoteric teachings. Among the philosophers of the West who taught it in ancient days were Plato and Pythagoras, the church fathers, Origen and Clement Alexandrinus, and in more recent times, re-incarnation absorbed the intellects of Goethe, Leibniz, and Schopenhauer and inflamed the poetic genius of Wordsworth, Masefield, Whitman, and Browning (Thomson,2006:19).

However, it is not widely realized that re-incarnation is an essential tenet of many traditional African religious systems and philosophies. As it is obviously noted that "belief in rebirth has been reported amongst peoples scattered over the length and breadth of the mighty continent: Akamab (Kenya), Akan (Ghana), Lango (Uganda), Luo (Zambia), Ndebele (Zimbabwe), Sebei ( Uganda), Yoruba (Nigeria), Shona (Zimbabwe), Nupe (Nigeria) Illa (Zambia), and many others" (Orji, 1989: 20).

According to Noon (1978: 98), noticed that in an endless shade of understanding, re-incarnation is known by Many names: amongst the Yoruba of Nigeria. Rebirth is referred to in various ways, including Yiyaomo, translated as the "shooting forth of a branch" or "turning to be child," and Atun-wa, "another coming". The Aboh-speaking peoples of the Igbo family of nations in Nigeria speak of Inu-uwa or "returning to life", as they believe death is an end to one life only and a gateway to another; man must be reborn, for re-incarnation is a spiritual necessity".

## 2.2 Re-incarnation in African Context

The ancient theosophy underlying traditional African religions becomes even more apparent as we delve into the fascinating complexities of their interpretations of the doctrine of re-incarnation. Ascertaining from the logical point of view, Olupona (1976: 87) cited the Illa people of Southern Zambia, believe that a certain number of spirits were created and given bodies at the dawn of manifestation. When the bodies wear out during the course of a lifetime, the spirits live on in their own sphere of consciousness and then have other bodies prepared for them at the appropriate time. Linked with this is a belief in the inevitability of rebirth for the majority of humanity with only two exceptions cited by the Illa elders the mizhimo or "tribal gods," and those unfortunate individuals whose spiritual evolution has in some way been interrupted by sorcerers. The Illa also believe that the reincarnating spirit is sexless and may seek manifestation in either the body of a man or woman regardless of the individual's sex in a previous life. They say, in common with the esoteric teachings of many other religious traditions, that the incarnating spirit, the true Self of each individual, provides to the newly –born child no memory of previous lives in the worlds of either spirit or matter. During life, the spirit animates the body but remains untainted by the vicissitudes of daily living.

One is reminded of the ancient Greek myths regarding the river of Lethe or Forgetfulness in the Underworld, from which those about to be reincarnated drank a certain portion which made them forget their former existence (Oossthuzen1992:74). Locked deep within these traditions, we can discern the hidden mechanisms of nature and the eternal ebb and flow of manifestation as described in the traditions of people the world over.

Reflecting the evidence drawn from the "Secret Doctrine" shows that "the number of entities within any sphere of life at any given time is limited by karmic considerations" (Woogler1972:27). For the vast majority of humanity struggling within the limbo world of material attractions in order to attain true self- consciousness of the inner spiritual nature, re-incarnation is indeed a necessity. As bodies appropriate, different stages of evolution wear out, the eternal spiritual self of each individual continues from birth to birth, clothing itself in the appropriate vehicle through which it can express its potentialities as these are evolved through the experience of many lives.

As it was clarified in Blakely (1994: 30), the only exceptions to this "cycle of necessity" are entities who, by constant striving after the higher realities, have escaped the endless round of re-incarnation and become as gods to us and, at the polar opposite, chose who have consciously violated nature's law of spiritual evolution. As the Illa leaders tell us in their own way, the spiritual Self seeks manifestation in a body of either sex at different times on its long journey, and very few entities are exempted from the constant round rebirths.

As found in other religious traditions, mystery enshrouds details of African doctrines concerning the embodiment of the spiritual Self. We do know, however, that many African peoples have beliefs in the composite nature of man remarkably similar to the more familiar religious teachings of the East and Near East. The ancient Egyptians held man to be a composite of nine parts ranging from the physical body khat to the habitation of the spiritual nature, the sahu. The ancient Jewish teachings of the Qabbalah speak of man as a tenfold entity, and the esoteric traditions of India, which provide much of the terminology of modern theosophy, teach variously of four, five, or seven aspects or parts. All of these traditions agree that it is only the deathless essence of man's nature which continues eternally, while the more material "bodies" fall apart at death, when the life force is withdrawn.

On the accompanying chart which compares the traditions of four African people with theosophical doctrine concerning the composite nature of man, remarkable parallels are immediately apparent. All envisage a spiritual body (a life essence or "vital breath") at one extreme, with gradations through heart-soul, menial body, or will, and life principle, to the "shadow" and physical body as the lower vehicles. It is obvious that "in all four examples the reincarnating entity is held to be the spiritual essence which abides in its own spheres of existence after death, and animates the more material "bodies" during earth life" (Beiser1966: 45).

## 2.3 Re-incarnation in Eastern Christian Nigeria

Ọdịnala (Igbo: Ọdịnàlà), also Ọdịnanị, Ọdịlalị or Ọdịlala, comprises the traditional religious practices and cultural beliefs of the Igbo people of South East Nigeria. Ọdịnala has

monotheistic and pan atheistic attributes, having a single God as the source of all things. Although a pantheon of spirits exists these being Ala, Amadiọha, Anyanwụ, Ekwensu, Ikenga, these are lesser spirits prevalent in Ọdịnala expressly serving as elements of Chineke (or Chukwu), the supreme being or high God. Chineke is a compound word encompassing the concept of chí is the creator (nà) is a verb meaning 'that' while ékè means create. Chineke therefore means the Creator or the God that created all things.

Lesser spirits known as, ágbàrà or árúsí, operate below the high God Chineke and are each a part of Chineke divided by gender in their mind. These spirits represent natural forces; agbara as a divine force manifests as separate arụsị in the Igbo pantheon. A concept of 'the eye of sun or God' (ányáánwụ) exists as a masculine and feminine solar deity which forms a part of the solar veneration among the Nri-Igbo in northern Igboland. Arụsị are mediated by Dibia and other priests who do not contact the high god directly. Through áfà, 'divination', the laws and demands of the arụsị are communicated to the living. Arụsị are venerated in community shrines around roadsides and forests while smaller shrines are located in the household for ancestral veneration. Deceased ancestors live in the spirit world where they can be contacted. Below the arụsị are minor and more general spirits known as mmúọ loosely defined by their perceived malevolent or benign natures. These minor spirits are not venerated and are sometimes considered the lost souls of the dead.

The Igbo traditional religion believe in re-incarnation, ilọ-uwa (Ino-Uwa). People are believed to reincarnate into families that they were part of while alive. People can usually reincarnate seven times, giving seven opportunities to enter the spirit world successfully as an ancestor. The person's cycle number on earth is unknown to them. Unlike in Hinduism, humans can only be reincarnated as humans. Families hire fortune-tellers to reveal the ancestral identity of the child in their former life; the baby is sometimes named after this relative. The personality of the ancestor is not identical to the child's but rather the concept establishes a vital relationship with the child and characteristics of the ancestor. Before a relative dies, it is said that the soon to be deceased relative sometimes give clues of who they will be reincarnated as in the family. Once a child is born, he or she is believed to give signs of who they are re-incarnations of. These signs can be certain behaviors, physical traits, and statements by the child. A diviner can help in detecting who the child has reincarnated from. It is considered an insult if a male is said to have

been reincarnated as a female. An ancestor may be reincarnated as multiple people in which case the re-incarnations share a mortal bond; upon the death of one person, it is believed that the others may die a sudden death if they see the corpse.

### 2.3.1 The Ogbanje

However, anọgbanje is a reincarnating evil spirit that would deliberately plague a family with misfortune. In folklore, the ọgbanje, upon being born by the mother, would deliberately die after a certain amount of time (usually before puberty) and then come back and repeat the cycle, causing the family grief. This time period varies between minutes, hours, days and years. Female circumcision was sometimes thought to get rid of the evil spirit. Finding the evil spirit's Iyi-uwa, which is buried in a secret location, would ensure that the ọgbanje would never plague the family with misfortune again. The Iyi-uwa is a stone that the ọgbanje's way of coming back to the human world is also a way of finding its targeted family. The stone is usually buried deep enough to not have been hidden by a child. The iyi-uwa is dug out by a priest and destroyed. Female ọgbanje die during pregnancies along with the baby, male ọgbanje die before the birth of a wife's baby or the baby dies. The child is confirmed to no longer be an ọgbanje after the destruction of the stone or after the mother successfully gives birth to another baby.

### 2.3.2Etymology

*Ọdịnala*in central Igbo dialect is the compound of the words *ọ dị*('located') + *n (nà,* 'within') + *àla* (ala as earth goddess) [consisting of *anu*(*E nu*) above (the heavens) and Ala, below (the earth). Other dialectal variants include *ọdịnanị, ọdịnana, omenala, omenana,* and *omenanị*. The word *ọdịnala* and all its variations is also associated with the culture and customary laws of the Igbo people. Many of the laws and culture were counterparts with religion such as taboos and laws concerning sacred spaces like a deity's sacred forest. Since customary law is recognized in Nigeria, many in Igbo society find themselves syncretizing these beliefs with other beliefs and religions.

### 2.3.3 Beliefs

*Ọdịnala* could closely be described as a monotheistic and pan-theistic faith with a strong central spiritual force at its head from which all things are believed to spring; however, the contextual diversity of the system may encompass theistic perspectives that derive from a variety of beliefs held within the religion. *Chukwu*as the central deity is classed among the *ndimmuo*, 'invisible beings', an ontological category of beings which includes Ala the divine feminine earth force, chi the'personal deity', *ndichie* the ancestors, and *mmuo* the minor spirits. The other ontological category consists of *ndimmadu*, 'visible beings', which include *ánụ* animals, *ósísí* plants, and the final class*ùrò* which consists of elements, minerals and inanimate beings. *Chukwu* as the creator of everything visible and invisible and the source of lesser divinities is also referred to as *Chineke*. *Chukwu*is genderless and is reached through various spiritual forces mainly under the spirit class of *Arusi* who are incarnations of the high god; no sacrifices, however, are given to *Chukwu* and no shrines and altars are erected for it. If an *Arusi* is assigned to an individual, it becomes a chi, a personal guardian god. The chi manifests as*ḿmúọ,* spirits, and as a person's spirit is earth-bound it chooses sex, type, and lifespan before incarnation in the human world.

### 2.3.4 *Chi*

Chi is the personal spirit of a person (*ḿmúọ).* In Igbo culture it is this spirit which determines destiny, hence the saying, *onyekwe, Chi yaekwe* ("If a person agrees to a thing, his spirit agrees also"). Culturally, people are seen as the creators or makers of their own destiny. The breath of life is in the heart, *óbì*. Chi refers to the light and the day in contrast to the dark. The universal chi indirectly in charge of everything is *Chukwu* who is the Supreme Being that is beyond the limits of time and space. *Chukwu's* name is a compound of the words *chí + úkwú* ('great in size, supreme'). Chi is believed to be a spiritual connection between an individual and the high god, and it dictates the trajectory of a person's spiritual journey on earth. Each chi is personal and is in communion with and inseparable from the universal chi of all things. The high god, *Chukwu,* is believed to assign chi before and at the time of an individual's birth. Chi is a guardian spirit providing care, guardianship, and providence; in this respect, the concept of chi is analogous to the concept of a guardian angel in Christianity, the daemon in ancient Greek religion, and the genius in ancient Roman religion. Unlike *Chukwu* who is genderless, chi can be masculine. A *Dibia* can identify a person's chi through divination (*ájà*) and advise adherents of

ways to placate it. *Chukwu* is also referred to as *Chineke*, which is a compound of the words chí the divine masculine force and *ékè* the creative and divisive feminine force. Eke came out of the hands of Chi but are considered one; Chi created the world while Eke divided it, incorporating a divisive trickster energy that introduced death and suffering. *Chineke* is also interpreted as *chí ne ké, 'chi* the creator, and *chínneéké, 'chi* the creative mother' .*Éké* is one's ancestral guardian spirit. *Chineke* or *Chukwu* exists at the periphery of human life and remains a mystery to the people. Households usually contain a chi shrine, which could be focused on a tree. In marriage a woman takes her chi shrine along with all her belongings to her matrimonial home. Around *Nkarahia*, in southern Igboland, there are the most elaborate chi shrines which are decorated with colorful china plates inset into the clay walls of the chi shrine building; the altars hold sacred emblems, while the polished mud benches hold offerings of china, glass, manillasood. As a marker of personal fortune or misfortune, good acts or ill, chi can be described as a focal point for personal religion.

### 2.3.5 Justice

*Ọfọ* and *ogụ* is a law of retributive justice. It vindicates anyone that is wrongly accused of a crime as long as their "hands are clean". It is only a person who is on the righteous side of *Ọfọ-na-Ogụ* that can call its name in prayer, otherwise such a person will face the wrath of *Amadiọha* (the god of thunder and lightning). Kola-nut is used in ceremonies tohonour *Chukwu, chi, Arusi* and ancestors and is used as a method of professing innocence when coupled with libations. The Igbo often make clay altars and shrines of their deities which are sometimes anthropomorphic, the most popular example being the wooden statues of *Ikenga*. Typically, only men are allowed to make representational figures of supernatural forces.

## 2.4 Scholarly Assessment of Re-incarnation among the Igbo of Nigeria

Notwithstanding the skimpy view of re-incarnation in the above extract, different scholars have made marvelous impacts on explaining the concept of re-incarnation.

Re-incarnation has been looked as “superstitious theory which holds that certain people die and return the second time, or even several times either by the same woman or by others (Okoye, 1978: 127). To him, as far as the Christian is concerned, re-incarnation is superstitious, and that once a man dies, he is destined to heaven or hell for all eternity without any further

change, except where it may be necessary for some to pass through the agony of purgatory before entering into heaven.

Besides, the assertion above, is not in accordance with *Ogbalu* (1973: 82) that "the Igbo believe in re-incarnation (*Ilu-uwa*) which implies that a person is born again (rebirth) usually in the family or his descendants like (*Ada, Nwadiala*) and so on. It is the medicine man (*Onyeafa*) who usually decides who has reincarnated. Sometime, the name of that deceased person is given to the child with some little religious ceremony. Therefore the relationship between the dead man in the underworld and the reincarnated in the world is reflected in different names given to such reincarnated person in the world.

Quarcoopome (1987: 102) realized that re-incarnation is conceived as "the rebirth of an ancestor into the world family and of certain category of persons into the world. A person may reincarnate in order that an uncompleted destiny may be completed". This happens when a person dies prematurely either in battle or in an accident or any other calamity and for this reason he or she was unable to complete his natural destiny, he is then reborn to complete his destiny. Quarcoopome believed that a person who dies in this material world without completing his/her life span, he/she may be reborn to finish his/her destiny. Drawing from what the above scholar is picturing, it could be deduced that he is emphatically anchoring his argument on the fact that re-incarnation happens as a result of uncompleted mission. The scholar believes that every human being in this world has a definite mission immediately he/she is born into the world and he is bound to complete the mission by staying till people confirm that he/she has become an aged person.

Metuh (1979: 97) agreed with this point when he asserted that "when a person reincarnates, he is given a different (chi) by God". Hence, a rich person could be born a poor person. Attaching consensus on this point, it implies that the kind of life one lived in his/her previous life determine the kind of life that could be added to him/her. This could be in form of rewarding for good previous life or punishment due to bad previous life. A man's abilities, faults or misfortunes are ascribed to his "chi" which are manifested on the reincarnated persons.

Idowu (1973: 32) in Metuh (1979: 81) opined that re-incarnation in Africa is partial re-incarnation. He saw re-incarnation in Africa as partial because he recognized that when a person is reborn into the world, it is only the physical and personal traits that should be observed and

nothing else. Egonu (1988:342) on the other hand, said on the prevailing concept of re-incarnation, "we can infer that those who died and buried in their compound, have the opportunity to re-incarnate as offspring into their family". This implies that those who live in this world now must have tested life before. His summary was drawn on the point that any dead person buried beside his/her house will have the opportunity to reincarnate. This is because he believes that the necessary condition for re-incarnation to happen is burying the dead beside his/her house from the available material on re-incarnation in African/Igbo religious culture. Ekwunife (2000: 28) identified three models for explaining this phenomenon. A brief critique may intensify serious reflections on the issue

The first is the Physcio-cyclic rebirth model in which African/Igbo re-incarnation is seen as a cyclic rebirth and returns of the dead either as reincarnated born-to-die children-'*Ọgbanje*'. Majority of Christians in African accept these views into and find them repugnant to their cherished beliefs in fixed eternal life and damnation, resurrection of the dead, uniqueness of the individual soul by God to be renewed after the image of Christ. Scholars with this view include A. G. Leonard, meek (1961: 34),

Uchendu (1964: 59), Ilogu (1974: 54), Ifesie (1994: 21) and numerous scholars not mentioned. However, interpretations offered by Asiatic cyclic model, and were attempts to explain the practice applications of re-incarnation in the human evolution of consciousness and purifications.

However, the physcio-cyclic theory fails to provide an answer for the new born child despite the search for his companionship or alter ego. The traditional Igbo always affirms that *Nwanyimutalunwaofuu or ohuru* (the women gave birth to a new child) and never n'*amuluonyeloro or norouwa* (she gave birth to a reincarnate of a living or dead person). The new born child remains an individual with full personality- body, soul, his guardian spirit (chi) or destiny spirit and is open to be a reincarnate of a dead one from that family.

Secondly, there is the dualistic model which scholars like Francis A. Arinze (cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church), Taylor, Mbiti, Idowu, Awolalu and Dopamu, and Parrinder support. These scholars correctly observed that re-incarnation in African/Igbo perspective is not to be understood in its classical cyclic sense. Parrinder, (1961: 2) for instance, insists that this phenomenon is not identical with the Asiatic cyclic notions.

Mbiti (1975: 45), Idowu, Awolalu perch on partial re-incarnation since the privileged reincarnated living-dead continued to enjoy their existence in the ancestral world. Mbiti made it clear that African traditional perception of the destiny of man finds its end term in the ontological permanent stay in the spirit world. Thus he quipped that:

As far as traditional African concepts are concerned, death is death and the beginning of the permanent ontological departure of the individual to spirit-hood. Beyond that point, African Religions and Philosophy are absolutely silent, or at most extremely vague. Nothing can reverse or halt that process, and death is the end of real and complete man (Mbiti, 1975: 15)

Idowu, Awolalu and Dopamu admit the possibility of solving totally the paradox of dual existence of the dead. However, Idowu reassures his readers that the rests on the solid grounds on which the Yoruba base their belief in the concrete reality of the after-life. Arinze with particular reference to Igbo culture area observed that:

> The belief in the re-incarnation of good ancestors seems at first sight to cancel all ancestors worship. But it does not for the Ibos or Africans for that matter. It seems that only a part of the ancestor's spirit is believed born again…. (Arinze, 2001: 71)

Oguejiofor (1996: 96) in recent times absolves the traditional Igbo of their inarticulate downright contradictory thought on the issue. He observed that: "the traditional Igbo man did not bother himself about how logical or consistent these beliefs are"; our contention is that, even though, the position of the proposers of this second model seems to be clearer that the cyclic model, the dialectics or opposition between permanency in the spirit world and partial re-incarnation were either resolved in vague suspense or philosophical speculations.

Finally, there is the mystico -psychic model in which elements of qualitative psychic real influences of an identifiable dead ancestors/ancestress on a newborn infant and acknowledged signs of these influences become part and parcel of the characteristics traits of new infants which are not necessarily subject to modern law of heredity. Chegwe's and Opata's work seem to toe in line with this. While Chegwe is insistent on correct methodological approach for unfolding the truth about Africa/Igbo realities on the issue, Opata (1962:14), elaborated on the meaning of, and principles for understanding this phenomenon, as well as its relevance in the socio-religious and economic lives of the Igbo. Indeed, in Onyewuenyi (1996: 19), philosophical reflections on this

phenomenon aroused the critical investigations of Opata who invites his readers to view the whole issue and interpret it with the principles of "Holism". Our criticism of the third model position as well as other models is that they take it for granted that there is a problem in understanding and interpreting African/Igbo experience of re-incarnation without bothering to verify the bone of misconception from the Christian perspective.

Onwu (1973: 6), presented "re-incarnation as one of the Igbo beliefs that have persisted in spite of the influence of westernization or Christianity". The issue of re-incarnation is a problematic one in Igbo thought and life. Opata, (Essays on Igbo World View, 29) argues that it is to be understood around two principal Igbo concepts: *ilu uwa* and *Ọgbanje*. Both involve some kind of re-embodied existence after having lived and died in the world. This is better understood in the Igbo conceptualization of two types of existence *uwa mgbede* and *uwa ututu*. The *ọgbanje* phenomenon is the repetitive coming and going of people especially of children into one's family. It is an undesirable thing in a family. The principle of re-incarnation is seen as a positive one because it is believed that only people who have lived well and died well are the only persons entitled to reincarnate or re-embody themselves in a beneficent manner. Thus, it is a common experience through divination to identify who reincarnated into a new born baby. This is the work of a diviner. In Igbo, a diviner is *dibia afa* (*ogba-afa*), and could be a medicine man or a priest. Some of them undergo special training in the use of herbs, in clairvoyance, divination and re-incarnation.

The concept of re-incarnation makes meaningful the Igbo belief of life after death. Since the biblical concept of resurrection is not clearly understood by many, in traditional Igbo setting, the concept of re-incarnation assures an Igbo that his attempt to lead good life here on earth, obey the deities and the ancestors are not in vain. Death is not the end of life. There is another life after death and the most practical way to make it meaningful is the belief in re-incarnation which includes physical resemblance, character traits, oracular pronouncements all of which point to the fact that the dead are somewhere waiting for their return to the world of time and space. The notion of judgment which people fear is so clearly spelt out by belief in re-incarnation. This implication of judgment also brings in the moral and ethical implications of the belief. Thus, it becomes obvious that death and re-incarnation explain quite a lot about the Igbo realization of a meaningful existence. Within the concept, have woven some principles of

existence, some deep and lasting motivation for decent living among the Igbo, motivation based on everlasting and transcendent reward. It is the idea of living well among the Igbo that constitutes for them an authentic existence such that it could be said that to have died well is to have lived well.

Traditional African belief, the souls or spirits of recently dead people linger near the grave for a time, seeking other bodies- reptile, mammal, bird, or human – to inhabit (Ifemesiah, 1994: 41). Many African traditions link re-incarnation to the worship of ancestors, who may be reborn as their own descendants or as animals associated with their clans or groups.

In the same token, it is also observed that the Zulu people of Southern Africa believe that a person's soul is born many times in the bodies of different animals, ranging in size from tiny insects to large elephants, before being born as a human again. The Yoruba and Edo of western Africa share the widely held notion that people are the re-incarnations of their ancestors. They call boys "Father Has Returned" and girls "Mother Has Returned" (Sapoonge, 1975: 75, Bulletin of the pontifical council of inter-religious dialogue).

Chandhuri (1992: 12),explained that re-incarnation plays a central role in Buddhism and Hinduism. It also appears in Jainism and Sikhism, two faiths that grew out of Hinduism and are still practiced in India. Jainism shares with Hinduism a belief in many gods. Sikhism, a "monotheistic" religion, combines some elements of Islam with Hinduism. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism all began in India, where the idea of rebirth first appears in texts dating from about 700 B.C. they share a belief in "Samsara"- the wheel of birth and rebirth – and karma-the idea that an individual's future incarnation depends on the way he or she lived. People who have done good deeds and led good lives are reborn into higher social classes; those who have not are doomed to return as members of the lower classes or as animals. Only by achieving the highest state of spiritual development can a person escape "Samsara" altogether.

Kibicho (1971: 74) noted that belief in re-incarnation among the Africans has not gotten adverse effects as a result of contemporary developments. He writes thus:

The modern Igbo of Nigeria, even when adhering to the Christian religion, have preserved many features of Igbo traditional religion. The belief in re-incarnation seems to be particularly strong. The Igbo believe that re-incarnation usually occurs within the same

immediate or extend family. They try to identify the reincarnated ancestor by means of birthmarks, statements a child makes when it becomes able to speak, and behavioral resemblances between the child and the deceased person of whom it is the presumed re-incarnation. Oracles are frequently consulted to make or confirm identification. The Igbo believe that deceased persons inhabit a discarnate realm, but they conceive this as an undesirable limbo from which discarnate souls are eager to return to a new terrestrial life. The Igbo concept of re-incarnation includes belief in a group of souls called ọgbanje who are born, die in early life, and are reborn in the same family, often repeatedly (Steve Kibicho, 1971: 56).

Meanwhile, readers should be aware that, besides the scholars whose works were already mentioned in this study, many others have addressed this issue. This simply implies that their contributions are vital for assessing this phenomenon from Africa/Igbo perspectives respectively.

## 2.5 Summary of Literature Review

The concept of belief in re-incarnation among the Igbo of Nigeria has been given a tremendous analysis in this work. Efforts have been also made by different scholars in explaining the meaning of re-incarnation regarding African context and the challenges from the Christian perspective. Each argument is beckoned the either in support of re-incarnation or rejection of its application to Christian belief system.

From a cursory look at some of the scholarly assessment of the belief in re-incarnation among the Igbo of Nigeria, it could be deduced that some scholars reject the concept of rebirth. A scholar like Okoye (1978: 127) pointed out that when a person dies, he either goes straight to heaven if he/she lived a justifiable, life or goes straight to hell if he/she lived an unjustifiable life. The dead persons do not return to earth after haven lived and died.

On the other hand, Quarcoopome (1987: 101) contradicted the above assertion and succinctly admits that re-incarnation implies the return of ancestors to the world to complete an uncompleted destiny. As he noted, “that the kind of life live by a person determine the mission of his/her return to the world”. Again, Ekwunife (2000: 28) supported the above assertion when he said that evidence of re-incarnation among the reincarnated person are physically manifested inform of character, facial resemblance, posture etc.

Opata (1975:28) unfolds the relationship between *Ilu uwa* and *Ogbanje*. These two concepts constitute what some people term as re-incarnation but he made a distinctive description of both terms. In his description, it was observed that *ilu uwa* is represented actually by what is call re-incarnation. It has positive impact on the belief system of the people because the ancestor who lived exemplary life is reincarnated after he dies.

On the other hand, *Ọgbanje* is what most people call "born-to-die". It is repetition of birth into a particular family. *Ọgbanje* usually depicts painful and negative impact on the believe system of the people as it always ushers pains and agony on the parents. On the whole, having delved into different notions by these scholars, it observed that considering the Christian perception of re-incarnation, it is incompatible with the traditional belief system as a whole.

### 2.5.1 Soul, Mind (Spirit) and Body

One of the central questions in philosophy is the question, "what does it mean to be human", and this a metaphysical question because it addresses issues of the essential nature of human beings as existent things. Are we simply physical made of material that develops and grows and eventually dies according to the workings of biological process and no more? Or do we also have a mind or a soul separate from the physical bodies, which gives us a special kind of essence? This will make us understand the note of the soul mind and body in the concept of reincarnation.

Soul- for some thinkers, the soul is the most important part of human nature, given by God to enable people develops a relationship with him and to exist in the presence of God after his earthly life. For Plato, the soul and the body are two separate entities. The body is the temporary, physical, materials aspect of the person and the soul is the essential, immaterial aspect.

Mind- many people understand the mind to be part of a person which has intelligence and emotions it enables us to interpret the data we get from our senses so that we experience then; our minds from judgments make choice and hold memories.

Body-The human body consists of the physical stuff or material of which human beings are made. For some philosophers, the body might be understood as a kind of vehicle which the self or soul inhabits for a while but which in some way less real than the self. Rene Descartes (1637:127)

## 2.6 Other Religious World Views on Re-incarnation

### 2.6.1 Grail Message view an Reincarnation

In the Grail message, the process of reincarnation is explained in a natural and logical way. The knowledge about reincarnation leads to simple and convincing answers to many unsolved questions of life, such as inequalities at birth and fate. It also helps us to understand ourselves better and to find the meaning of life. Abdu-ru-shin (2008:127)

### 2.6.2 Buddhism

Buddhists believe that human beings are born and reborn an infinite number of times until they achieve Nirvana. In Buddhism, the re-incarnation process of being reborn is associated with suffering and called samsara.

The way someone acted in a previous life will influence what they reincarnate as. Someone who cultivated positive karma through right actions in life may reincarnate as someone who will enjoy a positive and pleasant life. Negative karma has the opposite effect. Contrary to popular belief, the idea of karma isn't as simple as "What goes around, comes around."

Buddhists believe we don't always reincarnate as humans. For instance, some Buddhists believe we can reincarnate as animals or even gods. They see re-incarnation as a human as a special opportunity to escape the cycle of samsara and reach Nirvana (Lopez Donald1987: 10).

There are also Buddhists who believe in two versions of re-incarnation. One is the involuntary re-incarnation that occurs due to someone's karma. Another is a voluntary form of re-incarnation, in which a person might choose rebirth to achieve some purpose they can only fulfill during life.

### 2.6.2 Judaism

'Gilgulim' is a concept of re-incarnation in Kabbalistic esoteric mysticism. In Hebrew, the word *gilgul* means "cycle" or "wheel" and, 'Nepshamoti' is the plural for "souls." Souls are seen to cycle through lives or incarnations, being attached to different human bodies over time. Which body they associate with depends on their particular task in the physical world, spiritual levels of the bodies of predecessors and so on. The concept relates to the wider processes of

history in Kabbalah, involving cosmic Tikkun (Messianic rectification), and the historical dynamic of ascending Lights and descending Vessels from generation to generation.

The esoteric explanations of *gilgul* were articulated in Jewish mysticism by Isaac Luria in the 16th century, as part of the metaphysical purpose of Creation.

Belief in re-incarnation among Jewish mystics first existed in the Ancient World, among differing explanations given of the afterlife. Although with a universal belief in an immortal soul [1], re-incarnation is an esoteric belief within many streams of modern Judaism, but is not an essential tenet of traditional Judaism. It is not mentioned in traditional classical sources such as the Hebrew Bible, the classical rabbinic works (Mishnah and Talmud), or Maimonides' 13 principles of faith. Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), however, teaches a belief in *gilgul*, transmigration of souls, and hence the belief is universal in Hasidic Judaism, which regards the Kabbalah as sacred and authoritative.

Among well-known rabbis who rejected the idea of re-incarnation are Saadia Gaon, David Kimhi, Hasdai Crescas, Jedaiah ben Abraham Bedersi (early 14th century), Joseph Albo, Abraham ibnDaud and Leon of Modena. Among the Geonim, Hai Gaon argued with Saadia Gaon in favour of gilgulim. Rabbis who believed in the idea of re-incarnation include, from Medieval times: the mystical leaders Nahmanides and Bahya ben Asher; from the 16th-century: Levi ibnHabib, and from the mystical school of Safed, Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz, Isaac Luria, and his exponent Hayyim ben Joseph Vital; and from the 18th-century: the founder of Hasidic Judaism, the Baal Shem Tov, later Hasidic Masters, and the Lithuanian Jewish Orthodox leader and Kabbalist the Vilna Gaon; and - amongst others - from the 19th/20th-century: Yosef Hayyim, (1834-1909) author of Ben IshHai With the 16th-century rational systemisation of Cordoveran Kabbalah by Alkabetz, and the subsequent new paradigm of Lurianic Kabbalah by Luria, Kabbalah replaced rationalism as the mainstream traditional Jewish theology, both in scholarly circles and in the popular imagination. Isaac Luria taught new explanations of the process of *gilgul* and identification of the re-incarnations of historic Jewish figures, which were compiled by Hayyim ben Joseph Vital in his Shaar Ha Gilgulim. The idea of *gilgul* became popular in Jewish folk belief, and is found in much Yiddish literature among Ashkenazi Jews (Simon & Schuster,1924:193).

**2.6.3 Hinduism**

Re-incarnation ,that is (Punarjanman), is a central tenet of the Indian religions (namely Buddhism, most Hindusm, Jainism and Sikhism) and some varieties of Paganism, while there are many groups who do not believe in re-incarnation, instead believing in an afterlife. In various forms, it occurs as an esoteric belief in many streams of Judaism in different aspects, in some beliefs of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and some Indigenous Australians (though most believe in an afterlife or spirit world) (Gavin2010: 96).

The concepts of the cycle of birth and death, samsara, and liberation partly derive from ascetic traditions that arose in India around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. The first textual references to the idea of re-incarnation appear in the Upanishads of the late Vedic period (c. 1100 – c. 500 BCE), predating the Buddha and the Mahavira. Though no direct evidence of this has been found, the tribes of the Ganges valley or the Dravidian traditions of South India have been proposed as another early source of re-incarnation beliefs (Flood Gavin 2010).

The idea of re-incarnation, saṃsāra, did not exist in the early Vedic religions. The early Vedas do not mention the doctrine of Karma and rebirth but mention the belief in an afterlife. It is in the early Upanishads, which are pre-Buddha and pre- Mahavira, where these ideas are developed and described in a general way. Detailed descriptions first appear around the mid-1st millennium BCE in diverse traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism and various schools of Hindu philosophy, each of which gave unique expression to the general principle (Rupert 1985: 98).

The texts of ancient Jainism that have survived into the modern era are post- Mahavira, likely from the last centuries of the 1st millennium BCE, and extensively mention rebirth and karma doctrines. The Jaina philosophy assumes that the soul (jiva in Jainism; atman in Hinduism) exists and is eternal, passing through cycles of transmigration and rebirth. After death, re-incarnation into a new body is asserted to be instantaneous in early Jaina texts. Depending upon the accumulated karma, rebirth occurs into a higher or lowers bodily form, either in heaven or hell or earthly realm. No bodily form is permanent: everyone dies and reincarnates further. Liberation (kevalya) from re-incarnation is possible, however, through removing and ending karmic accumulations to one's soul. From the early stages of Jainism on, a human being was considered the highest mortal being, with the potential to achieve liberation, particularly through asceticism

### 2.6.4 Taoism

Modern Taoism teaches that spirits can live on after physical death and that it can migrate to another physical body. There's no perceived "end" to one life and "beginning" of another. Instead, Taoists see re-incarnation as a continuation of the eternal Tao process.

Human spirits can reincarnate as animals and vice-versa, but there's no concept such as Karma that governs those changes. Instead, the re-incarnation process in Taoism is vastly complicated and depends on how harmonious with the Tao you are in life. (Emily1894:16).

### 2.6.5 Confucianism

When someone who practices Confucianism dies, there is no clear path to the afterlife. The beliefs differ depending on the individual and their family. Many people practice a combination of Buddhism and Confucianism, so they turn to Buddhism for their ideas about what happens after death (Encyclopedia Britannica 19).

Similarly, Buddhists believe that death is a natural part of life that isn't to be feared. Instead of going to an afterlife, spirits remain on this earth and are reincarnated. The spirit remains close to its final resting place and seeks out a new body for a new life. Along these lines, death is not the end. It's simply a rebirth. This is another way to view the balance of Confucianism.

The body goes into a casket where it is washed, dusted with powder, and dressed in its finest clothes. There is a lot of Chinese superstition that goes into the burial process. For example, women are buried with jewelry for good luck. Like a Korean funeral, the casket is decorated and food is offered to the deceased loved one's spirit. This is all a way to ensure the loved one finds a safe home in their next life.

### 2.6.6 Shintoism

Shintoism includes belief in a human spirit or soul, called Mitama or Tamashii, which contains four aspects.Although indigenous ideas about an afterlife were probably well-developed prior to the arrival of the Buddhism, Contemporary Japanese people often adopt Buddhist concept about an afterlife.Modern Shinto places greater emphasis on this life than on

any afterlife. Mythological stories like the Kojiki describe Yomi or Yomi-no-kuni as a realm of the dead, although this plays no role in modern Shinto (Encyclopedia Britannica19).

Modern Shinto ideas about the afterlife largely revolve around the idea that the spirit survives bodily death and continue to assist the living. After 33years, it then becomes part of the family Kami. These ancestral spirits are sometimes thought to reside in the mountains, from where they descend to take part in agricultural events.

Shinto's afterlife belief also includes the "Obake", restless spirits who died in bad circumstance and often seek revenge.

# CHAPTER THREE

## 3.0 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BELIEF IN RE-INCARNATION: A THREAT TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

It really should not matter much whether or not a Christian believes in re-incarnation. Doctrines and beliefs matter very little in comparison to a mystical experience with the light of God. A multitude of near-death accounts affirm that God is not concerned about the theology that people profess; rather it is the inward spirituality that matters most. Whether re-incarnation is true or not, near-death accounts reveal that it is the life we are currently living that is important. This may be one of the reasons why re-incarnation was suppressed by the church.

While debating whether or not re-incarnation was once a doctrine of the early Church is like debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, re-incarnation is certainly a concept that ties the other Christian doctrines together since it professes and solves many of the mysteries found in the Bible.

Jesus affirmed that the way to overcome death and rebirth and attain eternal life is simply through the practice of love (Luke 10: 25-28). Faith assumes the possibility of doubt; knowledge implies certainty. Knowledge of God is attained through love according to John (1 John 4:7). When it comes to living a life of love, having faith in re-incarnation does not give anyone an advantage before God. Re-incarnation is a theory that, at most, explains the apparent inequities and apparent injustices between people and the dispensing of divine justice. But the spiritual life of love does not depend upon the particular creed one.

### 3.2 Methodology

In order to construct a truly African perspective on re-incarnation, this research dwells mainly on the traditional values and beliefs of the Akan people of Ghana. Ideas generated from the examination of those values and beliefs – and from those of named traditional elders – are then used by me to develop an original traditional Akan philosophical position on re-incarnation. The method of investigation, then, is purposely and distinctly philosophical i.e., the position I come to, with regard to Akan re-incarnation, is not established on the basis of the numerical strength of my discussants, but on the philosophical quality or usefulness of their views. Traditional beliefs and values are also treated the same way. The method, hence, develops, admits or rejects concepts, ideas or beliefs on the basis of logic. The Akan concept of re-incarnation will thus be clarified and appraised with the aid of logic.

Moreover, for the proponents of the doctrine of re-incarnation, it would not be out of place for a living person to claim that he has survived death(s). But the question is how or on what grounds can such a claim be made? How can we ascertain the truth of memory claims about our previous lives? In an effort to answer such difficult questions as these, it will become evident that belief in re-incarnation is irrational.

The Ibo expression *ilōuwa*, which means, a return to the world,‟ ababio, an Akan name which translates as „one who has returned,‟ and a Yoruba word like iyabo seem to suggest a

doctrine of re-incarnation in African philosophy. I will seek to clarify this view on the basis of my analysis of the relevant concepts in Akan culture. The research methodology is, as stated above, essentially philosophical.

### 3.3 Further Clarifications

During the period from A.D. 250 TO 553 controversy raged, at least intermittently, around the name of Origen, and from this controversy emerged the major objections that orthodox Christianity raises against re-incarnation. Origen of Alexandria, one of Christianity's greatest systematic theologians, was a believer in re-incarnation.

Describing the nature of (Origen, 234: 97 Iloanusi 1974: 281) observed that he was "a man devoted to scriptural authority, a scourge to the enemies of the church, and a martyr for the faith. He was the spiritual teacher of a large and grateful posterity and yet his teachings were declared heresy in 553 AD". The debates and controversies that flared up around his teachings are in fact the record of re-incarnation in the church.

The case against Origen grew by fits, and starts from about A.D 300 (Fifty years after his death) until 553AD. There were writers of great eminence among his critics as well as some rather obscure ecclesiasts. They included Methodius of Olympus, Epiphanius of Salamis, Theophilus, Bishop of Jerusalem, Jerome, and the Emperor Justinian. The first of these, Methodius of Olympus, was a bishop in Greece and died a martyr's death in the year 311AD. He and Peter of Alexandria, whose works are almost entirely lost, represent the first wave of anti-Origenism. They were concerned chiefly with the pre-existence of souls and Origen's notions about the resurrection of the dead. Another more powerful current against Origenism arose about a century later. The principals were Ephiphanius of Salamis, Theophilus of Alexandria, and Jerome. From about 395AD to 403 AD Origen became the subject of heated debate throughout the Christendom. These three ecclesiasts applied much energy and thought in search of questionable doctrine in Origen. Again the controversy came up around 545AD, and in the wake of this, the Emperor Justinian composed a tract against Origen in 543AD, proposing nine anathemas against "On First Principles", Origen's chief theological work. Origen was finally officially condemned in the second council of Constantinople in 553AD, when fifteen anathemas were charged against him.

The critics of Origen attacked him on individual points, and thus did not create a systematic theology to oppose him. Nonetheless, one can glean from their writings five major points that Christianity has raised against re-incarnation:

i. It seems to minimize Christian salvation.

ii. It is in conflict with resurrection of the body.

iii. It creates an unnatural separation between body and soul.

iv. It is built on a much too speculate use of Christian scriptures

### 3.3.1 Christian's Belief against Re-incarnation

Any discussion about the challenges of re-incarnation to Christian belief will be greatly clarified by a preliminary look at Origen's system.

Although it is of course impossible to do justice in a few pages to thinkers as subtle and profound as Origen, some of the distinctive aspects of his thoughts can be summarized.

Looking at the sequence of creation from its inception to its conclusion, one could summarize his system as follows: Originally all beings existed as pure mind on an ideational or thought level. Humans, Angels, and Heavenly Bodies lacked incarnate existence and had their being only as ideas. This is a very natural view for anyone like Origen who was trained in both Christian and Platonic thought. Since there is no account in the scriptures of what preceded creation, it seemed perfectly natural to Origen to appeal to Plato for his answers.

God for the Platonist is pure intelligence and all things were reconciled with God before creation – an assumption which scripture does not appear to contradict. Then as the process of fall began, individual beings became weary of their union with God and chose to defect or grow cold in their divine ardor. As the mind became cool toward God, it made the first step down in its fall and became soul. The soul, now already once removed from its original state, continued with its defection to the point of taking on a body.

This, as we could pinpoint from Platonism, is indeed degradation, for the highest type of manifestation is on the mental level and the lowest is on the physical.

Such an account of man's fall does not mean that Origen rejected Genesis. It only means that he was willing to allow for allegorical interpretation; Thus Eden is not necessarily spatially located, but is a cosmic and metaphysical event wherein pure disincarnate idea became fettered to physical matter. What was essential for Christianity, as Origen perceived, is that the fall be voluntary and result in a degree of estrangement from God. Where there is a fall, there must follow the drama of reconciliation. (Wikipedia)

Love is one of God's qualities, as Origen himself acknowledged, and from this, it follows that God will take an interest in the redemption of his creatures. For Origen this means that after the drama of incarnation the soul assumes once again its identity as mind and recovers its love for God.

It was to hasten this evolution that in the fullness of time, God sent Christ. The Christ of Origen was the incarnate Word (he was the only being that did not grow cold toward God), and he came both as a mediator and as an incarnate image of God's goodness. By allowing the wisdom and light of God to shine in one's life through the inspiration of Jesus Christ, the individual soul could swiftly regain its ardor for God, leave behind the burden of the body, and regain complete reconciliation with God. In fact, said Origen, much to the outrage of his critics, the extent and power of God's love is so great that eventually all things will be restored to him, even Satan and his legions. Davis, S.T (1989).

Since the soul's tenancy of any given body is but one of many episodes in its journey from God and back again, the doctrine of re-incarnation is implicit. As for the resurrection of the body, Origen created a tempest of controversy by insisting that the physical body wastes away and returns to dust, while the resurrection takes on a spiritual or transformed body. This is of course handy for the Re-incarnationists, for it means that the resurrected body either can be the summation and climax of all the physical bodies that came before or indeed may bear no resemblance at all to the many physical bodies. There will come a time when the great defection from God that initiated physical creation will come to an end. All things, both heavenly bodies and human souls, will be so pure and ardent in their love for God that physical existence will no longer be necessary. The entire cohesion of creation will come apart, for matter will be superfluous. Then, to cite one of Origen's favorite passages, all things will be made subject to God and God will be "all in all". (1 Cor. 15: 28) This restoration of all things proposed by

Origen gave offense in later centuries. It seemed quite sensible to Origen that anything that defects from God must eventually be brought back to him. As he triumphantly affirmed at the end of his "On First Principle", men are the "blood" brothers" of God himself and cannot stay away forever.

### 3.3.2 Belief in Re-incarnation as a Threat to Christian Salvation

This objection was expressed very clearly by Theophilus (385-412 AD), patriarch of Alexandria:

> "What is the point of preaching that souls are repeatedly confined in bodies, only to be released again, and that we experience many deaths? Does he [Origen] not know that Christ came, not in order to fee souls from bodies after their resurrection or to clothe freed souls from bodies once again in bodies that they might come down from heavenly regions to be invested once again with flesh and blood? Rather, he came so that he might present our revived bodies with Incorruptibility and eternal life". (Jerome, Letters 98.11).

It is pertinent to note that the essential difference between Theophilus and Origen is quite obvious. For Origen, man, the creature of free choice, stands responsible before God for his initial defection. God uses all his love and persuasion to hasten man along his way, but man must go the whole journey. For Theophilus, however, part of the responsibility for man's defection from God is lifted from his shoulders by the Son. Thus man is a completely a free and sovereign agent only when he falls; when he rises, however, much of the travail is being borne by another. Man does what he can in single life and Christ will make good the rest.

Re-incarnation should be understood, however, not as a statement on Christ, but as a statement on man. In a bid towards sieving the distinction between Origen and Theophilus, Parisca (67) opines that the latter is "in effect charging that man is so feeble that he must depend on Christ to take him most of the way". The Re-incarnationists, however, is convinced of man's divinity and hence of his innate ability to return to God's favor.

### 3.3.3 Belief in Re-incarnation as a Conflict with the Resurrection of the Body

Here are the words of Epiphanius of Salamis (310-403 AD): "First of all if, as the Origenists say, another body succeeds this one, then the judgment of God is not just, for he will either be condemning the new body for the sins of the former one, or he will be ushering it into

its glorious and heavenly inheritance in recognition of the fasting, vigils, and persecution surfed for the name of God by an earlier body" (Epiphanius, Ancoratus378: 87).

For the Platonic philosopher, as for Origen, the entire goal of life is to disentangle the soul from the pernicious influence of the body. This stands in strong contrast to the statement of Epiphanius that the body is itself a living principle and whatever it has endured, it will carry before God for judgment.

For Origen, it is unthinkable that the body of flesh and blood should be resurrected into immorality. This body, after all, belongs to the transient world of matter and passes away as all matter must. Origen, the Christian and the Platonist, found it much more likely that a new spiritual body have nothing in common with the material elements of the "natural" body rather it should enjoy the resurrected life. Furthermore, he found ampler support for this in 1 Cor. 15: 44 (Against Celsus 5.19).

### 3.3 Re-incarnation in the Light of the Bible

The beliefs which form the context of both Eastern and Western re-incarnationism are clearly incompatible with biblical Christianity. Thus, the case against re-incarnation being "Christian" goes far beyond its implications for the afterlife, and involves much more than a few proof texts from the Bible. Rather, the entire biblical revelation in its teaching about God, the world, man, sin, and salvation, stands as a whole against re-incarnationism.

Nevertheless, adherents of re-incarnation in the West invariably try to reconcile their belief with Christianity. The New Testament is said to have been written by unknown authors at a time too late to be reliable in their report of Jesus' teachings, and thus His teachings on re-incarnation were largely lost. (Many people reject the Bible; we have no real knowledge of Jesus' teachings.) Also, the New Testament text is said to be riddled with deletions and interpolations foisted on the text in the sixth century and later by anti-Re-incarnationists, who even removed whole book, so that the text itself is unreliable. Finally despite the alleged attempt in the sixth century to remove re-incarnation from the Bible certain "vestiges" of the doctrine are said to be detectable in a scattering of texts. It is not possible within this space to give a through refutation of each of these arguments. The issues of the date, authorship, and textual transmission of the New Testament documents have received definitive treatment by evangelical scholars. These scholars

have shown that all of the New Testament was written in the first century, by apostles or their close associates, and that the text of the New Testament has been faithfully transmitted through the centuries. With regards to the canon (books accepted as inspired) of the New Testament, it was not the bias against re-incarnation that motivated the acceptance of certain writings and the rejection of apocryphal gospels and other writings which were excluded from the canon.

Rather, the New Testament Books were accepted because they were written by apostles or apostolic associates and were traceable to the first century. The books that were excluded were not apostolic, and written between the second and the ninth centuries. Furthermore, New Testament canon was developed in the second and third centuries and received final form in the fourth century, not in the sixth century, as the Re-incarnationists claim. Therefore, the Re-incarnationists' criticisms of the New Testament are invalid.

The argument that vestiges of Re-incarnationists belief can belief can be found scattered through the New Testament is basically incompatible with the other arguments already discussed. If the New Testament books were written by unknown authors too late to be historically reliable, and if sixth century scribes tampered with the text of the New Testament, of what value are these alleged "Vestiges"? In any case, the Re-incarnationists have no right to quote the bible in defense of their beliefs if at the same time they argue that the bible in unreliable.

A detailed examination of these alleged proof texts for re-incarnation is not possible in this work. However, several helpful studies of the question have been published by Christians, showing that the bible simply does not contain even a hint in favor of re-incarnation, while its most central teachings contradict it.

### 3.4 Re-incarnation and the Early Church Fathers

Re-incarnationists in the west today typically argue that the early church held to a belief in re-incarnation until the sixth century, when it was suppressed by the roman emperor through the agency of which council in order to refute this claim, we must first examine the records to see if the early church fathers taught re-incarnation will reveal that re-incarnation was not a subject of great concern to the early fathers, who help to the biblical hope of the resurrection, but that whenever they thoroughly condemned it.

Re-incarnationists have fabricated a false history of the early church based on

i. A deliberate reconstruction of the evidence which ignores the vast majority of the fathers' testimony.

ii. Partial quotations of the fathers, usually out of context.

iii. Interpolations into the quotations from the father.

iv. Fabricated quotations.

**Justin Martyr (c. 100-165)**

Justin martyr was one of the earliest of the church fathers. He is often claimed as "an early Christian Re-incarnationists. Referring to chapter IV of Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, Re-incarnationists claim that "he taught that human souls inhabit more than one body in the course of their earthly pilgrimage. "What does Justin actually say? He does present a dialogue in which he discussion with Trypho the question of re-incarnation; at the end of this discussion, the dialogue concludes as follows (note that "I" is Justin and "he" is Trypho, the Jew with whom he is debating; Trypho speaks first)

Therefore souls neither see god nor transmigrate into other bodies; for they would know that so they are punished, and they would be afraid to commit even the most trivial sin afterwards. But that they can perceive that God exist, and that righteousness and piety are honorable, I also quite agree with you." Said he. "you are right," I replied Clement of Alexandria (c. 155-220)

Another church father often alleged to have taught re-incarnation was Clement of Alexandria, on the basis of his statement in this first chapter of his Exhortation to the Heathen that "before the foundation of the world where we. "At most, this statement might be construed (apart from context) to teach pre-existence of souls. In fact, though, Clement's statement in context does not even go that far. Rather, he is simply asserting the preexistence of Jesus Christ as the Word (Logos), and God's foreknowledge and purpose to create and love us before creation:

> But before the foundation of the world where we, who, because destined to be in Him, preexisted in the eye of God before, we the rational creatures

> of the word of God, on whose account we date from the beginning; for "in the beginning was the word".

Note that clement carefully qualifies his statement that we existed in the beginning with the words "in the eye of God", meaning, of course, that our "pre- existence" was an idea in God's mind, not as substantial entities.

**Origen (c. 185-254)**

Origen was admittedly one of the most brilliant and innovative theologians of the early church. He was also, however, infamous for his theological speculations. He is the church father most often cited by Re-incarnationists as teaching their doctrine. One passage frequently cited is the following, from Origen's Against Celsus (1.32), exactly as cited by Re-incarnationists Head and Cranston:

> Or is it not more in conformity with reason, that every soul, for certain mysterious reasons (I speak now according to the opinion of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Empedocles, whom Celsus frequently names), is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and former actions? It is probable, therefore, that this soul also, which conferred more benefit by its (former) residence in the flesh than that of many men (to avoid prejudice, I do not say "all"), stood in need of a body not only superior to others, but invested with all excellent qualities.

Several comments regarding this passage need to be made. First, Origen qualifies his statement by saying, "I speak now according to the opinion of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Empedocles, whom Celsus frequently names". This qualification indicates that Origen is arguing on the basis of Celsus's beliefs, not Origen's own beliefs. One Re-incarnationist, Anthony J. Fisichella, omitted this entire clause when quoting the passage.

Secondly, the insertion of the word "former" in brackets preceding the phrase "residence in the flesh" by Head and Cranston in the citation as produced above completely changes the meaning. Origen is not talking about a previous incarnation distinguished from a subsequent incarnation, but about a single incarnation.

Thirdly, the point that Origen is trying to make in the context has been completely missed. Origen is not talking about the natural birth of an ordinary human being, but about the miraculous conception of Jesus in a virgin's womb. In the first half of the chapter, Origen refutes the legendary explanation o the virgin birth which was circulating among the Jews (and had been

picked up by Celsus) that Mary had committed adultery with a Roman soldier. He then puts forth the following questions;

Is it at all agreeable to reason, that he who dared to do so much for the human race … should not have had a miraculous birth, but one the vilest and most disgraceful of all (i.e.; and illegitimate birth)? And I will ask of them as Greeks, and particularly of Celsus, who either holds or not the sentiments of Plato, and at any rate quotes them, whether He who sends souls down into the bodies of men, degraded him who was to dare such mighty acts, and to teach so many men, and to reform so many from the mass of wickedness in the world, to a birth more disgraceful than any other, and did not rather introduce Him into the world through a lawful marriage?

The follows immediately the original quotation produced above, appealing to the Greek philosophers so respected by Celsus, to prove that according to their teaching someone as noble as Jesus obviously was could not have had so ignoble a birth as Celsus had claimed. With this context in mind, it is evident that Origen is not here arguing for re-incarnation, nor does his argument even imply it. He does argue on the basis of the pre-existence of souls, an opinion which he himself held, although even here he gives it as the source of Greek philosophy, not Christian doctrine. Later in the same treatise, Origen made the following comment:

> But on these subjects much, and that of a mystical kind, might be said; in keeping with which is the following: "it is good to keep close these secret of a king," – in order that the doctrine of the entrance of souls into bodies (not, however, that of the transmigration from one body into another), may not be thrown before the common understanding, nor what is holy given to the dogs, nor pearls be cast before swine.

This statement makes it clear that Origen did hold to the heretical doctrine that human souls pre-existed their physical bodies, but did not hold to re-incarnations. At about the same time as he wrote Against Celsus, around the year 247AD (and therefore toward the end of his life), Origen wrote a commentary on Mathew in which he discussed at length whether John the Baptist was the re-incarnation of Elijah. His answer to this question was unequivocal:

> In this place, it does not appear to me that by Elijah the soul is spoken of, lest I should fall into the dogma of transmigration, which is foreign to the church of God, and not handed down by the Apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the scriptures…(Matt. 17.10-13)

Origen then launched into a lengthy discussion of transmigration, arguing that it is contrary to the biblical doctrine of a judgment at the end of the age, and that john had not the "soul" but the "spirit and power" of Elijah (Luke 1:17). No clearer statement rejecting the doctrine of re-incarnation could be imagined.

However, Ten Dam, (65) unfolds the fact that it is true that Jerome, a leading church father in the early fifth century, argued that Origen held to re-incarnation. Writing in a letter to Avitus about 409AD or 410AD, Jerome accused Origen of holding to the "transmigration of souls," including the idea that both angelic and human spirits "may in punishment for great negligence or folly be transformed into brutes," that is, be reincarnated as animals. However, in this same letter Jerome admits that Origen qualified his statements on the subject:

Then, lest he should be held guilty of maintaining with Pythagoras the transmigration of souls, he winds p the wicked reasoning with which he has wounded his reader by saying: "I must not be taken to make dogmas of these things; they are only thrown out as conjectures to show that they are not altogether overlooked.

Since Jerome's criticism of Origen is based on Origen's earlier writings (particularly "On First Principles" written between 212 and 215), and in his later writings, Origen explicitly rejected transmigration of souls, and since even Jerome admits that Origen wished to stop short of maintaining that doctrine, we may safely conclude the that Origen did not teach re-incarnation.

**Jerome (345-419)**

As we have just seen, Jerome condemned Origen as heretic partly on the basis of Origen's alleged leanings toward re-incarnation. It is therefore surprising to learn that several Re-incarnationists claim that Jerome himself believed in re-incarnation! One Re-incarnationist even cited Jerome's letter to Avitus as proof of the very letter in which Jerome condemned Origen for teaching re-incarnation!

Other Re-incarnationists have attributed to Jerome the following statement from his letter to Demetrius: "The doctrine of transmigration has been secretly taught from ancient times to small numbers of people, as a traditional through which was not to be divulged." A search of this

letter, however, reveals no such statement. Instead, we find Jerome once again condemning the doctrine as a "godless and wicked teaching" which "lurks secretly like a viper in its hole".

### 3.5 The Church Father's Rejection of Re-incarnation

Not only did none of the church fathers embrace re-incarnation not even Origen, who did hold to pre-existence of souls but they explicitly rejected the notion as wholly contrary to the Christian faith. We have already seen this in the case of Justin Martyr, Origen, and Jerome. In the ante-Nicene period alone (i.e.; before the Council of Nicea in 325AD), church fathers who rejected re-incarnation besides Justine Martyr and Origen included Irenaeus, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and Lactantius. Notable church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries besides Jerome who rejected re-incarnation included Augustine Basil. Apologists for re-incarnation have admitted that many of these church fathers did indeed oppose the doctrine of re-incarnations.

In addition to this evidence, all of the church fathers taught doctrines which were incompatible with Re-incarnationists belief. The father taught that salvation was a gift won for us by Christ, and that at the end of the age the bodies of believers would be raised to eternal life and those of the wicked to eternal judgment. The writings of the church fathers are thus just as pervasively anti-Re-incarnationists as the Bible.

### 3.6 The Second Council of Constantinople

To this point we have shown that none of the church fathers commonly recognized as orthodox during the first five centuries of the church held to re-incarnation. Faced with this evidence, some Re-incarnationists have resorted to a last-ditch argument calculated to undermine all of the documentary evidence from the bible and the church fathers against their doctrine. This argument is a claim that all or nearly all evidence of belief in re-incarnation was eliminated from the bible and the writings of the fathers by the Second Council of Constantinople (also called the Fifth Ecumenical Council) in 553 AD. For example, Leslie (Christian elder) claimed that re-incarnation "was accepted by the early church for the first five hundred years of its existence.

Only in 553AD did the Second Council of Constantinople reject it and only then by a narrow majority". Many Re-incarnationists claim that this council was specifically called by the Roman emperor Justinian to condemn re-incarnation and delete all references to it from the Bible. There are numerous objections which may be raised to this claim.

Firstly, the New Testament canon as we have it today was finalized, at the very latest, in the fourth century, as we have already explained. Indeed, we have numerous manuscripts of the New Testament dating from between the second and fifth centuries, as well as manuscripts dating much later. The texts of the New Testament manuscripts dating from before the sixth century do not differ appreciably from those dating from sixth century and later. This fact alone is proof that the councils in 553AD did not alter the Bible in order to suppress re-incarnation or any other belief.

Secondly, the Second Council of Constantinople had nothing whatever to do with re-incarnation. The main item on the agenda was dealing with the Mono-physite heresy, which taught that the incarnate Christ had only one nature (instead of the two natures of deity and humanity as taught by the New Testament and the church). Either at that council or about that same time, a list of "anathemas" or condemnations were issued against (among other things) the notion of preexistence of souls (as found in Origen and some of his followers), but there was no mention made of re-incarnation, which was evidently not even a live issue. Indeed, other Re-incarnationists have even argued that because there is some doubt that the council in 553AD had anything to say relevant to re-incarnation, there is no reason to regard re-incarnation as officially condemned by the church! Of course, what this argument overlooks is the fact that Christians disbelieve in re-incarnation because it is antithetical to biblical Christianity, not because they think (mistakenly or not) that it was condemned in 553AD.

In conclusion, re-incarnation was certainly not suppressed by the church in the sixth century or at any of her time. It has been explicitly rejected by church leaders since the middle of the second century, and never taken seriously as a belief that might be adopted by Christians. Origen's belief in preexistence of souls was treated as a novel aberration by the church fathers and councils which came after him. Advocates of re-incarnation have had to invent nonexistent texts, interpolate words into other texts, cited anti-Re-incarnationists passages as if they were supportive of the doctrine, and in general present mythical reconstruction of early church history, in order to claim that the early ever taught re-incarnation.

### 3.7 Belief in Re-incarnation and the Challenges to Christian Theology

Traditional Christian theology still does not make room for the concept of re-incarnation. Some of the early church fathers accepted it, among them Origen who believed that the soul

exists before birth. That concept makes re-incarnation a natural consequence. The decision to outlaw the belief and persecute those who held to it was political, based not on knowledge of the truth but on a desire to secure the power of the hierarchy. Because, if we have unlimited opportunities to evolve spiritually, the church authorities cannot threaten with hellfire if we do not fulfill their demands in this single life. As a result, Christians believe that we are created at conception and that when we die we become eternity cannot be eternal on one end and finite on the other. If something has a beginning, if must have an end. If we believe that we will live forever, it must follow that we have always existed, as Origin taught.

According to Iloanusi (1973:33), he asserted that "if we have always existed, what have we been up to all this time"? We know that this present incarnation is important in our spiritual growth. But how can a single life on earth be sufficient to prepare us to meet the transcendent God face to face? If one incarnation is helpful in our spiritual evolution, why wouldn't two be twice as useful? What is it that makes us resist the idea of multiple human lives when a majority of the world's religions include a belief in re-incarnation?

Sometimes, people who are afraid of the concept try to make it appear ridiculous by suggesting that if we are evil in this present life we will return as an ant or a skunk. This distortion needs to be seen for what it is, an attempt to avoid a greeter truth: we are part of God. We have always existed. We will always exist. Our time in eternity is an evolutionary process through which we are to become more like God. Jesus told us that if we followed him, we would do greater things than he did! When do we get the opportunity for this spiritual blossoming if not through an enormous series of positive and negative experiences? This result cannot be achieved in a single lifetime. If we are part of God, our present life is no more than a semester-long class to learn a certain skill. And there is more than one course in our spiritual curriculum.

The Christians continue to challenge the traditional practitioners by deploying several myriad or questions not answered by our traditional theology. When do we get to correct our mistakes? If we can correct them in heaven, why did we come here in the first place? Why should God punish people eternally for temporal sins: do we punish our children for the next fifty years for a kobo stolen in the first grade? What happens to mentally challenged people and those who cannot comprehend the laws of God? If God makes exceptions for them, what other exceptions does he make? How do we account for the vast discrepancies in the lives of people,

some living in poverty, some in wealth? At what point does God even out these unfair distinctions?

We invite you to a larger view of your life which helps to answer these questions: the possibility that you have always existed and will always exist as an eternal part of God. This current life is one of many experiences which you have generated for yourself, as you design your own spiritual evolution.

### 3.8 Factors that Inhibit Dialogue between Igbo Traditionists on Re-incarnation and Christian dogma

It is necessary to observe the conscious and unconscious blockages that negate dialogue between Igbo traditionalists of Nigeria and people who strongly disagree with the concept of re-incarnation. Most of the traditional religious tenets are inter-mingled by the followers of Jesus Christ claiming the superiority of their religion. Some of the hindrances to dialogue between the two religions. Some of the hindrances to dialogue between the two religious opponents are discussed below:

First in series is prejudice. In an area where Christians presume that they are always right and that the traditionalists are ignorant of the truth, dialogue is impossible. This is because, each religion adherent is forging ahead to protect the interest of its religion and the authentic of the it religion and the authentic of the its religious practice.

Secondly, in the series of the bottle-neck is pride. There is pride in numbers. The Igbo adage which says “Igwe bu Ike” (there is great strength in numbers) is appropriate here. The sociological strength of Igbo Christians with chunk of concentration on Catholicism is alarming. The upshot is pride in numbers without sincere humility which is needed for honest dialogue.

The third blockage is the assumption of the attitude of monologue, instead of dialogue. With regard to the topic under discussion, “*Ino-Uwa”* (re-incarnation), nearly all the studies done so far were carried out by Christian scholars. Their findings depend largely on their goodwill and assumed methodology. Hence, dialogue with African traditionalist has been mono-

logic. Christians know what to make out of it and go for it, leaving the traditionalists' view in abeyance. Christians do the talking; answer questions which the traditionalists should have given, cut, join, and pass the final verdict and still claim to be dialoguing.

Finally, there is an imaginable ignorance among the Christians. Many Christians are ignorant of traditional values, customs, beliefs and practices. Yet, they claim to know much about them, since they claim to be African/Igbo. For the, being a native is tantamount to knowledge about the customs and practices of their society.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## 4.0 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REALITIES IN IGBO THEOLOGICAL BELIEF IN RE-INCARNATION

**4.1 Introduction:** This Chapter attempts to find out if Re-incarnation is a physical reality or a psychological construct embedded in a peoples accumulated customs and traditions etc.

### 4.1 .1 Re-incarnation as a Concept and Belief

Re-incarnation is the belief in the 'transmigration of souls' the movement of soul through one body to another; Wikipedia (2000: 894) The soul movement in re-incarnation is indeterminate; it may be from humans to animals, birds, plants or even insects. As a doctrine of coming back to life after death, re-incarnation has its root in Latin, reincarne, which means, 'again,' to incarnate into another body, to en-flesh, to enter into a new body. e.g (John 2000)in the third edition of the "Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary" defines reincarnation as 'to be borne again in another body.' To take up another flesh is the very sense in which Eastern religions represent and understand re-incarnation. Re-incarnation is a generic term for the entire concept of the soul migration. There are various other terminologies designating soul migration such as, metempsychosis, transmigration, metensomatosis, and palingenesis. This last term, mostly refers to the stoic doctrine of the cyclic recurrence of the world.

Re-incarnation belief goes back to some ancient Middle East religions. There are equally beliefs in re-incarnation by some modern day religions. The religious movement of theosophy is a good example. Theosophy comes from two Greek words, Theos (God) and Sophia (wisdom). It is a system of thought stressing clairvoyance and telepathy. Neo-Platonists literarily define the

concept as meaning divine knowledge. Theosophy teaches that all religions are attempts by the "Spiritual Hierarchy" to help humanity. Madame Blavatsky founded theosophical society in 1876. As much as re-incarnation belief is a native belief of the Asian religions, 20 to 25% of the Christian West, holds it as a fundamental doctrine of life after death. And while these Asian religions see it as karma the percentage of western Christianity talk of the retribution justice or the karma in sense of justice and one harvesting what one has sworn. Nevertheless, the belief is one of human oldest religious doctrine. The doctrine expresses the immortality of the person.

Re-incarnation has its origin in the worldview, life, history and religious philosophical culture of prehistory ancient peoples. The idea of the universe by early members of the human society was one in a round shape form. The shape of the world as spherical directed a lot of the thought pattern of prehistory humans. It equally determined a lot of their conclusion. The ancient people's experience of activities within the 'round shape' universe guided their notion to the conclusion of the cyclic nature of history. They realize that plants fall on the soil, die and rejuvenate. They noticed the cycles and seasons of the year. The dry season introduces the rainy season the winter welcomes the spring. The earth rotates on its orbit. The day begets the night, the night the day, the old gives way to the new, the new becomes old and passes on, one season after the other and the movement continues. This continuous process and movement in nature aided in forming all they believed about life and death, time and history.898 All this is about repetition. They are about regeneration and movement. For the ancient thinker, they are about history. Since they happen with nature and things, they definitely are history of humanity. It became evident that nature is inexplicably in a constant cyclic flux.

Heraclitus (c.535-475) alludes to the fluidity in nature in his philosophy of Ta Pantarehei (everything is in flux). He analogically represents fluidity in nature in three stages comparable with the flowing of a stream. For Heraclitus, no one steps into the same river twice. This is in the sense that, ever fresh waters flow on those who step into a running stream (Heraclitus 525: 12). Second, all things move and nothingare permanent. One who steps into a flowing stream remains in the stream but not in the same water because one cannot step into the same water twice (Heraclitus 525: 49a). Third, everything is in the constant state of change and nothing remains steady thus, you cannot step twice into the same stream (Heraclitus 525:899)From this, it becomes clear that nothing is permanent except change. Movement and repetition remain the

only constant of existence. Having observed this the ancient naturally began associating events and history in the mode of the change and potency. History and events became anticipatory and acquired a cyclic notion. In this shape of mind, ancient cultures saw history in a different way. They interpreted it as a cyclic movement and repetition of what happened before. Once an event happens, it may repeat itself. This way of appreciating history was also included in the understanding of human life after death. Thus, the doctrine of re-incarnation was formulated in order to accommodate human history as repetitive.

## 4.2 The Igbo Belief in Re-incarnation

Igbo concept of Re-incarnation is imbedded in the idea of *ilo-uwa*. The concept of *ilo* or *inouwa* as the case may be, stems from two Igbo words *ilo* or *ino* (welcome) and *uwa* (the world). A definition after this compound word will be something like'welcome to the world,' 'return to the world.' The Igbo people share in no small way the African sense of hospitality. Africans value the human person so much so that they easily incorporate them, be they relatives, strangers or visitors. Africans have amazing ways of expressing welcome. Various communities have different symbolic ways of expression of welcome. There could be in forms of presentation of kola nuts, traditional gin, palm wine, coconuts, smoke chalk, palm branch, pot of water, salt, etc. The commonest way to show welcome is by way of greetings. Passing a person on the street without saying a word of greeting is a sign of disrespect and bad manners. In Igbo land, exchanging pleasantries and greetings with a guest is the first art of hospitality. It must be done before the visitor is presented with kola nuts. In cases of assembly discussions kola nuts must be presented before any meaningful interaction could be started. (Nwala 1985:74)

The Igbo words, *ilo, ilola, ino, nno,* are one and various dialectical ways of exchanging greetings and saying welcome. When a visitor comes into the house, the first reaction of the householders is to greet the visitor. Newborn babies are seen as visitors. Once a child is born into a family, everyone receives it as a visitor. Whoever that is present at the announcement of a new birth will normally say; '*nwaloro m uwabirikwe' or 'nwa m ilo*' (*ino, ilola* - my child you are welcome). The child in the meaning of this greeting is acknowledged as a visitor and a new member of the family from the great beyond. The family welcomes and incorporates the child among their members. Fundamentally, the Igbo know that this new visitor in the house is from *Chineke* or *Chukwu* (God). Some Igbo the ophoric names parents give their children confirm this

opinion. The names show that the new child, the visitor came from God and is a new creation. We have such names like *Osinachi* (God sent), *Chinwenwa* (God's child), *Onyinyechi* (God's gift). The Igbo people believe children are gifts from God. They know the foundation of the baby. They know it comes from Chineke (God). Despite this knowledge, traditional consultation after the birth of a child is a necessary aspect of the spirituality of the people. It is part of their culture. The consultation is to determine who has returned.

The principle of 'coming back to life' in Igbo tradition called *ilo-uwa* is a phenomenon that expresses the belief in the continuation of life the way re-incarnation defines the Eastern doctrine of immortality. The crucial question at this point is whether these two concepts are related. Do the two ideas share the same path or are they different. I would want to come to their relationship by defining their differences. Re-incarnation in the classical sense is a general way of making amendment for mistakes of previous life. It is an act of grace whereby the reincarnated is given the opportunity to make reparations and to make spiritual advancement. In the opinion of classical re-incarnation, life is full of huddles and mistakes. As such, reparation for human weakness cannot be achieved in a single existence because life itself is too short. A single process of birth cannot do the reparation. Invariably everyone is expected to reincarnate several times before this atonement could be made. The souls of adults and children alike are subjected to a rigorous process of automatic migration. In Igbo understanding, the concept of rebirth patterns to adults alone. Children are not known to come back after death in the form of rebirth except in the cases of the *ọgbanje*. (Okonji 1970: 96)

This phenomenon will be treated subsequently. Re-incarnation in classical understanding is a sort of punishment but in the Igbo concept, rebirth is the reward for life well live. Eastern religions avoid re-incarnation. Igbo religion welcomes rebirth. Classical re-incarnation informs the independence of the soul. In the classical definition, the nature of the soul is distinct from the nature of the body. The body is material and remains a substance of decay. On the other hand, the soul is indeterminate. It has the capability to leave for one body after another. It can reincarnate into a higher stage or into a lower state. It can become human or brute. As an independent consciousness, the soul or spirit is sustained self-reflection capable of rediscovering itself in every intact essence. On the other hand, ilo-uwa or coming back after death in Igbo society is not determined by the autonomy of the person. The society and the families of the

deceased mainly determine it. Not everyone is wanted back. Thieves, lawbreakers, wicked people, lazy individuals, the weakling and sickly people, people who died of abominable and virulent diseases and those who committed taboos including suicide are never wanted back. The society and families prevent bad characters and unfortunate people from coming back. Prevention is through medicine and making of concoction. The rite of *inishiarishi* is one such rite performed to prevent social misfits and miscreant from reincarnating. The only people that are wanted back are the peacemakers, honorable men and women, wealthy and prosperous people. Rebirth in this form is invoked by way of elaborate sacrifices and rites of passage at ones death. Decent and expensive burial ceremonies are majorly in anticipation for the coming back of the dead. Unlike in re-incarnation, coming back to life after death in terms of *ilo-uwa* is not a punishment. Everyone desire to be born again but not everyone is allowed to be born again.

### 4.3 The Igbo Eschatology

Social status is important among Igbo, and they attach particular importance to improving one's status. As with other tribe, high social status derives partly from the family into which a person is born, but the Igbo give less importance to this circumstance than other tribe do. An Igbo aphorism says, "No one knows the womb that bears the King" (Uchendu 1964: 20), shows the importance they attach to individual accomplishment when they make judgments about status.

The Igbo believe that a person may continue to improve his status from incarnation to incarnation, and the belief in re-incarnation comforts dying persons who think that they have not raised their status sufficiently in the life that is ending. This idea relates to the importance the Igbo attach to identifying the deceased person of whom a baby is thought to be the re-incarnation. The baby can thus, on reincarnating, assume whatever status he had in the previous life and build on it in the new life.

(Uchendu1964: 16), believe that at death, a soul or personality passes into a realm of discarnate beings, and that Igbos are more concerned about their status in the discarnate realm than they are about the fact of dying.

Secondly, the Igbos regards the discarnate realm as a joyless limbo from which the discarnate souls are eager to return to terrestrial life. They therefore, consider terrestrial life to be desirable, and unlike the Hindus and Buddhist, they have no aspiration to stop being reborn.

Thirdly, the ceremony of the "second burial" of a deceased person influences the condition of the discarnate personality by helping it achieve tranquility in the discarnate realm and a satisfactory positioning for re-incarnation. If these rites are improperly conducted, the deceased person's spirit may become displeased and bring misfortune to the negligent offspring.

The Igbos believe that good conduct in life leads to a higher status both in the discarnate realm entered after death and in the next incarnation. Thus, an evildoer who by dishonest craft or skillful manipulation of the gods attains a high economic status and power will nevertheless have a low status in the discarnate realm. He may, moreover, have an inauspicious rebirth and return as a twin or be born feet-first, conditions that are considered taboo.

Apart from the foregoing rather limited effects of misconduct, the Igbos do not believe that moral conduct in one's life influence the circumstances of another. As it is mentioned earlier, they have no concepts corresponding to the elaborate doctrine of retributive karma found in Hinduism and Buddhism. The circumstances of a future life derive much more from the results of bargaining with one's Chi and from the fulfillment of wishes expressed pre-mortem for an improvement in one's situation.

The Igbos believes that persons who die young will reincarnate more quickly that those who die at older age. This enables a person whose strivings for a higher status were terminated early to resume them sooner. Aspirations for improvements in another incarnation may lead, for example, to opportunities for a better education. Also bargains made before re-incarnation with one's personal god (Chi) may result in more favorable opportunities for advancement in social status in the next life.

(Onwuejeogwu1973: 41-42), believe that not everyone reincarnates. He mention two types of persons who cannot reincarnate; those who have led worthless, ineffective lives, especially if they have never married and had children; and those who have died accidental death, committed suicide, or died prematurely. Sometimes Igbo person who feel angry and unforgiving over the wicked or useless conduct of a person who has died will try to prevent that

person from reincarnating. They may try to do this by denying burial to the corpse (Meek 1943: 307), by burying it face downwards, or by other rituals.

Most Igbos like living and wish to live a long life, and when they die they hope to return quickly from the discarnate realm and resume their endeavors towards the attainment of a higher social status. However, some Igbo souls are said to wish to die young, these are the *ọgbanjes*.

The Igbo belief in re-incarnation is what we might call the malleability of one's situation. The concept of karma in Hinduism and Buddhism tends, in many person to permit, and even inculcate, an attitude of resignation and hence of passivity toward misfortune in life. However, the Igbos believes that through their own exertions both in ordinary terrestrial affairs and by invoking the agency of gods, they can modify an unpleasant life situation. For them, although conduct has some effect on one's destiny, one's own wishes and efforts can change one's circumstances in a more immediate future than that envisaged for the effects of karma by most south Asians.

### 4.4 The Belief in Ọgbanje

It is right at this point, to say that with the notion of *ọgbanje* in Igbo cosmology, an element of ambivalence and confusion begins to creep in the way the Igbo understand Life After Death. The phenomenon has been mentioned as another instance to support a classical re-incarnation belief among the Igbo people. The exceptions called ọgbanje are conceived as a group of persons who, in the discarnate realm, have become leagued together in a kind of conspiracy to harass their parents by dying young. Typically, anọgbanje child lives only a few months or years and then dies. Some ọgbanjes die suddenly without any premonitory illness, whereas others are frail and sickly for months or years before dying.

A single Ọgbanje soul may be born, die, and be reborn in the same family, only to die again. Indeed, the Igbo word Ọgbanje means "to make several trips to and from a place" (Williamson 1972: 404). The word is sometimes translated into English as "Repeater child" (Noon 1974: 641).

Stories of *ọgbanje* (repeater child) are common tales among the Southern states of Nigeria. Night stories and moon light tales are often garnished by the mysterious life of the *ọgbanje* children. The *ọgbanje* is believed to possess extra ordinary mystical power. The

phenomenon is known among the Yoruba as the Abuki. The myth of the origin according to Igbo mythology has it that in the long distant past, some group of children were born into this world. When they realized the competitiveness of the world and their inability to survive the struggle, they decided to die and to go back to *Chineke* (God). On arrival at the gateway, the spirit on guard confronted them and questioned their early return. On further enquiry, the spirit guard discovered that these children made early return simply because they were too lazy. They would not want to work hard on earth. However, to prevent indolence and further reoccurring the spirit gatekeeper did not allow these children spirit being entrance. They were sent back into the world. The children spirit beings knew they would be laughed at when reach the human world. However, since they would not want to be taunted as non-achievers in life, the children spirit beings decided to form a society in the spirit world. They selected the forest as their abode. The forest in Igbo culture is a representation of fear and angst. Dissident spirits include those of the *ọgbanje* roam the forests. The gathering place of the *ọgbanje* in the forests is usually on top of big trees. They gather on top of such trees as the mahogany, iroko, and baobab. As spirits, they are never visible to the naked eyes. In this forest, their activities are majorly playing on top of the trees. Nevertheless, they decide occasionally to be born into the physical world, into human families. They allow themselves this just for the fun of it. After some time they will return to their spirit kins. They usually make oaths to one another deciding when to return to the spirit world. This pact they always try to keep. Agonizing parents sometimes give suspected *ọgbanje* children names that they feel may appeal to their conscience. So that these children may come to understand how much pains they have inflicted to their families by their constant deaths and rebirth. They are given such names like Onwugharam, (death allow me), *Onwubiko* (death I plead with you), *Onwu m* mere *gini* (death what have I done wrong).Some *ọgbanje* children could be benevolent. Instead of dying, they may decide to stay alive to reciprocate the love they have received from their families. Situations such as this means the *ọgbanje* child is breaking the pact made with the other members of the group. And for the others who have kept the terms of the pact and have returned to the spirit world, this is a serious act of betrayal of the entire group. In revenge they rest of the group would visit their living counterpart and threaten him or her with either illness or misfortunes for not respecting the terms of their covenant. The more obdurate a member is the more severe and frequent the harassment from members. Though children are most associated with the spirit of *ọgbanje*, young adults in some other cases equally have been

identified as members of this group. The frequency in which death occur in a given family could make members attribute the occurrence to the phenomenon of the *ọgbanje.*

Within the group of *ọgbanje* children, two subtypes seem to be distinguished. In the first type, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth occur in infancy or at least within the first four or five years of life. In the second type, the *ọgbanje* child survives early childhood and lives into the teens or early twenties only to die suddenly and seemingly capriciously. Girls seem to form a majority of this second group (Okonji1970: 70), and they seem particularly likely to die at the time if marriage or the delivery of their first child.

Shortness of life span is one of the major characteristic of the *ọgbanje* syndrome. To know whether the *ọgbanje* spirit causes the frequency of death, family members especially parents whose children always die at infancy have always engaged the services of a medicine man. Sudden sickness and sudden recovery is equally a characteristic of *ọgbanje*.

The *ọgbanje* child always suffers from sudden attack of fever and convulsion. In the early days of Igbo Heilpraxis (medical practice) causes of these constant attacks were very difficult to decipher. Once a child is suspected of being an*ọgbanje*, the parents invite the medicine man. A more complex and profound attempt to heal the *ọgbanje* lays on the ability of the medicine to solve the problem of convincing the child to reveal the hidden place of her paraphernalia. To do this the medicine man starts by series of persuasion, mocking or cajoling. The mocking may induce the child to show him where he/she has buried his or her *iyiuwa*. That is a kind of spiritual paraphernalia. These may include cowries, shells, threads, beads, fingernails, hairs, articles of clothing. At the discovery and the digging up of the items or item the medicine man prepares concoctions against the sudden death of the child. Amulets, charms, talisman and beads are some of the preparations that the medicine man hangs around the neck of the child. In a situation of the death of the *ọgbanje* child, the medicine man is contracted. He performs some rituals and at the end, he uses sharp razor or similar objects to mutilate the body of the child. This is done for three purposes.

First, it is done to frighten the child from reincarnating or coming back to the family. Second, it is carried out in order to warn members of the child's *ọgbanje* group of similar consequence. Finally, the body is disfigured so that the other members of the group will be unable to recognize the dead child when it goes to join them. Their inability to recognize it as

their member will warrant them to reject it. And this will stop the process. There is yet another fascinating perspective to the *ọgbanje* phenomenon. It is believed that some *ọgbanje* children have dare and defiled the power of the medicine men. Despite the harrowing treatments given them by the medicine men, some *ọgbanje* children have returned to their parents. When they return it is believed they have bore the scares of their mutilation. The apparent manifestation of such physical phenomena have posited as grounds to argue for re-incarnation in Igbo culture. The preponderance of this phenomenon not withstanding it is established from biogenetics that gene traits of parents have been found in later generations of the members of their families. Psychologists believe that the mind can be active and exact as a photocopying apparatus. It can copy objects from the phenomenon and transfer them to the noumenon and vice versa.

The argument refuting genetic process to re-incarnation holds that what reappear in the newly born in the physical is the personality traits of the reincarnator. Acts of 'maltreatment' performed on the body of the dead child impress itself in the psyche of the agonizing mother who makes a mental capture of them. The mind of the mother photocopies and transfers these images into the sub-consciousness. They are probably to resurface during the next pregnancy. What appears on the physical body of the newborn is the dominant physiological peculiarity of experience. *Ọgbanje* child did not resurface. What could have appeared are the lineage characteristics and not the *ọgbanje* or the ancestors?

Elizabeth Isichei gives another perspective to the *ọgbanje* phenomenon. She tells us that the *ọgbanje* seem to be one of those infant sicknesses that early traditional medicine was unable to administer effective treatment. As a result, the syndrome was couched in myth. With the improvement in medicine and healthcare technology, the *ọgbanje* syndromes are getting precise explanations. They are receiving the "explanation of sickle-cell anemia, which is very common in Igbo land." Through the efforts of health workers, people in charge of families and expertise of marriage councilor's remarkable progress have been made in the reduction of sickle-cell anemia birth cases in Igbo land. The reduction of the sickle- cell anemia cases in Igbo land is gradually putting the ọgbanje story to rest.

### 4.3.1 Psychological Aspects of Ritual to the Concept of Ọgbanje

It is quite little about the effectiveness of the measures taken to prevent suspected *ọgbanjes* from dying. The people who practice such rituals both *ọgbanje* doctors and the parents,

who engage them or carry out their own program, certainly believe in their efficacy. It is admitted, however, that some *ọgbanjes* are not successfully treated and others are undetected before they suddenly die. When the measures seem insufficient, the *ọgbanje* doctor, or sometimes the parents themselves, may mutilate the child. In some areas around Igboland, they amputate the distal phalanx of the left little finger. However, in other regions of Igboland, other parts of the body may be removed. The reform of an *ọgbanje* often requires the assistance of a native doctor with special skills. He has several resources. Okonji (1970: 70) describes a rather elaborated ritual in which the child is required to dance to frenzied music while balancing a medicine pot on its head. If the ritual succeeds, the *ọgbanje* patient indicates the place where the object of the oath has been secreted. It is then excavated or otherwise exposed, and the child recovers.

If, notwithstanding whatever measures have been taken to keep a suspected *ọgbanje* alive, the child nevertheless dies, the parents experience anger as well as grief. They have similar emotions if any child dies suddenly, even if the child had not previously been suspected being an *ọgbanje*. The parents may then mutilate the body of the dead child. Part of a little finger may be amputated, but in some cases the father of the infant who had died cut off several of its fingers and toes. Noon (1974: 42) cited a case in which parents burned the lips of the deceased *ọgbanje* baby. When the parent's emotions are particularly intense, they may burn the entire corpse of the child.

As mentioned earlier, that the Igbos attaches importance to birthmarks and birth defects as indicators of the person who has reincarnated. When an *ọgbanje* childe has died and the body has been mutilated, the parents closely observe the next children born to the family. If a child is born with a birth defect corresponding to a particular mutilation of a deceased *ọgbanje*, such as absence of the distal phalanx of the left little finger, they identify the newborn child as the *ọgbanje* reborn. They consider that he or she has now returned to stay, and it is said that children having such birth defects (with rare exceptions) survive infancy and childhood and do not, like their predecessor siblings, die young.

Parents also believe in the power of the mutilations practiced on the bodies of deceased *ọgbanjes*. In support of this, they cite cases of children born with birth defects corresponding to

the mutilation wounds inflicted on a deceased *ọgbanje*, these later-born children are said to survive into adulthood.

The widespread belief that *ọgbanjes* have concealed somewhere an object as part of their oath to die young may have developed as a feature of the ritual to free suspected *ọgbanjes* from the oath. Okonji (1970:2) skeptically suggested that *ọgbanje* doctors may, in at least some instances, previously conceal objects that are to be dug up later during the ritual. If they do this, they would consider the deception a legitimate subterfuge to enhance the *ọgbanje's* vacillating wish to continue living.

### 4.3.2 High Infant Mortality and the concept of *Ọgbanje*

Infant mortality has been (and remain) high in Nigeria and other countries of West Africa. The principal causes, in medical terms, are pneumonia, malnutrition, dysenteries, sickle-cell disease, and malaria. Of these, sickle-cell disease has been particularly identified as the cause of the repeated deaths in the same family that the concept of the *ọgbanje* aims at explaining (Isichei1969: 26-27). One can clearly understand how the association may have developed. Of the disorder mentioned sickle-cell disease is the only one with a clear-cut genetic causation. The sickle-cell trait is transmitted genetically, and when heterozygote marries, one-quarter, on the average, of their children will have sickle-cell disease. In such a family, if one child has already died in infancy of sickle-cell disease there is a 25% chance that any later- born child will also have the disease and similarly die young.

Many Igbos know that sickle-cell disease is only one cause, although an important one, for the high infant mortality in Nigeria. Edelstein (1986: 83) analyzed blood samples of children in Igboland who had been mutilated (with amputation of the distal phalanx of the left little finger) as suspected ọgbanjes. We found that this group included no children with sickle-cell disease and are no carriers of the sickle- cell trait.

## 4.5 Re-incarnation and Fatalism in Igbo Traditional Religion

The Igbo traditional religion has no concept corresponding to that of retributive karma in Hinduism and Buddhism. In Christianity and Islam, misfortune is often explained as due to the will of God, while in Hinduism and Buddhism it may be attributed to karma. The karmic cause

can be set back and attributed to some remote predecessor in a series if re-incarnations. In this way a person as the one whose misconduct in a previous life led to the present situation but at the same time he or she acknowledges that events do have causes in someone's volition, they do not occur accidentally. The concept of the Chi may serve this purpose for Igbo people. As (Arinze 2001: 15) stated "to one's Chi, may be ascribed a person's successes and failure". The Chi is not oneself, or not the whole of oneself, and yet the bargaining with the Chi (before one's incarnation) establishes the general pattern of the events of one's present life. This concept thus combinesa desirable remoteness from immediate responsibility for misfortune along with an avoidance of the idea that events just happen without willed cause.

These beliefs have important consequences for relations between parents and children. In the west, parents do not become angry at a child who dies in infancy and childhood. If they feel any anger about such a loss, they tend to direct it either toward God, conceiving as unjust to them, or towards doctors and hospitals who may be thought to have done less for the child than they should have done. Parents in Hindu- Buddhist countries also do not feel anger toward an infant or child who dies. For them, the loss results from the effects of their karma and that of the child. The causative karma can be set far back in anterior incarnations, and neither the parents nor the child are considered immediately responsible for the death. It is not so among Igbo. The Igbos regard even a newborn infant as having the power through its own will to live or to die. Consequently, if a child dies young they may become angry at it. Correspondingly, a child who lives has done so because he loves his family, and this may contribute to the great affection Igbo parents have for their children.

### 4.6 Igbo Ontology on Re-incarnation Ideality

Re-incarnation in Igbo is *ilo-uwa*; a compound of two Igbo words; ilo and uwa. Ilo literarily translates to come back. *Uwa*, is the earth, the world of living humans. Linguistically, when the Igbo say *ilo ta* go, it asks the question; have you returned? Thus, the Igbo refer to *Ilo-Uwa;* as a return to the world from Ala- *muo*, the realms of the spirit world where the ancestors live. Therefore, *ilouwa*, simply means to come back or to return to the land of the living from the realm of the ancestral spirits. Apparently, the Igbo perception of re-incarnation is to return to the visible world from the invisible world. This claim is in tandem with Igbo perception of the Cosmo comprising two intricate co-penetrating worlds of visible and invisible with interacting

beings in their various hierarchies. This is what (Ekwunife2000: 35-36) alludes to when he argues that "the existence of the two worlds as they impinge on each other in a continuous interaction for the Africans, is not a figment of imagination which modern scientific and technological education can snuff away completely."

Unequivocally, the Igbo view of re-incarnation is part of reality; a fact which proofs abound today, the contact with Western Culture and Christianity, notwithstanding. It is to the credit of Christianity that it has made some remarkable impact on the religious outlook of the Igbo. However, the enduring conviction of the Igbo on re-incarnation leaves much to be desired when examined from the evidence of the experience of prodigy, physical defects at birth noticed in the previous existence, the doctrine of seven rounds in the evolutionary cycles of man (*uwamuwaesaa*), names of children and existence of *ọgbanje* (born to die or changeling).

Incidence of child prodigy which is referred to in the local parlance as *ebibiuwa*; whereby a young person exhibits unusual intelligence or skill for his age, is usually cited by the Igbo as one of the proofs of re-incarnation (Onyewuenyi 1996: 96). There are indicators in the traditional society that some children exhibit certain acts that are quite incompatible with their age. Usually, people are perplexed at such exhibition of unusual intelligence. Added to this sometimes a child could be in possession of knowledge of event that took place years before his birth. In the traditional society such finds explanation in the re-incarnation of a deceased relative who witnessed such events while alive and now have reincarnated in the newborn baby. Lending credence to this, Stevenson (1974: 85) observes that "they (Africans) try to identify the reincarnated ancestor by means of birth marks, statements a child makes when it began to speak, and behavioral resemblances between that child and the deceased person of whom it is the presumed re-incarnation." It is explained that such people are identified to have existed previously owing to those qualities which they now exhibits. Hence in their new life, having obtained body through which the acquired genius can be expressed, they display these quite early in life. Such children are referred to as being older than their age.

Reappearance of physical defects or scar which a deceased person carried on the body of a new born child is another proof of re-incarnation. Studies reveal that some people born with scar or deformity on their body are re-incarnations of relatives who died with those body defect or wound in their previous life. Stevenson (1974: 86) opines that the subject of the Igbo cases

showed a high incidence of 68% of birth defects and birth marks said to correspond with wounds on the previous personality. This in a sense shows that marks are used more to indicate incidence of re-incarnation in Igbo land and has remained the strongest valid argument for re-incarnation.

Naming a child is an important function in Igbo land and has transmitted Igbo belief in re-incarnation. A child is usually given two names at birth; the first one reflects either the day the child was born or other circumstances surrounding its birth. But the second one according to Basden (1966: 82) is suggested by;

> The display of some characteristic trait or some resemblance, fancied or otherwise, to a deceased member of the family. The Ibo (sic) believes that all children are re-incarnations of beings who have already passed through a lifetime in this world; hence a man will point to a little girl and gravely inform you that she is his mother reborn into the world (p.60)

Such names as Nnedi (my mother is still living), Nnamdi (my father exists), Nnenna (the mother of my father), Onochie (a replacement), Nnamani (my ancestral father), etc point to the fact of re-incarnation. The name Onochie in particular is usually given to a male child born shortly after the death of its father. The child may not resemble its deceased father but for the fact that it was not born a female, shows that he is a re-incarnation of its father who has come back to take his position in the family.

*Ọgbanje* (born to die) is a strong indication of Igbo's belief in re-incarnation. Though it is not regarded as such, Stevenson (1974: 85) rightly remarked that the Igbo concept of re-incarnation includes belief in a group of souls called *"ọgbanje"* who are born, die after a short while, and are reborn in the same family, often repeatedly. To demonstrate that the trajectory of *Ọgbanje* is not a welcome development mutilation of the child's deceased body is carried out as a deterrent. A decision could be taken to cut off one of the toes, or fingers or a part of the ear in order to stop the child from tormenting the mother in its cycle of born to die.

Achebe (1986: 58), remarks that some stubborn ones eventually reappears again with the mark on the body. And this goes to confirm the claim by the Igbo that the dead person return to life to continue a new life as a new born baby in the same family. Among the Igbo, it is common knowledge that life consists in and is well understood to be transmigration of human souls through the seven worlds of being (*uwam uwaesaa*). The expression *uwamozo* (in my next world) underscores this fact. It is expressed usually in their daily experience, relationships and

interactions to convey what one wishes to be in the next world. Women, because of the intimidation and subjugation to inferior status by men in this world wish to come back as men in their next world. Likewise, some weak men desire to come in their next world as women having found male responsibilities tasking. When a child does quite a good turn to an old father or mother he receives the encomium; "ezi *nwam, ịgakwa abụ nwam naụwam ụwaasaa*" – meaning "my good child, you will continue to be my child in my seven worlds of being.

This belief exercises an immense influence in creating the consciousness of the underlying idea to regard the present life as a probationary one, preparatory to another life to come. Each phase of life lived prepares one for the next and the round continues. This to the Igbo is salvation and it is predicated upon decent life.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA ANALYSIS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the research design, data analysis, presentation and method to be used for the study. It describes the research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, research instrument, data collection procedure and statistical techniques.

### 5.1.1 Research Design

The descriptive survey design will be adopted in this study. The method involved sampling from the population of the study and generalizing the findings obtained from the analysis of the sampled data to the entire population. Hadley (1989: 49), states that a survey design is used to access and predict the views, reactions or standings of a large number of people on a limited topic Under survey design, there searcher develops a list of questions and presents them in a standard way typical of each participants, in the interview or questionnaire.

### 5.1.2 Area of the Study

This study focused on the psychological realities in Igbo Theological belief in re-incarnation.

### 5.1.3 Sources of Data

In order to reliably generate data that would help the researcher for this research work, the primary source data was adopted, complimenting citations of relevant texts.

### 5.1.4 Population of the Study

The population of this research work comprises of people of different religions mostly of the Igbo tribe of Nigeria.

### 5.1.5 Sample Size

A total number of 100 respondents will be used for this study, and it will be made up of individuals from all works of life.

### 5.1.6 Sample Technique

A simple random sampling procedure was adopted in choosing the population of the study as it involves a fairly large tribe which is the area under the research study, indicating a homogenous population.

### 5.1.7 Statistical Techniques

Simple Percentage (%) calculation was used in analyzing the data collected. The main purpose for the use of the simple percentage was to reduce the different sets of numbers to a common base in order to facilitate statistical analysis and interpretation of data. Thus, the simple percentage formula was used:

$$\frac{FX100}{N1}$$

Where:

F- Stands for number of respondents per item in the questionnaire

N- Stands for the total number of all respondents in the group, which would be multiplied by F=Score.

$\frac{100-}{1}$ Represent the total number of the percentage of all respondents.

### 5.1.8 Instruments of Data Collection

In an educational research like this, one way to obtaining the required information is through the use of questionnaire; it helps to gather data from many subjects within a short period of time. Questionnaires and indebt interview guide was used for data collection. The questionnaire contains two sections

### 5.1.9 Method of Analysis

The data here will be analyzed using descriptive and statistical packages for Arts, via tables, frequency and percentages etc.

## 5.2 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data and answers to research questions, the data are organized according to research questions postulated to guide the study. The one hundred (100) copies of the research instrument were distributed, properly completed and retrieved. This indicated a 100% return rate, thus good for analysis.

### 5.3 Demographic Data of Respondents

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age Range**

| S/N | Age Range | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 15-24 years | 25 | 25.0 |
| 2. | 25-34 years | 35 | 35.0 |
| 3 | 35-45 | 20 | 20.0 |
| 4 | Above 45 years | 20 | 20.0 |
| | **Total** | **100** | **100%** |

Table 2 above revealed that based on the data, it can be deduced that the majority of the respondents were between the age range of 25-34 years, with 35 respondents representing 35.0%. The age range of 15-24 years had 25 respondents representing 25.0%, while the age range of 35-45 years had 20 respondents representing 20.0%. The remaining 20 respondents representing 20.0% were above 45 years. Therefore, the data shows that the majority of the respondents were within the age range of 25-34 years.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

| S/N | Religion | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Male | 45 | 45.0 |
| 2. | Female | 55 | 55.0 |
| | **Total** | **100** | **100%** |

Table 3 above shows the distribution of the respondents according to their gender. 45 of the respondents were male, this accounting for 45.0%, while 55 respondents representing 55.0% were female. This data shows that majority of the respondents were female.

**Table 4: Distribution of Respondent by Religion**

| S/n | Religion | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Christianity | 20 | 20 |
| 2. | Islam | 5 | 5 |
| 3. | ATR | 50 | 50 |
| 4. | Others (i.e Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism) | 25 | 25 |
| | **Total** | **100** | **100** |

Table 4 above shows the distribution of the respondents according to their religion 20 of the respondent were Christian, this accounting for 20 %, 5 of the respondent were Islam accounting for 5 % ,50 of the respondent were of ATR accounting for 50 % while 25 are of other world religion thereby accounting for 25%.

## 5.4 Answer to Research Questions

### 5.4.1 Knowledge of Re-incarnation

**Table 5: Knowledge of Re-incarnation**

| S/N | Questions | Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Have You Heard About The Word Re-incarnation Before? | Yes | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | No | 45 | 45.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 20 | 20.0 |
| 2 | Do you have proof of Re-incarnation? | Yes | 10 | 10.0 |
| | | No | 90 | 90.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 0 | 0.0 |
| **TOTAL** | | | **100** | **100%** |

From the given data in Figure 4 above, we can make the following observations:

The first question asks whether the respondents have heard about the word "Re-incarnation" before, and if yes, what they know about it. Out of the total number of respondents (100), 35 have heard about the concept of Re-incarnation before, while 45 have not heard about it and 20 are indifferent. Interestingly, all the respondents who had heard of Re-incarnation were able to accurately describe it as the belief that after death, the soul is reborn in another body. This

suggests that Re-incarnation, while not widely known, has a clear and consistent definition among those who are aware of it.

The second question seeks to understand whether the respondents have any proof of Re-incarnation. Out of the total number of respondents, only 10 claim to have proof of Re-incarnation while 90 do not have any evidence to support the belief. However, the data does not provide any details about the nature or quality of the evidence provided by the 10 respondents who claimed to have proof of Re-incarnation.

In light of these observations, it can be inferred that while a significant portion of the respondents have heard about the concept of Re-incarnation, the belief does not have widespread acceptance or proof. The fact that only 10 out of 100 respondents claim to have proof of Re-incarnation suggests that the belief is not universally accepted, and that those who do believe in it do not necessarily have concrete evidence to support their beliefs.

Overall, the data provides a snapshot of the awareness and beliefs surrounding Re-incarnation. While it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions from this limited dataset, the findings do suggest that Re-incarnation is a concept that is known to some but not all, and that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the belief.

### 5.4.2 Inter-Faith Dialogue

**Table 6: Inter-Faith Dialogue**

| S/N | Questions | Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | What denomination are you? | Christianity | 50 | 65.0 |
| | | Islam | 15 | 20.0 |
| | | Atheist | 10 | 15.0 |
| | | Hinduism | 10 | 10.0 |
| | | Buddhism | 5 | 5.0 |
| | | Other | 10 | 10.0 |
| 2 | What do you think Re-incarnation means? | Re-incarnation is the transmigration of the soul from one body to the other | 70 | 70.0 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | after death. | | |
| | | Re-incarnation is the process of taking up another body after death | 20 | 20.0 |
| | | Re-incarnation is a process of righting your wrong in the first life. | 10 | 10.0 |
| 3 | What do you think is the role of religion on the belief in re-incarnation? | To ensure peace among all religion | 25 | 25.0 |
| | | to tolerate the wrong of other religion | 5 | 5.0 |
| | | ensuring peaceful and harmonious state | 40 | 40.0 |
| | | All of the Above | 15 | 15.0 |
| 4 | Do you think religion has any significant role to abate the argument surrounding re-incarnation? | Yes | 45 | 45.0 |
| | | No | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 25 | 25.0 |
| 5 | Did you think religion has made the aim of re-incarnation realistic? | Yes | 15 | 15.0 |
| | | No | 55 | 55.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 30 | 30.0 |
| 6 | Do you believe that faith and re-incarnation are interconnected in Igbo theology? | Yes | 20 | 20.0 |
| | | No | 40 | 40.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 40 | 40.0 |
| 7 | Do you think that beliefs about re-incarnation are essential to Igbo faith, or can one be a faithful Igbo follower without believing in re-incarnation? | Yes | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | No | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 35 | 35.0 |
| 8 | Do physiological concepts, such as the soul and the body, factor into Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation? | Yes | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | No | 25 | 25.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 40 | 40.0 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Does an Igbo belief about re-incarnation affect attitudes towards karma and the cycle of life and death? | Yes | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | No | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 35 | 35.0 |
| 10 | Does the beliefs about re-incarnation shape cultural practices, such as ancestor worship, mourning, and burial? | Yes | 60 | 60.0 |
| | | No | 25 | 25.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 15 | 15.0 |
| 11 | Do Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation relate to Christian or other religious influences? | Yes | 40 | 40.0 |
| | | No | 45 | 45.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 15 | 15.0 |
| 12 | Are there any tensions or conflicts between traditional Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and modern scientific or medical knowledge about the human body and mind? | Yes | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | No | 50 | 50.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 15 | 15.0 |
| 13 | Is the Igbo belief about re-incarnation influenced by historical and cultural factors, such as the experience of colonialism and globalization? | Yes | 70 | 70.0 |
| | | No | 20 | 20.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 10 | 10.0 |
| 14 | Do you think that beliefs about re-incarnation have the potential to shape social or political movements in Igbo culture? | Yes | 55 | 55.0 |
| | | No | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 15 | 15.0 |
| **TOTAL** | | | **100** | **100%** |

From Table 5 above, the data provides insight into the beliefs and opinions surrounding re-incarnation in Igbo culture. The responses to the questions indicate a diverse range of opinions on various aspects of the topic.

Religion and faith play a significant role in shaping beliefs about re-incarnation. While 45 respondents believe that religion has a significant role in abating arguments surrounding re-

incarnation, only 15 respondents believe that religion has made the aim of re-incarnation realistic. Additionally, 20 respondents believe that faith and re-incarnation are interconnected in Igbo theology, while 40 disagree. This suggests that while religion and faith play a role in shaping beliefs about re-incarnation, there is no consensus on the exact nature of this role.

The data also suggests that beliefs about re-incarnation are not essential to Igbo faith, as seen in the responses to question 7, where 35 respondents believe that one can be a faithful Igbo follower without believing in re-incarnation. However, physiological concepts such as the soul and the body do factor into Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation, according to 40 respondents. This suggests that while re-incarnation may not be essential to Igbo faith, it is still an important aspect of their beliefs.

The influence of historical and cultural factors on the belief about re-incarnation is also significant, as seen in the responses to question 13. 70 respondents believe that the Igbo belief about re-incarnation is influenced by historical and cultural factors, such as the experience of colonialism and globalization. This suggests that beliefs about re-incarnation are not static and may change over time as historical and cultural contexts change.

Beliefs about re-incarnation also have the potential to shape cultural practices and social or political movements, as seen in the responses to question 14. 55 respondents believe that beliefs about re-incarnation have the potential to shape social or political movements in Igbo culture. This suggests that beliefs about re-incarnation are not only a matter of personal belief but also have broader social and political implications.

Finally, there are some tensions or conflicts between traditional Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and modern scientific or medical knowledge, as seen in the responses to question 12. 35 respondents believe that there are tensions or conflicts between traditional Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and modern scientific or medical knowledge about the human body and mind. This suggests that while Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation may be deeply ingrained, they may also be challenged by modern scientific or medical knowledge.

In conclusion, the data provides a nuanced understanding of the beliefs and opinions surrounding re-incarnation in Igbo culture. While religion and faith play a significant role in shaping beliefs about re-incarnation, there is no consensus on the exact nature of this role.

Additionally, beliefs about re-incarnation are not essential to Igbo faith, and historical and cultural factors influence beliefs about re-incarnation. Finally, beliefs about re-incarnation have the potential to shape cultural practices and social or political movements, but may also be challenged by modern scientific or medical knowledge.

**Table 7: World Religions and the Igbo Theology of Re-incarnation**

| S/N | Questions | Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Do you think world religions are friendly to the concept of re-incarnation? | Yes | 45 | 45.0 |
| | | No | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 20 | 20.0 |
| 2 | Do you think the relationship between the concept re-incarnation and other world religious is reciprocal? | Yes | 20 | 20.0 |
| | | No | 60 | 60.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 20 | 20.0 |
| 3 | Describe the relationship and other religions | Cordial | 15 | 15.0 |
| | | Very cordial | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | Formal | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | Poor | 15 | 15.0 |
| | | Very Poor | 5 | 5.0 |
| 4 | Do you think this relationship can be improved? | Yes | 50 | 50.0 |
| | | No | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 20 | 20.0 |
| 5 | Do Igbo theological beliefs about re-incarnation require a belief in the existence of a soul? | Yes | 85 | 85.0 |
| | | No | 5 | 5.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 10 | 10.0 |
| 6 | Can a person be reincarnated as an animal in Igbo theological belief? | Yes | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | No | 60 | 60.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 10 | 10.0 |
| 7 | Do Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation involve the idea of karma or a cycle | Yes | 80 | 80.0 |
| | | No | 10 | 10.0 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | of cause and effect? | Indifferent | 10 | 10.0 |
| 8 | Is re-incarnation seen as a way to achieve a higher spiritual state in Igbo theology? | Yes | 70 | 70.0 |
| | | No | 15 | 15.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 15 | 15.0 |
| 9 | Does belief in re-incarnation influence how Igbo people care for the elderly or those who are dying? | Yes | 40 | 40.0 |
| | | No | 50 | 50.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 10 | 10.0 |
| 10 | Can someone be reincarnated into a different gender or race in Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation? | Yes | 50 | 50.0 |
| | | No | 40 | 40.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 10 | 10.0 |
| 11 | Is there a specific time period between one incarnation and the next in Igbo theological belief? | Yes | 40 | 40.0 |
| | | No | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 30 | 30.0 |
| 12 | Is re-incarnation a central tenet of Igbo religious beliefs? | Yes | 60 | 60.0 |
| | | No | 20 | 20.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 20 | 20.0 |
| 13 | Is the process of re-incarnation seen as deterministic or does free will play a role? | Deterministic | 45 | 45.0 |
| | | Free will | 35 | 35.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 10 | 10.0 |
| | | I don't know | 10 | 10.0 |
| 14 | Is there a specific process or ritual associated with the transition from one incarnation to the next in Igbo belief? | Yes | 50 | 50.0 |
| | | No | 30 | 30.0 |
| | | Indifferent | 20 | 20.0 |
| **TOTAL** | | | **100** | **100%** |

Table 6 above shows the responses of the respondents about world religions and the Igbo theology of re-incarnation.

Firstly, regarding the concept of re-incarnation and world religions, there seems to be a mixed response. While 45 respondents answered "Yes" to the question of whether world religions are friendly to the concept of re-incarnation, 35 respondents answered "No," and 20 respondents were "Indifferent." Additionally, regarding the relationship between re-incarnation and other world religions, 60 respondents answered "No" to the question of whether this relationship is reciprocal, while only 20 respondents answered "Yes," and 20 were "Indifferent." These responses suggest that there may be differing views and attitudes towards the concept of re-incarnation within and between world religions.

Furthermore, when examining the relationship between Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and other religions, the majority of respondents (45 out of 80) viewed this relationship as either "Cordial" or "Very cordial." However, a significant minority of 20 respondents viewed the relationship as either "Poor" or "Very poor." Additionally, when asked whether this relationship can be improved, 50 respondents answered "Yes," with reasons such as promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding, sharing knowledge and experiences, and mutual respect and tolerance.

Regarding Igbo theological beliefs about re-incarnation, the data reveals that the vast majority of respondents (85 out of 100) believe that these beliefs require a belief in the existence of a soul. Similarly, 80 respondents answered "Yes" to the question of whether Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation involve the idea of karma or a cycle of cause and effect. This suggests that the concept of re-incarnation is intricately linked to other fundamental beliefs in Igbo theology.

The data also provides insights into the specific beliefs and practices associated with re-incarnation in Igbo theology. For example, while 70 respondents answered "Yes" to the question of whether re-incarnation is seen as a way to achieve a higher spiritual state in Igbo theology, only 40 respondents answered "Yes" to the question of whether belief in re-incarnation influences how Igbo people care for the elderly or those who are dying. Additionally, while 50 respondents answered "Yes" to the question of whether someone can be reincarnated into a different gender or race in Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation, 60 respondents answered "No."

Regarding the process of re-incarnation itself, the data shows that there is a variety of beliefs and opinions. While 40% of respondents answered "Yes" to the question of whether there is a specific time period between one incarnation and the next in Igbo theological belief, 30%

answered "No," and 30% were "Indifferent." Among those who answered "Yes," there were varying beliefs about the length of time between incarnations, with 15% believing it to be 1-5 years, 20% believing it to be 5-10 years, and 30% believing it to be 10-20 years. Additionally, while 60% of respondents answered "Yes" to the question of whether re-incarnation is a central tenet of Igbo religious beliefs, 20% answered "No," and 20% were "Indifferent."

Also, when it comes to the question of whether the process of re-incarnation is deterministic or whether free will plays a role, the data reveals a split among respondents. While 45% of respondents believed the process to be deterministic, 35% believed free will to play a role, and 10% were "Indifferent," with an additional 10% responding "I don't know." Similarly, regarding whether there is a specific process or ritual associated with the transition from one incarnation to the next in Igbo belief, 50% of respondents responded "Yes," 30% responded "No," and 20% were "Indifferent."

Overall, the data suggests that a significant majority of respondents believe in the concept of re-incarnation in Igbo theology and see it as a central tenet of their religious beliefs. The belief in the existence of a soul is closely tied to the idea of re-incarnation, with 85% of respondents affirming that Igbo theological beliefs about re-incarnation require a belief in the existence of a soul.

The idea of karma or a cycle of cause and effect is also strongly linked to Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation, with 80% of respondents affirming that Igbo beliefs involve the idea of karma. This suggests that Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation are rooted in a belief in the consequences of one's actions and a desire to achieve a higher spiritual state.

The data also reveals some interesting insights into how Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation may influence daily life. For example, while 50% of respondents believed that someone can be reincarnated into a different gender or race in Igbo beliefs, the majority (70%) also believed that re-incarnation is seen as a way to achieve a higher spiritual state. This suggests that Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation are rooted in a desire to improve oneself spiritually, rather than a desire to change one's physical circumstances.

Finally, the data suggests that there is some diversity of opinion among respondents when it comes to questions of determinism and free will in the context of re-incarnation, as well as the

question of whether there is a specific process or ritual associated with the transition from one incarnation to the next in Igbo belief. This highlights the complexity and diversity of religious beliefs, even within a single tradition like Igbo theology.

## 5.5 Summary of Findings

**Research Category One: Inter-Faith dialogue**

The study examines the role of religion, faith, historical and cultural factors, and modern scientific knowledge in shaping beliefs about re-incarnation in Igbo culture. The data reveals that while religion and faith play a significant role in shaping beliefs about re-incarnation, there is no consensus on the exact nature of this role. Thus, while beliefs about re-incarnation are not essential to Igbo faith, they still play an important role in Igbo beliefs, with physiological concepts such as the soul and the body factoring into these beliefs.

The data also suggests that historical and cultural factors significantly influence beliefs about re-incarnation, with colonialism and globalization being two key factors. Furthermore, beliefs about re-incarnation have the potential to shape cultural practices and social or political movements, but may also be challenged by modern scientific or medical knowledge. This tension between traditional beliefs and modern knowledge is evident in the responses to the study, with some participants highlighting conflicts between traditional Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and modern scientific or medical knowledge about the human body and mind.

Overall, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the beliefs and opinions surrounding re-incarnation in Igbo culture. It highlights the importance of religion, faith, and historical and cultural factors in shaping these beliefs, as well as the potential for these beliefs to shape broader cultural practices and social or political movements. However, the study also highlights the tension between traditional beliefs and modern scientific or medical knowledge, which may challenge or conflict with these beliefs.

Research category two: World Religions and the Igbo Theology of Re-incarnation

The findings of this study suggest that there is a mixed response to the concept of re-incarnation and its relationship with world religions. While a significant number of respondents

believed that world religions are friendly to the concept of re-incarnation, there were also many who believed otherwise. Similarly, there was a split among respondents about the reciprocal relationship between re-incarnation and other world religions. Within Igbo theology, the majority of respondents viewed the relationship between Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and other religions as cordial or very cordial, but there were also those who viewed it as poor or very poor.

Regarding Igbo theological beliefs about re-incarnation, the study found that the vast majority of respondents believed in the existence of a soul and that Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation involve the idea of karma or a cycle of cause and effect. This suggests that the concept of re-incarnation is intricately linked to other fundamental beliefs in Igbo theology. The data also provides insights into the specific beliefs and practices associated with re-incarnation in Igbo theology, such as the belief that re-incarnation is a way to achieve a higher spiritual state.

However, the study also revealed diversity in beliefs about the process of re-incarnation. There were varying beliefs about the length of time between incarnations, and while the majority of respondents believed in the concept of re-incarnation in Igbo theology and saw it as a central tenet of their religious beliefs, there were also those who did not. Additionally, there were differing beliefs about whether the process of re-incarnation is deterministic or whether free will plays a role, and whether there is a specific process or ritual associated with the transition from one incarnation to the next in Igbo belief.

Overall, the study suggests that Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation are complex and interconnected with other theological beliefs. There is diversity in beliefs about re-incarnation, even within the same religious tradition, highlighting the complexity of religious beliefs. The study also indicates that the beliefs about re-incarnation in Igbo theology have practical implications, such as a belief in the consequences of one's actions and a desire to achieve a higher spiritual state.

## 5.6 Discussion of Findings

Findings of the data highlight the complexity of religious beliefs, even within a single tradition like Igbo theology. The findings suggest that Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation are deeply intertwined with fundamental beliefs in Igbo theology, such as the belief in the existence of a soul and the concept of karma. Furthermore, the majority of respondents see re-incarnation

as a central tenet of their religious beliefs, which indicates its importance to the Igbo people. However, there is a diversity of opinion on specific aspects of re-incarnation, such as the process of re-incarnation and the role of determinism versus free will.

The data also suggests that there is room for improvement in the relationship between Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and other religions. While the majority of respondents viewed the relationship between Igbo beliefs and other religions as cordial, there were a significant minority who viewed it as poor. Respondents identified promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding, sharing knowledge and experiences, and mutual respect and tolerance as ways to improve the relationship.

Another interesting finding is the diversity of beliefs and opinions among respondents regarding the specific details of the process of re-incarnation in Igbo theology. For example, while some believe that there is a specific time period between one incarnation and the next, others do not. Similarly, while some believe that the process is deterministic, others believe that free will plays a role. This diversity of beliefs within a single religious tradition is not surprising, as it is common for religious beliefs to evolve and change over time, and for individuals to interpret and apply those beliefs in different ways.

The data suggests that Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation are intricately linked to other fundamental beliefs in Igbo theology, such as the belief in the existence of a soul and the concept of karma. The majority of respondents believe that re-incarnation is a central tenet of Igbo religious beliefs and see it as a way to achieve a higher spiritual state. Additionally, the data highlights the importance of promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding in order to improve relationships between different religious traditions and to foster mutual respect and tolerance.

Overall, the findings highlight the complexity and diversity of religious beliefs, and how they are shaped by historical, cultural, and social factors. They also demonstrate the importance of mutual respect and understanding between different religions, and the need for open and respectful dialogue to promote understanding and tolerance.

# CHAPTER SIX

## 6.0 SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Summary

Re-incarnation has been given different interpretations by different scholars and religionists from different historical, cultural and ideological influences. Among the Igbo/African scholars, it has been pursued from two models: the traditional physico- cyclic model of interpretation presents re-incarnation as a cyclic return of a dead person into a new born child. This model was used by scholars such as Mbiti (1975: 69), Metuh (1981:187), Idowu (1973: 73), Basden (1966: 82), Onunwa (1979: 199), Onwubiko (1981:94) though their interpretations apparently differ. Recently, Ekwunife (2000: 20) developed a mystic-psychic model which represents re-incarnation 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 the new born child". This shift from the traditional position argues that the phenomenon under study should be viewed from the religio-cultural context of the people involved and not from its English transliteration. This research adopts the traditional model.

Re-incarnation belief in the Igbo culture can be dated as far back as 1400 years ago (Nwala, 1985), the belief is still being held in this present age. Even before and after the invasion of the white men that brought about the Christian religion and Western civilization, the belief of re-incarnation has been an important aspect of the Igbo culture. Honestly, I find Igbo belief of re-incarnation fascinating and very interesting, and I just couldn't help myself but to find out more about it. Here are some fundamental beliefs of the Igbos concerning re-incarnation. The Igbos believe that there is a place called "land of the dead" otherwise known as "discarnate realm". This realm is inhibited by the souls of the deceased who are eager to return back to the land of the living. This place is believed to be undesirable for these deceased souls and thus prompt their return to the land of the living by means of re-incarnation. The Igbo believe that a person can attain perfection by being reincarnated over and over again. Also, the belief in re-

incarnation comforts a dying person who believes he is yet to attain perfection in the life that is ending. The dying person is never scared of dying, instead they believe they will be born anew by a member of the family. This means they will continue to improve their status quo from incarnation to incarnation till they attain perfection.

The Igbo believe that how well you conduct yourself in your present life will determine how much you'll be respected both in the land of the dead and in your next life. Consequently, if an evildoer dies, no matter how rich and powerful they might be, they would be a subject of mockery in the land of the dead. Also, things may go wrong with the person in their next life. They may also be reincarnated as wild animals, or trees, or anything that is non-human. The Igbo believe that someone who dies at a younger age will incarnate more quickly that someone who dies at old age. This means that someone who is yet to become what they are destined to be in life, but were terminated early in life, will be reincarnated quicker so as to resume their destinies sooner. Some Igbo believe that those who lived worthless and ineffective lives, for example, those who never got married or had no children or those that committed suicide, never get reincarnated. Sometimes, when someone refuses to forgive a dead person who was wicked when they were alive might prevent the dead person from being reincarnated. Also a dead person can be prevented from being reincarnated if they are denied of their burial rites or are buried face down, or by any other rituals. Though these are simply belief systems without physical proofs. Especially there are belief systems whereby one did not marry and had no children such quickly reincarnates to marry and produce children, etc, but, for what purpose?

## 6.2 Research Observation

The researcher observed that the written texts or scholarly works consulted and questionnaires administered, showed some measures of skepticisms as people are still undecided, and the scriptures still don’t have a stand, while majority of Christian preachers, preach against it.

## 6.3 Research Findings

During the cause of this research, it was discovered that modern Igbos of Nigeria, even when adhering to the Christian religion, have preserved many features of Igbo traditional religion. The belief in re-incarnation seems to be particularly strong. The Igbo believe that re-

incarnation usually occurs within the same immediate or extended family. They try to identify the reincarnated ancestor by means of birthmarks, statements a child makes when he or she becomes able to speak, and behavioral resemblances between the child and the deceased person of whom it is the presumed re-incarnation. Oracles are frequently consulted to make or confirm identifications. The Igbo believe that deceased persons inhabit a discarnate realm, but they conceive this as an undesirable limbo from which discarnate souls are eager to return to a new terrestrial life. The Igbo concept of re-incarnation includes belief in a group of souls called ọgbanje who are born, die in early life, and are reborn in the same family, often repeatedly.

This work delves into assessing the concept of re-incarnation among the Igbo society and its implications on contemporary Christians and rival religions. As a result it is not devastating to say that people reincarnate after their death. Evidences in this study have shown its possibilities irrespective of pressures from modern changes around the world. On the other hand, arguments from the Christian perspectives are perhaps being strongly challenged.

### 6.3 Recommendations

It is in the light of these finding that we briefly recommend the following strategies as a means of arriving at a compromise between belief in re-incarnation among the Igbo society, and contemporary Christians, and other religious counterparts.

i. Christians should hold up to their religious tenets so as to build cordial relationships between traditional practitioners and contemporary changes. Through this, the adherents of African traditional religion will be acquainted with lease of hope that they are not as stupid and immature in religious thinking as they have been hitherto regarded by Christians, especially in Igbo land.

ii. Socially, apprehending the concept of different culture will immensely help to understand the people's culture as they are not as we thought they are. As a result it will reduce anarchy, social tensions, religious intolerance, and silence rebellion to a drastic level.

iii. The issue of religion should not be attached to political system of the people. This will enable the people see the traditional wisdom in placing their social and political activities under the sacred sanctions of the supernatural. Thus, an important of any religious system is serve as social regulator of man's mundane activities by not only providing the moral principles of

actions in the mundane world, but also spiritual leaders to inspire and direct in human world. In this case the re-incarnator serves this purpose.

## 6.4 Suggestion for Further Research

It is certain that human knowledge is pan-cosmic, in the sense that there are certain limitations in viewing a subject from one perspective. Amidst various thoughts raised in this work, the researcher keeps maintaining one central observation which continues to filter the mind of the researcher who is convinced that the subject "re-incarnation" should not be left to lay bare only on the Igbo traditional belief. The researcher thus suggests that further research studies be carried out in other traditional religious worldviews and other African traditional religious and the Igbo traditional beliefs on re-incarnation, for further clarification, and understanding, of the physical realities of re-incarnation.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The belief in *Ilo-Uwa* (re-incarnation) forms part of the religious, cultural and social aspects of Igbo life. It conveys the truth that salvation encompasses the total man; that personality survives after death; then that the total human soul is neither obliterated nor wholly absorbed in the divine, rather it remains an individual personality capable of rebirths.

In this way, the fear of death which subjects man to lifelong bondage is allayed. On the other hand, the belief in ancestor hood is a fitting climax to the hope of everlasting life. The Igbo notion of the after world is not a place where the dead live a shadowy, strengthless, ghostly and impotent life. Rather, it is a place where the dead live in renewed vitality, active and influential in human affairs; from where they engage in a cycle of deaths and rebirths. Therefore, the point is this; that symbolisms and pictures which convey the issues of life after death in Igbo religious culture do not matter. What is important is the truth behind them which can be utilized in the ongoing dialogue between Christianity and Igbo culture.

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## APPENDIX

**SECTION A**

1. Gender: (a) Male [45] (b) Female [55]
2. Age: (a) 15-24 [25] (b) 25-34 [35] (c) 35-45 [20] (d) 55 and above [20]
3. Religion: (a) Christianity [500] (b) Islam [15] (c) Hiduism [10] (d) ATHEIST [10] (e) Buddhism [5] (f) Other [10]
4. Occupation: (a) Student [30] (b) employed [50] (c) unemployed [20]

**SECTION B**

1. Have You Heard About The Word Re-incarnation Before? (a) Yes [35] (b) No[45] (c) indifferent[20] If yes what do you know about Re-incarnation? - "Re-incarnation is the belief that after death, the soul is reborn in another body."
2. Do you have proof of Re-incarnation? (a) yes [10] (b) No [90] If yes any evidence? - "No evidence"

**SECTION C**: Inter-Faith dialogue

1. What denomination are you? (a) Christianity [55] (b) Islam [20] (c) ATR [10] (d) ATHEIST [15]
2. What do you think Re-incarnation means? (a) Re-incarnation is the transmigration of the soul from one body to the other after death. [30] (b) Re-incarnation is the process of taking up another body after death [20] (c) Re-incarnation is a process of righting your wrong in the first life. [10]
3. What do you think is the role of religion on the belief in re-incarnation? (a) To ensure peace among all religion [25] (b) to tolerate the wrong of other religion[5](c) ensuring peaceful and harmonious state [40] (d) All of the Above [30]
4. Do you think religion has any significant role to abate the argument surrounding re-incarnation? (a) Yes [45] (b) No [30] (c) Indifferent [25]
5. Did you think religion has made the aim of re-incarnation realistic? (a) Yes [15] (b) No [55] (c) Indifferent [30]
6. Do you believe that faith and re-incarnation are interconnected in Igbo theology? (a) Yes [20] (b) No [40] (c) Indifferent [40]
7. Do you think that beliefs about re-incarnation are essential to Igbo faith, or can one be a faithful Igbo follower without believing in re-incarnation? (a)Yes [30] (b) No [35] (c) Indifferent [35]
8. Do physiological concepts, such as the soul and the body, factor into Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation? (a) Yes [40] (b) No [25] (c) Indifferent [35] How - "Igbo beliefs suggest that the soul is reborn into a new body after death, but the exact mechanism of how this occurs is not specified."
9. Does an Igbo belief about re-incarnation affect attitudes towards karma and the cycle of life and death? (a) Yes [35] (b) No [30] (c) Indifferent [35] How - "Igbo beliefs suggest

that one's actions in a past life influence the circumstances of their next life, thus linking re-incarnation with the concept of karma."

10. Does the beliefs about re-incarnation shape cultural practices, such as ancestor worship, mourning, and burial?

- 60 respondents answered Yes
- 25 respondents answered No
- 15 respondents answered Indifferent

11. Do Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation relate to Christian or other religious influences?

- 40 respondents answered Yes
- 45 respondents answered No
- 15 respondents answered Indifferent

12. Are there any tensions or conflicts between traditional Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation and modern scientific or medical knowledge about the human body and mind?

- 35 respondents answered Yes
- 50 respondents answered No
- 15 respondents answered Indifferent

13. Is the Igbo belief about re-incarnation influenced by historical and cultural factors, such as the experience of colonialism and globalization?

- 70 respondents answered Yes
- 20 respondents answered No
- 10 respondents answered Indifferent

14. Do you think that beliefs about re-incarnation have the potential to shape social or political movements in Igbo culture?

- 55 respondents answered Yes
- 30 respondents answered No
- 15 respondents answered Indifferent

**SECTION D: RE-INCARNATION**

1. Do you think world religions are friendly to the concept of re-incarnation?

- 45 respondents answered Yes
- 35 respondents answered No
- 20 respondents answered Indifferent

2. Do you think the relationship between the concept re-incarnation and other world religious is reciprocal?

- 20 respondents answered Yes
- 60 respondents answered No
- 20 respondents answered Indifferent

3. Describe the relationship and other religions

- 15 respondents answered cordial
- 30 respondents answered Very cordial
- 35 respondents answered Formal
- 15 respondents answered Poor
- 5 respondents answered Very poor

4. Do you think this relationship can be improved?

- 50 respondents answered Yes
- 30 respondents answered No
- 20 respondents answered Indifferent Reasons: promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding, sharing knowledge and experiences, mutual respect and tolerance.

5. Do Igbo theological beliefs about re-incarnation require a belief in the existence of a soul?

- 85 respondents answered Yes
- 5 respondents answered No
- 10 respondents answered Indifferent

6. Can a person be reincarnated as an animal in Igbo theological belief?

- 30 respondents answered Yes
- 60 respondents answered No
- 10 respondents answered Indifferent

7. Do Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation involve the idea of karma or a cycle of cause and effect?

- 80 respondents answered Yes
- 10 respondents answered No
- 10 respondents answered Indifferent

8. Is re-incarnation seen as a way to achieve a higher spiritual state in Igbo theology?

- 70 respondents answered Yes
- 15 respondents answered No
- 15 respondents answered Indifferent

9. Does belief in re-incarnation influence how Igbo people care for the elderly or those who are dying?

- 40 respondents answered Yes
- 50 respondents answered No
- 10 respondents answered Indifferent

10. Can someone be reincarnated into a different gender or race in Igbo beliefs about re-incarnation?

- 50 respondents answered Yes
- 40 respondents answered No
- 10 respondents answered Indifferent

11. Is there a specific time period between one incarnation and the next in Igbo theological belief?

- Yes: 40%
- No: 30%
- Indifferent: 30% How long?
- 1-5 years: 15%
- 5-10 years: 20%
- 10-20 years: 30%
- More than 20 years: 10%
- Don't know: 25%

12. Is re-incarnation a central tenet of Igbo religious beliefs?

- Yes: 60%
- No: 20%
- Indifferent: 20%

13. Is the process of re-incarnation seen as deterministic or does free will play a role?

- Deterministic: 45%
- Free will: 35%
- Indifferent: 10%

- I don't know: 10%

14. Is there a specific process or ritual associated with the transition from one incarnation to the next in Igbo belief?

- Yes: 50%
- No: 30%
- Indifferent: 20%