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Year | 1999

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THE IDMA OF BENUE STATE NIGERIA: THEIR RECEPTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY SINCE 1924.

EBUTE OBIABO.

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

MAY 1999
I hereby declare that
this thesis is my own work
and constitutes the result of my own research of the project.
Dedicated
To
Ene, my wife;
and
Obiabo, Achigili, Onyiloko
Oyinsbute, Alechenu
and
Achetu
our children
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the end result of what has been for me a great opportunity to study and explore in detail a new area of mission scholarship. I was first introduced to the need for an effective contextualisation of Christianity in the Idom culture and the cultural process through which Christianity could effectively translate itself into the Idom context, tradition and needs at a Bible translation workshop conducted by the Rev. Professor Eugene Bunkowske and Dr. Robert Koops at the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, Jos Plateau State Nigeria in July 1981. As I have sought to understand more fully this area of mission scholarship, Dr. Jack Thompson has been my constant source of help, inspiration, and encouragement. His wise counsel and guidance have left their mark on what follows. I am deeply indebted to him for his willing and careful guidance during all the stages that underlie this thesis.

I would like to acknowledge briefly here the great and profound debt I owe to my wife Ene Obiabo and our six children: Obiabo, Achigili, Onyiloko, Oyinsbute, Alecenu and Achetu for all the understanding, love, care, prayer and encouragement they have unselfishly shown to me, not only during the writing of this thesis, but throughout my family days. Without their sacrifice, love, support and prayers this thesis might not have been completed.

My great gratitude is also due to the following: Mr and Mrs Broadhurst and family for their practical Christian fellowship, support, prayers and love not only during the writing of this thesis, but throughout our time in the United Kingdom. Mr and Mrs J King for reading the draft typescript and making valuable suggestions with regard to matter, English and style. Mr and Mrs S Halliday, Mr and Mrs H Kilkpatrick, Mr and
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I am indebted to all our friends in Methodist Church in Ireland and in particular, those in Glengormley, and Finaghy Methodist Churches, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Baptist Church in Ireland, The Church of Ireland, especially, Upper Ballinderry Parish Church, the Free Methodist Church, Elim Pentecostal Church. I am particularly thankful to all our brothers and sisters in the Ballymacbrennan, Tansy, Botier, Upper Room, Ballyrobert, and Larne Mission Halls. Five-Mile Hill Pentecostal Fellowship Church. Belfast City Mission and Christian Charitable Volunteer Helps Mission for all their prayers and practical support, not only for this thesis, but also for us as a family and God’s work in Nigeria. The Rev. B Leach and Mr. Sinclair Halliday whose prayer fellowship and support cannot be measured in words, but both sadly died before this thesis was completed. I am thankful to all our friends at the Qualboe fellowship for their Christian care, love and prayers during our time in the United Kingdom.

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Finally, I am most thankful to the Almighty God who has given me life, strength and skill to carry out this research.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.
This thesis looks at the process of Idoma reception and development of Christianity, which was initiated by British Methodist missionaries in 1924. It argues that such a process requires a cultural transformation through which Christianity is re-shaped to suit the Idoma need, custom and traditions thereby regaining the lost cultural cohesion which the Idoma need to adapt Christianity and spread it among themselves.

The thesis begins with the reasons for the choice of this study, the aims, purpose and methodology of the research. It calls attention to the need to see the Idoma as subjects of religious change and not merely as objects of evangelisation by overseas missionaries. Another important consideration is that of Idoma ethnicity. Having defined Idoma ethnicity the thesis argues that the question of origin could not be satisfactorily answered from sociological and anthropological investigations alone, but rather through the active participation in the life and culture of one's own people.

This leads to a discussion of Idoma theology, which is defined, explained and compared to other types of primal African theology. It is strongly argued that Idoma theology has its sources in Idoma history, language, culture, arts and music, and that its main creeds and beliefs are traditionally passed from one generation to another.

Attention is drawn to the overall history of how the Idoma made contact with Christianity, and their reaction to the Methodist missionaries and their early activities. It is argued that, for Christianity to have effectively interacted with the Idoma people, the missionaries should have realised that the Idoma had their own past, religion, culture and tradition which needed to be respected and appreciated.
One of the central arguments of the thesis focuses on the spread of Christianity in IdÔma and the use of education as an agency of evangelism and church growth. The methods and aims of Methodist mission education in IdÔma and the messages that were passed on are critically examined and evaluated. The thesis argues that the IdÔma social and economic needs, language, culture, and environments were left out of the missionary educational activities in IdÔma, which were tailored primarily at producing teachers, preachers and local missionaries who would spread Christianity in IdÔma. The section on Bible translation represents the heart of this thesis, focusing on contextual factors in the reception and development of Christianity in IdÔma. The thesis evaluates how the New Testament was translated in comparison to the Old Testament, and argues that the problem of inculturating Christianity into IdÔma life has not been sufficiently looked at either scientifically, ethnographically, linguistically, historically or culturally in the New Testament translation. It argues that these problems were better addressed in the more culturally attuned translation of the Old Testament, using the principle of dynamic cultural or natural equivalence translation. The thesis also looks at contemporary IdÔma Christianity and the cultural process through which the IdÔma have come to terms with Christianity, accepting it as an essential factor of their life and developing Christianity in their concrete historical situation; it concludes that an awareness of the culture, religious beliefs and traditions of a given people are essential components of the successful reception and development of Christianity. Christianity is consistently interconnected to the cultural presuppositions and practices of the culture where it is located. If Christianity is to find expression among any group of people, it can only do so in and through their cultural practices and traditions.
MAP 1: BENUE STATE LOCATION IN NIGERIA

MAP 3: DIALECTS OF THE IDóMA LANGUAGE

MAP 4: THE IDOMA DISTRICTS

A NOTE ON IDZMA ORTHOGRAPHY

Since the missionary contact with the Idzma in 1924, all the efforts in learning and reducing the Idzma language into writing have been based on mastering the western tonal pronunciation of the sounds the missionaries heard in Idzma. These they phonetically wrote down for their convenience at the expense of Idzma tones, sounds and phonetics, in which the missionaries could not orthographically differentiate between 'o' and 'ɔ' which are unique to the Idzma language in terms of accurate meanings of Idzma words.

This problem continued until 1985, when in a seminar/workshop on the Systematic Way of Writing Idzma, organised by the Idzma Bible translation project in consultation with the Benue State Government, the Universities of Jos, Zaria, Ibadan, Nsukka, advanced teachers College Katsina-Ala and Benue State Polytechnic that a standard authentic Idzma orthography was established and agreed upon.

Idzma since then has been written in a systematic and standardised way with 'ɔ' as against 'o' and with tones in which the low tone is indicated by the absence of a tone mark, the high tone marked with a vertical stoke, and the mid tone with a horizontal stroke in all institutions of learning in Idzma, Benue State and the country as a whole. This thesis will therefore, follow the agreed standardised way of writing Idzma with 'ɔ' and tonal marks, except when an existing text is being cited in our discussion.
The Following frequently used Idọma words in this thesis have been listed for the benefit of those not familiar with the Idọma language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aa</th>
<th>you plural</th>
<th>Akpọ</th>
<th>an unidentified tribe associated with the Idọma people</th>
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<td>Ada</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Akpọ̀</td>
<td>thunder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adà</td>
<td>first daughter</td>
<td>Alácé</td>
<td>ruin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Âdá</td>
<td>hut</td>
<td>Alalekwú</td>
<td>ancestral spirit</td>
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<td>Ádà</td>
<td>a big pot</td>
<td>Alekwafiya</td>
<td>ancestral masquerades</td>
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<td>Adaakwú</td>
<td>father of the ancestors</td>
<td>Alece</td>
<td>human beings</td>
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<td>Ahe</td>
<td>hand</td>
<td>Alermü</td>
<td>an orange</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abò</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>Al</td>
<td>us</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acádú</td>
<td>the royal undertaker.</td>
<td>Amuòme</td>
<td>last</td>
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<td>people</td>
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<td>agreement, curse</td>
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<td>women, name of a girl</td>
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<td>first</td>
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<td>anger</td>
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<td>lion</td>
<td>Anya</td>
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<td>chain, prison</td>
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<td>chin</td>
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<td>sorrow, sighing</td>
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<td>peace, name of a bitter plant</td>
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<td>world, name of a boy</td>
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<td>Ocịkapa</td>
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<td>ega</td>
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<td>root, decent, shout</td>
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<td>root, bottom</td>
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<td>Òcica</td>
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<td>Òkwúayí</td>
<td>truth</td>
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<td>fire, name of a boy</td>
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<td>home</td>
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<td>Òlekkwu</td>
<td>home of the dead</td>
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<td>Ije</td>
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salt
a girl's name
pounded yam, food
dream
exhibition
pain
wife
horse, back
who
sweetness
secret society
display or exhibition
traditional burial cloth
the open arena, play ground, or the council ground
hunting
road, entrance, way
lord, personal god, a tree
The Supreme God
sacrifice to a personal god
friend
moon
child
an arrow
today
traditional game
up
church
attribute, title
title holder
maize
everlasting fire, hell, damnation, pain, hell
inquest
shrine of a personal god
masquerade
death, cry
crocodile, name of a man
death spoils matters
school
house
propriation sacrifice
open wound
smell
stomach, inside
house holds
family units
primary family units
sea, a girl’s name
proverb. Pity sayings
great depth
name
purification sacrifice
the council of the people
horn
drum
ritual
chicken
sacred tree
honour
share
music played only for kings
sacred burial place for chiefs
fines
to kill
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Choice of the Research Topic

This thesis will explore in detail a new area of mission scholarship on the reception, effect and development of Christianity among the Idzoma people. Idzoma is one of the ethnic groups in Benue State Nigeria with a population of over one million, living in a strip of land about two hundred kilometres wide stretching from the bank of River Benue south for about three hundred kilometres. To the east live the Tiv, with the Igala to the West and the Igbo to the south. The Idzoma people speak a common Idzoma language with slight variations in dialect. About 60% of Idzoma people are Christians, less than 0.5% Muslims and the rest adherents of Idzoma primal religion.

The Idzoma, have been neglected in previous studies. For instance, the second half of the 19th century marks a period of a major inflow of missionaries to the West Coast of Africa with the aim of christianising West Africa. The story looks like a successful mission in terms of numbers of churches, schools, health institutions, theological colleges that were planted in West Africa, and the large number of people that responded to Christianity. The West African story tellers in narrating their story, especially about Nigeria, seem to focus predominantly on the Yorubas, Ibos, Hausas and other tribes of the southern part of the country almost totally without reference to the other tribes and especially the middle belt area, which ironically are predominately Christians. The Idzoma belong to these neglected areas in the eyes of the writers of Christian history in Nigeria. Even though few a books have been written on Idzoma by
by Dr Erim\(^1\) who focused primarily on the various phases of the Idoma migration to its present location, and argued that the Idoma people seems not to have a common identity before British colonial rule, Abraham\(^2\) who looked at the Idoma language from the Yoruba language perspective, and Armstrong\(^3\) on the history and culture of Idoma people, there is no evidence of any explicit reference to Christianity that made contact with the Idoma as from 1924 in any of these studies. Therefore, this research would be a study that would remedy an important area of neglect in Idoma, and contribute to our comprehensive understanding of the Idoma people, Idoma Christianity and the history of Christianity in West Africa.

Secondly, where we have any story at all on the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity, such stories are written mostly by the missionaries with their own goals. Among many of such goals is perhaps, to tell such stories for their own audience on how God assisted them to “bring light” to the benighted souls in a far away Idoma. Such stories are bound to be propagandist, primarily designed to boost moral and material aid in their missionary work. In most cases, such stories praise the triumph of Christianity over “paganism”. A close examination of such stories reveal that they lack overall perspective. They have been deficient because the perspective stems from an understanding of Idoma and what happens in Idoma from the world view of the missionaries, who are always telling “their story” and not “my story”. Such stories as Bartels rightly observes,


...are in general the work of European men and women who looked at the African scene with the foreign eyes. What these people saw and wrote had their own activities and attitude at the centre, and the result did not always reflect the thoughts and feelings of the Africans among whom they worked.4

Such history becomes Euro-centric instead of Idoma-centric, and therefore, sees history as “presented to them”, and not “my story”. Idoma becomes “their story or the story of Idoma” in which they give an account of what they think we are as Idoma, and not what we truly are. Idoma becomes chained up to the missionary diaries and books at the expense of other sources that make up Idoma, such as arts, songs, poetry etc. As result, Idoma always becomes a negative subject of her history in which she is not the object. This makes it the story of a winner and not a loser. There is a very strong need to look at the story of the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity from a new indigenous Idoma perspective. This need was earlier stressed by The Rev. Ivan Chetwynd who only deals with the story of the Methodist Church in Idoma from a Methodist missionary perspective in his book Seed Time: The Story of the Methodist Church in Idoma 1924-1974. When among some of his conclusions he said,

I am well aware of the limitations of this book
Above all, it is an “official” history, telling the story from the point of view of missionaries and ministers.
The real story of Methodism in Idoma is written in the changed hearts and lives of thousands of Idoma men and women. I hope that one day, some of them will tell their own story.5

Chetwynd’s observations firmly underline the need for a new indigenous perspective in the story of the Idoma reception and development of Christianity. This thesis will become the fulfilment of that hopeful day in which we will tell our authentic Idoma

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story of our interaction with the Methodist missionaries, and clearly set out what really happened in Idóma in her reception and development of Christianity.

Thirdly, being born and brought up in a country in which some one had always told your story for you, one is bound to ask, ‘What really is my own side of the story of the interaction between me and Christianity? What is my own history before I ever made contact with Christianity? Does my present understanding of Christianity truly represent Idóma culture? Is the articulation of my faith Idóma or alien?’ As my mind battled for answers to questions such as these, my problem became more compounded as a product of a modern missionary movement in which conversion to the Christian faith, had involved among other things, acceptance of alien religious tradition, denouncing of one’s own cultural heritage and embracing the Western culture.

To the Methodist missionaries who came to Idóma, Christianity was inseparable from their own western cultural inheritance, and many of the Idóma people who came to embrace or encounter Christianity have acquired many western traits that have nothing to do with Christianity. The Idóma interaction with Christianity lost the cultural cohesion which Idóma needed to adapt Idóma Christianity. The Idóma people were treated as having no religion, tradition, language, institutions, racial character, and empty vessels to be filled with European goods. They consequently felt deculturized and denationalised as Idóma Christians began to look, behave and dress like the Western missionaries. The Idóma Christians today have become fully aware of the cultural and religious discontinuity they had to suffer on the account of their Christian faith, and have also implied an uprootedness from their culture. How can the Idóma affirm their Christian faith in their own land without breaking their religious
and cultural ties? For the Idźma people to do this would imply their renunciation of the western cultural ties that were introduced into Christianity in Idźma by the Methodist missionaries with their own indigenous primal religious and cultural roots. There is therefore, a great need for Christianity to take root in Idźma and interact with the Idźma in such ways as they can call and feel to be their own.

Fourthly, I was brought up in a mission school where to speak my own language attracted a fine of two kobo. But why? Doesn’t God understand Idźma? My problems became more compounded when I became the Idźma Bible translator. My nine years of investigation into my own Idźma culture as a Bible translator raised many questions in my mind about the interaction between the Idźma and Christianity. How can I translate the Bible - God’s word into my own clear, natural meaningful Idźma, when I was forbidden the use of that language in my early education? Am I to translate English Bible or Idźma Bible? In order to do this, I became involved in Semitic research at Queens University of Belfast and tried very hard to examine the Semitic background, which is the cradle of Christianity and to relate this to Idźma. Such an exercise brought me to a great realisation that the Idźma people, have perhaps, entirely misunderstood or lost the basic understanding of Christianity, whereas the Idźma culture provides a perfect cultural setting for a better understanding of Christianity.

The need for historical and cultural understanding of the reception and development of Christianity in Idźma is illustrated in the existing Idźma New Testament which I regard orthographically, syntactically and literally in cultural terms as alien, and
points to the problems of finding ways to indigenise and contextualise Christianity in Idrma, West Africa and Africa as a whole. All these realisations and findings provide an urgent stimulus to a thesis of this kind, because I cannot sufficiently progress as a professional Idrma Bible translator unless these cultural issues are sorted out.

1.2. Importance and Purpose

(a) What I am proposing here is a study without precedent as the only major study of Idrma is Dr Erim's outside investigation into the development and the origin of Idrma as from the middle of the sixteenth century. I will go beyond this to Idrma pre-colonial and pre-missionary history and to contextual questions in relation to the Idrma interaction with Christianity which, had arisen from 1924 when the missionaries arrived in Idrma.

(b) The study is essentially that of emphasising the Idrma point of view in the interaction between Idrma and Christianity. It is hoped that such emphasis will provide a new perspective in the study of the reception and development of Christianity among a given people. It is also hoped that this study will, if not serving as a pioneer study of Christianity in Idrma, add another dimension in which the subjective feelings of the Idrma will appear. It is always important to view the reception, development and effect of Christianity on a given people from the inside outwards. In this process, we hope to see something of our own response to Christianity. By this we mean, approaching our discussion from the perspective of our

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6 The value of two kobo at the time of writing is less than .00% of one pence of British money. But its value at the time of the imposition of the fine was two pence. This was a lot of money then, when a whole month’s wage was about six pence.
Idzma self-understanding, and how we respond to the gospel as Idzma. This study therefore, aims at uncovering the Idzma cultural response to Christianity

(c) The significance of this study is also that it will enable the Idzma and non Idzma to better understand the heritage from which the Idzma has grown and thereby become aware of the kind of response the new Christian situation in Idzma demands; both the roles of churches and missionaries in the new situation, as they seek a new avenue of service to God in Idzma.

(d) The importance of this study will be seen again as it highlights the cumulative capital Christianity has derived from the cultural language of a given people. This study, will also highlight the need of adaptation of a culture of a given people as a vessel of rendering God’s message in the context of everyday life of that given people, and how such an exercise could enable effective indigenous reception and development of Christianity and real religious change among those people.

(e) The significance of this thesis, does not lie only in the interaction that exists between the Idzma and Christianity, but also with those Idzma who are very interested in their past, and are fully aware of the complexity of their history, and who have been crying for an Idzma historian for years. This study, therefore, will be a welcome relief in Idzma, that at last an Idzma attempt is being made to document their past, using their interaction with Christianity as a case study. This will contribute to our understanding of Idzma history, ethnicity, culture and origin.

(f) It is hoped that this study will reopen the whole subject of Christianity and culture with an indication of the fresh lines of inquiry now open to us. The particularity of
this study has hinged on the particularity of Idoma culture and religious beliefs as essential components of the reception, effect and development of Christianity in Idoma. It is finally hoped that this study will be a methodological contribution toward imparting greater coherence to the disparate sources of the Christian-culture interactions, and Christian missionary activities in West Africa and Africa as a whole.

1.3. Methods

Christianity as Isichei rightly observes, “is always related to the cultural presuppositions and practices of the culture where it is located”. If Christianity is to find an expression in Idoma, it can only do so in and through the Idoma cultural practices and traditions. The approach to this study therefore will be contextual. By, this we mean “the continual process by which God’s truth and justice are applied to and emerge in concrete historical situations” in Idoma. That is taking into account all aspects of Idoma content and the local Idoma situations seriously in our discussions.

This contextual approach will not be content with the foreign abstract, intellectual, and systematic presentation of Christianity in Idoma, but rather hopes and aims to primarily see Christianity in a truly, genuine Idoma concrete situation. Christianity in Idoma should not be concluded from the outside as a western impact on Idoma, but from the inside by the people of God in Idoma. The Idoma can be said to “have heard and received the message only as the Christian Church [in Idoma] has incarnated itself in the life and world of those who have embraced it”. This contextual approach will be addressed from the Idoma perspective and the process of, interaction between

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Idzima and Christianity will be closely examined and critically evaluated. We will argue for Christianity to be part of the local Idzima culture, rather than adopting a foreign culture to put Christianity in Idzima. Christianity, if it is to take hold in Idzima must be embodied in the Idzima receptor culture.

We will also focus on the Idzima as a people with their own history, religion, and social structures before they came in contact with Christianity. We will critically examine the variety of ways in which Idzima reacted to this external agent of change. To do this will require an investigation into the total context of Idzima life, their history, religion, language, epistemology, culture and way of life. This was done, during my ethnographic and archival field work in Idzima.

Emphasis will be given to the importance of the Idzima people, not merely as objects of evangelism, but as subjects in a process of dynamic religious change, who initiated in some cases the policies that missionaries followed. In other words, in what ways have the Idzima people and their culture affected the ways the Christian message is put or spread in Idzima? The Idzima perspective of this study will also place much emphasis on the Idzima cultural process through which the Idzima came to terms with Christianity, accepted it as an essential factor of Idzima life and tried to reshape Christianity to suit the Idzima needs, customs and traditions and spread it among themselves and beyond.

9 Ibid., p. 169
My underlying assumption will be the importance of the pre-knowledge of Idɔma and my historical, social, economic and religious knowledge of Idɔma. This will depend on my history, pre-Christian and Christian experience. Our experience data and Idɔma content will be taken into serious consideration. I will make an attempt to move from context to the text, rather than the western approach of the text to the context. The context here is Idɔma. Our Idɔma experiential context will throw meaning on the reception and development of Christianity in Idɔma.

Secondly, my experience of my own Idɔma language and the opportunity of a thorough investigation and analysis of that language and translating the Bible into that language is an added advantage for me. The experiences of the Idɔma grassroots, who may not have enough English to explain their views or responses and re-actions to some of the Methodist missionary activities and Christianity in Idɔma were primarily investigated without the barrier of an interpreter.

1. 4. Sources

The Idɔma themselves become one of the primary sources of this research. In this category, the Idɔma oral traditions, myths, legends, arts, music, sacred places, rites and ceremonies, dances, pithy sayings and religious system were thoroughly investigated, and critically examined. The collection of these materials necessitated my meeting the Idɔma people at the local scene on three occasions, first, between February 1981 to January 1982 as Idɔma Bible translator, second, July to September of 1996 and third, July to September of 1997 for interactions and some direct and informal interviews during my ethnographic field works in Idɔma. The interviews
were conducted with individuals of various categories and the information collected was classified, analysed, quantified and interpreted. The questions that were used in this fieldwork were open-ended questions. These, I believe gave the informants the opportunity to answer the questions in their own words. This enabled me to record a verbatim response to my probe using various recording techniques such as tape recording or note taking. This ethnographic field work in some occasions involved my participation overtly or covertly in Id⇒ma daily lives. Over a period of time, festivals, funeral rites and marriage ceremonies and other religious rites of Id⇒ma, were observed, and I recorded what was being said and done. And asking and collecting whatever data that were available to throw light on the issues that were the focus of this study.

Apart from being Id⇒ma, and part of the Id⇒ma system with my experiences as the Id⇒ma Bible translator, which was an added advantage for data collection, I also visited other neighbouring tribes related to the Id⇒ma such as Idomanokwu in Plateau State of Nigeria, Yala tribe in Gongola State and the Jukwuns in Adamawa State, collecting, collating and comparing data.

There were other primary sources that were consulted in this research. These included the archival materials of The Nigerian National Archives in Enugu, Kaduna and Ibadan. Otukpo Central archives in Otukpo, The Archives of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue. The Methodist National Archives in Lagos. The Archives of the Methodist Church Overseas Division (MCOD), the Norcross Diary, at MCOD in London, and the personal Diaries of ex- Methodist missionaries in Id⇒ma: Rev. T.A Johnston, Rev. and Mrs. Wyle, Rev. & Mrs. T. K Johnston, Rev. Dr & Mrs. Igwe.
The Archives of the Centre of the Study of Christianity in the non-western World (CSCNWW) and that of the School of Oriental and African Studies, (SOAS) University of London and finally the Idźma New Testament were consulted.

Other sources of information are secondary, but essential. These are the works already published by various scholars in this discipline or in the area of my research. These include books, monographs, articles; papers presented in seminars, conferences and personal interviews with some key missionaries that have worked in Idźma.

Although, the boundary of my research is set within Benue, Adamawa, Kogi and Plateau States of Nigeria, this does not preclude contributive examples drawn from the various States of Nigeria, and Africa as a whole. I would, however like to clearly state here that, whereas Idźma is part of Africa as a whole, and whereas contributive examples may be drawn from the various regions of Africa, the concentration of this study will be on Idźma. Even within this specific limitation, it is not possible to write about all that happened in the interaction between the Idźma and Christianity. As a result we will be purposefully selective in our discussions and focus on such issues that best illustrate the concern of this thesis.

1.5. Aims and Content

Having introduced, stated the reasons for the choice of this study and the aims, purposes, and the methodology of this research, this introductory chapter also sets out the principal thesis underlying this research, that the process of Idźma reception and development of Christianity, initiated by European Methodist missionaries in 1924, requires more effective contextualization in Idźma culture which will be achieved by
a culturally attuned re-translation of the Bible on the principle of dynamic cultural
equivalence so as to “invest Christianity with indigenous solidity”\textsuperscript{10} in Id\={m}a. And
methodologically, calling attention to the role of Id\={m}a as subjects of religious
change: not merely as objects of evangelisation by overseas missionaries.

\textbf{CHAPTER TWO} of this thesis will consider Id\={m}a history and ethnicity. This
chapter will briefly address the problem of the origin and development of ethnicity.
Who are the Id\={m}a? The thesis of Dr Erim and Professor Armstrong on the origin and
development of Id\={m}a will be critically examined and evaluated, by investigating the
\textit{Alekwu} cultic practices from which Erim and Armstrong were debarred. We will
throw new light upon the Id\={m}a pre-colonial and pre-missionary history. After
having established the Id\={m}a ethnicity the chapter will then consider cultural
characteristics common to all Id\={m}a namely: Birth, Marriage, Death, Burial and
Rituals.

This will help us identify Id\={m}a theology in \textbf{CHAPTER THREE} which will be
defined and explained, and compared to other forms of African primal theology.

\textbf{CHAPTER FOUR} will focus on the early missionary activities among the Id\={m}a. A
brief sketch of the overall history of how the Id\={m}a made contact with Christianity
will be presented. But since this is not the main thrust of this thesis, the emphasis will
be moved to some of the activities of the Methodist Church in Id\={m}a, which is one of
the particularities of this thesis. This chapter will look at the arrival of missionaries in

\textsuperscript{10} Lamin Sanneh, \textit{Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture}, Maryknoll, New York,
general and in specific the arrival of the Methodist missionaries. We will also find out here, the principal personalities involved. In other words, who did what in Idroma? We will then focus on settlement and problems in two specific areas: culture and language. What were the cultural interactions between the missionaries and Idroma? How did the missionaries handle Idoma culture or how did the Idoma culture handle the missionaries? We will focus on one case study in which one of the missionaries took to the Idoma culture of polygamous marriage and eventually married three Idoma ladies, and the consequences of his action for the Idoma, the missionaries, and the Methodist Missionary Society in London as well as its effects on the Idoma-Christian interaction. Attention will also be focused on the language problem. We will then focus on the missionary image and perceptions of Idoma past values, culture, religious beliefs and practices and language. We will highlight the effects such perceptions had on the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

This chapter will also examine the Idoma reaction to the Methodist missionaries and their activities. The time limit here will be the period between 1924-1962. What happened between the Idoma and the missionaries in the first thirty-eight years? The relationship between the Idoma and the missionaries during these periods were in most cases strained, and deceptive. Idoma appears to the Methodist missionaries as a vast sponge, at one moment ready to soak up missionaries and Christian religious ideas and another squeezing them out in sudden confrontation without much visible change: despite the superficial impression of receptiveness, missionaries appear to have encountered [in Idoma] a subtle, but stubborn resistance...11

In illustration of Sanneh’s observation, attention will be given to the factors of resistance as Idroma sought to retain those aspects of their culture which they regarded as fundamental and as result rejected the Christian message that threatened it.

CHAPTER FIVE begins one of the central arguments of this thesis focusing on the spread of Christianity in Idroma and the use of education as an agency for evangelism and church growth. In this, apart from focusing on a descriptive account of what happened, there will be a critical evaluation of the methods and the messages that were passed on, and all the problems that surrounded such an exercise.

In examining the educational activities, we would critically probe the aims and the objectives of the missionary education at various stages in Idroma. What type of educated Idroma were they trying to produce when they began to teach Idroma children Mathematics, Biology, European history, English and French? What were the missionary aims in banning and imposing a fine on the use of Idroma language in classes on Idroma children in favour of English language? Perhaps these questions and related ones had earlier troubled Westermann, when he rightly said,

> It is absurd to teach a child to read a foreign language instead of his own, and to make him believe that his own is not fit for reading and writing, so that from the beginning the child learns to despise that which should be dearest to him—the sounds his mother taught him.12

By and large, the effect of the injection of such teaching on a large scale into Idroma is obviously to break up much of the Idroma traditional way of life, culture, and language that is unique to every culture, and as much as possible, replace it with that.

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of the West. How are the Id›ma to be educated as Id›ma without removing them from their people, culture and environment? There could be no better answer to this question than that of a renowned missionary to Africa Alexander Fraser when writing about the aims of African education, he rightly argued that,

...subjects must be taught in relation to the life around. Science will begin with the observation of ants, seeing mosquitoes breed, getting to know the flowers and plants. It will go on to destroying mosquitoes, preventing the inroads of ants, improving flowers and trees, and studying soils....

But these were hardly the case in Id›ma.

CHAPTER SIX represents the heart of this thesis focusing on contextual factors in the reception and development of Christianity in Id›ma. The analysis will concentrate mainly on Bible translation, in which a very special emphasis will be given to the Id›ma Bible translation. But why? Sanneh’s explanation in this regard is worth noting as to why this special emphasis would be placed on the Id›ma Bible. He rightly, argues that without the native Scriptures the local populations construed the churches as an instrument of foreign domination, and became as a result alienated from the Romanized Christians. He said,

"Translation thus came to invest Christianity with indigenous solidity. The vernacular became a necessity for the life of religion, the soil that nurtured the plant until its eminence acquired doctrinal heights."

This section is unique in many ways. Apart from the fact that the writer is an Id›ma Bible translator, historians have paid very little attention to the cumulative capital Christianity has derived from the common language of the ordinary people. To many secular historians, languages are only of political importance, while the economic and

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14 Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message, 1993, p. 70.
social historians see language as a vehicle that creates social probability and perhaps social tension, but to the Christians, the adaptation of a vernacular as a vessel of rendering God's message enables effective, personal and community religious change. This is why we set out here to focus on Iḍma language in its cultural dimensions. After all, Christianity, before making any contact with Iḍma, had traditionally, right from its inception or origin translated out of Aramaic, Hebrew language and from that position came to exert its influence on a Gentile culture which she adopted to extend her life in the Greek culture and language.\(^\text{15}\)

Secondly, I am of the opinion that the genuine later reception and development of Christianity in Iḍma and the reaction of the Iḍma to Christianity and some of the missionary activities were on the basis of the Iḍma language and the impact the Iḍma Bible translation made on Iḍma. No matter how any one tries to translate the Christian message into Iḍma, the final articulation of such a message has to come from the Iḍma. No matter how much of Hebrew and Greek we know, the final name of God in Iḍma has to come from the Iḍma people. This demonstrates the supreme importance of this section on the Iḍma Bible translation. Iḍma in our view is best seen and understood in terms of Iḍma language. Translation and culture are intrinsically inter-twined. If you are into the language, you are into the unique culture of Iḍma, and where language dies, the culture dies as well. In giving up our language we give up ourselves as a national unit. Hence this area will be covered in detail.

Chapter six will also focus on the history of the Idòma Bible translation. This again will not just be a descriptive account of what happened, but a critical evaluation of how the New Testament was translated. We will highlight here, the problem of the unreadability, and clear natural meaning in Idòma. Why can the Idòma New Testament not be fluently and meaningfully read? Was the New Testament a literal translation of the Bible into Idòma or a true natural, clear, meaningful Idòma translation that took into consideration the Idòma cultural dimension? Was it a failure of execution? Why do the Idòma have so many problems in reading and comprehending the New Testament? It is argued that the problem of incultrating Christianity into Idòma has not been sufficiently looked at either scientifically, ethnographically, linguistically, historically or culturally in the Idòma New Testament translation. The existing Idòma New Testament, even though, it is close to the Idòma culture, it is sufficiently different, and as such, it is not in use. It is rather more of an Igbo New Testament than an Idòma New Testament.

In discussing the history of the Idòma Old Testament translation, we will briefly, discuss the problem of the interaction between the source language and the receptor language. How do we translate some Semitic concepts into Idòma? Or how do we handle in Idòma some Semitic cultural heritage? These and related issues raised the current controversial argument on the meaning of texts. These types of problems and others will be evaluated in this chapter.

This brings us to CHAPTER SEVEN in which we will consider Idòma Christianity today. This chapter will examine the cultural process through which the Idòma came
to terms with Christianity and accepted it as an essential factor of Idɔmma life and culture, and tried to reshape Christianity to suit the Idɔmma needs, custom and traditions. We will be asking in this chapter as well, what has Christianity done to Idɔma? Has Idɔma been robbed of its life, culture and traditions by Christianity or has Idɔma been able to persuade Christianity to translate itself into the Idɔma culture and life as it did in the Aramaic, and Hellenistic cultures, philosophies and world view?

We will also be focusing in this chapter, on how Idɔma discovers her selfhood and develops and articulates Christianity and theology in her own Idɔma concrete historical and cultural situation. We hope as well in this chapter, to attempt to liberate Christian theology from its paralysing captivity to western norms and relate it to the Idɔma cultural norms. The Idɔma have been converted to the western, Latin and Greek cultures in embracing Christianity, and now the Idɔma are asking: How do we see and embrace or interact with Christianity from the Idɔma perspective and point of view? This chapter will hopefully attempt to suggest the Idɔma articulation of liturgy with specific reference to church music in which Christianity must be allowed to take root in the soil of Idɔma culture in which they are planted, and how it may grow in structure as an institution of our own and not something alien. We will conclude with a specific reference to the effect of the Idɔma Bible translation on the Idɔma.
The EIGHTH AND FINAL CHAPTER will draw out from the study, those conclusions that are sustained by the thesis. We might go on to assess, the degree to which it can be claimed that Igbo Christianity is a distinctive cultural expression of Christianity in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria and the contribution this can make to mission scholarship, the reception, and development of Christianity in West Africa and African Christianity as a whole.
CHAPTER TWO

IDOMA PEOPLE: IDENTITY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the Idoma people and highlight specifically the areas of conflict in the Idoma interaction with Christianity. The discussion in this chapter would also help to highlight how to understand a non-literate society whose identity is based in the memory, the language and the social culture of the people. The question of where one comes from cannot be satisfactorily answered from sociological and anthropological investigations, but rather through active participation in the life and culture of one’s own people. From such position we would hope to penetrate the Idoma people. Even though the Idoma are very secretive people, and sometimes very difficult to understand, we would hopefully go beyond this barrier of secrecy as an insider and infiltrate the Idoma through their identity in forms of origin, language, social structures and organisations and specifically focus on three rites of passage; birth, marriage, and burial, and how these contribute to the Idoma identity and their implications for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

2.1 Idoma Origin

Idoma is one of the ethnic groups in Benue State Nigeria. The name Idoma originally applied to the Ocobo in Ohimini Local Government Area, Agadagba and Ugboju1 districts of Idoma, but now the name Idoma has been accepted more widely and

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1 See the Map of the Idoma Districts on page ix for the areas of Ocobo in Oglewu, and Agadabga in Ugboju districts
become the name by which all the Idoma ethnic groups designate themselves, and are today addressed as such by their neighbours.

For the purpose of our study, suffice to say at the moment that, Idoma people today number over one million people. They live in a strip of land or occupy a belt of territory that stretches from the southern bank of the River Benue south for about three hundred kilometres to the northern fringes of Igbo land. The Idoma territory lies between latitudes 60 North longitudes 80 east and covers an area of approximately six thousand square kilometres.

The Idoma are bounded by the Tiv, and Igede to the east, the Igala people to the west, and the Nsukka, Ezza and Igbo to the south, and the Benue river to the north.

This geographical outline of Idoma had been defined since the mid-nineteenth century. However, in spite of some administrative changes introduced during the colonial and postcolonial periods, Idoma ethnic label and territory remained virtually unchanged. Idoma today consists of twenty two administrative districts spread over seven local government areas of Benue State, namely: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Ohimini, Ogbadigbo, Okpokwu and Otukpo Local Governments. Otukpo is the headquarters of

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2 Idoma neighbours are the Tivs in Benue State, Igalas in Kogi State, Doma in Nassarawa State, Yala in Cross River State, Angers in Plateau State, Jukuns in Taraba State, and Nkum in Ogoja.

3 See Otukpo Local Government report 1976:6

4 Although, Igede people do not see themselves as Idoma today, from the evidences of oral traditions, it could be successfully suggested that Igede are Idoma. Especially from the traditions of the succession to the throne of the ce Idoma, which Igede held for over 45 years until 1996, when The ce Idoma travelled (died) showing that the Igedes are Idoma. According to the Idoma traditional law of the succession to the throne of the ce Idoma, a non Idoma or a slave will never be allowed to the throne of The Agabaidu of Idoma. On this ground alone, one could argue that, even though references are made to them as Idoma neighbours, we are of the view that the Igedes are Idoma. It is hoped that a later study will investigate this.

5 See The Benue State map on page vii for locations of these Local Governments
the Idoma traditional council\(^6\) and the home of the paramount Chief of Idoma. The

\(\text{Exc. Idoma}\)

Idoma people speak a common Idoma language with four variant tonal dialects as spoken in the north by the Agatu in Agatu local Government Area, in central Idoma spoken by the Ocobo, Oglewu in Ohimini Local Government Area, Otukpo, Adoka, Ugboju in Otukpo Local Government Area, and parts of Okpokwu Local Government Area, in the west by Okpokwu and Ogbadibo Local governments; and finally in the south spoken by the Agilas, Ulayi and Igwumales in Ado local Government.

Other ethnic groups also live in Idoma, and speak a different language from the Idoma language. These are Ezza and Izzi peoples who are sub-groups of Nsukka and Abakiliki Igbo in Enugu State. Uffiia and Effium who are sub-groups of the Orring language from Cross-River State. Both the Uffiia that is spoken by the Utokons, and Effium spoken in Agila, are to be found today in Ado Local Government. There are also the Igedes\(^7\) in Otukpo and Oju local governments and Akpa in Otukpo Local Government Area.

As Erim rightly stated,

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\text{until modern times, the Idoma were one of the least known peoples of this region. They were remote from the point of view of European contact in the early years of British Colonial administration in Nigeria. The greater part of Idoma land remained largely unknown until the second decade of this century.}^8
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\(^6\) Otukpo until 1976, had also been the political, religious and administrative headquarters of Idoma.

\(^7\) The Igedes recently have refused to be called or known as Idoma, but then, Who are the Igedes? This is what future study will hopefully investigate.

This is why it is very important here to place the Idoma people in a proper historical context which is essential for a better understanding of the Idoma, and for a better appreciation for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

Idoma is also the name of the language spoken by the Idoma people and the name of their land as well. The word Idoma therefore has three connotations: the people, their language and land. According to some sources⁹ the use of the term Idoma as a generic appellation for all the people speaking a language that goes by the same name is a fairly recent phenomenon. For example, Erim¹⁰ sees the word Idoma as “anglicanised” form of Idu’ma [i.e., born of Idu], and argues that Idu is the putative father of the original Idoma peoples. Erim constructed the following genealogy to buttress this claim:

It was Idu who begot all the Idoma.  
He also begot the following children:  
- Ananawoogeno who begot the people of Igwumale;  
- Olinaogwu who begot the people of Ugboju;  
- Idum who begot the people of Adoka  
- Agabi who begot the people of Oglewu;  
- Ebeibi who begot the people of Umogidi in Adoka, and  
- Ode who begot the people of Yala....¹¹

Despite the elaborate genealogy that Erim who is an outside investigator, constructed, the Idoma for several reasons have not accepted the putative father theory of all Idoma groups. Firstly, as Erim, rightly, noted himself, there is the erroneous belief by early colonial anthropologists who collected genealogies from which these claims are derived, that linguistic and cultural unity amongst groups like Idoma, implied

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¹¹ Ibid., p. 9
common ancestry\textsuperscript{12}. Secondly, it is important to note here that of all the twenty-two Id\textsuperscript{2}ma districts, only, Ugboju, Adoka and Otukpo claim descent from Idu.\textsuperscript{13} If the claims of these three districts are true, at what point in history did they separate to become three distinct entities? I believe this was long before their migrations from the Id\textsuperscript{2}ma ancestral homeland in Apa\textsuperscript{14}

Thirdly, there is no oral evidence in the other nineteen districts of Id\textsuperscript{2}ma that supports Erim’s theory of Idu as the putative father of the Id\textsuperscript{2}ma.\textsuperscript{15}

If the word Id\textsuperscript{2}ma did not derive from \textit{Idu’ma} - born of Idu, then, where does its origin lie? Major K. Officer a colonial administrator of the ancient Doma in the

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} See Otukpo Local Government, \textit{Archives}, OT/LG, Geneology/1.
\textsuperscript{14} All Id\textsuperscript{2}ma claim Apa as their ancestral homeland. Apa has been identified as a region of the ancient Kwararafa Confederacy, which, prior to the fifteenth century was under the hegemony of the Abakpawariga. The modern location of this region has not been successfully ascertained. While Meek for example in the 1930s suggested that Apa is between longitude 10 and 12, latitude 8 and 9. Justice A.P. Anyebe argues that Apa was located somewhere along Gindindorowa [Gindinwaya]-Wukari road in modern Taraba State. Armstrong (1955:147ff) earlier suggested that the Ife tribe commonly called the Apa-tribe is of unknown origin. And that different theories suggests that, they are of Filane extraction or that they are a branch of Yoruba tribe or the Igara, whose identity have now merged with that of Okpoto in whose country they settled at the end of the fifteenth century and intermarried with them. The Apa tribe are said to have lived at Apa near Ibi and known to have fled from the Jukuns in about 1490 A.D, under the leadership of Chief Idoko who was accompanied by the Hausa. And that they first settled in Agatu, engaged in a war, and were defeated by the Jukuns, who took their canoes as spoil of war, and fought the refugee Apas along the Banks of river Benue and killing the Chief of the Apasin Amagidi village, east of Bagana. And that one of the chief’s son Aiyagba Doko fled to Awuru market, and encamped there. Omeppa who was the head of all the Okpotos, which are probably the same race as Id\textsuperscript{2}ma, who occupied that whole region, now Bassa in Kogi State went peacefully to meet them and allowed them to settle in their midst. Erim (1981:15) on his part argues that depending on the period of investigation, Apa could mean a region of the Kwararafa Confederacy, when the Capital was further south, or the name for the Confederacy when by the seventeenth century, it had virtually shrunk to a Jukun State. Where is Apa? Who are its subjects remained as confused as ever. However for our study and in the light of Id\textsuperscript{2}ma oral traditions, we will suggest that, the ancestral homeland of the Id\textsuperscript{2}ma was most probably Apa when it was a region of the Kwararafa Confederacy before the sixteenth century. We arrived at this position because, Erim’s second and third identities of Apa, merely represents geographical shifts in locational sites after the migrations of the Id\textsuperscript{2}ma commenced.

\textsuperscript{15} During fieldwork in Id\textsuperscript{2}ma July-September 1997, Erim’s theory of Idu as the putative father of all Id\textsuperscript{2}ma was tested among 57 persons, 3 each from the different geographical areas of the 19 districts of Id\textsuperscript{2}ma, and none of these people could confirm his theory.
current Nassarawa State\textsuperscript{16} argues that the name \textit{Id\=ma} is a corruption by colonial administrators of the ancient Doma, which he postulates was the pristine home of all \textit{Id\=ma}, hence the reference to it as \textit{Id\=ma n'\=kwu}. However glorious this argument may look, there is no oral evidence in all of the twenty-two districts of \textit{Id\=ma} to support Officer's view.\textsuperscript{17} Where then, does the word \textit{Id\=ma} come from and who are they?

2.2 Who Are The Id\=ma?

The history of the origins of the \textit{Id\=ma} is as problematic as the history of many other Nigerian peoples. This is particularly so because of the anthropological definition of the word origins. Anthropologically, origins refer to the emergence of species. To try and situate the origins of the \textit{Id\=ma} people or any other people within the confines of this definition seems like embarking on a historical exercise that is devoid of primary evidence. This type of evidence is very important because the major distinguishing features between one African people and the other are usually language, culture and historical experience. For \textit{Id\=ma} in particular, there are a few problems. For example, \textit{Id\=ma} up to 1924 remained a pre-literate society. Moreover, archaeology, which could have given us some hard facts on the \textit{Id\=ma} past, is still in its infancy. Despite this probable handicap, efforts have been made by a few researchers to help illuminate this seemingly difficult aspect of \textit{Id\=ma} history. The researchers, armed with methodological tools that emphasise a multi-disciplinary approach, have been able to minimise slightly some of the difficulties and problems that are associated with \textit{Id\=ma} origins. Notwithstanding as Erim has pointed out in his work, \textit{The Idoma}

\textsuperscript{16} Doma was part of Plateau state, until 1996 when they became part of Nasarawa State, by Decree 1996 on State creation of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria.
Nationality\textsuperscript{18} to pose the question in this manner only compounds the problem of finding an answer. This is particularly so because the various groups which today collectively are called and refer to themselves as Idmma came from various sources and directions.\textsuperscript{19} For example, some of the Idmma migrants came from Apa and settled in the Kwararafa / Jukun Kingdom with common Idmma language. Meek\textsuperscript{21}, suggested that the Idmma of Onyagede in Ohimini Local Government Area, Okpiko, Awume and Agadagba in Otukpo Local Government Area migrated from Ankpa in Kogi State, and that Agatu, in Agatu local Government Area, Akpa, Otukpo, Adoka, in Otukpo Local Government Area, Ocobo, Oglewu in Ohimini local Government Area, Igwumale, Ulayi and Ijibgan clans in Ado local Government Area migrated originally from Apa.\textsuperscript{22} Macleod in his report on the Western Areas of Okwoga Division suggested that Okpoga, and Ugbokolo in the current Okpokwu Local Government area came from Ida in Kogi State; Edumoga from the Benue region, and that Otukpa, Orokam, Owukpa and Ichama are a mixture of Okpoto and Igbos.\textsuperscript{23} Brook, in his ethnographical report on The Okpoto and Egedde Showing Connection with Neighbouring Tribes argued that the Agilas in the Ado Local Government Area came to Ida from Apa and from there to their present location in Idmma\textsuperscript{24}. While some of these colonial anthropologists may be right in their various suggestions, very little evidence is found in the Idmma oral traditions in all of the Idmma districts as migrating from any where else other than Apa the ancestral home land of Idmma.

\textsuperscript{17} Officer's theory, like that of Erim was also tested during fieldwork in Idmma, July-September 1997, it could not be confirmed or attested.
\textsuperscript{18} See E. O. Erim, Idoma Nationality, 1981, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{19} For an interesting discussions on the various phases of the Idmma migrations, see E. O Erim Idoma Nationality, 1981,p.3 ff.
\textsuperscript{21} See C. K. Meek, "Ethnographical Report on Idoma Division" AR\ ANT \ 1 \ 6 Vol 1,1925
\textsuperscript{22} See earlier note on Apa in page 5.
\textsuperscript{23} See T. M, Macleod, (Capt) "Reports on the Western Areas of Okwoga Division" AR \ ANT \ 1 \ 6 Vol. 1 1925.
Therefore some scholars who made some attempts to locate the origins of the Idoma in most cases end up in some historical cul de sac.

Idoma as Armstrong suggested, for all intents and purpose is a linguistic appellation. His amateur study of the Idoma language suggests eight Idoma speaking people: Afu, Alago, Akeya, Etulo, Egedde, Yatchet, Yala and Idoma. Besides some dialectical differences, structurally and phonetically, all these groups with the exception of Igede and Akweya can be classified as Idoma-speaking. Within the Idoma unit of the language, Armstrong identifies four major dialectical divides. These are the northern dialects, made up of Agatu in Agatu Local Government Area and Ocekwu in Apa Local government Area, the central dialects comprising, Oglewu Onyagede in the current Ohimini Local Government Area, Adoka, Ugboju, and Otukpo in the Otukpo Local Government Area, the western dialects comprising of Edumoga, Ichama, Okpoga, Oroka, Otuka and Owukpa, and the southern dialects made up of Agila, Igwumale, Ijibgam and Ulayi. The identification of these dialects seems interesting, but fall short of the help it should have given us by leaving out some groups that are very crucial for any discussion on Idoma identity such as Ocobo.

However for the purpose of our study, our concern would be with the Idoma group that occupy Ado, Agatu, Apa, Ohimini, Ogbadibo, Okpokwu, Otukpo and Oju local government Areas of Benue State. These groups have common traditions that recognise ‘Apa’ as their ancestral homeland from where they migrated to their

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24 See J. N. Brook, “Ethnographical Report on the Okpoto and Egedde Showing Connection with Neighbouring Tribes” AR\ANT\1\6 Vol., 1 1925.
26 For full discussions on this dialectical classifications, see R. G. Armstrong, Idoma Speaking Peoples, 1955, p. 41ff, and p. 93 in particular.
27 It is believed and supported by one of the most powerful oral tradition sources in Idoma-the Alekwu cultic traditions that the Idoma came from Apa in the defunct Kararafa Jukun kingdom, settled at
present day location. In all of Idoma there are two major reasons for the shift of the Idoma from their ancestral homeland. Firstly, there was a prolonged chieftancy dispute between Idoma and other subjects of Apa Kingdom in which it is believed that the Idoma apparently lost out in both the struggle and the subsequent civil strifes. This first view attributes the Idoma migration from Apa to a number of political crises, which degenerated into warfare with Idoma losing out.

Secondly, the available oral history points to $fu\-nya$ the horse war as the cause of the Idoma migration out of Apa. One tradition has it that after leaving Apa, they settled in Igala land, from where they moved to the present Idoma location displacing its original inhabitants which some of the traditions claim are the Igbe people. This second view identifies a protracted warfare between the Idoma and the Hausa Fulanis. It has been suggested that the $fu\-nya$ the horse war that eventually drove the Idoma

different areas at different periods in history in the present day Idoma land. For more details on the location of Apa, see earlier note on p. 25.

28 $fu\-nya$-meaning horse war, refers to the invasion by the Hausa Fulanis in the early fifteenth century. The studies of the Kano chronicles had shown that two Kano kings: Yaji (1349-1385) and Kanajiji (1390-1419), led imperial and slave raiding campaigns into the Kwararafa region where Apa the ancestral homeland of the Idoma was located. Other notable invaders at this period include Queen Amina of Zaria and Mai Idris Aloma of Borno who at different times attempted to subjugate the Kwararafa confederacy. By the end of the fifteenth century, Mai Ali Ghaji of Borno (1462-1518) terminated Kwararafa threat to his empire when he sacked the confederacy. This development not only led to a considerable shift in the location of the power base of the Abakwariga, but also eroded a good measure of their hegemony. With the decline of Abakwariga political power, their vassals, like the Jukuns became independent and attempted to fill the power vacuum reacted by the demise of Abakwariga power. This process meant the subjugation of formal vassals like the Idoma speaking peoples. These Idoma groups, faced with the possibility of losing their newly won independence and recolonization by the Jukun, decided to migrate southward. The Abakwariga objected to the Idoma migration, which resulted in war with the Idoma who fought with bow and arrow and the Hausa Fulanis with sword and spare on horse back, resulting in the Idoma calling the war $fu\-nya$-horse war. This $fu\-nya$ is the principal cause of the Idoma migration to their present location. After the 1860, there was a collapse in the World Slave market. This decline in slave trade meant that the coastal supply of firearms was cut off. This gave the Hausa Fulanis a disadvantage over a lesser militarily equipped peoples of the Kwararafa kingdom such as Idomas, Igals and Jukuns with their poisoned arrows, $yi su$ (a), leading to an increased resistance, especially by the Idoma, resulting in the Hausa Fulani’s inability to override the Idoma.
out of Apa their ancestral home, refers to the invasions of the upper Benue and Gongola valleys in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century by the Hausas, Borno, Dingyi and Chamba peoples.\(^{29}\)

In the light of the discussions so far, it may be, rightly, suggested, that any analysis of the evolution of the Idoma ethnicity and identity that is not based primarily on the Idoma language, shared historical experience and to a lesser extent territory will not be a correct assessment or analysis of the Idoma people. This is why it is difficult for the Idoma people to accept Erim’s argument that “the heterogeneous groups which today answer to Idoma did not have a common identity prior to the British rule in this part of Nigeria.”\(^{30}\)

What of the common Idoma language, the unique Idoma culture and common shared historical experience, which in our view is one of the solid means of determining the identity of any given people? From Erim’s observations, he seems to suggest that the only common factor that determines the identity of any given group is the unfortunate British colonial rule in that area. To any Idoma person one of the most binding factors that determines the Idoma identity is the Idoma language and culture which is unique and distinct to the Idoma people. A later chapter will unfold this argument in detail.

Erim’s erroneous view on the Idoma identity was re-echoed again by another outside investigator on the Idoma people Patience Ahmed when she said, “it seems that before the British rule, the Idoma people did not have a common identity”\(^{31}\). What

\(^{29}\) See earlier note on p. 29.


does Ahmed mean by common identity? If a common language and culture are to be accepted as the solid mark of a true identity of a given people, then both Erim and Ahmed were wrong in their sweeping generalisations on the Idoma identity.

The development of Idoma ethnicity has some link to a current extinct group called the Akpɔtɔ.$^{32}$ Although the identification of this group and the nature of their real relationship with the Idoma remain very unclear, most of the students of Idoma history, and Idoma oral tradition agree to some extent that, some part of the present Idoma land was originally occupied by the Akpɔtɔ. Other groups including the ancestors of the Igala, Idoma and Ebira migrants gradually assimilated the Akpɔtɔ.$^{33}$

Other lines of inquiry that are available to us on the origin of Idoma ethnicity are the works of two colonial officers: Meek and Palmer. In 1925, Meek wrote:

...In the early Christian era, a greater portion of central Nigeria was occupied by races with names such as Mbum, Mbutu and

$^{32}$ Akpɔtɔ - are said to be the original inhabitants of the present Idoma land, Others classified them as the Idoma. While their identity remains a matter of scholarship controversy, the Idoma refused completely either to be called Akpɔtɔ or referred to as such. During field work in Idoma July-September 1997, the view that the Akpɔtɔ could be the present Idoma people was tested in all the Idoma 22 districts. There is no oral tradition any where in Idoma, that would support Idoma been called or referred to as Akpɔtɔ.

$^{33}$ Erim suggested that the Idoma migrants retained part of the language of the Akpɔtɔ group, but rejected their name. However during the colonial period, the name Akpɔtɔ was used in a derogatory manner to refer to the Idoma. Oral traditions of the Igala, Ebira and Idoma all shows that the Akpɔtɔ were the earliest inhabitants of the present territories of these groups. Both Armstrong and Ukwedeh support the view that the Akpɔtɔ played a major role in the formation of Igala, Idoma and Ebira Societies. Armstrong (1955:83ff) in particular argues that the Idoma together with the Yoruba and the Igala [all of which belongs to the Kwa language group ] formed the same social complex within the upper Benue region until about six thousand years ago when this group disintegrate. His hypothesis was largely based on glottochronology and lexicostatistical data also posits that this proto-society had the same concept of time; worshipped a host of local gods; as well as observing similar taboos and totems, and that the society broke up when the Yoruba separated from the Idoma. Although Armstrong’s argument attracted a number of criticisms such as the methodological defects inherent in lexicostatistics, and more specifically, the degree of the validity of inferences that can be drawn from anthropological linguistics. For instance, not all speakers of a language are derived from one tribe. This, however, does not invalidate the claim that a proto Yoruba-Igala-Idoma gave birth to the present Idoma. But how far this claim can be sustained remains a matter of scholastic controversy.
Mbafun which refers to tribes that had been driven into the central part of Cameroon and the southern provinces of Nigeria...one of such groups were the Hau who are ancestors of the Doma hence the name Adamawa. Doma is also the Jukun word for subject peoples like the Idoma or Dama of present Benue Province.\(^{34}\)

Meek seems to be suggesting here that as early as the eighteenth century the Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma or their ancestors were already resident within the upper Benue valley. But there is no evidence or record in Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma, either oral or written, that suggests that the Doma people of the present Nassarawa State of Nigeria are the Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma or the ancestors of the Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma people of Benue State. Rather the Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma of Benue State see the Doma people as their runaway children and slaves that live in the bush. Similarly, Palmer wrote that,

\begin{quote}
In 1918 during the time of Ibn Said there was an allusion to a king or kingdom situated in the Ngumatti district of Brono called Fali or M’bum. The Variants of the name Idoma include Doma, Doma or Damawa which refer to a particular people and their language.\(^{35}\)
\end{quote}

These peoples according to Palmer were, subjected to a Jukun aristocracy who held sway over them through occult and spiritual influences\(^{36}\). Again Palmer’s view is another solitary hypothesis that has no base or support in the Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma oral history and traditions. The early Arabic trader and European sources from which Meek and Palmer draw their conclusions, seems rather too slim and hardly enough to enable us to move from the realm of speculation to that of concrete historical experience especially those of Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma origins.

Capt. F. Byng-Hall in his article “Northern Tribes and Emirates”, argues that the Id\(\dot{\text{m}}\)ma probably


\(^{36}\) Ibid.
were originally one and the same tribe as Okpoto, whose customs are similar, despite the traces of four hundred years of comparative civilisation through the intercourse and with the Apa, which the Idoma never enjoyed.\(^{37}\)

While he may be right that Idoma did not have a happy connection with Apa, the ancestral homeland of the Idoma, the Idoma as early discussions have shown rejected being called or identified as Okpoto or Akpọ people.

The one authentic and indigenous source that we can now turn to, in our quest for Idoma origin and the development of Idoma ethnicity is the oral documentary hypothesis as chanted in the Alekwu cultic folk music as to the origin of Idoma. In this regard we will provide the translation of the Alekwu Abọ chant\(^{38}\) and the English transliteration to enable us established the Idoma pre-colonial history and origins. This was how Alekwu Abọ put it,

\[\begin{align*}
\text{EEESEEYI} & \quad \text{a call for attention} \\
\text{Id=} & \quad \text{Id=ma the home of the father} \\
\text{Ad} & \quad \text{that begot me} \\
\text{n=} & \quad \text{Where does Id=} \\
\text{Id} & \quad \text{come from?} \\
\text{ma } & \quad \text{What is the root of Id=} \\
\text{u} & \quad \text{ma?} \\
\text{a=la } & \quad \text{Id=} \text{ma used to live in Apa} \\
\text{Ap=} & \quad \text{Id=} \text{ma is crowd, power and wealth} \\
\text{we } & \quad \text{A Tiger kills, a Tiger eats} \\
\text{ewa } & \quad \text{A Lion kills, a Lion eats} \\
\text{sf} & \quad \text{Id=} \text{ma kills, but} \\
\text{a} & \quad \text{le} \\
\text{le} & \quad \text{le} \\
\text{le} \\
\text{le} \\
\text{le} \\
\text{le} \\
\end{align*}\]

They said, Idrama should not eat

Idrama exclaimed Uwooo

This can’t be

Fight started, war started

Idrama’s bridge collapse

Water overcomes and swallows Idrama

It was the Idrama share

that they refused Idrama

Caused the fight that made

Idrama to leave Apa

Secondly

Why did Idrama leave Apa?

If you aim at a bird that is about to fly, it will fly higher

Horse war is that last arrow aim

that finally moved Idrama from Apa

Apa a land of kaka kpe

A land that is enough for food and drink

when Idrama left Apa

They went to the land of Jukun, Ida

Before they came to the present

Idmaland

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38 The tape of the Alekwu Aboje chant which was recorded during fieldwork in 1980 for the Idrama Bible translation work is with the present writer.
Aje n’obo je lọ wọ̀lọ́ a\textsuperscript{39} A land that their Lord gave to them

It could be observed from this authentic Idomma oral historical source that the Idomma was originally living in Apa. And things seemed to be going well, they grew, multiplied and they were rich and powerful. However, at certain stage of their stay in Apa they were refused a well deserved honour or dignity in Apa.\textsuperscript{40} The Idomma felt that was unfair in that as the saying goes in Idomma, the lion hunts and eats or the tiger, why were the Idomma refused their well earned position or honour or power? They fought for this, and they lost out in the fight. From that moment they started thinking of when to leave Apa. The last straw that broke the camel’s back was the \textit{efunyà} – the horse war that we referred to earlier in our discussions\textsuperscript{41} that finally moved Idomma from Apa their ancestral homeland. When they left Apa, they travelled via Wukari, and Ida to their present Idomaland.

In the light of our discussions so far, it could be concluded that the Idomma came from Apa the defunct Kwarafa Jukun Kingdom in the current Taraba State of Nigeria, settled at different areas at different periods in history in the present day Idomaland. The Idomma had to migrate from Apa due to a number of political crises which degenerated into a warfare with Idomma losing out, and \textit{efunyà} – the horse war, which refers to the invasion of the Kwarafa Kingdom by the Hausa Fulanis in the early fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Alekwu Abọje chant, 1980.
\textsuperscript{40} According to His Royal Highness, Late Dr. Abraham Ohpabi, The Agabaidu of Idomma, When asked during fieldwork for Bible translation on the 7th of July 1980 on What was the honour that the Idomma were refused in Apa, he replied, “this honour that the Idomma were refused was in relation to a Chieftancy title which was theirs as a result of achievements in war, ethical standard of the Apa community, and the chronological list of succession to the Chieftancy office.
Who are the Idmma? Could the evidence of material culture answer this question? The Idmma up to the coming of Christianity, the Jukun and the Hausa fulanis were not able to absorb them. Rather, the Idmma had been able to resist being absorbed until the coming of Christianity. Why were the Idmma able to resist all forms of absorption prior to the coming of Christianity? This was due to their very firm or tight internal organisations through family, community, social organisations, the pattern of Idmma agriculture and the unique Idmma culture.

2.3 Idmma Social Organizations And Pre-Colonial Political Systems And Economy

2.3.1 Ipuunu

_Ipuunu_ is the basic primary unit of the Idmma social structure. This consists of the man as the head of _Ipuunu_, his wife or wives, their children and their sons wives and children. _Ipuunu_ normally will occupy an area of family land with a group of houses around the open space, with each wife having her own house, and the man with his own house. There are also other huts within the _Ipuunu_ such as _Inuegi_ - granaries, with grinding stones and _Itakpa_ which is the central meeting place of any _Ipuunu_ in Idmma.

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41 See earlier discussion on pages 29-30.
42 Ibid.
43 _Ipuunu_ is the primary Idmma family.
44 As earlier observed, a man is culturally allowed to marry more than one wife in Idmma.
45 For further details on the role of _Ipuunu_ in the Idmma society, see Otukpo Local Government Archives, Idmma social, political, and Economic Organisations, 1958.
2.3.2 *Ipuzma*

Closely related to *Ipu'na* is the *Ipuzma*. *Ipuzma* in most cases is the male ancestry line made up of a very careful sub-lineage of the *Ipu'na* - that is those who are of the same birth. *Ipuzma* can expand with several related *Ipuzma* constituting themselves into a wider lineage. *Ipuzma* are to some extent a political unit normally possessing a more or less unified identifiable piece of land, whose members are related to one another in the male lineage and can undoubtedly claim their descent from a common male ancestor. According to the *ccidoma*, the Agabaidu of *Idoma*, their names are distinctively called “ai” meaning “sons”. *Ipuzma* is not exogamous, though it is highly stressed and considered a good thing to marry outside one’s *ipuzna* and possibly one’s *Ipuzma*. It is a however a known rule in *Idoma* that persons that have either a common father’s father or mother’s mother should not marry each other.47

2.3.3 The formation of *zpu* a group of *Ipuzma* forms a bigger unit called *zpu*.48 The formation of *zpu* again is traced to the male ancestral common lineage. *zpu* is currently one of the strongest political units in *Idoma* life from the pre-colonial *Idoma* until now. As later discussions will highlight, they are the determining factors of Christianity entering or making contact with any *Idoma* group of persons. The head of the *zpu* is the *ce*-chief, who is the *nyakwa ce* - the most senior elder. He is the *Ondujia*- the custodian owner of the Land. This makes him the owner of the *Ajia* Shrine-where the whole *zpu* comes to *piajia* - worship and sacrifice to the land at the *ikpbajia* - the

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46 This is the *Idoma* patrilineage.
47 This view was confirmed as a general practice in the whole of *Idoma*, by the *ccidoma* the paramount chief of the *Idoma* people during fieldwork interview in his office in July 16th, 1997.
48 *Zpu* is the *Idoma* clan and a bigger family unit in *Idoma*. *Zpu* embraces more that two families.
earth-shrine., and the ancestral cult *Alekwu* and in this capacity he is known and addressed as *Adalokwul*—the father of the dead or the ancestors' spirits.

2.3.4 *syi*: Idóma Mini State

By *syi* the Idóma mini-state, we use state in this context to mean a body of persons politically and culturally organised in a given territory with a sovereign character. The primary purpose of the Idóma mini state is to maintain law and order by a system of law that is applicable to the Idóma society. The mini-state concept here may, also, refer to a society that lacked powerful royal dynasties or highly centralised government. The Idóma mini state lacks the urban capitals, and had small populations and occupied small territories usually referred to as *Ipuuma*. The basic building unit of the Idóma mini-state as earlier discussed was the partrilineage *Ipu* pu, which in its biological-territorial settings is made up of one or more lineages *Ipu* ma who identify a common ancestor. Men who had acquired status through age and wealth ran the government of the pre-colonial Idóma mini-state. Collectively these men are referred to as *ai-gab* or council of the elders. These men together with a recognised —*ché*-chief oversee the various institutions through which their state is administered. The *Ofila*-village community council was one of most important of these institutions.

The *Ofila* is the general assembly made up of adult male family heads in each *Ipu* nu. According to the Idóma tradition and the testimony of Mrs. Obo Okpabi, women and children may attend these councils, but, while the children are only there to listen

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49 *Eyi* could also be defined as the Idóma higher step of regional confederacy.

50 *Ai-gab* are the titles for the community office holders. They serve as councillors in their various portfolios or offices in the community.


52 Mrs. Obo Okpabi, fieldwork interview, 20th August 1996. Obo is the most senior wife of His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of Idóma.
and learn, the most elderly women who are classified and given male status\textsuperscript{53} may have a say or contribution to make at this assembly on behalf of the women. This ojila serves as a primary legislative adjunct to the community’s body politic. The ojila approves the election results into the lineage head and other important titles. They are also responsible for sanctioning and implementing group functions, i.e., public works, state festivals, and mobilisation of able-bodied men for war. All the activities of Ojila are however carefully controlled and monitored by the council of elders, who in our view are the real leaders and rulers of the Idoma.\textsuperscript{54}

Next to Ojila is the ai-uta - sons of justice, which were made up of Idoma youths with the responsibilities of enforcing the directives from the Ojila and lineage head. They collected fines, physically dealt with individuals or group offenders and supplied the bulk of the military force for the community. As Magid correctly noted, because the ai-uta were primarily an enforcement agency, their field of operations was usually difficult to monitor and control. They therefore, had the propensity, and often did become a power of their own once they were mobilised.\textsuperscript{55} As a result of this, the elders seldom mobilised them until it became absolutely necessary to do so.

The maintenance of law and order, correction of social evils and punishment of those who breached the laws of the Idoma land were vested in the hands of a number of societies: Ny’gny’gnyk, Owuna, Achukwu, and Ikpokwu.\textsuperscript{56} However, membership of

\textsuperscript{53} These are very elderly women who have long passed menopause, who are classified as having the ability to communicate with the ancestors on behalf of the Idoma women.


\textsuperscript{56} These are male secret societies that women are denied membership of. The women are also barred from seeing some of the masquerades of these societies, especially, the Achukwu, as doing so will result in their becoming barren, or they will kpoebi - that is committing a taboo, that will require
these societies according to Chief Oko, The Agbo of Ocobo, were restricted to male adults who have distinguished themselves in war, hunting and agriculture.57 As earlier noted, the government of each mini-state was run by a council of elders—the Anyákwa xe, with some having a specialised portfolio which necessitated their daily interactions with the lineage head xe. Such Aigab are the xeayi, Aidokoanya, and maddaci gjila. They could be rightly described as the right hand men of the lineage head. Of lesser Aigab are the Achadu - the royal undertaker and king maker, kédi - the administrator of Sassed ordeal, kégi - the commander in chief of the Army and the skpácu - the land administrator or land distributor and xooliči - market administrator. In the Idɔma tradition, these lesser titles are not hereditary, but acquired with age and wealth. The emphasis here is on individual achievement, e.g., execution of enterprise or spectacular physical courage in the defence of the community or the execution of a dangerous mission. Later chapters will highlight the roles of these Idɔma titleholders in the Idɔma reception and development of Christianity.

At the apex of all Idɔma mini-states is the xe - Chief or Lineage head. This is the most senior office in the mini-state. According to the traditional office of the Acadu58 of Idɔmaland xe is chosen in consideration of age signifying genealogical proximity to the ancestors. Also personal wealth and valour are essential in choosing specific animal and bird sacrifices in order to purify them, and for their womb to be opened again for child birth.

58 In the Idɔma tradition, the Acadu of Idɔmaland is the royal undertaker and the king maker. His office is both political and spiritual in his choice of a new king, and as he consults the Ajɛ-earth goddess and Alekwu—the ancestors before a king is chosen. Traditionally, the Achadu must be a male as women especially the young ones who have not reached menopause yet, are not allowed to be an eye witness some of the initiation rites of a new king, and when a king is being buried.
which member of the senior Aigab—ministers becomes the z<. The Idema z< is not first among equals. Although both the Aigab and Ojila could curtail certain aspects of his power, he wielded real power as far as the people of his state were concerned. For instance, acting with the Aigab, he could promulgate ine - laws or ordinances that had the force of law. Any individual or community who breached these ordinances was summarily dealt with. In the Idema tradition, the z< enjoyed certain privileges that set him apart from even the senior Aigab. For example, the skins of such animals as lions, tigers or leopards killed within his domain went to him. So did the hind legs of cows and buffaloes. He also received portions of fines collected by the Uta and the Abo oluhi and could confiscate disputed properties or stray slaves and animals found in his domain. All these are fixed obligations. Outside these fixed obligations the z< received gifts from numerous favour seekers, and portion of meat from animals killed during communally organised hunts or festivals, such as Ejealekwu festival, the Ajọpọ festival. The z< is the both religious and political head of Idema. In places where this is not so, he plays the role of communicating the wishes of the ancestors to his people and vice versa. This in fact accounts for the elaborate cultural rituals undertaken before a titled elder assumes the position of z<. These rituals religiously legitimised the office and articulated its political authority. For example, during the z<’s installation, he dies to his family and all his lineage attachments. He loses all his personal belongings to the society as a whole. The Alekwu ancestral mask performs the burial ceremony of ṣe o h'kla'

60 These rituals are top secrets that are not to be talked, discussed or written about. However, if you are a male indigenous Idema man, you could under an oath of secrecy be allowed to read, Justice A. P. Anyebe’s unpublished paper, “The Idoma Secrets”, 1975.
*okwu* - this is the opening of the path to the grave, and to the spirit world for him. He at this point loses his personal identity as Mr. A, or B, and loses all the obligations that he owes to the individuals and even to his own family. He becomes a king, owning no property or wealth of his own, but as a king he owns the whole land and its citizens.

2.3.5 *lf* - *Anyia* - AGE GROUP, SLAVERY AND WOMEN.

2.3.5.1. *lf* - age groups are a highly developed association in Idoma. Its principal aim is a mutual aid club for social activities. They work and relate to one another in units, and always act on the collective voice of the group. However, they are not outside the control of the village elders. Should their activities become suspicious, the whole age group set would be invited to the council of elders for discussions and explanations. The outcome of such meetings is usually a caution, or a ban on that particular age group for a limited time or indefinitely for a very serious problem. We will later highlight the significance of the age group in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity later in chapter seven on the Idoma Christianity today.

2.3.5.2. *lf* - Slavery Idoma was repeatedly overrun and raided for slaves by the Hausa Fulanis, who had a slave market in Onyagde called *Olohiabakpa*- Hausa market, where slaves were brought from other parts of the North and sold to the slave traders for onward transportation via the Ida coast to the western countries. The Idoma would in a few situations keep a number of slaves themselves, but would never sell into slavery another Idoma person, with the exception of an uncontrollable village thug, that the whole community disowned, and no longer required his or her presence

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among the Idọma community. Instead of killing such a person, he or she would be sold as a slave, but the parents of that person have the right of ransom in order to bring him or her back to the community on an oath undertaking that such a person would be of good behaviour, and will in no way be a threat or menace to the community any more. In the Idọma thought, a slave is a person without parents or relatives to defend him or her. Chief Owuna of Ocobo, told me in one of my interviews with him when he was asked, 'how did the Idọma get their slaves?' He answered, “in the European slave trade days, if you find a stranger either man or woman in Idọma, and not related to anyone, that stranger could either be killed for sacrifice, sold as a slave or kept as a son or daughter or as a wife”. That is why the Idọma concept of freeing a slave nkwu ugboga, eyi piya eyi um, mla anya m - means, ‘I made the stranger or the unknown person my son, or daughter or wife’.

2.3.5.3. Anya - women in Idọma are generally thought of very highly. Though they may be excluded from certain councils and societies that are exclusively for men, just like similar societies exist exclusively for women, they are mostly involved in the day to day life of the Idọma people and in decision-making. However, they must not be openly seen to be dictating to their husband or older men what to do. The Idọma women are respectfully greeted with the appropriate titles of their birth such as “Ai-Agbo, i - kọ, Onirje, Ai-dọogwu, ga”, thereby giving them a very high degree of respect and identity and a very strong sense of belonging. In the Idọma tradition,

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64 These are Idọma women traditional title greetings that reflects their identities before and after marriage. It is a pre-fix “ai” children of, plus the name of their ancestral father or town i.e., “ai-Agbo”, - Children of Agbo. This Agbo is normally regarded and accepted as the putative father of the whole of that village or community.
once the Id-ready ma women are married, all that they are and have belongs to their husband.\(^{65}\)

### 2.4 Agriculture

Like most other African societies in the pre-and postcolonial era agriculture was, and still remains, the most important economic activity of the Id-ready ma people. This is seen in terms of both the Id-ready ma that are engaged either in full time or part time farming, and the prestige that this carries among the Id-ready ma. As Okwu rightly noted, in Id-ready ma they would, in most cases, measure a man’s success not only in the size of his family and compound, or the numbers of his wives and children, but most importantly, in the size of his farm and his yam and grain barns.\(^{66}\)

However the antiquity of agriculture in Id-ready ma is difficult to determine in absolute terms. Oral evidence suggests that agriculture pre-dated the Id-ready ma migration from Apa whose kings are always referred to in the Alekwu Cultic Chant as Ōndụ' eh-zma \(\Rightarrow b\alpha\) - that is - the lords of agriculture and stockpiler of grains.\(^{67}\) The significance of agriculture in both the pre- and postcolonial Id-ready ma can be viewed in two perspectives: First, agriculture’s close association with religion.\(^{68}\) Second, the fact that the entire calendar year in Id-ready ma revolves around agriculture. As we will see later in the discussion, the mother earth \(Aj\varepsilon\) sustained the Id-ready ma at two levels. First, at the level of the Id-ready ma material livelihood, and second, as a repository of the remains of

\(^{65}\) Although, this used to be the general practice in Id-ready ma, it is sadly being eroded away in Id-ready ma today as the result of Western influence and education. However, some parts of Id-ready ma, especially the western Id-ready ma sticks to this practice till today.


the Idoma person. These are the reasons why all matters concerning the Idoma relationship with the ajé - earth, would be carefully pursued later in our discussion.

The peak point of religious observance was the ancestral feast of the Ejealekwu festival,\textsuperscript{69} where, stock is taken of the previous season in Idoma and prayers and offerings are made to the ancestors to consolidate their continued support in the next season, and correct the ills, if any, of the previous season. This ancestral feast symbolised the unity of the Idoma community tied by bonds of blood and marriage to the sustaining ajé - earth. However the timing and the celebration of this ancestral feast that is the main bond of unity in the Idoma community had been the main bone of contention, controversy, and conflict in the interaction between Idoma and Christianity. Secondly, the Idoma year ìhayi, and its component parts, ìjá-month, revolved around agriculture and the climate seasons. Subsequently the Idoma new year began and closed with the ancestral feast of the Eje Alekwu. After this came the period of land preparation with the first rain, then came tilling, sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storing in that order.\textsuperscript{70} All of these last from about March till late October or November. Other non-agricultural activities, e.g., hunting and craft manufacture were done between late November and Early March. Fishing is done between July and November when the annual floods swelled the river. Idoma has two recognised agricultural systems: these are shifting cultivation and bush fallowing. The high point of the Idoma agricultural year was the harvest of yams, when the farmers reaped the fruits of their labours. Central to a successful harvest was proper storage.

\textsuperscript{68} Our later discussion on the ajé oopa-the earth festival and sacrifice in the next chapter will fully illustrate this point.

\textsuperscript{69} See later discussion in the next chapter for details of this festival.

\textsuperscript{70} For further details, see R.G. Armstrong, \textit{Idoma Speaking Peoples}, 1955: 65ff.
This is very significant in that it has a very direct bearing on the quality and quantity of food that would not only see the family through to the next harvest, but also provide them with enough seed for the next planting season, and enough surpluses to exchange for goods which they did not produce. In all these, quick and proper storage is essential, as it will reduce the danger posed by pests both human and animal.

The annual cycle of Idzma agriculture is that of hoeing agriculture during the raining season and hunting with bush fire in the dry season. Most of the crops grown in Idzma are Ḩi, Ocikāpā, Igwu, Eje, Igbankpa, Ologō, Obonū, Akei, Ōgege, eyē. These are yams, rice, guinea corn, beans, maize, cassava, groundnut, melon, sweet potatoes and, millet. And other fruits like Angb, gende, Aja, Ape, oleke, and Alemu – banana, pineapple, mangoes, pawpaw, sugarcane and oranges.

2. 5 Idzma Culture And Traditions

Culture as generally used according to Sanneh “has to do with customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious and social group.” Newbiggin viewed culture as the sum total of ways of living that is “developed by a group of human beings and handed down from generation to generation”. Culture has also been defined by Matthew Arnold in his essay “Culture and Anarchy” as not just “the scientific passion for pure knowledge ‘but the moral and the social passion for doing good in order to make reason and the will of God prevail’”

Given these three definitions, we employ culture in this thesis with particular regard to the Idoma customary beliefs, social forms and norms, language and religious beliefs. These are the Idoma body of beliefs, manners and practices that are handed down from one Idoma generation to another without necessarily being reduced to writing. The process of passing this from one generation to another could be described as traditional. For our purpose, this is a useful working definition. However, a few features deserve further elaboration. First, at the heart of the Idoma culture is a body of ideas which seeks to explain the why and how of things. These ideas help shape the Idoma values and attitudes or reactions that enabled judgements to be made. Second, among the Idoma people, culture is a social phenomenon. It is what holds the Idoma community together, and gives them the sense of identity. It is probably right to suggest that no behaviour is in-born. It is acquired and passed on from one generation to another through, language, stories, rituals, music and art forms. Thirdly the Idoma culture is subject to change as a result of intrusion of new ideas, other cultures and religion. We will explain three parts of the Idoma culture that have direct bearings on our discussion on the Idoma interaction with Christianity.74

2.5.1 Birth.

According to the Idoma tradition, the whole act of conception in Idoma is a sign that the ancestor is pleased with the earthly family, and desires to share fellowship with the family again by coming into this life in the form of re-incarnation in a baby. A pregnant woman is therefore protected from the power of the evil ones i.e., $\Rightarrow$he, and

\footnote{We will later discuss in chapter seven, how these three cultural practices had been the bone of contention, controversy and conflict in the interaction between Idoma and Christianity, and the later contributions to Idoma Christianity.}
Anjènu by various sacrifices on the part of the husband and the in-laws. Sacrifices are specially made to Alekwu, or the ancestors or the divinities such as, Anjènu, øw. sji, sjebi, Ibobo etc. in order to ensure the safe delivery of the baby. It is believed in most parts of Idoma that every secret act of adultery by a pregnant woman before or during the pregnancy must be confessed, and sacrifices made to the ancestors and other divinities, or else she will surely die during the child-birth.

Before the child is born Ogwo.sba - the soothsayer is consulted to know the type of child who is coming, and which of the ancestors is re-incarnating in the baby, and to determine the future of that child. When this is determined, the ancestor is appeased in a form of sacrifice, and prayerfully urged to arrive safely without complications, as the whole family is expecting his or her return to and reunion with the family.

When the child is eventually born, according to the tradition the child is taken into the room with the mother and is not allowed out until the seventh day when the child will be named and circumcised or her ears pierced if she is a girl. The significance of the child and the mother remaining in the room for seven days before the child is brought out will be later examined. We will also highlight the implications this has in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity. The mother would remain unclean for those seven days, after which some sacrifices would be made to the ancestors and other divinities to make her ceremonially clean again.

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75 These are witches, and personal water spirits.
76 See later discussion on Alekwu.
77 This was witnessed on 3rd June 1969, when Anya died during childbirth according to the traditional belief as a result of unconfessed adultery before and during pregnancy. A later attempt to confess and make the necessary sacrifice, when she was gasping for breath was too late to save her life.
78 Although this is not a wide or general practice in Idoma today, perhaps as a result of the influence of Christianity on the Idoma, however, this is a current cultural practice in Idoma.
In some parts of Ìdàma on the seventh day, all the elders of the village are sent for very early in the morning at cock crow to assemble where the child will be named and circumcised, and dedicated to Òwà or Anjèmù. It is very important for us to carefully note here what happens in this act of naming ceremony as we will critically examine and analyse the events later in chapter seven on the Ìdàma Christianity today. The sequence of events here is very interesting:

1. The Elders all gather in a semi circle at the entrance of the house where the baby and the mother are staying.

2. The ogwọ ọbà-soothsayer is consulted whether it is right for the baby to come out or not. This is done with the beating of Oke and the Soothsayer communicating with the world of the Spirit through anwa or ọba Ajë. He receives answers from the world of the Spirit and communicates this to the elders.

3. The elders, after being satisfied with the message from the world of the Spirit, ask that the child be brought out.

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79 These are current practices which is still going on in Ìdàma at the time of this writing.

80 These are personal gods or guardian angels. During fieldwork in Agila, 18th August 1997, I was told by Ogbogo, a retired 70 year old teacher, the timing of this ceremony must be in the morning, as that is the only time to get the attention of the ancestors before they begin their day to day business. His argument looked credible as most serious business is conducted very early in the morning in Ìdàma.

81 Oke is a big traditional metal gong of about two to eight feet long, played with a smooth wood to invoke the attention of the ancestors or spirits, through the soothsayer to an occasion of prayers or important ceremonies in the community. The soothsayer also uses oke in communicating with the world beyond. This is followed by ọba anwa—that is a shell of a specific spiritual tree used by the soothsayer in his acts of divination to ascertain the minds of the ancestors.
4. A family friend who is very kind, of good reputation, hard working and some how wealthy will on behalf of the family bring the baby out with the mother dressed in her best cloths and a group of her own friends following behind.

5. The oracle is consulted to determine the name of the child, when this is ascertained, the child is named in this order:

A) He is lifted and placed in the arm of the most senior elder or the Soothsayer facing the east. He had to face the east, because it is generally believed among the Idoma that life begins in the east and that human beings like the sun begin with childhood in the east, where the sun rises, through adulthood and sun set in the west where they are buried facing the west. There life sets again to re-emerge in the east in the Idoma ever-cyclic motion of birth, dying and rebirth.

B) The child is given a name that reflects the family history or an event in the family or the community or the entire Ipu Idoma: such as, Adak\-le, \-i\-k\-le, Alac\-e, gb\-le- he or she is come to guard his house. Oojum - It is enough for me or I am tired of all the troubles xas\-e-. Alechenu, \-iy\-e- brother, \-i\-e- mother is back. w\-acon\-e, Oce\-fu, Ikwubi\-da, Ofikwu, Owun\-be\-e, Any\-be\-e. 82

C) The child, still in the arm of the elder or the holy man, will be given the following symbolic gifts with the following words:

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82 Adak\-le- if the head of the family dies, and a male child is born immediately after his death that child is called Adak\-le, meaning the father of the family is come back to look after his family, and vice versa for a mother, and the girl is called \(\text{snk}\-\text{le}\), meaning the mother of the house is back. If there is sudden death in the family, and the main bread winner is gone, and a girl is born immediately after his death, she is called Ikwubiel\-a- meaning death spoils matters and things. Alechenu means the unexpected has happened. This name is only given when a family had a surprise, or wins a war or a barren woman became pregnant and had a baby. Alace symbolises disaster, ruin and hopelessness. This name is given only to the girls when a family lost a war or the only man in the family lineage dies and no hope of the patrilineal continuity of the family, and a girl is born after all these hopeless situations, she is called Alace, meaning ruin or the glory is departed.
(i) Ikpootuta<sup>83</sup> Nyila, ka ayi wọko lebọka ikpootuta'aa - multiply and may your seed be like the seed of this Ikpootuta, alligator pepper

(ii) Ije Òwọnọ i tu wọwaa ko le ije je ga wọ, ka a le gboagbenu ne Òwọje ga wọaa - May you grow to be a rich and have as much wealth as your Lord will give you

(iii) Eenikpọ Ọgane eenikpọ i le ọlọ ọlọ duuma ṣa ma, a le ọlọ a duuma ṣa duu - As water is a friend of all and enemy of none, may you be a friend of all and enemy of none.

(iv) Anzọleɛ Ọnye ku odulẹ we anṣẹ, anṣẹ ki je ipi aa, oyẹyi ku wọ ko le ọnye tu odulẹ aṣe, ọga duuma ne ọgbẹ mla Ọnyẹ, le ọgbẹ Ọma ìà, ka a le ipi Ọmọje. - As palm oil sweetens and smoothes difficult things, may your life sweeten other lives and smoothen difficult situations. Palm oil also heals. Where ever there is wound and pain heal that wound and pain. Be sweet and peaceful.

(v) Ọmọ Ọmọ we Ọnye ku Ọmọ aa, ọga duuma ne Ọmọ yọ abọ i gẹẹ wa h, we Ọnye lealọ, lealọ ti Ọmọ oowa mla ipi - As salt sweetens food and preserves from decay, may your life sweeten other lives and preserve others and our community from decay and smell

<sup>83</sup>This is an alligator pepper.
(vi) e'ime' $\text{xen'oe bi e'ime' waa, bi oyxen' waa, e'ime' ke le xnye,}$

$\text{aman }\eta\text{o ke he }\text{snu duu.- He who brings kola brings}$

life. May your life bring life; As kolanut is bitter and
sweet, your life may be bitter, but, you will come out
sweet, just like sweet water after a bitter kolanut.\(^{84}\)

The child then is shown to the entire elders and all those present, and
his name is repeated by all three times.

D The child would then be dedicated at the entrance of the family shrine to $\text{w}.$
or Anjoni - personal god by the priest.

E He will then, be circumcised or her ears pierced.

F This would be followed by a feast, singing and dancing, and some gifts
presented to the mother. The husband will kill a white cock for his wife, who
will eat all of the cock by herself, if she chooses not to share it with any one,
but not the gizzard, which must be given to the elder. This white cock is
symbolic of the husband's happiness.

2. 5. 2 Marriage

Marriage is a very essential binding fabric of the Idzma people. A lot of work, care
and preparations are put into this. Marriage in Idzma is not primarily between the two
people concerned, but the two families of the couple, and their related families. As we
will later find out in chapter seven, marriage is a major contributing factor to what we
regard as Idzma Christianity today.

\(^{84}\) Ikpoootuta, is alligator pepper; ije is money; een'kp is water; anole - palm oil; xma-salt and
$\text{e'ime}$ is kola nut.
In the Idoma tradition when a boy is old enough to desire being married, he will be tested to know if he will be capable of marrying and supporting a home, his wife and children. His father will give him some seed yams to plant, or a hunting gun. He will then be instructed to provide food for his father and mother and the rest of the family for a period of not less than a year from his farm or the game that he hunts. If he is eventually found to be capable of providing effectively for his parents and the rest of the family, he will then be considered eligible to marry, and will be officially permitted by his parents to do so.85

However, this does not mean that he will go out openly to look for a woman. His parents privately and strictly monitor his interests. When he eventually becomes very interested in a particular girl, he informs his parent, his mother in particular, of his interest. His mother then will visit the girl’s family, and work very hard to establish friendship with the girl’s mother. After being good friends to each other for about six months to one year, the boy’s mother will reveal her intention by saying to the girl’s mother, *Ugwụ le ọzi ọzi ọzi wọ, an ọzi ọzi ọzi wọ, a ọzi ọzi ọzi ọzi ọzi wọ* - A hen hatched chicks in your house and I have come to buy one of them, or by telling her, *N mà ọzi ọzi ọzi wọ, ọzi mà ọzi ọzi ọzi ọzi wọ, ọzi mà ọzi ọzi ọzi ọzi ọzi ọzi wọ* - I saw something in your house, which I love so much, and I want to have that thing for my son. *Koicóoo, ku oklobia ọzi ọzi ọzi um ko wà ega iyì ọzi wọ* - Please can my young man come to visit you?86 When this

85.During fieldwork in Agila in Ado Local Government Area on the 18th of August 1997, Chief Odang Ogenyi the traditional ruler of the Agila people when asked about the importance of this practice in Idoma, maintained that, this was the most crucial test of the Adulthood of a man. He felt that, this practice is really what makes a man in Idoma. Although, this testing of a man at a certain stage is still practiced in Idoma, it is more practised among the Agila, than the rest parts of Idoma. In some part of Idoma, such as Otukpo, it could be correctly stated that this practice is gradually been forgotten.

86 This is a common approach that is generally practised in Idoma up to the time of this writing. The importance of this practice among the Idoma people was tested on His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, the Agabaidu of Idoma during fieldwork in Otukpo on the 10th of July 1996 when asked when is a marriage legitimate in Idoma? He responded by saying that, when proper steps are taken by the parents and a proper request made by the mothers of the men who are to marry, that is when a marriage is recognised in Idoma, as it begins the solid foundation of marriage in Idoma.
is agreed, the boy will then begin to visit and spend time with the potential mother-in-law, but he must never come near the girl in any way. As soon as the boy arrives at the girl’s family home, she disappears. The father will be silently watching all this without getting involved, until it reaches his level. When the boy has shown his presence in the girl’s family, each of the two families then will carry out private investigations into the background of the other family for any past history of disease, slavery, murder, theft, laziness, fraud or adultery. This investigation will be carried out more thoroughly on the girl’s family, to find out the history of twins, early death of females in her family, rampant cases of divorce among the females, and finally, whether the girls’ family is recognised in the society. The match is deemed fit or suitable when no record of the vices listed above is discovered in the historical background of any of the families.

According to Chief Ifere, The Òçeapa of Igwumale, after thorough investigations are carried out on the both families’ historical backgrounds, and other private investigations on the part of the boy and the girl through each other’s friends, the boy and his family will then, fix a day for the boy to formally introduce himself to the girl. This will take place in the girl’s mother’s room. The boy will come with his mother when the girl and her mother are seated in a room. Upon entering, the boy and his mother are welcomed, and given seats at the opposite direction of the girl and her mother. The boy’s mother will say to the girl’s mother, “I saw something in your house that is good, and I want to have it for my son”. The girl’s mother will then reply, “what is that thing”? The boy's mother answers,” Your beautiful daughter”. This will be followed by a smile from the girl, with her face hidden behind her mother’s back. The girl's mother will then say, “Let your son speak to the girl
herself". The boy will then dip his hand in his pocket and bring out two kobo, (about one pence) and silently stretch his hand to the girl. If the girl wishes to marry the suitor and eventually stretches out her hand, accepts the two kobo from her suitor and passes it on to her own mother, then she has consented to the marriage. On the other hand, if she refuses to accept the two kobo from the boy it means she did not accept or consent to marry her suitor, and that ends whatever process that had been set in motion sometimes before with regard to the marriage. This indicated that Idoma girls have the choice of who they want to marry. They did not just accept any man that is forced on them by their parents. If accepted the boy can from that moment send her gifts, but no physical contact or holding of hands is allowed.

The boy and his family will then formally introduce themselves to the girl’s family by presenting a gourd of palm wine, local tobacco leaves, kolanut, bush meat, and potash to the girl’s father in his home. The girl’s father by accepting these presents indicates his consent to the marriage between his daughter and the boy. He will then tell the boy of his intention to inform his extended relatives about the boy’s visit to his home. Henceforth the boy pays regular visits to the girl. He can even sleep in the same room with the girl, provided he buys a mat. But, if the boy attempts to have sexual relationship with the girl and the girl reports it to her mother, and it becomes publicly known, the consent that was given to the marriage is withdrawn. It is the generally belief that the boy is only interested in making love to the girl, thereby spoiling her virginity. This is very symbolic, as the girl’s parents will later in the marriage find out

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87 Chief Ifere, The Ìcwìpà of Igwmale, fieldwork interview 29th August 1997.
88 In the Idoma tradition, without this introduction, the boy would be regarded as a stranger to the father of the girl, which may create a serious set back in all that has been put in motion as far as the process of that particular marriage is concerned.
89 This is not a general practice among the Idoma. It is unique mostly to the Agila people of Ado Local Government Area.
from the boy’s parents if their daughter is a wife or not. What this means, is, if she was a virgin before meeting the husband or not. If the answer is positive, a cow is killed for her and she is given other gifts, but if the answer is negative, she is classified and looked at as a family disgrace, and some how treated as a second class wife in her husband’s home.90

During the period of the courtship, each year the boy organises communal farming for his prospective father-in-law when ever the latter is about to plant any crop. The boy’s parent also visits the girl’s family periodically with gifts of earrings, cloths, necklaces, soap, body cream etc. for the girl. The girl is never allowed to visit the boy in his house during the courtship. If she does, a gun is fired to signify that the girl is married to the boy and no bride price will be paid, and the boy would have his wife for free. During this period of courtship, various sacrifices are made for the girl to prepare her for a married life. Some parents will kill goats, rams or cows for their daughter depending on their means. The killing of these animals attracts special titles, for example, a girl for whom a cow is killed is orinya, and for whom many animals are killed is oréwà. These titles are very important, especially for women from Agila and Igwumale.

Some rituals accompany the killing of these animals. Before the animals are killed, the girl is brought before the eldest man in the village. The elder will then offer eple - kolanut, and water libations to the spirits of the ancestors, saying some prayers or incantations as this is done. The animal will be made to drink this water that prayer is said into, this water will then be passed on to the girl who also will drink from the same vessel as the animal. This is to prevent this girl in her marriage life from the

90 This stress on the girl’s virginity before marriage is still currently emphasised in Idrma. However the slight unfairness in such emphasis is that such requirements are not made of the boys, which indicates inequality and unfairness on the part of the Idrma girls.
powers of any witch that will use animals or spirits of animals to harm her in her married life. The animal will be killed, shaved and eaten in the evening. The eldest man in the village will offer the head of the killed animal to the spirits of the ancestors, saying, *ŋi ɓẹnẹ i le kwu ŋi kọ* - it is animal’s head that is used as substitute for a human being. We have decided to be very detailed here, because of the implications that marriage ceremonies and practices had on missionary activities in Idoma, and its later implications for Idoma Christianity, which later chapters will highlight. After all these preliminary preparations, come the actual Idoma marriage ceremonies of paying the bride-price⁹¹

On the day that the bride price is be paid, relatives and friends are invited to witness and support the paying of the bride-price. On this occasion, an elaborate feast is prepared by the girl’s family, but funded by the boy’s family. This feast includes pounded yam, bush meat with various other types of meat and fish, with melon seed or *gbọọ* soup, drinks, icanyi, etc. After eating and drinking, selected elders from both families take their seats at opposite directions of each other, and begin to negotiate the bride price, through, the *Omi* - an interpreter. There is no fixed bride-price in Idoma. The girl’s father determines the final amount that is paid. This may be a very big amount or small amount depending on the character and behaviour of the potential son-in-law. For example, the bride price may be increased should the suitor be guilty of the following offences: (i) abandoning or deserting the girl for a period of three or more months; (ii) simulating sickness or illness to escape working

⁹¹ The observations below are based on the marriage ceremony of Abo and Abu of Opa Adoka in Otukpo Local Government, which I observed and participated in during my field work in Nigeria, 8th Sept. 1997, and other information gathered through interviews during the period of my field work in Idoma July-September 1997 and the information given by His Royal Highness the Ọọọ Idoma, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of Idoma during my translation work on the Idoma Bible.
for his father-in-law on his farm during farming seasons; (iii) sitting idle when his bride’s parents are working in his presence or in the same house or environment, and (iv) showing any lack of respect for his bride’s parents, especially the mother-in-law, as for instance, by throwing down firewood with a clatter near her house. The bride-price may be paid in part or full, on this day depending on the boy’s means.

Traditionally, marriage ceremonies take place during the feasts of *Eje Alekwu*[^92] in [gwa] or [n][^93] during hunting seasons.

During the marriage ceremony, the girl is taken to the house of her father’s relatives or hidden in her mother’s room in the company of her close friends. When she is asked for, to come and collect the bride-price money for her parents, she is declared missing. Her close friend appears before the elders and offers to go and look for her, should the suitor pay her transport fares. The boy will proudly pay whatever amount this girl demands. She will then go to look for the girl, while the elders and all the participants at the occasion patiently wait for the appearance of the girl.

The bride, dressed up in glamorous and beautiful apparel, will slowly move, in the company of her friends, from where she was hidden in the midst of many other people, mostly, if not all, women, singing and dancing round the girl. On sighting the girl from a distance, the boy and all his friends, join in the dance with [ga][^94] and gunshots into the air. Amidst dancing, cerebration and festivity, the bride and her maids are showered with gifts of money by the bridegroom, his relatives and friends.

[^92]: This is an ancestral feast that is celebrated annually between March and April. The Iduma people where possible would return to Iduma land to participate in this feast and celebrations.
[^93]: The former feast is during the raining seasons, while the latter is during dry season.
[^94]: [ga] is a traditional shout of joy performed by the women with one of their hand across their mouth, and the other raised to the back and the rest of the body dancing to the sounds of drums and other musical instruments such as uba, drum oke and ogalumpe-pipe or flute.
and also by the bride's relations and other well-wishers. When the rejoicing throng finally arrives at the scene of the marriage, the bride is taken to the elder who is the head of her family. She stands beautifully silent in front of the elder and all that is happening is explained to her, including the bride-price that is to be paid. She will then be asked a very important question. Ťdanŋ kæ ka aŋŋ ge we Ťana Ťnya le Ťba aŋŋ, Ťana Ťga je uweyi le Ťana Ťmla ada nŋ Ťmla aće Ťle aŋŋ. Ai ka a kwu ije i ṭma aje ka a kwuŋ gam. - If you know that you will be an excellent wife to this man, and will not be a disgrace to your mother and father and the rest of the members of your family, then bend down and give me the money in front of you. The girl will then stoop low, take the money, and pass it on to the elder. This will be followed, with Ťga and dancing, and the girl is showered with money by the bridegroom, his relatives and friends. This will be finally followed by some sacrifice to release the girl from whatever she was bound to prior to her getting married.

Families that worship Anjenu, consult the oracle to know which of the spirits of her parents loves the girl. When they find out, they make a sacrifice to free the girl from being killed by that spirit when she marries. The spirit is thought to be jealous and needs to be appeased. Sacrifices are also made, to receive the blessings of the ancestors in her marriage. The girl will then be officially handed over publicly to the bridegroom’s father, who will in turn give the girl to his son for a wife. The significance of this is, in Idma, no matter how old you are, you are not matured nor will never have enough money to marry for yourself, but your father marries for you. Secondly, should there be future trouble and unhappiness in that marriage, the girl’s parents complain to the bridegroom’s father, and urge him to resolve whatever is causing the unhappiness in the marriage. Parental role is very important in marriages in Idma.
Although the girl is officially handed over to the bridegroom, after the payment of the brideprice which could either be by the exchange of girls between families, by working for the father of the girl on his farm for a period of four to eight years, and by money she is not allowed to go home with the boy that night. While she stays with her parents for the night, the boy goes back to his house to get his house ready for the arrival of his bride.

The bride in the evening of the following day arrives at her husband’s home with the food stuffs, cooking utensils, enamelware, bed sheets, pots, cloths and every other thing that she will need in her husband’s home bought for her by her parents. She will be accompanied on this trip by her few close friends and relatives, whom after eating the feast prepared for them by the bridegroom will return to their home that very night, and the couple will be left on their own for the first time.

In the light of our discussions so far, we would conclude this section by restating that, marriage in Idoma is not just between the couple, but the two families and related families and to some extent a community affair. Mothers are in most cases the determining factor in the Idoma marriage if that marriage is to continue or not. Idoma girls are given the choice of whom to marry. The marriage process among the Idoma involves good friendly relationships between the families. Parents and relatives of the

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95 R. G. Armstrong, *Idoma Speaking Peoples*, 1955, p. 145 earlier, observes, that there are three ways of marrying in Idoma: (1) by exchange, when a girl of one family is exchanged for the girl of another family. On this occasion, the groom gives his bride five brass rods and her mother ten; (2) by dower, when on betrothal the suitor gives five brass rods to the girl, ten to her mother that she may buy salt, and thirty five to her father, five of which he is supposed to be spent on tobacco, ten on kolanuts, and twenty on acquiring the goodwill of his guardian spirit. Later on the suitor gives forty rods to his betrothed’s mother and a hundred rods to her father, besides a gown or black cloth-Opa in their stead.
prospective couple conduct investigations into each other’s family background for any history of disease, crime, and other bad conditions. The result of these investigations determines whether the intended marriage relationship between the partners is suitable or not. Bride-price will have to be paid either in part or full. This will be followed by a sacrifice either to Anjenu\(^96\) or the Ancestors. After which the girl is finally taken to her husband’s home.

2.5.3 Burial

Burial is a very important affair among the Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma, due to the Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma belief in reincarnation and life after death.\(^97\) To the Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma people, physical death is a mere transition from this earthly life to the next life and the world beyond.\(^98\) The Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma, therefore, always take proper care during burial ceremonies and rites, in order that nothing would be done in error and so prevent the smooth transition to the next life.

There are, generally, four types of burial rites and ceremonies in Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma. These are the burial of an infant, young people, adults, and an elder who is the head of the family and a chief. The kind of burial that is given to an Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma person varies with the age or class status of that person. For example, is the person to be buried a chief or a commoner? Is that person rich or poor? Just like the \textit{Alekwu Aboj} chanted in the \textit{Alekwu} cultic chant

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\(^96\) This is a personal guardian angel.

\(^97\) See the next chapter on the Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma theology for discussions on the Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma belief in reincarnation and life after death.

\(^98\) Although, this chapter deals specifically with the Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma people, it is however important to point out here that the Id\(\text{\textexclamdown}\)ma belief about life after death may have similarities with other Nigerian, West African and possibly Other African Countries. For example, for a similar belief among the African people, see Jude Ongang’a, “The River-Lake Luo Phenomenon of Death: A Base for Religious Interaction” in \textit{Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa}, James L. Cox (ed.,) Cardiff, Cardiff Academic Press 1988.
Eko n o l ṣ à ṣ à gekwu,
zi agáddó ge ka ṣ à ṣ à,
kplọ kplọ kplọ
Aman ọ, Eko n o l zụ du gekwu,
Uba I dē
timm timm timm,99
when a poor person dies
the wooden bed will be sounding
kplo kplo kplo (this is Idoma ideophone)
but when the rich person dies
the drum will be sounding
timm timm timm.

In other words, the burial of the poor is dry and less festive and ceremonial, because there is nothing to eat and dance for. Rather all you hear is the noise or the rattling of his wooden bed that is being removed from his room by his heir. But the burial of the rich is very festive with a lot to eat, drink, dancing and celebration. Ordinary people are buried within twenty four hours of their death, but the rich, and the people of honour and influence are buried after a suitable funeral has been arranged, which may take two to three days and the later second and third burial ceremonies on the seventh and fourteenth days respectively. Our discussion will start with:

2.5.3.1 Burial of an Infant

In the Ido\(\text{ma}\) tradition, the death of an infant is announced by the wailing of women when the child breathes its last.\(^{100}\) Such a child is buried as quickly as possible in the bush.\(^ {101}\) Infants under two years old are wrapped in banana leaves, and a kind of a leaf called \(\text{zwz}\) or \(\text{Ikikila}\) in Agila district. The banana leaves are first laid in the grave then corpse is placed on them, and covered by other banana leaves, then covered with the earth near the mother's hut or room. The significance of wrapping and burying an

99 This is a transcription of the tape of Alekwu Ab\(\text{je}\), Chant, recorded during fieldwork in Otukpo in 1977. We cannot specifically date in detail this source, as Alekwu is a mystery especially in relation to women to whom the date and what is behind the Alekwu mask must be kept secret. The tape is with the present writer.

100 This is still a current practice in among the Ido\(\text{ma}\) people.
infant’s corpse with banana leaves and burying it close to the mother’s hut, in the Idzuma traditional belief, is to ensure an early reincarnation, resulting in an early pregnancy of the mother soon after the infant’s death. The corpses of children aged between two and five years are wrapped in a locally woven cloth called, *pū*, then buried.

In a case where a woman’s children have always died in infancy, she is advised to maltreat the corpse of her latest dead child before burial. Such maltreatment is done to chase away the evil spirit believed to be continually reincarnating in her womb and dying. The corpse of the child is dragged around the compound, then lacerated with knife cuts before burial. This treatment of the infant’s corpse is believed to forestall further reincarnation of the child that is not prepared to stay with the mother, but keeps coming and going. Later discussions in the next chapter will highlight the Idzuma concept of reincarnation.

2.5.3.2 Burial of a Youth

Among the Idzuma people the death of young a person is generally viewed as a very bad omen and disaster for the family and the entire community. The wailing for a young person is greater than the wailing for an elder, adult or infants. The death of a young person is announced in the southern parts of Idzuma, such as Agila, Igwumale and Ulayi with many gun shots to alert the whole village that something very terrible

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101 The reason why such infant is buried in the bush was, according to the traditional belief of the Idzuma traditional people that, such an infant chose not to stay with the people by his death. Therefore, he or she had to go and live in the bush. He or she is therefore buried in the bush.

102 This is no longer a wide practice in most parts of Idzuma today, but still practiced in some parts of Idzuma, especially among the Agila in Ado Local Government Area.
has happened in the community. 103 On hearing the gun shots all the community begin to troop to the scene of the gun shots to find the cause. This is followed with much wailing by all that are present. A grave would be quickly prepared at the back of the family compound, and the young person is taken away for burial. He or she is buried without celebration. 104 He or she will be dressed in his or her best clothes, wrapped in a traditionally woven cloth, and placed in the grave. The young ones who die of diseases like tuberculosis and leprosy are buried in the bush and no ceremony is performed, except that of calling home their spirit from the bush. 105 In present times, they will be buried in a coffin. When the Idomma began to bury their young ones in a coffin will be discussed in later chapter on Idomma Christianity today. Before the young persons are buried there is usually an Ikpodookwuooka106 - an inquest to determine the cause of the death before they are buried. This Ikpodookwuooka leads us to the next group of burials in Idomma where this features prominently.

2.5.3.3 Burial of Adults And Elders

In the Idomma tradition, when an adult dies in Idomma, messages are usually sent round, and all the elders are gathered. The corpse is dressed in his or her best outfit, and made to sit on Ugada - or ate107 in Agatu area or lie on a mat on the floor with a plate on his chest. The women will sit round the corpse, some crying, especially the

103 Otukpo Local Government Archives, OTKP/ AG/2/ Agila.
104 In the Idomma tradition, bad omens are never celebrated, and since the death of young people are considered as bad omen and disaster for the community, their burial are never celebrated, but more painfully mourned.
105 During fieldwork in Ocobo in July 1997, an elder of Ocobo, ëganyi who is believed to be the oldest man in Idomma today was asked, as to the reason why, young people who died of tuberculosis or leprosy are buried in the bush. He replied, Eko ku ikee aa, agwu we cda obizobi nehi, ëce ne o le agwu amann ka ëko, ipu aci ne o ge la aa, ipu aci we ële nu a, ële ëce ne e ke I nyi ëko aa that is in the olden days, whoever had tuberculosis or leprosy, lived in the bush, the bush is his or her home, and it is in somebody's home that you would bury that person. He is right, by starting his answer from eko ku ikee aa- in the Olden days, because this is no longer a current practice in Idomma.
106 See the later discussions on Ikpoelookwuooka for further details.
immediate families, and those closely associated with the corpse. All the elders gather at ṣpọ - the community assembly ground and the burial ceremony will begin with ikpọ́daọkwoọka108 - an inquest. We will be very detailed here in our discussion, due to the role ikpọ́daọkwoọka plays in Ìdọma Christianity, and for its metaphysical, philosophical and theological implications for both the Ìdọma people and Ìdọma Christianity.

*Ikpọ́daọkwoọka* may be defined as “group discussions by the delegates of paternal and matrilineal representatives of the family of the dead person as to the reason for his or her death”109. The tracing of the cause of death, and also providing the answers to the cause of the death, and the prevention of such similar deaths in the future, and the imposition of the appropriate judgement, penalty or fine on whoever is judged to be the cause of the death. As Armstrong rightly stated, inquest in Ìdọma literally means, “talking about the cause of death..., a talk about the matter of the corpse”110.

We must bear in mind that in order to fully understand the Idoma *ikpọ́daọkwoọka*, one has to be aware of the religious, phenomenological, metaphysical and philosophical factors that are central to any discussions on Ìdọma

*ikpọ́daọkwoọka*111.

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107 These are traditional wooden chair and a clay pot.
*Ikpo*daokwuooka* is very central to the Id*rema people, because it enables the Id*rema to discover the cause of death within their community. It also provides them with ways of handling the problems that are associated with death, e.g., witchcraft. As Amali rightly pointed out,

Inquest performances are public dramatisations of societal and individual grief. These public performances restore a sense of health to the society and the individual. They also reprimand and punish those who are presumed to have been responsible for the death of a person. They serve as deterrents to individuals within the society who may plan to harm their fellow men. An inquest may be used as a means of enforcing a social sanction.... The performances of inquest depict death as a transition between two lives, temporal and spiritual. They also demonstrate that life and death are stages of cosmic process, that is of an infinite cycle.\(^\text{112}\)

In Id*rema, it is generally believed that death is in most cases, if not always, caused by external forces or agents, such as witches or poisoning agents, which can be human, animal or metaphysical. This is still a current passionate belief in Id*rema, despite their current scientific knowledge as to why deaths may occur

In the Id*rema *ikpo*daokwuooka, although the ritual ceremonies are held for every Id*rema indigenous adult, inquest on the death of the elders are in most cases more detailed than of a young person whose death is always classified as a misfortune for the family and the community. As a result, at his or her death, an oracle is consulted through *sbaanwa*\(^\text{113}\) - this is the material that is used to consult the ancestors, other divinities and spirits to determine the cause of the death of a young person. When this

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\(^{111}\) See next discussion in chapter three on Id*rema theology.


\(^{113}\) *sbaanwa* is a divination act that is currently practised in Id*rema, in consulting the ancestors, and the spirits, in ascertaining their minds and views on matters of great importance to the Id*rema people. The Id*rema response to a given situation in most cases is determined through this practice of *sbaanwa*. 
is done, and the cause of the death is known, the community elders ask either the parents or whoever is judged to be responsible for the death of the young person to make the required sacrifices, and other reparations so as to prevent future occurrence of such death in the community.

But in the event of the death of an older person, the Ikpo da okwu ooka may follow more complex procedures as stated below:

1. When there is death in one of the families, the elder of that family who will be the most senior man will send a very formal message to the most senior elder in his sublineage saying: ị um Abu amanị ka Ada gekwu - my child Abu or Ada has died.

2. Opo le egba dê amanị egbe le e tâ ka- A horn-call, gun shot and wailing cry officially announces the death.

3. The head of the sublineage on his part sends a message to the head of his principal lineage, saying, ị um, Abu, amanị ka Ada gekwu - my child Abu or Ada has died.

4. The head of the principal lineage sends in turn a message to the other two or more principal lineages, and they in turn will inform their sublineages about the occurrence of the death.

5. All the members of the deceased families both paternal and maternal will be informed, and the deceased’s friends of the same age group or peers and all the

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114 The procedures that are described here are based on the general ld-ма procedure of Ikpo da okwu ooka, and on my eye witness observation and active participation during fieldwork in Adoka in the ikpo da okwu ooka of Chief Omaji ece, the deʃ of Adoka on the 26th July 1997.
members of any associations he belonged to will be notified of his or her death.

6. On the following day, at about noon time, elders, families, family friends and spectators will assemble at ụpu - an open arena for the ikpo’dao-okwuoka.

7. When all the required elders and persons are present, then the ikpo’dao-okwuoka inquest begins with the following happening simultaneously:

   (a) The dead body will be dressed and laid on a raised platform in Itakpa - the reception hall surrounded by gifts of clothes, money from his family and friends, and other things he or she may need in the world beyond. In Idoma North, the corpse is bathed and a white traditional hand-woven cloth is used to wrap the body and head, leaving only the face open. The corpse is then seated on a chair clothed in a flowing gown covering the corpse and the chair leaving only the head to be seen. A calabash plate is placed on the chest. People, one after the other, will come, say few things about the dead and some may send messages to their dead father or mother to remember them, and they will then drop some money into the calabash plate on the deceased’s chest. In Adoka, the dead body is made to sit outside on a pot with his back resting on his ancestral sacred tree - ọdịm, where he worshipped his ancestors. One of the senior elders gives thanks to the ancestors for the life of the deceased and those who need to communicate with their dead ones are given the chance to tell the corpse their messages for their relatives in the world of the dead. A message he or she must surely deliver in the world of the dead.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{115} The Idoma world of the dead will be discussed in the next chapter on the Idoma theology.
(b) About twenty women will form a circle in front of the deceased, dancing and singing with their hands around each other’s waist.\(^{116}\)

(c) While they are dancing, they will be singing farewell songs to wish the deceased a safe journey to his eternal home, and songs that will carry a message of comfort and sympathy for the family, and songs that bear messages to their own loved ones that have gone before.

(d) When this *uculo* -ritual is going on, a masquerade called *Owunaekwu*\(^{117}\) comes into the compound where the dead body is lying and listening to his inquest and farewell songs and the messages he or she was being given for the others who had departed before. *Owunekwu* dance to a lone flute. The music from the flute will instruct *Owunekwu* to act or be still or flog people with the exception of the *£se*-king and the *anyakwu£se*-elders, thereby reducing all the people present at the occasion to the same level.

\(^{116}\) The song and the dancing is called *Icica*, which would be led by an elderly woman who traditionally reached a male status in the Idoma tradition, that she has passed the age of menopause, and has been regarded as a man by the community. The writer has a copy of the only *Icica* record ever produced, by the Late Professor R.G. Armstrong.

\(^{117}\) As Samson O. O Amali, *An Ancient Nigerian Drama*, 1985, p. 21 rightly observes, *Owunaekwu* is very unpredictable, at one moment he will be calm, at the next he will become very wild. Once his musical flute begins to sound, he will remain still in one spot standing on one leg, then he will utter ferocious sounds, warning that he will attack. He then spins around on the spot on one leg, gradually gathering momentum, and finally charging wildly with full speed at the audience at the inquest. At the peak of his violent act, the community believes that spiritual forces had completely possessed him, and that he had reached the highest level of transformation, union and fusion with the spiritual forces that are represented. He is believed at such moments to be in complete oneness with the forces. Although his blows are very painful, none is allowed to attack *Owunekwu* back, as his actions are carried out in obedience to the spiritual forces. *Owaekwu* also functions to reduce all men to the same level by meting equal treatment to each through flogging. He has the right to flog any one present at the inquest with the exception of the elders and chiefs. The masker of *Owunekwu* will be known in the society, but during the performance at inquests his human and personal identity was totally lost to the spirit that he represented. He becomes the spirit himself.
8. The inquest formally begins with:

a) A call to silence  
\[ \text{EEEEEEEEEY! a ma uya ee'oooo!} \]

b) Traditional salutations to all the participants  
\[ \text{Ocobo -Agbo,} \]
\[ \text{Otukpo -du, Ugboju -Bande,} \]
\[ \text{Adoka Alegwu etc.} \]

c) The host lineage’s first formal questioning of the deceased’s family  
\[ \text{A le tutu êëëë? Are you Ready?} \]

d) The paternal family of the deceased’s first response to the host’s question, \[ \text{Il, Ai ka le enyi gwâ ee' Yes, but have some drink first.} \]

He will then present pots of guinea-corn beer to the participants. The partaking of the drinks not only satisfies the physical thirst, but symbolically acts as a ritual communion of the Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma Ipu\(\Rightarrow\)ma and people with itself and the dead.

e) The host lineage accepts the drink. When he accepts the drink, he will then present it to the guest lineages.

f) The guest lineage accepts the drinks, and then presents it to each person in order of seniority and traditional protocol, and shares the drinks among all the participants.

g) The paternal family of the deceased will be questioned a second time:
\[ \text{Èlî ya ee'ne a ke} \]

Why has the paternal family of the
Deceased assembled representatives of the various Ipu⇒ma?

h) He will respond to this vital second question by stating that:

\[\text{'yi al}⇒\text{kwù a n} \]

it was our child that died.

i) The paternal family of the deceased will be questioned further on the steps he had taken to prevent this death:

\[\text{'di ne a yà }\text{se' n} \text{isam nyà} \]

What have you done to prevent

\[\text{kè hé'al}⇒\text{aa? Ab}⇒\text{ayà le} \]

this death? What steps have you

\[\text{ne enyi nyà je }\text{fiá' akpa }\text{zfù}⇒\text{aa} \]

taken before the river

overcomes bridge?

j) The paternal family of the deceased will respond by stating all the steps he had taken to prevent this death, and what eventually led to the death of the deceased, and puts the responsibility of the death on the third party, in most cases the maternal family or a witch, or any other external forces.

k) The third party will be called to defend himself or herself.

l) The defence of the third party

m) The whole matter is further pushed to the guest lineages for further examination and final verdict as to what was responsible for the death of the deceased.

n) The guest lineages will then speak according to the order of seniority.

o) The lineage participants will repeat and summarise all the various speeches, and adding his own view.
The guest lineages will then provide the final verdict that consists of the following:

1. Expression of sympathy to the family and the community

2. The delivery of the verdict, which consists of appropriate measures to be taken against those accused of being responsible for the death, and taking the problems associated with death to Ohugaci the divine patron of death for the final solution.

3. The ordering of Idoma burial cloth pa. This will be brought forward, seen, measured, and accepted.

4. The ordering of the gift giving ceremony to commence. This may include clothes, money and the ram to be slaughtered on the grave in order to ensure the deceased smooth journey to the spiritual world, and his safe return to earth when he will be recreated as an ancestor.
Finally, the ordering of the last rites for the burial of the dead to begin. These last rites are very important as they finally open the way into the spirit world for the dead.

After this elaborate inquest that may take between four to five hours, then the actual burial will take place. We have decided to be very detailed in our discussion of the Idoma ikpọdàókwọoka—an inquest followed by burial, because of the later significant role it played in Idoma Christianity.

After the ikpọdàókwọoka, the corpse will be dressed with his best clothes and other clothes that he was given at the inquest with the gift of money and the gifts, wrapped in ọpa—the Idoma burial cloth, placed in a traditional coffin called akplata, unless he is the most senior elder or chief, then placed in the grave. The person to start filling the grave picks up some earth with his hoe, passes it under his thigh three times and places it at the side of the head of the corpse, and does the same at the side of his or her foot. All others will after him pick up some earth and pour it on the corpse. This symbolises farewell in Idoma. Males are laid to rest facing the east, symbolically reminding them to rise early at sunrise to go to their farm in the world of the dead.

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118 The spiritual world of the dead in Idoma is believed to consist of the following: (1) The reception at the gate to the world of the spirit of the dead for the newly arrived from the human world. (2) The cleansing of the face of the new spirit from the human world with certain potent liquid medicine by the spirits in the world of the dead. (3) Merriments, dancing singing by the spirits of the world of the dead for the new arrival from human world (4) and finally the questioning of the new spirit from the human world, about the conditions of the human beings he or she has left behind, and any other messages he or she must have been given for those in the world of the dead.


120 See later discussion in Chapter seven.
Women are laid to rest facing the west, to remind them to return home at sunset to cook the night meal in the world of the dead.

Masqueraders will normally be present or be in attendance at the burial to represent the spirits of the ancestors, coming to welcome the spirit of the deceased to the abode of the ancestors. The masquerade sing seven different songs, and the corpse is covered after the last song.

The head of the family is never buried outside the family compound, but in the compound at a site where his tomb will be protected and sheltered from the rain. Elderly women who are classified as male in the community, are charged with the responsibility of watching over the corpse of an elderly person before the burial. During this time of watching the corpse, they continually play icica - some rattles, and icica songs. They are rewarded with money and drinks for doing this. Some sacrifices will be made to icica as well. For example, if the deceased is an old woman, a fowl is used to make a sacrifice to the icica - rattles that are played for the corpse. The head of the fowl is buried with the corpse, while the women who played the icica eat the rest of the fowl. For an old man, a goat is used. The goat will be killed with a single stroke of a knife, skinned with an opening on the skin, the flesh cut up in pieces and put back into the skin through the mouth. This is then buried with the corpse.121

Those who take part in the burial or witness it, will pick a leaf, move it round their heads three times and then touch their bodies with it. Simultaneously, they request the departed not to hurt them as they know nothing about his or her death. They also ask
the departed to protect them, and leave the leaf on the grave. In the Icfama north, they will put *cĩdu a* stick on the grave, which is only removed on the seventh day in the presence of the man who inherits the deceased's property. A tortoise, a symbol of peaceful journey in Icfama will be killed and a cock, and their blood, with ground millet and wine, plus the liver of the tortoise are placed on the grave and the stick removed. The brother of the deceased will then make the *ohěbi* sacrifice to the spirit of his brother and the ancestors before he can touch the property of the deceased. Failure to do so will result in the anger of the deceased being kindled against him, which may result in his death or a very bad disease such as leprosy. Burial is very significant to the Icfama people, because of the Icfama belief in life after death and reincarnation. It is passionately believed throughout Icfama land that physical death is only a mere transition from one stage of life to another. Care, therefore, must be taken to bury a person properly and to avoid breaking any of the taboos or burial rites.

2.5.3.4 The Burial of *xc-a* Chief

In the Icfama tradition, when a chief dies, it is not disclosed publicly, except to the relations and the most senior elders of the community for a period of three months. This disclosure to the relatives and the most senior elders will be done in figures of speech or adages, such as:

\[ Agābā le tā iplu upū \]
\[ *xc* le piya Agābā\]

The Lion has gone to the forest or

The Chief has become a Lion

It will then be officially claimed that the Chief is unwell and has gone to another town for treatment or that he has travelled. During this period of public silence, his corpse

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[121] This is still a current practice among the Icfama people, especially among the Otukpo, Ocobo, Ugboju and Oglewu clans.
will be buried in the bush in a place called, *ukwulukwu* - the burial place for Chiefs, or he will be buried inside his house.\(^{123}\)

During the burial of a chief, in addition to various other rituals and sacrifices, it is customary to kill and bury two slaves with the chief, one as a pillow for the chief’s head and the other as a resting place for his feet. Or, their two legs will be broken, with one sitting at the late chief’s head, while the other at his feet. They will eventually be buried alive with the chief. It is believed that those two slaves will help the chief in carrying the chief’s belongings to the world of the dead and his ancestral home. The chief’s youngest wife may be buried alive with him in order for the chief to have a wife in the world beyond\(^{123}\).

We have observed in this chapter the Idoma identity and suggested that this group of people living on a strip of land that stretches from the southern bank of the river Benue to the northern fringes of the Igbo land, numbered over one and half million people. They have common tradition that recognises Apa as their ancestral homeland, whence they migrated due to a prolonged chieftancy dispute and the *efi-nya* - horse war with the Hausa Fulanis. Dr Erim’s erroneous view of Idu as the putative father of what he called “the original Idoma” was rejected on the grounds that his argument was not based on the Idoma context, but on early colonial anthropologists who collected the so called Idoma genealogies. Secondly, of the twenty two Idoma districts, it is only in Ugboju, Adoka and Otukpo that claim descent from Idu. And finally, there is no oral evidence in the other nineteen districts of Idoma that supports

\(^{122}\) Such pronunciation would normally come from the Achadu who is the royal undertaker and the king maker.

\(^{123}\) The later is mostly practised in the southern part of Idoma among the Agila, Ulayi and the Igwumale in Ado Local Government area.
Erim’s Idu putative father theory of the Idoma people. We then went on to examine the Alekwä Abjọ cultic chant to establish the Idoma pre colonial identity and origin and concluded that the Idoma came from Apa in the defunct Kwarara Jukun Kingdom and settled at different periods in history to the present day Idoma land. This was followed with the examination of some Idoma social organisations, political systems, economy, agriculture, and three aspects of the Idoma culture: birth, marriage, and burial that have direct bearing and very significant roles to play in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

Let us now turn our attention to some religious, metaphysical and philosophical factors central to our discussion on the Idoma interaction with Christianity in the next chapter on the Idoma primal theology.

123 Although it is against the law to openly do this today in Idoma, but in reality it is still being practised secretly.
CHAPTER THREE

IDΩMA PRIMAL THEOLOGY

In presenting this chapter we will be using the writer’s observation from fieldwork in IDΩMA July-September 1997, and his personal indigenous experience of IDΩMA and the IDΩMA system1 to present our discussion on the IDΩMA primal2 theology, though slightly influenced by Christianity. How have the IDΩMA been articulating God, creation, life after death, etc., before they made any contact with Christianity? Since theology could be defined as an intellectual articulation of God, creation, the supernatural or the supersensible, one is bound to ask, how does IDΩMA intellectually articulate God and the supernatural, creation, this world, and the world beyond? Is there any unique IDΩMA way of articulating theology?

We investigate in this chapter if God was present in the IDΩMA world view, religious beliefs and practices, arts and music, epistemology before the IDΩMA ever made contact with Christianity. Basing our proposition on the universal Supreme God who is ma iyinu fu-self revealed in works and words in IDΩMA, we will critically examine the epistemological avenues of the IDΩMA people and hopefully come to the evaluation that the IDΩMA believe and worship the same one supreme God as any one else in the world.

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1 We had to rely upon fieldwork observation and our IDΩMA experience, and the oral evidence in our discussion, due to the scarcity of written material, that is if there is any at all on the IDΩMA primal theology.

We will also examine the Idọma response to that one and the same supreme God in their acts of worship and rituals before they made contact with Christianity.

We will define what is meant by Idọma primal theology. It is however important to point out at this stage that the Idọma primal theology is by no means to be regarded as mutually exclusive of African theology of which a lot had already been written and defined by various scholars. However for the purpose of our studies, we would focus primarily on the Idọma people. But such focus does not preclude us from making reference to African theology in general or the writers on African theology when necessary.

3.1. Idọma Theology: Definition

By Idọma theology, we mean an interpretation and translation of God’s revelation and self-disclosure in a given context in which the Idọma find contact with mythology, ethics, worship and rituals of primal religion, beliefs and practices. It is an interpretation of God in terms that are relevant and essential to Idọma existence within their context.

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4 For example, Raimo Harjula a Finnish missionary defines African Theology as an interpretation of God’s self-revelation in a given context which in Africa situation finds contact with mythology, ethics and rituals of traditional African. Whereas Idowu, in his book African Traditional Religion, argues that African theology should emerge at a point in which Christianity meets with African Traditional Religion, others such as Agbeti felt, when we talk about African theology, we should mean the interpretation of the pre-Christian and pre-Muslim African people’s experience of God. In his chapter on the question of identity as a key to understanding the concerns of theology in modern Africa in the second century AD. Bediako, Theology and Identity, p. 3 agrees with the earlier position of Adrian Hastings, African Christianity, p. 50 that African theology should be seen ‘as a dialogue between the African… scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa’. 
The Idɔma context as observed by Bediako in relation to Africa as a whole in his book *Theology and Identity*, “has to do with the possibility of genuine theology, which seeks a synthesis between... religious commitment and cultural continuity”.  

Idɔma primal theology could also be defined as the interpretation of the pre-Christian Idɔma experiences of God. It is the primal articulation of the Ɖwɛjɛd in Idɔma, and the Idɔma religious beliefs and practices prevalent before the arrival of Christianity in Idɔma. This is the tangible and felt practical relationship with what is believed in the Idɔma traditional religion as supernatural power. Idɔma theology is the primal indigenous articulation of God in Idɔma. It is that theology that has been traditionally handed down from generation to generation by the Idɔma forebearers to the present generation of Idɔma. This Idɔma primal theology is not a thing of the past, but a theology that the Idɔma today have as their own by living it and practising it in their daily lives.

Cox argues that, the choice of the term primal:

> was motivated in part by the desire to avoid injecting pejorative attitudes into the study of certain types of religion as phenomena, thereby overcoming descriptive biases.  

The term “primal” is however used here to mean something that is real, original, inborn and inherent in the Idɔma articulation and response to Ɖwɛjɛ - God, resulting in what we call Idɔma theology. We mean the Idɔma first-truth inherent in their language,

5 K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 432.
6 Ɖwɛjɛ is the Idɔma word for the supreme God. See later discussion for details of Ɖwɛjɛ.
7 The conveyance of the Idɔma theology from one generation to another was through oral transmission.
culture, and concrete historical experiences in their primal articulation of rowoico, creation; the Idoma worldview, divinities, life after death; reincarnation, worship and sacrifice. Using the term “primal” in relation to the Idoma theology is completely in agreement with John B. Taylor’s suggestion when he rightly states that, the term primal could be regarded as something “basic or fundamental that is observed in societies or religion”.9

One of the greatest critics of the terminology, “primal”, Dr. Cox, even consents to the use of this term, when it is been used in relation to theology. He correctly agrees, “this is a valuable terminology for theology”10. Mitchell defines the word primal as meaning, “something basic, fundamental, prior.”11 In his own definition cited by Shaw, Harold Tuner defines the term “primal” as “both primary and prior; they represent a common religious heritage of humanity”.12 Walls on his part states that, it is that, which “underlies all the other faiths, and often exists in symbiosis with them...and have an active life within and around cultures and communities influenced by these faiths...”13 therefore possessing “historical anteriority” and represents a “basic elemental status in human experience”.14 Using this word in relation to Idoma theology therefore, we mean that Idoma religious experiences beliefs and practices which are prior, basic and fundamental to the Idoma people, that exist within the Idoma “symbiosis”, with active

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10 James L. Cox, Classification of Primal Religion, p. 13.
14 Ibid., p. 252.
life within the Ickuma culture and tradition. Ickuma primal theology is that which, while practically active in Ickuma, has its own unique Ickuma context and beyond, tolerant of Christianity and other religions, possesses its sources in the Ickuma history, language, culture, arts and music, and has basic creeds and beliefs that are passed on from one generation to another. It could be suggested that the Ickuma children are born into the Ickuma primal theology.

Theology, as Walls rightly argues, “...springs out of practical situations, it is therefore occasional and local in character”. It holds therefore, that any valuable discussion of the Ickuma theology must take Ickuma context, situations and locality into serious consideration. Principal to our discussion in this line, are the Ickuma epistemology, language and religious experiences. Examining these closely, we discover that Ickuma primal theology has the following basic structures:

3.2. THE Knowledge of ‘kwixco – God

What we are contending here, is that ‘kwixco-God to the Ickuma is an existential reality and not just a philosophical abstract concept. We are totally in agreement here with Marshall Macluhan, who argues that God dies the moment he becomes a concept. To the Ickuma, ‘kwixco is not a concept, but a reality that they knew, thought of, and spoke

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15 A. F. Walls, “The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”, Missionalia, 10 (3), 1982, p. 100. 16 The words concept or conception are philosophical terms which are inadequate to describe the religious consciousness of the Ickuma. As a term it applies to a general idea derived from senses. The natural process by which such an idea is obtained is called abstraction. However, it must be pointed out here that we do not mean that the Ickuma are less philosophical than the westerners or any other race of the world.
of prior to their contact with Christianity. The Idóma, as our earlier discussion had pointed out, have a local indigenous name for God. They called God ìwà-fọ. The Idóma people traditionally believe there is a real ìwà-fọ who is ma iyinu fu self-revealed in his ìkùlọ works. It is not for them to prove ìwà-fọ's existence, but rather demonstrate their comprehension of the revealed ìwà-fọ and their ritual response to him. As the Idóma express it in their ita18 ìye duuma i nwu ìyipe, ìene ìwà-fọ we a ñà - no one teaches a child who God is. This implies among the Idóma that the knowledge of God is inherent and primal to the Idóma, so much so that even a child can understand whom God is. The existence of God is ta eyi pese immanence and self-evident with the Idóma. For example, Mr Ogbe was asked during fieldwork in Iga Okpaya, Aba a je ka ìwà-fọ iko yọ lọ a how do you know that there is God?

He replied,  

Ma um see me
N yọ ì do I exist?
ìdān'ọ ka n yọ if I exist
ai ka ìwà-fọ yọ then God exists
ìdān'ọ ka ìwà-fọ I yọ Because, if God does not exist
ì kẹ yọ 'ọ duù19 then I can't exist

18 Ita is the Ìdóma idiomatic and proverbial sayings
19 Mr. Ogbe, Fieldwork interview, Iga Okpaya, 27th July 1977. Mr. Ogbe who is 72 years old is one of the first generation Christians from ìzekwu in the northern part of Ìdóma. He is the senior circuit steward of Iga Okpaya Circuit, a post he has held for over 30 years now. Although the constitution of the Methodist Church Nigeria makes provision for this office to be rotated every five years, the Iga circuit decided that Mr Ogbe must hold this office as long as he wished. This stand they took, though in disobedience to the Constitution of the Methodist church, was due to what they called, “the transparent honesty and integrity” of Mr. Ogbe as their leader. This man’s Christian integrity is not limited to Iga only, but throughout the Diocese of Benue and beyond to other parts of the country such as Jos, Kaduna, Zaria and Kano.
This is perceived through the very Idorsa existence. They express this as follows: 

\[ \text{duuma ne oyeyi y} \text{a wico y} \text{ab} \text{ wherever there is life, there is God.} \]

To the Idorsa therefore, the very existence of life, demonstrates the existence of God's reality to them.

The Idorsa generally believe in the existence of a supreme being called \( \text{wico} \).

\( \text{wico} \) is a compound Idorsa word that can be broken as follows: \( \text{w} \) - meaning, 'Lord, owner, the source being who is supreme' and \( \text{i} \) meaning 'up'. Putting the two together, \( \text{wico} \) in Idorsa means 'the Source being who lives above' or 'the Lord' or 'my owner' \( \text{wum} \), who is above. Is this a case of another African "high God" who is removed from the day to day life of the people as argued by various scholars?\(^{20}\) To the Idorsa, even though \( \text{wico} \) is high-\( \text{i} \)co, He is not removed from the day today life of all the Idorsa people. He is always present and active in their lives and context.\(^{21}\)

To them, \( \text{wico} \) is one who is supreme, "superlatively great, incomparable and unsurpassable in majesty, excellent in attributes, stable, unchanging, constant and

\(^{20}\) See for example, F Baudin, Fetishism and Fetish Worshippers, 1855, p. 9ff; Diedrich Westermann, Africa and Christianity, Oxford University Press, 1973, especially p. 65 ff.; Rattray, Ashanti, 1923, p. 139 ff.; Margaret, The Ngoni of Nyasaland, Oxford University Press, 1957, especially, p. 158, where she argued that the "Ngoni undoubtedly had the idea of a creator, removed and unapproachable by man". To all of these scholars, the God of the Africans, is a high, removed, unapproachable, idle sleeping God that has nothing to do or without any active part in the day to day lives of the Africans. African theologians like Idowu, in his book, African Traditional Religion: A definition, 1973, SCM Press, had given some adequate reply to these erroneous views about 'the African God'. However, we would point out here that, most of these writers did their writing at a time when probably, they had little access to the proper source of African belief and practices, or when they had little more than a chance opportunity of a fleeting glimpse of the vast continent of Africa. Those who have looked more carefully into the African primal religion and the African context, would easily agree today that the sweeping statement of the 'African High God' that is removed from the day today life of the African cannot now be taken seriously, either by the Africans or an objective scholarly minded non-African investigator.

\(^{21}\) See later discussion on the presence of \( \text{wico} \) among the Idorsa people.
realistic."\(^{22}\) Besides the name \(\text{w}z\text{i}\text{CD}\), Icfama is very rich in \(ic\text{gg}ba\) - attributes of God which clearly demonstrate that to them that God is a living one, "who is an ever present, ever active, and ever acting reality in the world."\(^{23}\)

This \(\text{w}z\text{i}\text{CD}\) expresses himself in his \(ic\text{gg}ba\) - attributes among the Icfama. By the attributes of God in Icfama, we mean the quality or the characteristics of God to the Icfama people. These are the properties of \(\text{w}z\text{i}\text{CD}\) as are visibly exercised by him in his works of creation, preservation and providence which are preserved in the Icfama traditions, language and culture. As Danquah correctly states

\[\text{Man is so utterly limited, he cannot think of the ultimate Reality, but in metaphors, drawn from the ordinary concrete things of common experience.}\] \(^{24}\)

Idowu's observation on the Yorubas of Nigeria is also applicable to the Icfama, when he said,

\[\text{The Yoruba do little abstract thinking. Their picture of Olodumare is therefore of a personage, venerable and majestic, age(sic) but not ageing with greyness which commands awe and reverence.}\] \(^{25}\)

Instead of the usual practice of imposing western theological categories of Christianity and concepts of God on the Icfama tradition, we will let the Icfama speak for themselves. Let us further examine through the Icfama language, culture and history what they say about God.

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\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 150

In all of God’s major *aie-gba*-attributes as we observe among the Idzma perception, God’s sovereignty will be the right summary of Idzma articulation and knowledge of God. They see God as sovereign in *oce* - the world with respect to his creatures; nature and to *wici’s* person. Prior to the Idzma making contact with Christianity, they expressed the cosmic sovereignty of God as *anu ene o ogoga kla nwune fiye duu*. God who is sovereign in the entire universe. The Idzma in their tradition do not compartmentalise the created universe, but refer to and believe the natural and spiritual world as two sides of the same and one coin and over this *wici we otula ye ku nu aa*, God is supreme and sovereign.26 God’s sovereignty and supremacy in terms of his power is perceived in Idzma both in creation and control and demonstrated in their address to God especially at the time of prayer *Ani ene ya ece aa, ke I le wici innu ti gla aa*, He who makes the world controls and sustains it.27

*Wici* is the absolute controller of the universe. And this is the main focal point at which that fact of the reality of his uniqueness in the Idzma concept may clearly be brought home to us. The fact that *wici* controls the universe embraces all that we have been trying to say, and shows the western theological falsity of the notion of the

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26 See Okwu V. C. “Early History of Idomaland”, Ahmodu Bello University, Seminar, 1974.
27 This prayer was offered by Mrs. C. O Carew, a 67 year old and the President of women’s fellowship of the Methodist Church, Benue Diocese, during fieldwork in Otukpo on the 3rd August 1997 at morning worship prayer, Norcross Church Otukpo. The same prayer was heard in eight other places of worship in Idzma during field work in Otukpo, Orokam, Iga, Adoka, Ugboju, Umogidi, Iwili, Owukpa and Onyagede. This particular prayer became almost like a collect in which the Idzma acknowledge God who is the creator and absolute preserver of the world.
“withdrawn God” in Africa, of which Idzoma is part\textsuperscript{28}. This western concept of a world created, equipped and self-going with self charging and self directing power as Idowu correctly argues, is alien to African belief.\textsuperscript{29} The Idzoma in particular do not think like this, but rather anthropomorphically about their articulation and knowledge of \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{w}i}}\textit{\textsc{c}}\textit{\textsc{o}}}\). They do not know of any \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{w}i}}\textit{\textsc{c}}\textit{\textsc{o}}}\) who is not “an Immanent being”\textsuperscript{30-31} The analysis of the Idzoma name of God as earlier discussed, may imply that he is far away, but, at the same time, the Idzoma believe that \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{w}i}}\textit{\textsc{c}}\textit{\textsc{o}}}\) is near and active in the universe as we shall discover later in the discussion. We could rightly suggest here that, with regard to the creation, control and maintenance of the universe, as far as the Idzoma are concerned, only \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{w}i}}\textit{\textsc{c}}\textit{\textsc{o}}}\) is the absolute origin of things, in other words okwute- the Source being, and only \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{w}i}}\textit{\textsc{c}}\textit{\textsc{o}}}\) has absolute power and authority, as expressed in their language, \(\text{\textit{Anu we okwute ku d\textit{\textsc{d}a doodu, mla f\textit{\textsc{u doodu aa}}}}\), He is the source being and all power.

\(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{w}i}}\textit{\textsc{c}}\textit{\textsc{o}}}\)’s universal control is portrayed in the Idzoma image of \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{c}}}a}\)-a monarch king. This is because of the Idzoma traditional structure that is hierarchical as observed earlier in chapter one. A common proverb in Idzoma as in other African tribes is \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{c}}}a \textit{\text{duuma i leh\textit{\textsc{b}a}} \textit{d\textit{\textsc{w}i}}\textit{\textsc{c}}\textit{\textsc{o}} a \textit{\texteta} \textit{\textsc{ma}}}\) - there is no king like God. As Parrinder rightly observes, this proverb “...is often painted as a text on the front of motor lorries, to show that God is supreme and the human will must bow to him”.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{28} For this Western false notion of African sky God, see earlier not, and also K. Little, \textit{The Mende of Sierra Leone}, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, pp 217ff, and a befitting counter argument from Idowu, \textit{African Traditional Religion: A Definition}, 1976:154ff.

\textsuperscript{29} E. B. Idowu, \textit{African Religion}, p.155.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} \(\text{\textit{d\textit{\textsc{c}}}a}\) is the Idzoma word for King or a monarch king.

\textsuperscript{32} G. Parrinder, \textit{Religion in Africa}, p. 31.
The Idoma believe and describe God as the most powerful in heaven and earth,  
\( \text{Idoma}\) the king who is most powerful in heaven and earth.33

Closely related to \( \text{Idoma}\)'s ultimate power in the universe in Idoma, is \( \text{Idoma}\)'s presence and relation to time and space and nature. The Idoma regarded him to be present everywhere as expressed in their oral proverb \( \text{Idoma}\) God who is present everywhere; \( \text{Idoma}\) God who is present everywhere, \( \text{Idoma}\) God who sees both heaven and earth at the same time, \( \text{Idoma}\) God who fills everywhere. God who sees both heaven and earth at the same time, God who fills everywhere. God who fills everywhere like the wind. To the Idoma, God is present everywhere.34

This \( \text{Idoma}\) who is supreme, omnipresent, all powerful, frowns upon and punishes evil or bad things. A metaphor is used in Idoma to clearly convey this idea of evil and punishment. One of the most repeated phrases that carry the connotation of judgement, is the metaphor of thunder akpla. \( \text{Idoma}\) akpla God is thunder.35 \( \text{Idoma}\) akpla God is thunder. This is a general metaphor that is commonly used among the Idoma people. However, it use of it is more common in Ocobo, Ugboju, Adoka, Iga-Okpaya, Ugbokpo than the rest parts of Idoma.

33 For further details of the Idoma portrayal of \( \text{Idoma}\) as king, see R. G. Armstrong, “Idoma kings: The Nature of Their Office and Their Changing State” 1972. This is an archival material of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, department of African studies.
34 These are common sayings in all the 22 Idoma districts as attested by the Idoma people during fieldwork in Idoma, July-September 1997.
35 This is a general metaphor that is commonly used among the Idoma people. However, it use of it is more common in Ocobo, Ugboju, Adoka, Iga-Okpaya, Ugbokpo than the rest parts of Idoma.
into open confession before dad and mum of whatever we have done wrong, even the most secret of such deeds.

God is also seen as the beneficent God. We find this in the Idɔma oral expression SWEP ma eyinyinyi or omayiiniyi - the merciful and compassionate God. He is also seen or perceived as a saviour, OHENYATA He who rescues or saves a person. SWEP is also sovereign in holiness and righteousness, ANU ONO le yoooolo. I kla le onya duuma ƞ ma He who is clean, pure and without blemish, whose eye I ma øga doo duu, sees everywhere. SWEP is unique and incomparable. The uniqueness of SWEP is the one reason why the Idɔma have no images, either graven, painted or drawn of him. The Idɔma express NY ϣ DMA ƞ ka ɔdi ŋe a g e le SWEP gla a a? Whom or with what will you compare God? ϾEC DUUMA AMA ƞ KA ɔDA DUUMA I YO ƞ - no one and nothing. The very fact of SWEP’s uniqueness implies his transcendence. Our earlier discussion on the Idɔma knowledge of God as ϾEC - king, emphasises his uniqueness. To the Idɔma SWEP la icọ o y o ãbu o kla y ã gbihi - God is up, he is in the front and he is at the back. SWEP we eékponi - God is one.

In the light of our discussions, and the analysis of who SWEP is to the Idɔma, basing our analysis on the Idɔma oral tradition, proverbs, sayings and the testimonies of those interviewed during fieldwork in Idɔma, and the writer’s personal experience and his knowledge of Idɔma context, it could be suggested that, the Idɔma belief in a supreme God- SWEP, was in no way due to any cause of Christian missionary influence or
teaching. It could be passionately suggested that their belief in Œwơco has nothing to do with the missionaries. Before Christianity ever made contact with the Ìdọma, they already knew, who God was, and had a way of articulating that God and responding to him in worship as this chapter and subsequent ones will highlight. The Ìdọma have their distinctive knowledge and experience of Œwơco. God is not a word borrowed from the missionaries. The Ìdọma knew Œwơco before the missionaries arrived in Ìdọma.

Secondly, it could be concluded that the Ìdọma speak of Œwơco God as a living Supreme being, who is the ultimate power in the universal hierarchy of power. He is the transcendent immanent, the all powerful one, who is the creator of the universe, the regulator, permeator, harmonizer and supporter of all the other forces that are in the universe. McVeigh needs to think again, when he generalises and argues that, “the African view of God is characterized by ambiguity.... They make no clear distinction between God and other beings”.36

Among the Ìdọma, there is a very clear distinction between Œwơco the Supreme God and other beings like Alekwu or Anjenu, as later discussion will highlight. No conclusion could better correct McVeigh’s erroneous view than the correct observation of Mungo Park, in his observation on the Yoruba concept of God, which is also applicable to the Ìdọma, when he said,

*I have conversed with all ranks and conditions upon their faith, and can pronounce without the smallest shadow of doubt, that the belief in one God...is entire and universal among them.*37

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37 R. Worthington, *The Life and Travels of Mungo Park*, 1883, New York, p. 21
The Idoma believe in a Supreme God called \\textit{Okwute}, who is the creator and sustainer of the universe, and the ruler of all things. In articulating His \textit{icbga} attributes, the Idoma perceive \\textit{Okwute} as a God of power, the most powerful and almighty, \textit{anu onwu nwune fye duu}, the invisible as epitomise in the name they give to their girls such as \\textit{nyama}, who has seen God?

3. 3. The Knowledge of Divinities

Although the Idoma believe in one supreme God, who is the source being - \textit{Okwute}, that maintains and controls the universe, they also believe in other divinities. This is not only common to the Idoma people, but as Idowu, correctly observed, “west Africa may be said to be the home of the divinities”. Wherever you go in West Africa, the belief in divinities is very prominent. There are variations of these divinities from one African country to another. But this does not mean that the African concept of God is polytheistic, but rather it is monotheistic. This is due to the fact that the African world is under a “unitary theocratic government”.

These divinities were not created, but brought into being in the nature of things with regard to the divine ordering of the universe. They are derivatives from \\textit{Okwute}, that is they are in being in consequence of the being of \\textit{Okwute}. The powers, functions and authorities of these divinities will have no meaning outside \\textit{Okwute}. These divinities have their own local names in Idoma which is either descriptive of their roles or their

\begin{footnotes}
39 See E. B Idowu, \textit{African Religion}, especially chapter five for a detailed discussion of this idea
40 Ibid., p. 155
\end{footnotes}
natural phenomenon, which are believed among the Idoma to be the manifestation of
their being as later discussion will highlight.

These divinities as earlier discussed “were brought into being as functionaries in the
theocratic government of the universe”42. Each of these divinities in Idoma are connected
to the local situation, and each is believed to be the \( \text{zwrico ku} \) - the god of, either a
particular group of people in Idoma, or their function in the ordering of the total Idoma
communal life. Locally, the divinities’ local name appears to limit their scope
linguistically to the Idoma locality.

In the Idoma traditional belief, these divinities also function as \( \text{zwrico} \)’s ministers with
each having a portfolio in his monarchical government. It could be suggested that they
are also the intermediaries between \( \text{zwrico} \) and man, especially with reference to their
functions. So much so, that they become Idoma channels through which they believe
they can approach \( \text{zwrico} \). They are like a half way house to the Idoma in their relation
to \( \text{zwrico} \). In certain cases, they may be sufficient in some way, but by no means an end
in themselves.

Questions have been asked time without number whether these divinities are real or not.
To the Idoma, and perhaps, peoples of other African countries, especially west African
countries such as Ghana, Togo, Liberia, The Gambia and Sierra Leone who believe them

\[41\] For example, Orisanla among the Yoruba, Olokun among the Edo of Benin, and Adam \( \text{cancanco} \) among
the Idoma were not created.
and have experienced the functions and the roles of these divinities, they are real. But to outsiders, especially westerners, to whom probably, the divinities have never had any significance, they have no real objective existence. It could however, be suggested that, it is not altogether right to assume that these divinities are not real on the ground that certain persons or group of persons have not had the experience of them. Idowu’s suggestions are worth noting here,

It will be sheer presumption to claim that we know all already all that there is to know about the fact of spiritual powers and the supersensible world.  

Some of these divinities that the Idumo believe in are said to be divinities of heaven, i.e., Adamcanco - my father who is the king of heaven. Their origins are divine secrets which are beyond the capability of the Idumo to research. Others may be conceptualisations of wic’i’s icgba attributes, while others are Idumo ancestors or heroes who have been deified, i.e., Alekwu, which we will later discuss. It would take another thesis to list and assess all of these divinities and their numbers in Idumo.

However, in order to illustrate our discussions on the Idumo belief in the divinities, we will focus on three of these divinities that are significant and widely believed in Idumo.

42 E. B. Idowu, African Religion, p. 170
43 Ibid., p. 175
44 Adamcanco is a heavenly divinity whose origin is a divine secret. The Idumo has no means or ways of probing into his existence. He functions in almost identical capacity as wico - the Supreme God.
3.3.1. Zm>sd
This is a personal individual god, through whom, Zm>sd co is approached. This divinity is represented by a tree called UdazwiD, which is usually planted at the centre of the family compound by the head of the family. When an individual feels all is not well, or is looking for a favour, sacrifices of fowls, and offerings of food and libations of either palm wine or obulukutu⁴⁵ - local beer - are offered to him. When a new child is born to an Idzoma family, they are brought to the zm>sd shrine, called Ikpozm>sd⁴⁶, and dedicated to the family deities. An oracle is consulted at this point to know which of the ancestors that have returned to this physical world in this baby, the child is then named either after that ancestor or a relative of that ancestor⁴⁷. A male family member of that ancestor gives the new baby a drink of water, to enable the new child, which is believed to be a reincarnated ancestor, to live at peace with the family he has returned to.

3. 3. 2. Aji
The earth goddess, Aji⁴⁸ who is the custodian of morality and source of fertility is highly revered in Idzoma. It is believed in Idzoma that Aji is a goddess of protection, and responsible for an abundant supply of crops. As our earlier discussions in chapter two indicated, the Idzoma are agricultural people, therefore they attach much importance to Aji. Among the Idzoma she is believed to be the giver and administrator of moral laws. Aji is also seen especially among the Otukpo people as a counterpart of God, and is even

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⁴⁵ Obulukutu is a local beer that is made from guinea corn or millet mixed with corn. This local beer takes nine days to brew.
⁴⁶ Ikpozm>sd - literally means at the foot of my personal god. In other words, to be brought before a personal god.
⁴⁷ See earlier discussions on child birth and naming ceremony in Chapter two.
considered by some to be senior to God. This belief is observed in the annual Idoma prayers offered to Aje during the Ajéoopa\(^{49}\) festival as cited and translated below

\[\begin{align*}
\&^{\text{E kwu la ozzi}} \quad \text{They took the sacrifice to the east,} \\
\&^{\text{ozzi ka e kwu la oznie}} \quad \text{The east said, send it to the west,} \\
\&^{\text{E kwu la oznie}} \quad \text{They took the sacrifice to the West,} \\
\&^{\text{oznie ka e kwu la dwico}} \quad \text{The west said, send it to God} \\
\&^{\text{E kwu la dwico}} \quad \text{They took the sacrifice to God} \\
\&^{\text{dwico ka e kwu la ajé}} \quad \text{God said, send the sacrifice to the Earth,} \\
\&^{\text{ohigbù ka ajé \& we myakwuwea}} \quad \text{For the Earth is the Senior}^{50}
\end{align*}\]

At times Aje could be said to be more revered than the supreme being dwico, as greater reverence is given to Aje among the Idoma. Aje, the earth goddess or the land goddess has always been held in high esteem, even from the days of the Idoma forbearers and during their migration from one place to another. The Idoma people moved with some soil from their last settlement, which they buried in their new settlement. In the Idoma tradition this act symbolised the Idoma belief that the new settlement was an extension of the former one.\(^{51}\) The place where the soil is buried becomes the shrine of the Aje called

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\(^{48}\) Aje is believed in Idoma as the custodian of morality, the source of fertility, God's counterpart, and even believed to be senior to God.

\(^{49}\) Ajéoopa is the sacrificial rituals and festival celebrations for the earth goddess.


ikpoaje. The tree, a symbol of the personal God is planted, and the Obiokwute, or Adalekwu or onduajé\textsuperscript{52} or \textsuperscript{53} takes charge of the ikpoaje.

Traditionally, the Obiokwute is regarded as a king-priest, hence in addition to his presiding over the civil and military affairs of the Idzama, he also plays the role of a chief priest for the people. At the time of the installation of the Obiokwute-king, he will be taken to the place in the forest called Ukwulukwu\textsuperscript{53}, where a portion of the soil is scraped up and put in a piece of 'ipa - a locally woven burial cloth, folded and tied to the new chief's left hand. This traditionally signifies that the Idzama land has been committed to the chief's hand. A cock is killed and the blood is put into the chief's eyes symbolising that, if the chief commits any evil during his reign, he will be destroyed by the land.\textsuperscript{54} The chief will then be brought home on the shoulders of some strong men, with dancing and the sound of drums, special music of ukpo and pancele\textsuperscript{55} called Obiokwute is the most elderly man in the Idzama community. He is also called Adalekwu, which literally means, the father of the spirits of the departed, or onduajé, meaning the owner of the land.

Ukwulukwu is the sacred shrine where Aje is worshipped and Chiefs are buried, with the exception of the Igwumale in Ado Local Government Area that sometimes bury the chief in his room.

Anyebe, "Idzama secrets" 1975.

This is a special traditional musical instrument that looks like a flute played at very special occasions such as described above.

For details, see Ogbu, A., "Idzama secrets" Otukpo Historical Text, 28, 27\textsuperscript{th} Nov, 1975, no. 8, pp. 179-180.

\textsuperscript{54} For details, see Ogbu, A., "Idzama secrets" Otukpo Historical Text, 28, 27\textsuperscript{th} Nov, 1975, no. 8, pp. 179-180.
The festival of Ajọọpa is held annually, mostly between March and April annually for Ajọ. As we will later observe in our discussion, the timing of this festival is one of the major areas of contention in the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity as this period falls within the Christian "calendrical ritual"57 of Easter. In the Idoma tradition this ajọọpa involves a sacrifice to the land in order to invoke the blessings of a bountiful harvest during the year. Nine days before the ajọọpa, the people will prepare gruel or enyi58 from guinea corn and during this time, there must be no beating of drums. On the day of the sacrifice, the elders and some of the people will go to the Ikpoajọ in the forest, and set its portion of land on fire, after which they will search for the object of the sacrifice aṣe - stone59. This mysterious stone is generally believed to be seen only as the god opens their eyes to see it, if not they will not see it. Failure to see it results in the failure of the sacrifice, and problems such as disasters, wars, epidemics, poor harvest for the community. The women of the community are said to be less fertile as the result of the failure of this sacrifice, and those who are already pregnant will have difficult deliveries.60 But when the aṣe is found, an oracle is consulted on what to be given to the land for sacrifice. A goat or cock, will be slaughtered, depending on what the land demands, and the liver is placed on the stone and local wine - obulukutu poured on it. At this point the chief or his representative will pray for peace, calling the names of all the other chiefs before him. The priest, after this prayer, takes a black fowl and thrusts a stick through its hind end and pushes the stick into the ground beside the sacred aṣe - stone

57 James, L. Cox (ed.), Rites of Passage, p. xiii.
58 Enyi is a local non-alcoholic drink that is made from grains such as, guinea corn, corn or millet.
59 According to one of my informant during fieldwork in Adoka 10th September 1982, Chief Oko, the Alegwu of Adoka, this aṣe is not just a stone, but a spiritual mystical stone with the human ability to move about and respond to the wish of the worshippers.
which is believed to have been placed there by the ancestors. The identity of the ancestor that placed it there remains unclear. The community will then bring their gifts of various types of food crops like, yams, beans, banana, corn, palm oil, and place them at the Aje shrine and pray for fertility, either of the people or crops.

A special feature at this occasion involves the playing of drums called, ukpo, okanga, uba, okengwu, and flutes known as okpancele, ukpana, angwu, and umolo.61 This is very unique in the sense that, the — chief dances to the sound of this music, with a special shield in his left hand, and a mysterious symbol of office called Okwute in his right hand. Also tied to his left hand is the piece of traditionally woven cloth called apa containing some soil, which he received on the day of his installation as chief of the Ido ma people.62

In the Ido ma tradition this festival of Ajwoopa must be kept sacred. In order to do this and to pay respect to Aje, it is forbidden during this festival to dig or weed the land in any way, or to chop wood so as to hurt the land. Any one who breaks this instruction is regarded as unclean by the community and that individual has to be purified again, through the rites of purification which entail animal or bird sacrifice to the Alekwu, ancestors and above all the Aje that was defiled, and by paying the stipulated fines.63

61 These are very special or occasional musical instruments that are played on festive days, such as the one described above, or during the installation or death of a chief.
63 According to Otace of Adoka, a 69 year old adult, whose duty is to kill the sacrificial animal and birds during the ajwoopa festival, when asked on the 13th of August 1997 during fieldwork in Adoka. He
result in such an individual incurring the curse of *Ajé* - the earth goddess. Other taboos that defy the *Ajé* according to the *Øè ørokm*, Chief D.E. Enence are homicide, theft, adultery, and witchcraft, poisoning of persons within the community, and doing any work to the earth on festival days. If the *Ajé* has been defied through the breaking of any of these taboos, it must be cleansed by the performance of some rituals at the *Ikpoaje* during the festival of *Ajéopa*. When the land is defiled and needs to be cleansed, emissaries are sent to bring some soil from the *ikpoaje*, before the sacrifice is made to the land. It is traditionally believed that if a person with a questionable character is sent on this mission, he will be afflicted with a deadly disease such as tuberculosis, leprosy or even die during the mission. During fieldwork in Igwumale, the writer was informed by Apoci that an instance of this occurred in 1978, when three persons from Igwumale were sent to *Olepfu* to obtain some soil, for the sacrifice of the cleansing of the land. They had killed some Igbo people during the Nigerian civil war of 1966 to 1970, but failed to perform *uculo* the rites of cleansing before they were sent. It was generally believed that they died as the result of it. There is a shrine dedicated to *Ajé* called *Ikpoaje*, which is built in isolation from the community. This shrine is visited once in a year. There is an annual festival for the earth goddess called *Ejeajé*.

explained that the purification sacrifice involves the killing of a cow or a ram, and a white cock, depending the degree of the offence. And the fine includes some grain offerings and money payment to the Opaaje—the *Ajé* priest.

65 Otukpo Local government Archives, *OTKP/Idɛma Historical Text/ 1928*.
66 This is the act or acts of the performance of rituals in *Idɛma*.
3. 3. 3. Alekwu

This constitutes the next level of the Idoma belief in the divinities. These are the spirits of the departed relatives, or ancestors of the Idoma. They are regarded as the roots of the Idoma community, as Professor Amali rightly stated, “When they are uprooted, the society dies. They guard, regulate and provide for the society”.68 The relationship between Alekwu and their descendants is very strong. This relationship is regulated through the uculo-rituals. The Idoma Alekwu can be classified as superhuman beings active in bestowing blessings when they are ritually appeased, as well as occasionally bringing misfortune to their descendants such as sickness, scarcity and infertility. They see to the smooth running of the Idoma society and family lives. They are sought for protection, and defence at times of war. They are seen as great intercessors for the Idoma and their descendants. These “living dead...speak a bilingual language of human beings whom they... ‘left’ through physical death, and of the spirits to whom they are now nearer than they were when they were physical men”.69 In the Idoma tradition they are believed to help keep the Idoma from trouble, and punish severely when they are offended. Hence, the Idoma dreads to incur the wrath of the Alekwu in any way by committing any offence. Most of the worship life of the Idoma is centred around the Alekwu, whom they consider as the intermediaries between God and man.70

69 J. S. Mbiti, Concepts of God, p. 230
would be made up of elderly men and some elderly women who have reached male status in the society, and they are no longer looked at or regarded as women, but men.\textsuperscript{74}

The \textit{Eje Alekwu} festival is held yearly for the \textit{Alekwu}-ancestors. This is a very significant and important occasion for all sons and daughters of \textit{Id\-ma}, due to the following reasons:

First, it is the most holy and sacred festival among the \textit{Id\-ma} community till now. Second, it brings together all the indigenes of \textit{Id\-ma}. They will travel from far and near to \textit{Id\-ma} to celebrate and participate in the \textit{Eje Alekwu} festival. Third it is believed that this is the period that the \textit{Alalekwu} or the ancestors come home from the spirit world to commune with them. Fourth, this festival is believed in \textit{Id\-ma} as observed by James Cox in a related African situation in Zimbabwe, to "restore harmony to a cosmic and social order which in some manner has been disrupted"\textsuperscript{75} by some spiritual forces. Fifth, it is an occasion of thanksgiving for the past \textit{Id\-ma} year, and moments of prayer and when new covenants are made for the coming year. This festival will also include sacrifices of fowls, goats and cows that are made to the ancestors at the ancestral shrines.

The ancestors at this festival are represented by ancestral masquerades such as \textit{alekwuafiya}, wearing masks that contain in a hidden place certain relics.\textsuperscript{76} The actual working of the masquerades \textit{alekwuafiya} is a great secret which we are not permitted to reveal in our discussion. The traditional reasons are that the women under no circumstances must know the secrets of \textit{alekwuafiya} or else they will not be able to bear

\textsuperscript{74} These are very old women in the \textit{Id\-ma} community that must have reached menopause at least twenty to thirty years prior to the period of regarding them as men.

\textsuperscript{75} James L. Cox, (ed.), \textit{Rites of Passage}, p. xii.

\textsuperscript{76} Though we are forbidden to explicitly describe and discuss all the information that we were given about \textit{Alekwu}, we were however permitted to briefly explain that, some of the hidden relics that the \textit{Alekwuafiya}
children any longer. As the saying goes in Idzema, *E le ebi kpo* – that is they have invoked upon themselves the most heinous taboo in Idzema, that will require them to undergo an elaborate purification rite, that will not only last for years, but require so much money, that the family concerned could not afford it.

3. 4. The Belief in The World of Spirits
Closely related to the belief in *Alekwu* is the Idzema belief in spirit beings called *Alelekwu* and the world of the spirit, called *Alekwu*. These spirits are not necessarily the spirits of the ancestors as we earlier discussed. They are of a separate category and class from the ancestors. However we must admit here that, in most cases as we examine the functions and the roles of these spirits, it could be rightly argued that these spirits and the ancestors may be classified under the same nomenclature of spirits. However, there are differences between them. For example, while the *Alekwu* or the ancestors have always been seen as being related to or part of the Idzema human family, these other spirits do not have clearly defined associations or functions. As Idowu correctly argues in the case of the Yoruba of Nigeria, which is equally applicable to the Idzema, these spirits may be anthropomorphically conceived, but they are more often than not thought of as powers which are almost abstract, as shades or vapours which take on human shape; they are immaterial and incorporeal beings. They are so constituted that they can assume various dimensions whenever they wish to be ‘seen’ – they may be either abnormally small or abnormally tall, fat or thin, ... when they appear beside the natural object which is their residence, they may appear in the form or shape or dimensions of the object.77

To the Idoma, these spirits “are ubiquitous”\(^78\) The Idoma traditionally believe that both
the creation and its object has its own spirit, therefore in Idoma, there are human, animal,
birds, botanic, water and environmental spirits, such as mountains, hills, rocks, streams,
rivers, waterfalls, and the wind.\(^79\) Some of these spirits are good ones that not only bring
blessings to the Idoma community through the fortune-tellers, but inhabit some special
people within the community, with a unique gift of \(\varepsilon i\) - medicine that heals. Such person
is seen as both Oboci - doctor and Adaalekwu -the father of spirit. Such persons are
believed to have also the power to make medicine \(\varepsilon i\) for protection of farms, against
injury during wars, and for some cure and prevention against witches, \(\pi\varepsilon\); snake bites,
thieves and stab wounds. There are also the disastrous and evil spirits of witches\(^80\),
which are very real to the Idoma.

These spirits have categories, and in most cases with their local names, closely associated
with their functions as later examples will illustrate. No better summary is more
appropriate here in our discussion on the Idoma belief in spirits, than that of Idowu,
when he said, “of Spirits in Africa [ in Idoma] there is no end. On the whole, they are
regarded with dread, although, it is believed that one can bargain with them or that they
could be controlled”\(^81\) by sacrifices and prayers. Let us at this point illustrate this belief

\(^78\) Ibid., p. 174
\(^79\) R. G. Armstrong, “A West African inquest,” American Anthropology, Vol. 56, no.6, p. 1051ff. See also
\(^80\) For an interesting discussion as to the reality of the spirits of witches not only to the Idoma, and Africa
as a whole, see Idowu, “The Challenge of Witchcraft”, Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, IV. 1,
by listing and briefly discussing some of these spirits that are so fundamental to the
Idoma.

First and foremost is the *Alekwu.* Most of the religious activities of the Idoma are
centred around *Alekwu.* *Alekwu* in Idoma is believed to be the intermediary not only
between God and the people, but also between them and other Spirits. Most of the Idoma
ancestors are classified as *Alalekwu.* These are ancestral spirits in the supersensible
world that are interested in what goes on with the Idoma in the visible world. They are
mysterious powers or forces in the Idoma world, and their presence makes the Idoma
live in fear. If the Idoma men and women are to enjoy life, peace and happiness, they
must live according to the laid down directives of these superhuman, and supersensible
beings and their agents. To qualify as ancestral *Alekwu,* it is of paramount importance for
such a one to have lived a good old age life, with good moral standards, and to have been
given a good Idoma traditional burial. The *Alekwu* is always willing to intercede for the
Idoma, help them in time of trouble and disasters, punish them should they offend the
ancestors, and tell the Idoma when the ancestors are hungry or are being neglected by
their immediate family.

Secondly, there are spirits of *Ukpo* that inhabit the *ukpo* tree. Ukpo is believed to
impert knowledge to the community and also tell the community when disaster is
looming such as war, or droughts or disease epidemics. There is *Abie,* this is the Idoma
god of justice, whose principal duty is to make sure justice is done in the community,

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82 see earlier discussion on belief in divinities, p. 92-94.
83 For good Idoma burial, see earlier discussions on burial in chapter 2, p. 61-75.
such as catching thieves, and equal treatment of women. *Uloko* and *Ugwu* are spirits that protect against poisons. *Inyan* is the spirit of childbirth, and the punisher of those that do evil. *Owuije* is the spirit of stability. This spirit only exists in Igwumale in Ado local Government of Benue State, Nigeria.

Thirdly, and finally in our list of examples is the *Anjenu*. This spirit is both good and harmful. *Anjenu* is good when this spirit acts to protect, heal deranged persons, and acts as giver of children to barren women. Normally, every child that is born in *Idzima* is dedicated to the *Anjenu*. In the *Idzima* tradition, girls are classified as the wife of *Anjenu* until their marriage. And in order for such girls to be happy in their new married homes, and to be fertile for childbirth, a sacrifice must be made to the *Anjenu*, to release such girls from his hand before she sleeps with her husband. And if this is not done, it is believed among the *Idzima* people that she will not only become barren, but prone to be deranged, unstable, turned mad and eventually die. *Anjenu* can be bad, when it possesses a person. Not only will he turn such person into *Atam-Ekp* , but drives him from the community to go and live in the river, forest or a refuse dump, thereby becoming very antisocial and dangerous to the community.

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84 *Ukpo* is the *Idzima* tree of wisdom or spirit of knowledge. And prophesy.
85 *Ence* is a female God of justice who is only worshipped by the *Idzima* women.
86 *Uloko* and *Ugwu* are protective spirits. They are symbolised by the trees after which they are named.
87 This is the spirit of childbirth which is worshipped not only by the *Idzima* people, but also by the *Idzima* neighbour, the Igbo people.
88 There is a very close similarity between *Owuije* and the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament. It is hoped future studies will investigate this.
89 *See earlier discussion on the *Idzima* marriage for the roles and functions of this spirit.
90 Though this is a general belief in *Idzima*, such belief is not widely held in *Idzima* totally, with the exception of Agila where such beliefs are still strongly held.
3. 5. Worship and Sacrifice

In his treatment of the traditional view of worship in Africa in his book *African Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, McVeigh, is correct in his suggestion that, “The African is deeply religious, and his religious sentiments express themselves in worship”. This is definitely true of the Iduma people who are very religious. They could also be described as a worshipping and sacrificing community.

The Iduma, always seek fellowship and communion with *Zwico*, the supreme being; the Alekwu, ancestors and other spiritual beings, whom they believe are part and parcel of their daily lives, and the guardian of the Iduma community. The Iduma are very religious instinctively and they must worship and sacrifice to something.

What is this Iduma worship? We will simply define this as the Iduma response to the awareness of a divinity, supreme, ancestral, or spiritual. Worship denotes the worthiness of an individual divinity to receive honour in accordance to that worth. Iduma worship points them beyond man to the mystery overriding the Iduma existence. To the Iduma, worship is a ‘consent to Being’. It is the Iduma’s “act or acts of turning to God” - *Zwico*. This worship is “an imperative urge..., the basic instinct which was evoked in [Iduma] by the very fact of [Iduma] confrontation with the numinous” Iduma worship is their spontaneous act either collectively or individual, as the Iduma heartmeditates on the divinity.

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91 This is a water spirit, that drives its victim into the river at any time of the day, but mostly at nights.
3. 5. 1. *sya* - sacrifice is an integral part of the Idɔma worship. The Idɔma have various reasons for worship. According to some of our informants during fieldwork in Idɔma, they worship or sacrifice in order to secure *nwọko*’s active favour or that of the Alekwu, divinities, ancestors or spirits.\(^95\) Secondly, they worship to ensure the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of the Idɔma people and their land.\(^96\) Thirdly, they worship to establish a relationship between them and the object of their worship.\(^97\) The Idɔma especially worship *nwọko*, - the source of being, because they owe their destiny to Him. The Idɔma will never worship what they can manipulate or control. There are supreme being, divinities and other unseen spiritual forces, or powers, some good others evil, that are beyond the Idɔma control, and they must worship to maintain good links with such powers. Worship in Idɔma can be said to mean in the words of Mbiti of Idɔma

...renewing contact between people and God, or between people and the invisible world.... Worship is also used as a means of creating harmony in the world of mankind.... Through worship man cultivates a spiritual outlook on life.... Acts of worship are a means of linking the spiritual and physical worlds, putting the invisible in touch with the visible.\(^98\)

From our observation during fieldwork in Idɔma, it could be suggested that there are seven main features or characteristics of the Idɔma worship. Firstly, there are liturgies\(^99\) in Idɔma worship. These are the means of communicating with the Idɔma object of worship. These include the beating of a primal instrument of worship called *Oke*.\(^100\) The

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\(^{95}\) Abọje, *fieldwork interview, Umogidi, 3\(^{rd}\) August 1997.  
\(^{96}\) Kọkwu, *fieldwork interview, Iwili in Adoka district, 4\(^{th}\) August 1997.  
\(^{97}\) Ibid, Abọje.  
\(^{99}\) See Chapter seven for detail discussion on the Idɔma liturgy.  
\(^{100}\) Oke - it is difficult to find a dynamic equivalence of oke in English or give a back translation in English. However, oke is a metal instrument, which can be between two feet to ten feet long. A piece of wood is used in playing this instrument.
worship. These include the beating of a primal instrument of worship called *Oke*[^1]. The playing of the *oke* calls the attention of the object of worship to the place of the worship. When the officiating priest is satisfied, through a spiritual medium that the object of worship is present to receive his worship, the priest continues with the worship, by pouring water on the ground, symbolically establishing a cool and calm atmosphere, during this period of worship. This will be followed with invocations and recitations of names of the various ancestors, praises, and other *icọọgba* attributes of the divinity, such as *Adam nọ ge fiyedeada* - my father that surpasses all other people’s father, *awọ nọ o le ma otu, i ma on -* you who sees at night and day, *ọda duuma i ke gwo wọ ajẹ* - nothing has ever overpowered you. In doing this the *Idọma* worshipper hopes to secure the attention of the divinity and cause such divinity to be favourable to his prayers. Secondly, *Inalegwu*. - Prayers in which he begins this prayer by stating his case, Such as,

\[
\begin{align*}
A \ kē \ mā \ u m \ ẹ x & \quad \text{you see me} \\
\ a \ jē \ xā\ dā \ nē \ o \ yà \ ẹ x \ nē \ n \ wā \ i cē \ aa & \quad \text{you know why I come today} \\
\ a yī \ nē \ a \ jē \ gā \ a m \ a a & \quad \text{the children that you gave to me} \\
\ ọ cē, \ ọ mī, \ ọ hā \ ọ wē & \quad \text{sickness, hunger, poverty, suffering} \\
\ gā \ jē \ u wā \ k pō \ ń m o \ ẹ x & \quad \text{are about to kill them} \\
\ A \ i \ lē \ e y jī \ kw jum \ ā n c ā \ k pō\ 000 & \quad \text{will you continue to look at me like this?} \\
\ U m \ wā \ k a \ a \ lē \ lē \ lē \ g wā & \quad \text{I come that you eat, drink} \\
\ k a \ ń ū \ k u \ w o \ k o \ l e \ g b o & \quad \text{so that your mind will cool, and calm down}
\end{align*}
\]

[^1]: *Oke* - it is difficult to find a dynamic equivalence of *oke* in English or give a back translation in English. However, *oke* is a metal instrument, which can be between two feet to ten feet long. A piece of wood is
This is just one of such prayers stating the Idọma case before worship. Some of the needs may be private, communal; before and after war, agricultural and all other Idọma occasions, times and seasons. Most prayers are expressed in words as stated above, but sometimes they will use gestures in their communication with the supernatural. For an example, if an Idọma person is highly wronged, with a very high degree of arrogance on the part of the person that offends him or her and there is nothing else he or she can do about it, the person will come to oduduzed'ọba102 look up to ọmọiko, raises his or her hands up with the palm wide open, and the eyes firmly looking up says, ọmọiko n'ek - It is God's. After which that person will no longer push the problem any further, but leaves it to God to fight on his or her behalf. The Idọma worship is normally led by the family priest, or the most elderly man in the Idọma local community, who is believed to be in contact with the world beyond and the Alekwu or ancestors.

Thirdly, these prayers are usually accompanied with eyaoogwo103. There are various types of sacrifices in Idọma depending on the need occasion and the season. They range from Ajawọpọ104 - sacrificing to the Land, ọmọopọpa105 which, will normally require a cock or a male goat, plus some local wine called obutukutu or enyi which is non alcoholic.

101 This prayer was observed in Ocobo during the worship of Ihobo during my field work in Ocobo on the 22nd of July 1997.
102 Oduduzed'ọba is the centre of the Idoma family compound
103 Eyoogwo are the various sacrifices in Idọma.
104 See earlier discussions on Aje for details.
105 Omọopọpa is a sacrifice to a personal God
Inyila-%le\textsuperscript{106} - this is when a woman has defiled the family compound by using some taboo words to insult another person, such as calling an Ocobo man ewo- dog, attracts a sacrifice of purification consisting of a sacrifice of a cow, a black ram, some grain, drinks and a feast for the elders and the young men of the community.\textsuperscript{107} This sacrifice in most cases is required by the elders of the community should a woman commit adultery. The wife and her parents must pay the cost of the sacrifice only. She must perform this sacrifice and sanctify the land, appease Alekwu and the ancestors and purify her marriage relationship. Failure to do this according to the Idɔma tradition will result in her husband not being allowed by the elders to sleep with her.

There is the iye oogwu\textsuperscript{108} - in which a person is purified and cleansed by the confessing of the person's sins on either a goat or a chicken and driving it to the bush, or making such confession on a money coin and putting such money at cross roads, hoping that whoever picks that money has picked all your bad omens with it. There is also the Anjäwu\textsuperscript{109} sacrifice. There are others such as ọjọbi, ohebi. Ibobo, inyànwi, ọwọoofu, alekwu ooyá etc that future studies may elucidate. These sacrifices are where the Idɔma render something to the supernatural being or beings in order to achieve a given aim or end. This sacrifice as pointed out earlier may involve the shedding of the blood, either human or animal's or bird's, and local beer and other non-alcoholic local drinks, and some feasts, either for a select group of persons or the community as a whole.

\textsuperscript{106} Inyila-%le is a purification sacrifice

\textsuperscript{107} Mr. Dganyi, fieldwork interview, Ocobo, 15\textsuperscript{th} August, 1996. Mr. Dganyi is over 98 years, and the oldest man in Ocobo and the whole of Oglewu district.

\textsuperscript{108} Iyeoogwu is a cleansing sacrifice. It is also an appropriation sacrifice, and similar to the sacrifice of atonement among the Hebrew people.

\textsuperscript{109} see earlier discussion on spirits, p. 104 ff.
The fourth feature of Idzma worship is the ehi. This may involve human beings, animals, food stuffs, water, wine, and money, depending on the need and the reason, and occasion for the sacrifice and the offering.

The fifth feature, is the objects of worship and sacrifice, which includes ozo, the supreme God, Alekwu, the ancestors and the spirits.

The sixth feature is the place of worship and sacrifice. This includes shrines, rivers or streams, family compound, and crossroads, and under some sacred trees.

The seventh is the participants. This includes the worshipper, the divinities and the supernatural beings, and some class of elders and some very older women who are classified as male in the community who eat the sacrificial meals.

3. 6. The Idzma World, Life After Death and Reincarnation

It may be rightly stated that all human beings have presuppositions through which they see the world. There are two terms that are commonly used in the study of any man's world view. These are cosmogony and cosmology. Both are compounded from the Greek word Kosmos- the world and gonos - generation. In most cases, cosmology will be used to refer to the science of the origin of the earth, and to the various theories of the formation of this material world, or universe, and cosmogony on the other hand refers to

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110 ehi is the giving of offerings.
111 see earlier discussions on pages 104-107
112 Some of the sacred trees in Idzma are ukpo, Ulolko, da and Iklaga
the world or world order\textsuperscript{113} The Idźma world in all of its totality, that is, material, spiritual, social and cultural is made intelligible to them by the Idźma cosmology. This is what explains to them how everything came to be. The Idźma world like that of many other Africans is twofold. The world of man, and the world of the spirit, or this world and the world beyond. Let us examine these worlds briefly:

3. 6. 1. First εεε- the Physical World, or the World of Man.

Central to the thinking of the Idźma, is his visible world, peopled by human beings, and things, both living and non-living.\textsuperscript{114} The western world view of natural order, which inexorably goes on as planned, is strange to the Idźma. The Idźma world is a dynamic one, a moving equilibrium, constantly threatened by social calamities and other disasters, such as droughts, famine, epidemic disease, and other supernatural or antischolar forces such as witches and sorcerers. The Idźma according to εεεkwu ɛgbu and Mr Agbiti believe that these forces that disturb the physical world are controllable through worship, sacrifices and offerings.\textsuperscript{115}

2. 6. 2. Second ɛɛɛkwu - The World of the Spirit, and the home of the Ancestors

To the Idźma, this physical, visible world is not on its own. It is enveloped by the spiritual world of the Alekwu and the ancestors and the spirits. The world of Alekwu, ancestors or spirits according to Mr. Oke ɛna could be in the underground, underworld or

\textsuperscript{113} For full discussions of this theory, see Encyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature (1969). s.v "cosmogony" and Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed, ed 1932.


\textsuperscript{115} Mr ɛbgu, ɛ & Agbiti, fieldwork interview, ɛpa-Adoka, 10th September 1996
nether world. Sometimes it could be in the forest, rivers or waterfalls, mountains and
hills, or around the homes of human beings\textsuperscript{116} where the ‘living dead’ linger around for a
short period or a longer period\textsuperscript{117}. The Id\-\textoma traditionally believe that some of the
disasters, such as famine, plagues, sickness, infertility, and death of infants are the work
of these spiritual beings or some of the ancestors who want to keep the infants.\textsuperscript{118}

Through this visible world, appeals, worship and sacrifices will be made to these
supernatural spiritual beings or forces that have some, if not total and ultimate control
over the Id\-\textoma interest and destinies. Both this world and the one beyond are created by
zw\v{z}ico. To understand Id\-\textoma’s perception of creation, it is worthwhile to examine
some of the descriptive terms used for creation in Id\-\textoma and probe some of their creation
myths. For example, in the Id\-\textoma language, the verb \textit{y\textasciiacute{a}} to make or do is only used in
relation to God, when they think of creation. zw\v{z}ico \textit{y\textasciiacute{a}} or adam\-\textit{c\textasciiacute{a}nc\textasciiacute{o} y\textasciiacute{a}}. - God
makes or my father the king of heaven makes.

To the Id\-\textoma people, their ancestors who are their closest links to the spiritual world are
the inhabitants of the world beyond. These ancestors are the Id\-\textoma “living dead”\textsuperscript{119}.

To them, death does not write ‘finish’ to the human life, but only a transition to the next
world, as expressed in the Id\-\textoma oral proverb \textit{\textit{\textcopyright i\textasciiacute{a} aga \textit{dd\textasciiacute{a} n\textasciid{u}}} - he or she has gone to
his or her father, or \textit{\textcopyright \textit{\textcopyright i\textasciiacute{a} \textit{zi\textasciid{e}}} he or she has gone home. These expressions which the
Id\-\textoma use to describe death and relate to it highlights their concept of life after death,

\textsuperscript{116} Mr. \textasciid{Z}\textasciid{a}, fieldwork interview, Umogidi, 10\textsuperscript{th} July 1996
\textsuperscript{117} See also Mbiti 1970:257-258.
\textsuperscript{118} Adsmu Agabi, fieldwork interview, Ogwule, Agatu, September 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1986. This is a wide spread belief in
Id\-\textoma, that those in the world beyond are mostly responsible for their problems in this physical world.
and that beyond this life there is another one. They believe that there is a continuation of life beyond this visible world, in which the departed had gone to live, with others who already live there. In the Idoma tradition as shown by the testimony of Mr Obinya, in this next world, people don’t suffer hardships such as hunger, sickness or death, but it is a place where happiness, comfort, pleasure, eating and drinking exist. It is the home of abahi and eb. As discussed earlier, the burial rites in Idoma, show that they believed in life after death before they ever made contact with Christianity. For example, during burial ceremonies, the deceased are given money, clothes and all the other things that they will need for the next life. Relatives of those, who earlier lost their loved ones come to send the corpse with messages and some money and even clothes, to their departed relatives who exist and live in the world beyond. Chiefs are buried with slaves to help the chief carry his goods to the world beyond, and at times the youngest wife of the chief is buried alive with the chief, in order to live with him in the world beyond. To the Idoma therefore, as Awolalu correctly observes, “death does not write “the end” to human life, but opens the gate to the hereafter...hence prominence is given to belief in a continuation of life after death in Idoma

121 Mr. Obinya. Bible translation fieldwork interview, Igboanmaa in Otukpo, 9th July 1982. Mr Obinya is one of the elders in Otukpo who possesses a great knowledge of the Idoma tradition. He is well versed in the inquest and Alekwu systems. At the time of my conversation with him, he was about 76 years old. He sadly died in September 1993 just two years before the start of this research.
122 Abahi is comfort and eb is peace.
123 see earlier discussion in chapter 2. p. 61-76.
3. 6. 3. Reincarnation

There is a belief in Africa in general and in Idɔma in particular that “death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter”. The Idɔma believe in reincarnation. Among the Idɔma people, it is traditionally believed that their relatives or ancestors who have departed this life, can return again to this visible world in a baby. If one examines the names that they give to their children, one could clearly observe that some of those names reflect their belief in reincarnation and life after death. For example, if a boy is born immediately after the death of the head of the family or an elder, that boy will be called one of the following names Adakole meaning the father of the house has returned, or he is called ṣgbọle the head of the family has come to look after his house, or Ada, or Adam, my father has reincarnated, or ṣnyilkwu, ṣnyiwu, a man dies and comes back again. If such child is a girl, she is called ene-the mother is back, onekole, the mother of the house etc. This is a wide spread phenomenon, among the Idɔma. There are numerous evidences and such examples in Idɔma that confirm their belief in reincarnation. Every child that is born among the Idɔma is traditionally believed to be a reincarnation of one of the family ancestors or relatives, and sometimes a dear friend promised before dying that he or she is going to come back to this friend in a child. Such children are named accordingly as cited above. To the Idɔma therefore, life is

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125 Ibid., p.264
an ever-cyclic movement. It is a case of $\underline{\text{nyil}^{\downarrow} \text{kwu}}$ $\underline{\text{nyil}^{\downarrow} \text{wa}}$ - man dies and man
forever comes back.\textsuperscript{127}

This chapter examined Id\textsuperscript{ma} primal theology, which we defined as an interpretation and
translation of God's revelation and self disclosure in a given Id\textsuperscript{ma} context, and beyond.
It is tolerant of other religions and possesses its sources in the Id\textsuperscript{ma} history, language,
culture, arts and music. It has its basic creeds and beliefs that are traditionally passed on from one Id\textsuperscript{ma} generation to another. It is the interpretation of the Id\textsuperscript{ma} pre-Christian
experiences of God. We then went on to examine the basic structures of this Id\textsuperscript{ma}
theology which includes a belief in $\underline{\text{ndi}^{\downarrow} \text{co}}$ - the supreme God. We concluded that the
Id\textsuperscript{ma} belief in the supreme God was in no way influenced or due to any cause of
Christian missionary influence or teaching. The second structure of this theology was the
belief in the divinities, which have various functions in the ordering of the total Id\textsuperscript{ma}
communal life. Detailed attention was given to three of these divinities $\underline{\text{ndi}^{\downarrow} \text{aji}}$ and
Alekwu that are very significant to the Id\textsuperscript{ma} community. A third structure, which is
their concept of the world of spirit, was considered. We suggested here that, although,
these spirits are not necessarily the spirit of the ancestors, but in a close examination of
their roles, they could be classified under the same nomenclature. We then examined
worship and sacrifice, and concluded that the Id\textsuperscript{ma} are a worshipping and sacrificing
community. This enables them to always be in communion with $\underline{\text{ndi}^{\downarrow} \text{ico}}$ and other
spiritual beings, whom they believe are part and parcel of their daily lives and the
 guardian of their community. We finally discussed the Id\textsuperscript{ma} world, life after death and

reincarnation, and concluded that to the Ichoma death does not annihilate life, but that life continues in this world and the hereafter or the next world.

This Ichoma primal theology we suggested, does contain a coherent body of belief and an interpretation of life which alone can provide the foundation for a genuine interaction between the Ichoma and Christianity. This Ichoma primal theology and religious experience should in our view occupy the central place in the Ichoma reception and development of Christianity. The Ichoma past religious experiences are not illusory. They should form the main vehicle for the Ichoma reception and development of Christianity. This we will examine in our next chapter on early interaction of the Ichoma and the missionaries.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE IDOMA AND THE MISSIONARIES: EARLY INTERACTIONS

4.1 The Opening of Idoma: The Railway Track

"It has been said that Christianity follows trade, but in the Idoma situation, it could be said that Christianity followed the railway"¹. The finding of coal in 1922 in the Udi District of the then Anambra State and the current Enugu State could be said to have been the main cause of the missionaries making contact with the Idoma people². In order to make use of this commodity throughout Nigeria and beyond it became necessary to lay a railway track in order that it might be brought down to the sea and by that means placed within the reach of the various concerns that required the use of such material. Therefore, work soon began on the construction of the railway track. This new railway track passed through the Idomaland, which prior to that period was unknown to the Methodist missionaries, but later it became an exciting discovery through the rail track. Banham in reporting the discovery of the Idoma people through the railway track to his home Church in London said,

This new track of railway is running through the portion of the country which has been allocated to our church by the conference of missionary societies quite a few years ago. This area is something like 50 miles wide and is bounded on the east by the Scottish Missions and on the west by the Church Missionary Society. By this means there is opened up to civilisation a vast population of native peoples altogether untouched by any missionary society ³

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² Rev. Banham, Primitive Methodist Leader, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, Advance, 14th September 1924
³ Rev. Banham, Primitive Methodist Leader, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, The Call of Nigeria I, 14th September 1922.
It is observed from this report that the railway track that passed through Idoma became an opening or a helpful link through which the missionaries could make contacts with the Idoma people. It is also noted that one of the aims of the missionaries in making contact with the Idoma people at that period was not for the spreading of the gospel only, but for the civilisation of the Idoma people. Banham correctly observed that up to that point no missionary contact had been made with the Idoma who had remained a very secretive people, closely knit together through paternal family ties, and who had resisted any attempt of outside influence\(^4\) However, the railway track that was at that time being built northwards from the Eastern Region of Nigeria, now the current Enugu State provided some employment for some Igbo\(^5\) workers from the east, who now lived among the Idoma for work purposes. Many of these Igbo workers had earlier made contact with Christianity, through The Primitive Methodist missionaries who, by 1924, had been well established in the eastern part of Nigeria\(^6\). The Igbo workers needed pastoral care and oversight. It was hoped that they in turn would spread “the gospel among the Idoma people in whose country they were living and working”\(^7\).

4.2. Reasons for Advance into Idoma

There were therefore, “very worthy causes for the extending of the frontiers of the Kingdom into Okpoto [Idoma] country”\(^8\). These ‘worthy causes’ as already indicated in our discussion are the pastoral needs of the Igbo Christians and their potential of

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\(^4\) See earlier discussion on the Idoma identity in chapter two.

\(^5\) Igbo has been known and identified in the past as Ibo, however, the Igbo people have rejected being called the Ibo, as this name does not represent their identity in any way, but just a convenient phonetic sound of the colonial masters in the colonial days who could not correctly call and pronounce their name which is Igbo. We would in this study, unless where a text is being cited, use, use, their proper name which is Igbo in identifying the Igbo people. We would also refer to their land as Igboland.

\(^6\) Familusi Methodism in Nigeria (1842-1992), 1992, p.87

spreading the Christian faith among the Iduma people. However, Banham in his article "Reasons for Extension"9 to the home church in Britain gave five further reasons as to why they should make contact with the Iduma people. The first was what he described as the colossal need of the Iduma people. He said,

There are many reasons why we should take up this work at once.
The strongest possible plea is found in the stupendous need of the people.
These people have but the faintest idea of life beyond the animal within them. They live in a state of dense moral darkness. They are a prey to every kind of superstition. Spiritually they do not know their right hand from their left hand and all kinds of cruelty and tyranny are practised in the name of religion. Infanticide, headhunting, murder and all kinds of oppression are rife. The people live in entire ignorance of the most elementary decencies of life. In too many cases they are callous and brutally indifferent to the sufferings of others. The truth is that the heathen conditions are scarcely describable. This should appeal to us and call forth the only response worthy of a Christian people. The way is open. The need is tremendous and urgent. The people are waiting for our approach. It is comparatively easy for us now to gain an entrance. But if there is a delay this phase may give place to another when the difficulties of the opening of Mission will be in time multiplied and greatly magnified10.

From the first reason that was given by Rev. Banham, for the missionary contact with the Iduma, we observed that the Iduma people were branded with all sorts of titles and names. Such descriptions were unfair views of the Iduma people and did not represent the true Iduma situation at that time. For example, in our earlier discussion in chapters two and three, we clearly set out the Iduma people with their own unique way of civilisation with the context of their social, political and religious structures, and with distinct religious beliefs and clear knowledge of the supreme God ʌwʌco and well defined religious beliefs and practices. How could they possibly have been described as

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8 Methodist Church in Great Britain, MSS Archives, Norcross Diary, p.1
9 Banham, Methodist Church in great Britain, Archives, Primitive Methodist Leader, Call of Nigeria 2, 23/11/22
10 Ibid.
people without religion, civilisation and morals? Banham’s article was intended for his home church, so it is possible he had to say such things as the ones cited about the Idọma, in order to attract support and personnel for the missionary work in Idọma.

However, what he said in his article represented a false view of the Idọma people. Such views could not represent the socio-religious situation of the Idọma at this time. ¹¹

His second reason was the fear of the threat of Islamic influence in Nigeria as a whole and in Idọma in particular. He perceived Islam as a menace threatening Nigeria, a poison against the cross and a hindrance to the missionary propaganda. He argued,

> Let us not forget the Mohammedan menace threatening Nigeria. The followers of Mohammed are operating along the railway as traders and every trader is a missionary of his faith and friends with the chief and headmen of the town, sowing seeds, which poison them against the cross. Should they spread their baleful influence over the people it would prove to be the greatest hindrance to missionary propaganda. Their hunting ground is the untouched heathen, where with the speciousness unsurpassed by any other class of missionary, they corrupt their mind and make them oblivious to any Christian influence. For Islam to gain a hold on these heathen folk would add to the severity of the task beyond comprehension¹².

These views would be a legitimate concern for any one who was never aware of the Idọma dealings with the Hausa Fulanis from the past. However, while the Islamic influence in Idọma may be a very genuine missionary concern, the Idọma from their past history have successfully resented or resisted any Islamic domination.¹³

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¹¹ Later discussion will highlight why Banham and possibly other missionaries had such a false and negative view of the Idọma people and their religion, past values and language.

¹² Banham, *Call of Nigeria* p. 2

¹³ See earlier discussion on the efùnnya- the horse war in chapter 2, p.29.
This was followed by the third reason which was the fear of other missionary bodies entering Idoma land. He said,

It is very important that we enter upon this new work immediately because the people in some towns along the railway are already asking for mission agents. The CMS has work at the colliery town and are some 20 miles nearer this new section than our nearest missionary residing at Nara who at the present is also working the Ovim station which precludes him giving attention to this advanced work whilst he is most anxious concerning it. The people do not understand anything about missionary boundaries and consequently have applied to the mission nearest to them about a teacher. The missionary may be able to put them off for a while but the time will come when they will think that we are unable to respond to the requests and will place teachers in these towns. This being done it would be no easy matter to control and if such transference prove impossible it would be tantamount to closing the front door to our advance. We need to avoid such an impasse and the only way to do so is to extend our outpost and place an advance guard further the field.14

Rev. Banham believed that, unless the advance to the Idoma was made immediately, it would be too late and other mission agents might have got there.

He fourthly suggested that it was necessary for them as missionaries to make new exploits for their own good. He argued,

It is of great consequence that we make this advance to the quickening of missionary fervour....We must keep our eyes forward and make fresh adventures. It is almost six years since the Nara station was opened. It is high time we took another step into the great beyond 15. He finally argued that if past experiences were things to go by, then they must advance to the Idoma. He concluded,

We have every encouragement for pursuing such a course, when we take into consideration the phenomenal success which had crowned our labours hitherto...If the progress only of the last decade be taken achievements are more

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14 Banham, Call of Nigeria, p. 2.
15 Ibid.
hitherto...If the progress only of the last decade be taken achievements are more wonderful still.... We need to be there. We ought to be there. We must be there to share in the great triumphs of Grace that are coming to that country. We should set apart at least two men to enter this field.... The field is white unto harvest. Therefore send forth the labourers together in the harvest.

4.3 The Advance into Id⇒ma

These reasons were also presented to the General Missionary Council who were deeply impressed, and urged "the immediate necessity of going forward to contest the right of the heathen superstition to continue to enthral and degrade the African people". A deputation was then appointed by the Council of Missionaries in Nigeria to visit the Id⇒ma people and report their findings to the council. The party of Revs Dodds, Banham and Finlay were detailed by the Missionary Council to visit and report on "the unmissioned areas beyong (sic)... the present to the farthest North". After the visit, Rev. F.W Dodds reported to the Missionary Council,

"the most exciting thing of all, something which promptly marked out a wider skyline yet for someone some day to reach, was to find ourselves in contact with an entirely new tribe. Even at Igumale (sic) the first thing we had learned had been that we had overshot Iboland by some 15 miles. We are in the Land of the Okpoto [Id⇒ma] peoples....We saw much of these Okpoto peoples, indeed more than we saw of Ibos. Three days we sojourned amongst them, scouring the countryside on our cycles, going into every hole and corner of these most representative towns, and gathering together a few of their words to compare with Ibo. For the Okpotos speak a language all their own, which as far as we can discover has never yet been written."

There were lots of excitement about this visit. First was the joy of being able to make the journey. Second was the realisation that Id⇒maland was bigger than they thought, and the

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16 Ibid., p.3
17 Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives “Missionary Extension in Nigeria. Challenge of the North”, Advance, August 1924, p. 5
18 Ibid.
19 Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, “Into The Big Blue In Nigeria”, Primitive Methodist Leader 2.4, p. 212
third was the discovery of the Idoma language, which had never been written at the time of Dodds' report.

The deputation also reported back to the Council that the Idoma were “a people prepared and waiting for the coming of the Evangel”. Among other things, they also reported that,

...of the readiness of this new country to be missioned the deputation has no doubts whatever, nor indeed of its eagerness for our educational services at least.... We were everywhere received with manifest tokens of pleasure.... We were particularly struck by the opportunity presented by the Okpoto speaking people. Their reception of us was if possible warmer than that of the Ibos.... Their language is not yet written. There is not a single mission school or church in the whole area.... We are earnestly of the belief that something should be done at once for this country. A little can be done by native agency.... The G.M.C should be urged to establish at least one European in this new country within the next six months if possible.

This report strongly emphasised the Idoma readiness to receive the missionaries. They demonstrated this, to the deputation that visited them not only by giving them a warm reception, but with gifts. The Idoma anxiousness for education is also in the report. Why, therefore were the Idoma people so ardent to receive the missionary education?

Following the full explanation and the authentication of the deputation’s report, the Primitive Methodist missionaries from Eastern Nigeria felt that there were very worthy causes giving rise to the extending of the frontiers of the kingdom into the Okpoto [Idoma] Country, and the opening of the Okpoto Mission.

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20 Rev. F.W Dodds, “Peoples of the Mist”, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 17th April 1924, p. 245
22 A later discussion in chapter five would highlight why the Idoma people were so keen on the educational programme of the church.
23 Norcross Journal p.1
We...recognise the responsibility resting upon us for the evangelisation of these peoples. We would especially recognise the call of the Okpoto people by the warmth of their reception of our missionaries and their expressed willingness to receive our workers”

That we instruct the Nigerian council to take immediate steps for the advance of our work into this territory as soon as arrangements can be completed.”

“That we approve the appointment of teachers to act under the direction of the Rev. C. Finlay”

“That we approve the suggestion of the appointment of a European to establish a new mission.” These resolutions definitely commit us to the advance and we confidently present the case to our people.23

Following these resolutions, in May 1924, the Rev. Finlay who was stationed at Agbani in Eastern Nigeria,

made a prolonged journey into the Okpoto Country...visiting Ogbahu to Oturkpo(sic) with stations in between, i.e. Eha, Igumale (sic), Utonkon and Otobi and several places adjacent to these different towns. As a result of this visit schools were promised and begun in the following places Igumale(sic), Otobi, Ikwonyi, Utonkon, Ikpmorokpo Utonkon, Otukpoasa, Oturkpo Ikpo(sic) Oturkpo Ichp (sic) and Agila.26

At the completion of Finlay’s first journey by the end of May 1924, an Igbo man Mr. Albert Nwosu, was left at Igwumale to have charge of the work and establish the school.27

Albert worked through June and July. On the 25th July 1924, Rev & Mrs. Finlay made a second visit to Idzoma. They continued further north to Makurdi, where the Igbo people who were labourers with the railway construction met them. The Igbos were already holding their own services in Makurdi before Rev. & Mrs. Finlay arrived there28. Rev.

23 Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, “The Story of a Pioneering Tour” Sound The Advance p. 16
25 Norcross Journal p.1
26 Norcross Journal p 35
& Mrs. Finlay joined in the service and "promised that a missionary would visit them again."²⁹

This promise was fulfilled when on the 16th September 1924, Rev. William Norcross, together with The Rev. Robert Banham arrived in Igwumale. They stayed in the Railway Rest House for two days, to meet the Igwumale Chiefs and the people and tried unsuccessfully to find a suitable mission site.³⁰ They continued their journey after two days to Otukpo where they met Capt. Noel Smith.³¹ They were well received at Otukpo and they proceeded to Makurdi to hold services for the Igbo railway workers.³² Rev. Banham later went back to Uzakoli in the Eastern part of Nigeria, while Rev. Norcross and Albert Nwosu who was first left in charge of the work returned to Igwumale the first point of missionary contact in Idoma, and stayed at the Railway Rest House. They searched for a Mission site, which was eventually found. By "the beginning of December, [Norcross] was living there in a 'Suite of Native buildings'"³³.

Norcross soon started the work of site clearing, and laid the foundation of the present Igwumale manse in July 1925, and eventually occupied it in February 1926.³⁴ Thus a mission station was opened in Idoma thereby establishing an official missionary presence among the Idoma people.

²⁹ Ibid.
³⁰ Ibid.
³¹ Capt. Noel Smith was the colonial District Officer at Otukpo, the headquarter of the Idomaliland.
³² Norcross Journal, p. 35
³³ Ibid., P.36. See later discussion for how Norcross was able to find a site for his residency in Igwumale and its implications for the interactions between the Idoma and Christianity.
Norcross began with the two basic tasks of most missionaries in a new area or situation: visiting the people and studying the language of the people. Norcross in his report to the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society (PMMS) in 1926, was able to describe his work that was based at Igwumale as an ‘amazing advance’. This was how he put it,

Over an area covering some 2000 squares miles and more, with an established population of a figure approximating to 100,000, what stark paganism! A pall of darkness hangs. And we are here to break forth with that ward for the driving away of darkness, and the spoiling of superstition, the Word that will make for the dawning of a new day of truth and light and goodness.

In thirteen places the gospel is being preached to this glorious end, and in ten village schools ten score (200) Okpoto boys are acquiring the beginning of an education that in its outworkings will spell so much change from the present day of chaos and blind groping.... Never was first promised brighter than it is in Okpoto.

There are many difficulties, but, ...having been called, the church cannot fail. An audacious faith, a sanctified will and, above all else, remembering that redeeming love is for men of every clime, will match us for this great venture. The way opens up. ‘Forward’ be our watchward.35

We are aware of the fact that Norcross intended this report for the benefit of the members of his home church and the missionary organisation that supported his work with a possible aim or result of attracting material aid for the work in Idzomaland. It must however be stated, that the descriptions attributed to the Idzoma people in his report did not represent either the Idzoma people or their situation at that time or previously. Our earlier discussions in chapter two on the Idzoma social, economic, political and religious structures and organisations prior to their making contact with Christianity, differs considerably from the view put forward by Norcross.

34 Ibid., p. 37
35 Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, Primitive Methodist Missionary, Society Annual Report, 1926.
From here on the work in Idoma was largely shared between Rev. Norcross and Rev. Hutchinson and others which will be explored in a later chapter on the spread of Christianity in Idoma.

4.4. Other Missionary Bodies

Although, the main focus of this chapter is selectively on the Methodist missionaries, it is important at this point to note that the Methodist missionaries were not the only mission agencies that made contact with the Idoma. Let us briefly examine other missionaries or mission bodies that had early contact with the Idoma.

4.4.1. The Roman Catholic Mission

One of the fears of the Methodist missionaries of other mission agencies getting into Idoma land as earlier discussed materialised when in 1926 the Roman Catholic Mission made contact with Idoma, when they opened a school in Igwumale. Their main mission residence was opened in Utonkon in 1931 from where they spread to other parts of Idoma land. The focus of their mission at that period was not on the Idoma people, but the non Idoma communities working with the railway. They directed their efforts mostly on making contact through schools, which they set up in direct opposition to the Methodists. By 1930/1 the Roman Catholic Mission had broken the monopoly which the

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36 See earlier discussion on p. 124.
37 L. Fuller (ed.) Rescue The Trophies, p. 30
38 Ibid.
Methodist Church had until that date enjoyed. Writing in 1930, Hutchinson said, “R.C.M have been making strong attempts to get a foothold in Idoma. In every legitimate way we have endeavoured to prevent the threatened overlapping and proseletising (sic). Up to the present we have been successful”. But towards the end of 1931, Hutchinson could only make limited claim for the Methodist missionaries when he wrote, “...a chain of causes enriching Idoma with the exception of the south west corner, held by the RCs.” The Catholics are strong today in Edumoga, Akpa, and Agatu and in Ochekwu. The Roman Catholic missionaries were preferred in many parts of Idoma to the Methodist missionaries due to their favourable stance on the Idoma primal religion, culture and other practices such as polygamy and drinking of alcohol.

The relationship between the Catholics and the Methodist missionaries at that period was more “of a bitter competition than that of brotherly co-operation”43. Unfortunately, this has remained largely the case up to the present.

4.4.2 The Christian Mission in Many Lands (CMML)

The Rev. Raymond T. Dibble was said to have come to Umalici near Enugba in Agatu district of Benue State in the current Agatu local Government Area in 192144, although, this claim could not be substantiated, either through oral or written history. By 1950, a group of missionaries opted out of the Christian Mission in Many Lands (CMML) to

39 M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 92.
40 Hutchinson Journal 26th May 1930 p. 5
41 Norcross Journal. P. 15
42 P. Mark, Missions, Idoma Division AR/ Otkp/ Misc/10 1927
43 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 9, See also M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 92.
44 L. Fuller (ed.) 1995:31
work with the Steward Publishing Company. They soon started a church which was
called, and still referred to today as Steward Company. Their churches are mostly found
in the Agatu Local Government area\textsuperscript{45}. Currently there is a split in this church, and a new
church called Christian Evangelical Fellowship Church of Nigeria (CEFN) was born out
of this crisis. Despite this split, they have not been able to spread to other parts of Idz\textsuperscript{ma}.
They are mostly limited to Agatu Local Government Area. They have no schools or
medical institutions.

4. 4. 3 The Church Missionary Society (CMS)

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) later came to Idz\textsuperscript{ma}land in the 1930s, and settled
in Otukpo, the capital of Idz\textsuperscript{ma}land\textsuperscript{46}. They planted five churches along the railway line.
But by an agreement in 1932 they handed over their churches to the Methodists the most
important being St Peter’s in Otukpo and withdrew from Idz\textsuperscript{ma}\textsuperscript{47}. Their reasons for
doing this were given by Chetwynd as an “attempt by Protestant missionary societies to
avoid overlapping, and … to prevent African Christians from inheriting the rivalries
which bedeviled church life in Europe, especially since the reformation” \textsuperscript{48}. However, in
1978, the CMS came back, as the result of the internal conflict that had arisen in the
Methodist Church Nigeria over the 1976 constitution of the Church\textsuperscript{49}. They have since
grown in Idz\textsuperscript{ma} with several churches, and two primary schools. The Anglican Diocese
of Otukpo was created in 1994, with the Bishop’s see in Otukpo.

\textsuperscript{45} Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue, \textit{Archives Other missions Ar/MCN/BD/1-9}
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
4. 4. 4 Other Denominations

While the 1960s onward marked the coming of the Baptist and the Aladura churches, the 1980s marked the coming of the Deeper Life Bible Church. The 1990s witnessed the springing up of many Pentecostal churches with one-man president-and founders all over Idoma land. However, the bulk of the Christian witness in Idoma was done by the Methodists.

4. 5 Settlement and the Language Problem

Following the reports of the first deputation to survey Idoma, and the subsequent two journeys made by the Rev. Finlay, the Rev. Norcross and his Igbo assistant Mr. Albert Nwosu took up residency in Igwumale in September 1924. After some initial difficulties of where to live, they were able to adequately settle well in Igwumale. According to Familusi, this was probably due to the fact that they came from a mission, The Primitive Methodist Missionary Society that was already well established in the eastern part of Nigeria which may have given them training in settling into an African society.

Secondly, Norcross had a Nigerian worker Mr. Albert Nwosu as his interpreter. However, there were still problems with regard to a location in Idoma to take up residence, and how to communicate with the Idoma people directly. We will focus our attention on two of these problems, namely: settlement and language that are relevant to our discussions.

48 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 10.
49 Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue Archives, Other Missions AR/MCN/BD/ 1-9
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, Advance, April, 1927 p. 112
54 M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 88.
4.5.1 Settlement

In their attempt to settle in Igwumale, the missionaries had to find a site that was suitable to their taste. The only site among many which was suitable to them was the site of the religious shrine of the people where their Owuije and Akatakpa were located. Norcross chose this site, for their Mission residence and asked that these be relocated. Their choice created a lot of tensions and debates among the local people, as most of the people perceived, and rightly so, the missionary’s choice as a direct attack on their primal religion and their sacred place of worship. After heated debates among the Igwumale people, the xasepa of Igwumale ruled that the sacred shrine of Owuije and Akatakpa be relocated for the missionary residence. Why was it the sacred site of the Igwumale people that was only suitable for the missionary residency? Whatever the missionary’s reasons were for choosing the sacred site of the people for the mission residence were not immediately known. However, the action of the xasepa in relocating the sacred shrine of the people, although later regretted, not only demonstrated that the ldma primal religion was tolerant of others, but the excellent goodwill of the ldma to the missionaries. Norcross, however, seemed very pleased that the people’s sacred shrine was relocated to make way for his residence. Reporting this later to his home church, he said,

Our first business was to find a site. Probably the best site in the District was secured. Incidentally, a town juju was located on that site. It spoke of the excellent goodwill of the people when in response to our wishes they located that shrine elsewhere.

55 See later discussions on this.
56 Ibid.
57 Norcross “A Term At Igwumale”, Advance April 1927
While Norcross was right in reporting that the relocation of the shrine in Igwumale demonstrated the people’s goodwill, his action, however, in insisting that the people’s religious shrine be relocated for his residence he turned half of the community against Christianity, and it has remained so up to the time of this writing. The people saw his action and rightly so, as a direct confrontation with and attack on their religion and their sacred place of worship. In one of the writer’s fieldwork investigations in Igwumale in July 1997, one of the most senior elders of Igwumale, Agbese, who was an eye witness to the events described was asked “zdi yà ee nè a kpó zù ce ñwìco n’ì mà? – Why did you not believe in God or become a Christian? He replied, N kpó zù ce ñwìco gbòo, amàn n, n le zù ce ñwìco ku Unìkrì si nê o wà I kpó øfú tì ìgwùmàle, kle le øga eliì à kù alì ca tì a jì sì a n’- I believe in God, but I do not believe in the God of Norcross that came and waged war on the Igwumale people and their religion and their sacred place.

Despite the fact that not all of the Igwumale people were happy with the relocation of their sacred place for mission settlement, Norcross certainly was, and viewed it as a mark of the missionary presence in Igwumale as indicated in his first term report of his work in Igwumale. This was what he said,

In company with the Rev Banham we first visited the town so that we might make known our desire to take up residence. Our proposals were made and our aims stated…. It was intimated that our desire would be granted and facilities given for the commencing of the mission. It is not all we might have wished but it is quite as much as we could expect. Confirmation of the people’s goodwill showed itself by giving us permission to look about and choose our own site. We were soon trampling the towns’ environs… the best site was secured. A town Juju that was located on the site we chose was relocated in response to our wishes…. Finding

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58 Agbese, Field work interview, Igwumale, 17th July 1997. Agbese’s view would be representative of most of the ìdàmà people who rejected Christianity as they viewed its arrival in ìdàmà and the missionary’s treatment of their indigenous religion as an attack of their religion and the community.
temporary residence with a teaching evangelist and his wife, we set out clearing our chosen site of scrub and bush over 100 yards square. This is a perspiring business; even though there be hundred pairs of willing hands to make the work light. After clearing, there are native materials to be accumulated, sticks for wall plate and ridge poles. Forked sticks were needed to support these and a thousand stick to make the framework for the roof, over which some hundred bundles of long grass will later be laid.... After two weeks our first mission house is put up in Okpoto (Idmma).... The house is not much to look at, nor can we expect a long life from it, but at least we now have mission premises. It is a sure mark that we are here.59

We observed from this report that, even though Norcross was aware of the fact that his request for the relocation of the religious site of the Igwumale people for his residency would be greeted with some difficulty, he still went ahead with the request. Although, Norcross was happy and satisfied with his action, as later discussion will indicate, his choice did more harm than good to the relationship and the interaction that existed between the Idmma and Christianity.

4.5.2 Language

Now that the missionaries had settled in Idmma, they would have loved to have been able to communicate with the people directly, but they couldn’t. Norcross acknowledged this painful fact of their inability to communicate with the Idmma, when he wrote,

On the door-step of the Mission so to speak, were 4,000 people. But we could not talk to them. That is the immediate problem of every missionary going new to his job. But here the missionary was going to a new tribe, a tribe which had no literature, was not conscious of anything in the shape of alphabet or grammar, or even writing. There were no books. That can be a staggering fact to people reading it in an article; it is much more staggering fact to the missionary who happens to be up against it in practice. So then, this all-important task of learning a new language, and an effort to write it down phonetically.60

59 Norcross, “Extension in Nigeria Okpoto Settling In”, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, Primitive Methodist Leader, 15th Jan 1925, p. 44
60 Norcross, “How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to Writing”, Kingdom Overseas, June 1933, p. 130.
Norcross and his team quickly and rightly realised the importance of the local language of the Idnma in any missionary work among them. He argued,

In pioneer work a missionary is called upon to put his hand to many difficult tasks, not the least obstacle to be surmounted being that of the local speech. Primarily our missionary is the custodian of something he desires to communicate. As long as he remembers that, he remains under the distinct urge to speak as the people speak, in order that his communication shall be direct.61

Norcross’s view on the importance of the language of the indigenous people as a vehicle of rendering the gospel among those people, was representative of the general mission emphasis on the importance role of the indigenous language of the people in any effective mission work.62

He further argued that, the main reason for learning and working at a new language and doing any translation work in that language is “ordained within the Gospel itself. The right of every man to hear the immortal story in his own tongue”63.

Language work then became a very important priority to the missionaries in the very beginning of their work in Idnma, because they felt that it was the most powerful thing for the Idnma indigenous people. Rev Norcross believed that

...Out of all the counting factors which come within the scope of missionary endeavour, no single one has been anything like so important, or so potent for

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61 Ibid.
62 For example, Alexander Fraser in his article, “Aims of African Education” in International Review of Missions, 1925, p. 516ff, argued that education “should be rooted in the vernacular... and the teachers must know the vernacular” if they are to be effective in teaching the Africans. Westermann, 1925, p. 27 argued on his part that “it is quite impossible for the Africans to grasp the full meaning of the Gospel and to make it his own spiritual property, if he is not taught it in his own language.... However well he may be acquainted with foreign idiom....”.
63 Norcross, Learning a New language, p.132
good, as that which makes it possible for sons and daughters of that land to turn to the story of the love of God, and read it for themselves.\textsuperscript{64}

With these strong convictions in mind Norcross and Albert with the help of Dibia\textsuperscript{65} started learning the Idoma language. As nothing had been written in the language before, they only had to depend upon learning the spoken word. By repeating what they heard to the Idoma people, they noted carefully its effects upon the locals who listened to them. However, their experiences of the Igbo language were of great benefit to them. This enabled them in a measure to give some direction to their often repeated inquiry \textit{enema wiyi ne} (sic) ‘What is this’?\textsuperscript{66} As they listened to the answers to their inquiry, they phonetically wrote them down, and hoped that they were correct answers. As it is in most translations into a new language, such answers could have meant so many things. For example, if they asked about an orange, the answer they could possibly get may have meant, a ripe fruit, an edible fruit, or a green or yellow fruit. Somehow their problem was even more compounded by inaccurate interpretation and the need for back translation for the missionary. Norcross himself noted this when he observed that more of their answers

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid. p.133
\textsuperscript{65} Dibia is said to be the first Idoma man from Igwumale who was very friendly with the missionaries, and helped Norcross in his work in Idoma, especially in the language area. During field work in Igwumale in July 1997 attempts were made to trace the identity of Dibia. This proved to be a very difficult exercise. While some felt he was an Efik-Idoma, others think of him as a Yala man. Yala is a tribal people in the present Adamawa state of Nigeria that are regarded by the Idoma as the Idoma sons who live in the bush. Others felt he was truly an Idoma man from Igwumale with no current existing relations in Igwumale due to the tribal wars that wiped out many tribes in Igwumale. However controversial his identity may be, the fact remains that he was very instrumental in helping the early missionaries in Idoma, with regards to the study of the Idoma language and interpretation.
would “come to them from Idr>ma into Ibo, Ibo into Efik, via Dibia to Albert the
Catechist and Albert to myself”67 This created the problem of accurate translation of what
is being said, communicated, taught and learnt.

This problem stayed with them during the period of learning the Idr>ma language from
the collection of Idr>ma vocabularies, to word formations, and sentence structures in the
Idr>ma language. Despite their difficulties, they were able to record some partially correct
Idr>ma vocabularies, and construct some phrases that enabled them to put together some
elementary principles of the Idr>ma grammar.

After the first six months of language study, Norcross reported that “we ventured to begin
the translation of St Mark’s Gospel, and during the following eighteen months, we
travelled through that Gospel not less than five times”68

Norcross, as observed in our discussion above, realised that although Idr>ma presented
them with a fine opportunities for effective application of all phases of missionary
endeavour, such as, evangelisation, educational activities and medical work, they could
not talk to the people due to the language problem. This made the study of the local
language the number one priority in their work in Idr>ma. A typical day in Igwumale as
described by Haswell sums up the early priority that the missionaries placed on the
Idr>ma Language.

66 Norcross, “How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to writing”, Kingdom Overseas, June
1933, p. 133
68 Ibid.
After breakfast we walk out to look for patients. Stroll round town. Most folk away at farms or hunting. A few at home, and among these find a few sick. Some difficulty in securing confidence, but when they see our genuine interest they allow us to help where possible. They are interested in our efforts to speak in their language. Pass on from here to farms on edge of town. Have previously memorised words for farm, yam, sun, and rain. We can ask, ‘Are you well?’ and reply to their similar enquiries in a most fluent manner. They are highly amused and compliment us on our progress.... Return to Mission House as sun becomes hot. Call two boys into study and work on Matthew’s gospel and various little speeches and essays. Difficulty is to get pronunciation correct, and concentrate on this.... Rule of the house is that until noon only native tongue is to be spoken no English. ...We have to walk about...with little notebook in our hands.... Visit compound and talk with people. Have carefully noticed words for ‘hunting’, ‘fine animal’ and evening meal’ etc., etc., and make the most of these. Our conversation must be rather monotonous! ...It is a grand day when we can make one’s first speech in the church, even if it has to be prepared with pains for hours before!69

Norcross and his team continued to work hard on learning the Iḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣ma language. Their efforts seemed to have paid off, when in September 1927 they were able to publish the first Iḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣ma primer, hymn book and St Mark’s Gospel. Though no Iḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣ma was able to read at that time, the translation work continued. A year later the Methodist catechism was translated from Ibo into Iḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣ma by Albert Nwosu, and subsequent translations on the Gospel of Luke and later Acts were continued with Albert Nwosu playing a leading role70.

Now that the missionaries had settled in Iḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣ma, and were beginning to learn the local language, and even ventured to do a translation in the local language, what did they think of the Iḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣ma people? What were their perceptions of the Iḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣ma religion, past values and

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culture? What was the Idzoma reaction and response to these missionary activities in Idzoma?

4. 6 The Missionary Perception of the Idzoma People

The early missionary images of the Idzoma, their religion, past values and culture were very negative. The Idzoma were described in the most derogative terms by the missionaries.71 To the missionaries, the Idzoma lived in oppressed moral darkness. A people full of superstition, cruel, and murderers of children. They perceived the Idzoma as insensitive, heartless, very brutal and indifferent to the sufferings of others and very oppressive72. Why were the missionaries so negative about the Idzoma people? Were their negative feelings toward the Idzoma people a carry over of the feelings that generally existed about Africans in the western world at that time, that which they transferred to the Idzoma people or were their observations true to the Idzoma situation of that time? How could they possibly be so negative about a people, they have not even known or studied properly? For example, Rev. Dodds after visiting the Idzoma for the very first time described them as

a people struggling in the bonds of heathenism, more vile than anything we had seen in the early days in Bende (Ibo); a people of low mental power and blood red passion; a people utterly out of touch with all things noble and pure; a people wild and fierce among themselves.... A people who live so much to themselves as to be timid of Europeans and quite indifferent to any service we could render.73

By and large, we suggest that the terminologies the missionaries used in describing the Idzoma people as our later discussion will highlight, were carry over terminologies of the

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71 See earlier discussion in p. 122ff
72 See for example, Primitive Methodist Leader, Call of Nigeria, 23rd November 1922.
social situations of the lower working class in their home country at that time that were imported into Idmma.

In one of Norcross’s letters to his parents he said this of the Idmma, “our Okpotos are 'raw' native.... Clothes don't matter...”74. Two years later, his negative view of the Idmma remained the same. He said, “the people are the laziest lot I’ve seen in the country”75.

The missionaries had these unfortunate negative images or views of the Idmma among whom they have come to live and work. Hastings, writing about the missionary’s image of Africa in general rightly puts it, “O the blindness, the darkness, the foolishness, of heathenism....”76 Darkness is unquestionably a recurring note in the missionary image of the Idmma. To the missionaries that were in Idmma, they were in a dark continent waging an aggressive war with the power of darkness that had gripped the Idmma, possibly, with the words of the following song in mind “O'er heathen lands afar, Thick darkness broodeth yet; Arise O Morning Star, Arise and never set”77

As indicated earlier, these negative views the missionaries have of the Idmma people were the views they had developed from the social problems of the lower working class

73 Rev. Dodds, “Peoples of the Mist”, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, The Primitive Methodist Leader, 17th April 1924, p.245.
74 Norcross, “Sunday in Igwumale”, Advance March 1926
75 Norcross Diary Sept 3rd 1928, p.129.
77 Methodist Hymn Book, No 811, V. 6.
of their own people which, they simply transferred to the Idömä people.78 The 
missionaries ideas of the Idömä at that period was the 19th century European general 
view of Africa. They felt at that period that Africa had no history, because the African 
history was not written down. This in our view is a mistake and wrong understanding of 
history which, is simply a story which is written down or not. They felt their western 
culture was superior to that of Africa and that they were culturally superior to the 
Africans. To them the Africans had nothing culturally worth talking about. These again 
are wrong views. The missionaries in our view refused to accept what they saw of the 
social structures, religious beliefs, and political structures of the African people. These 
missionaries simply dismissed them as Un-African. They felt such structures couldn’t be 
possibly African. This again we view as nonsense. 
Although, later discussions will critically evaluate and analyse the missionary’s negative 
view of the Idömä, it is worth noting here that, as the missionaries gradually began to 
know the Idömä people, some of their negative views of the Idömä began to change. 
Rev. Dodds who was very negative about the Idömä people in the early stage of the 
missionary contact with them, six months later had this to say about the Idömä towns, the 
industrious nature of the Idömä people and their high level of intelligence. This was how 
he put it, 

Their towns are neat and clean and abound in open spaces. Even the huts are 
spread well apart, which is not the case in the Ibo towns we saw..., the Okpotos 
seem highly industrious. Their particular habits and handicrafts are spinning and 
weaving of native cotton.... Observations told us that we had come to a Negro

78 For details of this argument, see General William Boot, "Darkest England"
people of a distinctively high order, well worth the serious consideration of our Church.  

Although, himself, guilty of having the low image and negative views of the Idroma, Norcross soon realised that it was foolishness and short sightedness on the part of the missionaries to maintain such a low image of the Idroma and to fail to see any thing human in them. He stated,

There are those who mainly by reason of short sight, utter base things respecting the native, those who never see any "humanness" in him. How foolish, and how far from the mark is such low judgement! He may come from the bush and the swamp... he can be “impressed”.

In one of the writer’s fieldwork interviews with some ex-missionaries to Idroma, Rev. & Mrs. Wylie were asked, What were your perceptions of the Idroma people? Mr Wylie replied,

An elderly missionary teacher told us that, our ‘servants’ those we came to serve must be seen to show us respect and that we should not always trust the Idroma people. Many Idroma he said could not be trusted. He told us of some one came one night and stole paw-paw and grapes fruit off his trees. But I don’t think it was anything to be excited about. Boys have always stolen or scrunched apples at home anyway. How does he know it was students who took the fruit? These attitudes of looking down on the locals are contrary to the newness of the Gospel values. We were equally appalled by the fact that while, we the British ministers could get one new car, added to the fleet, per circuit per year, our sole Nigerian colleague had had his request for a car refused. This was wrong and far from the Gospel we were to preach. We are the experienced ones with all our know-how, while they (the Nigerians) are either not very bright or slightly more generously, ‘they are trying’. We recalled comments made by our elderly missionaries, that the Idroma were less sensitive than whites. That they are quite happy living in a lot of noise and don’t appreciate flowers or beautiful scenery. We frankly squirmed at these attitudes and comments and throughout our missionary service these ‘old colonial’ stances caused friction and embarrassment.

79 Rev. Dodds, “Peoples of the Mist”, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, The Primitive Methodist Leader, 17th April, 1924, p. 245.
80 Norcross, “A Journey of Promise”, Methodist Church in great Britain, Advance, July 1926, p. 122
81 Wylie, Fieldwork interview 26th March 1996. Rev. and Mrs. C. Wylie are current ministers of the Kirkbymoorside Circuit of the Methodist Church in York.
It could be briefly concluded here that, while the early missionary images of the Idzoma were very negative, the later images were becoming more positive

4.7 The Missionary View of the Idzoma Past Values and Culture.

The customs and social structures of the Idzoma are the visible expressions of the Idzoma underlying values and beliefs; and form their worldview\(^{82}\). Religion and culture are in most cases linked, and it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between the two, as Stephen Neill rightly argues,

> There has never yet been a great religion, which did not find its expression in a great culture. There has never yet been a great culture, which did not have deep roots in a religion\(^{83}\).

Therefore, for the Idzoma to try to change from a set of religious beliefs and values will have big cultural implications for them, both as individuals and as groups. Had the missionaries been sympathetic to this feeling, the interaction between the Idzoma and Christianity would have been more positive in Idzoma. The missionaries should have created a way for Christian counter-culture to exemplify the values of Christianity within the particular Idzoma societal cultural context, as it has been in other cultural context, such as the Greeks and the Romans\(^{84}\).

Rather, they developed in Idzoma a dismissive and condemning attitude towards the Idzoma, ignoring their past and their cultural values. They showed lack of respect for both private and communal property and the personal dignity of the Idzoma. The following

\(^{82}\) See Chapter three on the Idzoma Theology

\(^{83}\) Cited in Brian Stanley, *Bible and the Flag*, p. 170, Also our earlier discussion on the Idzoma culture affirms this statement.

\(^{84}\) For detail examples of this view, See Andrew Walls, “The Gospel, As The Prisoner And Liberator of Culture”, *Missionalia* 10 (3) 1982, pp. 93-105
examples illustrate this point. As earlier discussed, on arrival in Igwumale in September 1924, Norcross was graciously offered any place of his choice as his residency in Igwumale. To the surprise of the Igwumale people, he decided to choose the sacred site of their worship of the Owuije and for his residency. He insisted that the Igwumale's sacred site be relocated to make way for his residency. The overruled the Igwumale people who raised objection to Norcross's request, and relocated the sacred site as requested by Norcross. Although Norcross saw the action of the people as a demonstration of their goodwill, the majority of the locals understood his action as lack of respect for their cultural values and direct confrontation with the people and their religion.

Secondly, during field work in Ocobo in Ohimini Local Government Area of Benue State, the Agbo of Ocobo, Chief Owuna, who was an eye witness to the first missionary contact with Ocobo told the writer the following story:

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85 See earlier note on page 134
86 Ibid.
87 See earlier discussion on page 135ff.
88 The Agbo of Ocobo is both the religious and political leader of the Ocobo people. Agbo is the father of the Ocobo people. As result all men are traditionally greeted as Agbo, and the women as Ai-agbo - meaning children of Agbo. It is only the chief that can be addressed as The Agbo of Ocobo.
When the missionary came to our home/place
he found our cultural sacred object which
he called the idols of the owner of the land
which were at the cross roads
he gathered them
set fire on them
when the owner of the land came to the place that
the sacred objects of his religion were burning
he shout a war cry, shouted, and cry in anger
the missionary told him
to close and shut up his mouth
If not, he would burn in the fire
with his sacred objects
when the owner of the land saw the gun that
was hanging on the shoulders of the missionary
he gradually retreat backward to
his house with sorrow and pain
The village was set in uproar

From this story, it is observed that when the missionary came to the writer's village in
1926, it was not a happy or comfortable time for the Ocobo community as the missionary

set on fire what he called “Idols” of the Onduaje at cross roads. He viewed them as simply objects of no cultural value. Therefore, he gathered them, and set them on fire. When the Onduaje objected to his action the missionary responded by warning and threatening him with a gun, or of being burnt with his idols in the fire. On seeing the gun that was hanging at the back of the missionary, the Onduaje had no choice but to retreat in pain to his home.

This story and many other similar stories of the missionary’s high-handedness with this highest degree of arrogance not only demonstrates the missionary’s complete lack of respect for the Idìma past values but took Christianity farther away from the Idìma. For example, in Ocobo the missionaries were chased out, and only returned after several years of a more careful approach, and with the bribe of a school for the village. The missionary’s tendency to treat everything primal in Idìma as either at worst harmful or at best valueless has not helped very much in the interaction between the Idìma and Christianity.

The Idìma society and her culture are so different from anything the expatriate missionary was acquainted with, that without some special orientation or training, the missionary found himself clueless and resulted in condemning the Idìma culture and its practices. As indicated in our earlier discussion, the missionary’s unsympathetic attitude towards the Idìma people, their culture, religion and values probably stemmed from the 19th century missionary backgrounds in which the Europeans only perceived Africa as a dark continent, without race, religion, history and culture. These were what they

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9 Onduaje is the Idìma title for the owner or the custodian of the community land held in trust for the community. He also in consultation with the Agbo of Ocobo oversees and fixes the calendrical rituals of the Aje - Earth the mother god.
transferred to the Idoma people. Although, the missionaries to Idoma have contributed so much to secular and the religious life of the Idoma people as later discussion would highlight, some of their attitudes to Idoma past values and culture implied some insult to the genuine values, that were, and are, to be found within the authentic traditions of the Idoma people. Those Idoma values need to be appreciated. For Christianity to better interact with the Idoma, it must realise that the Idoma had her own past, and this must be respected. This respect involves a consciousness of the Idoma past, but sadly the missionaries fell down very much in this area.

As the Idoma past is to be respected, so are the Idoma values; these may be tribal, individual or religious or artistic varieties. For Christianity to efficiently and effectively interact with the Idoma, it must be communicated to the Idoma in the Idoma ways of expressing truth, such as sapiential proverbs, enigmatic sayings, mythical stories etc. These are the means whereby the Idoma traditional beliefs have been expressed and passed on. If a way of thinking like this had been found in expressing Christianity in Idoma, it would have made it more attractive to the people.

The lack of missionary respect for the Idoma past values and culture has led to the later problems of nationalistic feeling that has come into the church in Idoma. The Idoma people became very concerned with the values of being an Idoma. This was so because, too much of the early missionary or expatriate attitudes towards the Idoma have

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91 See earlier discussion on p. 143 ff.
expressed something of the inferiority of the locals. "Enclavement"\textsuperscript{92} became the missionary approach and mission policy in Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma}. This policy advocated that the Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma} converts adapt European names, habits and tastes. Approaches such as this, as Lamin Sanneh convincingly argued "ruptured tribal bonds of solidarity and reciprocity and induced dependence on foreign customs and manners"\textsuperscript{93}. As later discussion will indicate the Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma} were no longer prepared to bear this imputation of inferiority. To be an Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma} is not either to be European or second best. All these sentiments would not have come had the missionaries respected the past values of the Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma tradition and culture.}

4. 8 Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma Religious Beliefs and Practice}

It has been a long standing plea in Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma for missionaries to be more oriented to the religion of the Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma and then interpret Christianity in the light of what the Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma people know. The alien character of Christianity was largely responsible for the continued parochial look of Christianity in some districts of Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma. Hayford is probably right when he argues that

\begin{quote}
...What a different state of things would prevail if the missionaries had first studied the religious system of the native before trying to improve it, or which is worse, before introducing a new one\textsuperscript{94}.
\end{quote}

But unfortunately, the early missionaries to Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma had not taken any trouble to understand any other religious system but their own which had to be accepted by the Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma. This has presented the Id\(\text{\textasciitilde} \text{ma Christian today with the double problem of not

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{92} Enclavement was first used by Lamin Sanneh in his paper, "The Yogi and the Commissar; Christian Mission and the African Response", \textit{International Bulletin of Missionary Research}, January 1991, 2-11
\item \textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 4.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
wholly understanding Christianity or his primal religion. The church will help the Idoma better, if it understands the former, and it speaks with authority about the latter. Isichei is right in her observation when she said,

There is an underlying problem, which greatly complicated relationship between foreign missionaries and African Christians, and it lies in the question: are traditional divinities an illusion, or are they real, but evil?
To the nineteenth century missionaries, the spirits of traditional religion were very often real demons. To...Africanists, this is a good example of White racism.  

The early missionaries to Idoma did not take the Idoma perception of the spiritual world seriously. They just condemned it as ignorance, hallucination, illusion and evil. Just as Wylie puts it

We were encouraged to view the Idoma traditional religion in a dismissive way. The attitude of the Church as a whole was that the traditional religion practised by the majority of the people was crude, ignorant and evil. The religion is poor and unsophisticated and rooted in superstition and fear.

This lack of understanding of the African spiritual worldview has brought a lot of friction between Christianity and the Idoma. Just as Mrs. Pearce, puts it, “The missionaries thought they had to take their western culture and way of doing things as well as God’s love to Idoma. This is wrong, and would never work in Idoma.”

As the missionaries failed to understand the Idoma religion, condemned it, and insisted that the Idoma replaced it with their own new Christianity, a state of tension was created.

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96 Wylie, Fieldwork Interview in KirkymoorsideYork, 26th March 1996.
97 Mrs. D Pearce, Fieldwork Interview 10th May 1997. Doreen and Wilf Pearce were missionaries in Idoma. They served in Otukpo and in Iga Okpay circuits. They are the current ministers of Sutton Coldfield Methodist Church, South Parade, Sutton Coldfield in West Midlands.
between Christianity and the Idoma people, whose lives lie in their traditional religion and their cultural practices. What were the Idoma reactions to all of these missionary activities and perceptions of the Idoma people, culture, past values and religion?

4.9. The Early Idoma Reaction

As earlier observed\(^98\) the first direct contacts between the Idoma and the Methodist missionaries took place in September 1924. This was during an expedition to explore possible sites for future mission advance, and to minister to some Igbo railway workers who had earlier made contact with Christianity in the eastern region of Nigeria, and were at that period working on the laying of railway tracks among the Idoma. The Revs. Banham, Dodds and Finlay, who were accompanied by an Igbo man Albert Nwosu reached Igwumale at that time in the area between Agila, Ijigban, Izee and Ebia. Although, Christianity had made contact with the Idoma through the Igbo railway workers prior to the missionary visit, it was the Norcross and Albet Nwosu’s visit to Igwumale on the 16\(^{th}\) September 1924 that initiated permanent contact between the Idoma and Christianity\(^99\).

The missionary attitude to the Idoma was fairly clear, as typified by Norcross writing to his home Church, “the Idoma are in darkness and deeply superstitious, and without any form of civilised religion. They are crude and ignorant”\(^100\). Therefore, they had to win them.

\(^{98}\) See discussion on pages 121ff
\(^{99}\) Norcross Journal, p. 1&2
\(^{100}\) Norcross, “The Call of Nigeria”, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, Primitive Methodist Leader, 1924
The Idoma attitude towards the missionaries on the other hand was much less clear cut.

There are several reasons for this. The first was the Idoma uncertainty about the precise nature of what the Methodist missionaries had to offer, due in large measure to the way in which the gospel was brought to them, especially, when the Idoma at the very early stage of their contact with the missionaries had to relocate their sacred shrine for the missionary residence\(^{101}\). The second was the internal division among the Idoma themselves as to what to do with the missionaries, just as Agbese confirmed in his reply, when asked what the Igwumale people did with the first missionaries that came to them. He said,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Alje afuleyi} & \quad \text{we didn’t know at first} \\
\text{A da nge yam la aubekee a} & \quad \text{what to do with the missionaries} \\
\text{Ace ohi ka al ka mi uwa} & \quad \text{Some people said we should accept them} \\
\text{Asha ka al k le uwa kpo} & \quad \text{Others said, take them} \\
\text{Nmo la ezi} & \quad \text{sacrifice them to the shrine} \\
\text{Uwa we use } & \quad \text{They are abominations and bad omens} \\
\text{Ma da ne ye da ucule ku al a} & \quad \text{see what they did to our shrine and cultural place} \\
\text{dan ka al I ke mi uwa} & \quad \text{If we did not receive them} \\
\text{al ke gaa le in kp a} & \quad \text{we will not have school} \\
\text{afuleyi a le } & \quad \text{at first, it was very hard} \\
\text{ama al ke mi uwa kpo} & \quad \text{still, we did receive them}^{102} \\
\end{align*}
\]

From this account it appears that the Idoma were divided on what to do with the missionaries, while some felt that they should be received, others saw them only as

\(^{100}\) Norcross, “The Call of Nigeria”, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 1924

\(^{101}\) See earlier discussion on pages 135ff
objects to be sacrificed at the shrine. This was largely due to the treatment that the missionaries meted out to the sacred place of the people. However, they were received for the purpose of providing school only.

4.9.1 Idoma Response

The initial Idoma response to these contacts appeared to the Methodist missionaries at least to be favourable. While it is also true that some early reactions pointed to some division among the Idoma about the wisdom of relocating the Owujegnu and the sacred shrine for the missionary residency. The fact still remains however, that the missionaries were received, and those contacts with the Idoma increased as time went by. According to Mark Abo, the first message of friendship was acknowledged with gifts of a chicken, plantain, three yams and a keg of palm wine to Rev Norcross from the Ọọpọlọpọ Igwumale.

It is however important to recognise or note at the outset that the Idoma and missionary expectations arising from their mutual contact were quite different. While the main concerns of the missionaries at that period were the presentation of Christianity and ‘civilisation’, the Idoma on their part saw the missionaries as providers of education through schools. They also saw the missionaries as those who would bring economic good fortune to the Idoma people.

102 Agbese, Fieldwork interview, Igwumale 29th July 1996. Agbese was one of the early converts in Igwumale. He also worked for the church as a sub Pastor. He sadly died immediately after this interview, at a probable age of 97.
The main basis of the Idzoma response to Christianity at that time, and even now, may be said to have been the Idzoma desire to retain those elements in their culture, which the Idzoma regarded as basic to them, and to reject those parts of the Christian message which threatened their cultural supremacy, and to be willing to adapt those parts of the Christian message which the Idzoma saw as strengthening that cultural supremacy. An approach like this would help explain the differing attitudes of the Idzoma people toward the missionaries and Christianity within the Idzoma cultural structure and the differing Idzoma approach to individual parts of the Christian message, for example preaching and schools. Although, the Idzoma reaction to Christianity was initially conditioned by economic and educational factors, there was also a religious element to it. Although the missionaries were harshly unsympathetic to the Idzoma religious beliefs, they admitted that the Idzoma had a distinct idea of a Supreme Being, which can be seen in the Idzoma distinct name of wico – God.

The Idzoma were already looking for missionaries, before the first missionary contact took place. In his article, “The Call of Nigeria”, Rev Banham reported that,

> Already we have heard of them searching for a missionary to open churches and schools in the country so that we are fully aware that they are no longer inert or indifferent to these matters but have themselves tried to take action. This of itself is eloquent of the opportunity which lies open to us in this field. Every one knows that the place to begin work where the people are anxious for your presence is far easier and more likely to yield a quicker result than when one is obliged to go amongst people who not entirely are partially indifferent to your approaches. Here one has to create a demand in the hearts and minds of the people for the good things he had to offer.... These people who are anxious for missionary work will

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103 Mark Abo, Fieldwork interview, Igwumale, 29th July 1997
104 See later discussion in Chapter seven.
105 See earlier discussion in chapter three on the Idzoma primal theology
not rest content in this present condition of wanting and waiting. They will seek out other ways and means to satisfy their desires."106

Even though the missionaries were aware of the Idzego’s prior preparedness to receive them, they were still anxious about a possible negative reception from the Idzego people.107 But to their amazement they rather found the Idzego people, very warm, kind, friendly and generous in their reception. This was how Rev. Finlay reported this Idzego reception:

We found these people of the midst, chiefs and headmen, were altogether in a different category, both in intelligence and deportment, from any other we met in the south. Clad in flowing garments from neck to heel, wearing caps in shape like those in the pictures of Henry VIII. Strung round with lengths of beads, their flesh even down to their finger nails was stained a not unpleasant red. They everywhere impressed us by their quick and warm interest in everything we had to say. . . . One pictures with delight the young Nduadu of Igwumale and his dignified senior Mjoko receiving us with ornate state in Igwumale. . . . Instead of our progress from town to town being through an atmosphere of suspicion and fear, it was all the other way about. . . . everywhere we had but to state our errand and be treated with delight and royally entertained in such manner as the town could manage.108

Telling one of such wonderful stories about the Idzego warm reception of the missionaries, Rev Dodds narrated an experience that was very profound to him. He said,

I remember Ndebe when we cycled out of this town. The chief was on his farm. Another old fellow was put forward to answer for him. He did not know us, and to our first questions gave us nothing but evasive replies. Seeing how the land lay, we told him that we were missionaries. No more than that, but at once danced around one another with excitement. Messengers went hot foot for the chief himself. On his speedy arrival he told us that he himself had been on the point of tramping 40 miles each way to see the District Officer, to discover what could be done about a school. This was one sample of our greeting everywhere.109

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108 Finlay, “Into the Big Blue in Nigeria”, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, Primitive Methodist Leader, April, 1924.
109 Rev Dodds, Peoples, p. 246.
This story clearly demonstrates the Idoma willingness to have the missionaries.

However, as we closely studied the continued relationship or the interaction between the Idoma and the missionaries, many questions came to mind as regard the real motives of the Idoma people in wanting the missionaries. For example for what purposes were they wanting missionaries? Was it for education and economic benefits as earlier observed or for the Christian message the missionaries had brought with them? It is important to note here that the Idoma interests in the missionaries were not entirely for the Christian message of the missionaries but for education.

The Idoma continued to be friendly to the missionaries and increased their confidence in mission and what the missionaries were doing, a fact noted by Haswell. He said, “one has been privileged to notice the continued friendliness of the Idoma people and an increase in their confidence in the mission work”\textsuperscript{110}

Initially, the Idoma were naturally suspicious of missionaries, but this changed with time. Rev Norcross confirmed this when he reported, “Every place on the circuit has been visited several times, and one is impressed with the growing friendliness of the people, and their deepening appreciation of the work of the mission. I found them just a little suspicious at first of the strange white man, but now in every place I am received with great cordiality”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{110} Haswell, May 17\textsuperscript{th} 1927, in Norcross Diary, p.38.
\textsuperscript{120} Norcross Diary, p. 41.
Although, the Idoma people were friendly and warm towards the missionaries, they remained withdrawn as far as conversion to Christianity and commitment to the church were concerned. After twelve months’ labour and work among the Idoma, their response to Christianity still remained cautious. This however did not discourage the missionaries. Hutchinson made this point very clear when he said, “It has been a joyous privilege to work on this field during the past 12 months. The people generally have shown themselves friendly and hospitable and one could always sense a hearing for the word. Though no great mass movement to the church has taken place, it is evident on all hands that the work mission seeks to do is becoming more and more appreciated[121].

However, when it came to the issue of schools, the Idoma were sometimes too agreeable. The reason for the great willingness and reception in terms of schools was a practical one. Hutchinson correctly noted it in 1930,

One feels however that the desire is very largely selfish, in that the demand is for schools only. This has been brought about very largely by the political Dept. adopting the policy of substituting Idomas for Hausas in court clerkships etc. Several boys who have passed through our schools now hold these positions. Boys and youths in other towns have noted this and wish to qualify for similar jobs. We would be glad to meet the demands in full, as we get a real chance for evangelical work in the towns through the schools[122].

Norcross reported, “We say it with unspeakable joy. Wherever we have gone, the people have heard our words with much respect and a show of gladness”[123]

[121] Ibid., p 44.
[122] Hutchinson 29th January 1931, Norcross Diary, p. 52.
[123] Norcross Diary, p. 113.
After living with the Ickoma for two years, the wife of Rev. Norcross had this to say about those she was living among, "Idomas have always shown themselves friendly. For the two years’ residence among them, their kindness, courtesy and curiosity regarding the doings of the missionary have been a surprising thing".¹²⁴

But as time went on, the missionaries came to realise that the Ickoma only wanted the material benefits such as education and some medical care that the missionaries brought, and not their message. For example, Norcross after having helped to stop the bleeding of a gun shot wound, and thereby saved the life of the man noted that this case and others "are bringing people to the mission, but I am afraid that at present they want only the physical benefits, but I always get the chance to speak the word to them."¹²⁵

We have examined in this chapter, the early missionary contacts with the Ickoma, and how the missionaries perceived the Ickoma people, their culture, past values and their religious views. It was observed that, although, the missionaries were very negative in their views at the early stage, and very unsympathetic to the Ickoma culture and religious beliefs, they gradually became more positive as time went by and as they got to know more of the people. The Ickoma people on their part despite all the missionaries' negative views of them, and the high-handed missionary approaches to their cultural values, were very receptive of the missionaries and friendly to them. However, such reception and friendliness were only aimed at the physical benefits and other economic good fortunes

¹²⁴ Mrs. W. Norcross, "Among the Women of Idoma", Methodist Church Great Britain, MMS Archives, Advance 1927.
¹²⁵ Norcross Diary, p. 126
they would gain from such friendly relationship with the missionaries. This, however, did not discourage the missionaries, who continued their work with the hope that the gospel would one-day take effect in Idema. Let us now examine how the missionaries continued their work in Idema.
CHAPTER 5
THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN IDΩMA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EDUCATION AS AN AGENCY FOR EVANGELISM

In presenting this chapter we will among other things be focusing on the use of education as an agency for evangelism, church planting and growth in IdΩma. Apart from the descriptive accounts of what happened, there would be some critical evaluation and examination of the aims and methods of the missionary education in IdΩma, and the messages that were passed on to the IdΩma people and all its surrounding problems.

5.1 The Spread of Christianity in IdΩma.

The whole programme of the Methodist missionaries in the spread of Christianity among the IdΩma between 1924 to 1974 could be seen from the perspectives of holistic evangelism. However, I wish to restrict my working definition of evangelism to the actual preaching of the gospel and planting of schools as an agency for evangelism, and establishment of churches. It will also take into account the religious instruction in schools, and general preparation of personnel for the mission work in IdΩma. I also wish to include in my definition other programmes specifically designed to deepen the spiritual life of the church, widen the scope of the spiritual and material horizon of the indigenous members, such as New Life for All programme, visitation and evangelistic campaigns.

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1 Evangelism is the methods or techniques of reaching out to other people. Evangelism and evangelisation will be used interchangeably in this chapter. However, we will differentiate here that, while evangelism will be used to refer to the methods or techniques of reaching out, evangelisation is used to refer to a much wider process in which the IdΩma in this case are said to be brought to the saving grace of Christ. For full details of a constructive understanding of evangelism, see David Bosch, Transforming Mission, Orbis Press, Maryknoll, 1991.
The spread of Christianity among the Idọma as Chetwynd rightly suggested could be divided into the following six phases: First, The pioneer stage of the work during 1924-1934. Second, 1934-1945 which was the period that the missionaries began to penetrate into Idọma “Deeper and Wider”. The third phase was between 1945 – 1960 which was a beginning of a lot of new things in the life of the mission. The fourth phase was 1960 –1969. This was a period of difficult challenges and new situations. The fifth, 1970 –1974, was the period in which the missionaries began to work together with other Nigerian staff.2 There will be discussion of these phases later in the chapter. We will add the current phase, 1974 –the present which could be described as a period of an indigenous effort and later developments. This will be examined in chapter seven.

Dividing African history into periods has been subjected to heated debates by various scholars of African history.3 For example, McGrath apart from advocating that African history should be developed to “resonate with present debates and aspirations” of African people argued for thematic classification of African history,4 while Jabez Ayo Langley is of the view that African history should be restructured to include not only the historical sites of African past, but “to re-examine the neglected aspects like the role of individual in history”,5 Jack Thompson called for the need to see African history “from a new perspective other than the western ones”.6

3 See the various scholarly contributions to this debate in Re-thinking African History, Simon McGrath et al., Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1997.
5 Ibid., p. 249.
6 Ibid., p. 474.
Nevertheless, having thought very carefully about these debates, we have come to the conclusion that up to this point no better periodisation has emerged for the Iδma situation than that of Chetwynd’s classification of the various phases of the spread of Christianity in Iδma.

In all of these phases, especially, those between 1924–1974 the missionaries used various strategies\(^7\) to spread the gospel among the Iδma. However, we will concentrate on two of these strategies: education and Bible translation. In our view these were central to the spread of Christianity and its later development among the Iδma. While this chapter will be focusing primarily on education as an agency of evangelism, the next chapter will be considering Bible translation.

At the same time that the Methodist missionaries were thinking of education in Iδma, the western missionary bodies were thinking on what to do with education in Africa. For example, the 1920s witnessed wide ranging and very long debates about African education. In his classic outline of these debates in his book *Christianity in Northern Malawi*, Jack Thompson identified the two major aspects that concerned the missionary bodies at that period. The first issue was the aims and methods of missionary education in Africa and the second was the role the relationship between the missionaries and the colonial administration played in the implementation of those aims and methods of the missionary education in Africa.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Some of these strategies include visitation, Gospel campaigns; open choir parade rounds the Iδma village, the open procession with coffin at Christian burials, arts and crafts, and youth camps.

\(^8\) See T. Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, p. 239.
The first led to the visit of the Phelps-Stokes Commission to West and South Africa in the early 1920s and a second visit to East Africa in 1924. “The Phelps-Stokes Fund had been as a result of a legacy of Caroline Phelps Stokes a rich American spinster in 1910, concerned with ‘the education of negroes, both in Africa and the United States’”. Thomas Jesse Jones, who was the director of the Phelps-Stokes fund, and the chairman of the 1924 commission argued that, “western education was unsuitable for Africa and had to be adapted to African conditions”. He felt that mission education should simply focus on five general objectives, which were “character, health, agriculture, skills, family life and recreation”. Rev. J. W. C. Dougall who was the secretary of the 1924 commission on his part “pointed out that the commission thought that all missions were rather limited in their educational ideas and that the education provided by many of them was inadequate to the needs of Africa”. Both of these men felt that most of the mission education was too academic for the day to day life and needs of the Africans. They advocated mission education be tailored to the needs of the African village situations and the life of the Africans.

The 1920s educational controversy or debate involving the aims and methods of the mission education in Africa was also the central point of discussion in the 1926 Le Zoute conference of which the Scottish missionary Donald Fraser was chairman. This “conference was an endorsement of the Jones over-all vision of education” in Africa. Even though the educational debate of the 1920s on the aims and methods

9 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
16 For further details about the whole educational controversy of the 1920s about the aims and methods of mission education in Africa, see T. Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, especially chapter eight.
of African education is not the primary concern of this chapter, it is worth noting that, despite these concerns of the western missionary bodies on the purpose and techniques of mission education in Africa, the Methodist missionaries to Idomma at that period seemed to have failed to take these concerns into serious consideration in their policy of education as an agency for evangelism in Idomma as our later discussion in this chapter will highlight. The Idomma life, needs and village situation seemed left out in the educational programme of the Methodist missionaries to Idomma.

5.2 Education: The School as an Agency for Evangelism

As part of the missionary strategy for the evangelisation of the Idomma, schools were established. The missionary aim in establishing schools in Idomma between 1924-1974 was to use them as grounds for recruitment of church members and also to raise well educated Idomma native assistants, who would eventually assist in the missionary work in the future. Norcross portrayed this aim in his report as follows,

If the question were to be addressed to our missionaries as to which they regarded as their most important task, they would probably answer the making of African missionaries. In such an answer it will be seen readily to widen the whole field of mission endeavour. Take an African and make him a Christian. African Christians are a worthy class. To take an African and put him to a life in which he will definitely set apart for teaching and evangelising other Africans means so much more. He requires to be educated and trained and wide terms these are. The very magnitude of the task confronting the Christian Church in Nigeria, let alone in Africa involves a direction and an endeavour along these lines. It were beyond the dreams of possibility even were it advisable even to send the European missionaries in sufficient numbers. The more economic way, the Christian way, is by the missionaries of this present age setting themselves to this all comprehensive duty of making African Christians. Mostly every society seeks to create an order of teachers and every teacher is a preacher.

16 Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue, Archives, MCN /BD/ ED/ MS/ 1Education.
17 For further details, see, Norcross, "Native workers", Advance, September 1927, p. 166
18 Ibid.
Norcross was of a strong belief that in educating Africans, and the Idomba in particular, they were producing teachers, preachers and missionaries who would spread the Gospel among their own people and that such a venture was better and economically more advantageous than the sending of an European missionary.

With these aims in mind, opening of schools became the number one or the higher priority than the actual preaching of the gospel in the missionary attempts to spread Christianity among the Idomba. Such a strategy, however, had its own set backs as Familusi correctly noted,

>Whenever the Church engaged in some form of social work, the 'secular' activities absorbed more time and energy, and can even lead people to overlook the church's basic task, which is to proclaim the Good News of the salvation which Jesus won for mankind and to guide people in their spiritual growth. [He concluded], this happened to some extent with Methodist educational work in Idoma...."19

Despite this, opening of schools at the early pioneer stage of the missionary work in Idomba continued without much difficulty with the exception of Otobi. According to Norcross, this is the only area that the missionaries encountered some difficulties when the attempt to open a school failed. He described the reasons for the failure as "robberies and wanton destruction"20 of the school house. It is, however, argued that it was not completely true that this was the main reason why the programme for establishing a school in Otobi failed. It could be suggested that the main reason for the failure of the school programme in Otobi or the unresponsiveness of the Otobi people to the missionary and the mission work, was not completely as a result of 'robberies or wanton destruction' as Norcross claimed. It was probably due to language problems, lack of communication and understanding between the missionaries and the

19 M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p.91. The writer adds the words in the square bracket.
local people. The Otobi people, though they could speak the Idoma language, had their own different distinct language called Akpa. The majority of the Otobi people then and even now would rather speak Akpa than the Idoma language. Therefore, whatever Norcross had to say to them at that period in Idoma or through the Idoma interpreters did not interest them. This lack of understanding one another also resulted in a high degree of distrust between them and the missionaries.21

This, however, did not put off the Methodist missionaries. They continued to establish schools as part of their missionary thrust in order “to provide means of Christian education, and thereby serve as preparatory and harvest grounds for church membership”22 The missionaries recognised the important role the school plays in the training of an individual for life in general. Norcross was of the strong view that it was important for all children to go to school not only for the development of mental powers and training for life, but for religious instruction and to be enabled to read for themselves the holy scriptures23. Therefore, children of both sexes were encouraged to go to school from the age of seven, until the period of their confirmation into the full membership of the church.24 Amu’s correct observation is his article “The Position of Christianity in Modern Africa” in *International Review of Missions*, is worth noting with regard to missionary use of education as an agency of evangelism. He said,

> The first missionaries intended education to help Christianity forward; Christianity was the primary concern,...Christianity and literary education have, by this means come to be identified as one and the same thing....25

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21 During fieldwork in otobi on the 21st August 1997, Norcross’s claim of theft and wanton destruction were tested on the people, especially on one Mr. Eka, a retired Headteacher, a product of mission school, and one of the early converts from Otobi. Both Eka and others failed to confirm Norcross claim, except for the later reason of lack of understanding, which resulted in mistrust and suspicion between the Otobi people and the missionaries.

22 Otukpo Local Government, *Archives Education Report Otkp / LG / ED / Report / 1.9*


24 Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocesan Archives, Missionary Education, 1 / 3

Right from the beginning, therefore, the school was seen or viewed as an agency for evangelisation, and everything was done to make the school pupils Christian. Within this framework, therefore, the school syllabus was designed in such a way as to give it a Christian focus. Teachers were given a very special training to equip them for the task of evangelism. Most pastors of the churches were selected from the teachers, while others played the roles of sub-pastors or catechists. On the whole, the schools were seen by the Ickoma and the missionaries as a Christian community where Christian education was provided school pupils, and an indispensable part of the larger Christian community. As the schools were considered as Christian communities, the chief aim of education therefore, was the participation in the life of a Christian community. Grace Igwe, one of the early pioneer teachers in the Methodist education programme in Ickoma, confirmed this view during a fieldwork interview with her in Hitchin on the 14th July 1998. When she was asked about the overall goal of the education programme of the Church in Ickoma, she replied, “When we educate and train teachers, we do so for them to go and teach, preach, evangelise and live the Christian life in the community.” Norcross for his part felt that if the congregational and school life were not that of a Christian community, then the most useful class lessons on the Scripture would be wasted. He argued, “our school should become not mainly a place where lessons are taught, but where lives are lived. We should be happy then, if the children of our church grow up in schools, which are Christian communities.

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26 Some of these school pupils were already grown up adults. Therefore, it was not difficult for the missionaries to use them in establishing churches or a new church to be established from the school pupils.


As Christian communities therefore, the work of the day in all the mission schools started with school assembly, which involved a period of worship. This worship included singing from the Methodist hymn book, Bible reading, a short sermon followed with prayer and concluded with the Lord’s prayer said by all at the assembly. The National anthem would then follow, and the national pledge. The assembly and other business of the school were all conducted in English, which is the official language of the school.

Despite the strong emphasis that was placed on the importance of the Idroma language by the missionaries in any meaningful mission work in Idroma, at no point in the history of the Methodist education activities in Idroma were efforts made to use the Idroma language as a medium of education. The Idroma language was not even considered as a subject to be taught. Rather the writer recalled an experience as a child brought up in a Methodist school, where the use of the Idroma language was not only banned, but attracted some form of punishment, such as, cutting grass in the football field, or the fetching of firewood for the missionary or the headmaster.

As Fraser argued in his splendid article “Aims of African Education” in International Review of Mission, for education to be effective in Africa, such education “should be

30 Later, some hymns were specifically selected and printed for schools from the Methodist hymn book. These collections of hymns were called Hymns for School.
31 Usually, this will be taken from the Revised Standard Version, copyrighted 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.
32 This national pledge was introduced to the school by law as the government became very concerned that the school pupils were being indoctrinated with Christian beliefs and the missionary way of life at the expenses of national consciousness. At the end of the assembly, therefore, all school pupils are required by law to say the following pledge: I pledge to Nigeria my country, to faithful, loyal and honest, to defend her unity and uphold her honour and glory, so help me God.
33 See earlier discussion in Chapter 4, p. 137-141.
rooted in the vernaculars... [he further argued] the teachers must know the vernacular, and be really interpreted in the life of the community from which the pupils spring".34 The writer is in complete agreement with Professor Diedrich Westermann when he convincingly pointed out that,

Language and the mental life are so closely connected that any educational work which does not take into consideration the inseparable unity between African language and African thinking is based on false principles and must lead to an alienation of the individual from his own self, his past, his tradition and his people. If the African is to keep and develop his own soul and is to become a separate personality, his education must not begin by inoculating him with foreign civilization, but it must implant respect for the indigenous racial life, it must teach him to love his country and tribe as gifts given by God which are to be purified and brought to full growth by the new divine life. One of these gifts is the vernacular, it is the vessel in which the whole national life is contained and through which it finds expression.35

In addition to the school assembly, a day in a week, usually Wednesday, was set aside for full school worship. The pattern of the school worship would follow the normal Sunday adult pattern of worship, using mostly the order of worship contained in the 1935 Methodist Divine Worship36. The school timetable included five lesson periods per week on religious instruction, and a weekly test on Bible memorisation. Three of the five religious lesson periods were used for Bible story lessons, one for Bible Memory work, which included learning passages from the Bible and hymns from the Methodist Hymn Book. The remaining lesson period was used for the weekly school service37. The nature of the school timetable showed the emphasis the missionaries placed on religious education in Idoma. The Pastor or the Catechist would be asked by the missionaries to examine the pupils in religious instruction at least twice in a

37 Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Archives, MCN/BD/ School Syllabus/Religious Education.
year in order to ensure that the prescribed lessons were properly taught by the school teachers, and correctly assimilated by the school pupils.\textsuperscript{38}

The school teachers were required to regularly attend church services as examples for the children. As part of the condition of their service put it, “All teachers must be Christians in full church fellowship of the Methodist church. The teacher must have his membership in the church in the place where he is serving”.\textsuperscript{39} And what is more, they were also subject to Church discipline and even dismissal, if they were found wanting spiritually. The teachers were placed under the complete control of the church by their terms of contract with the Church as follows:

The teachers shall be under the direction of the proprietor of the Methodist schools....In spiritual matters, the teacher is also subject to the discipline of the local consistory of the church and will be terminated without one months salary or lieu of notice if he is found wanting spiritually.\textsuperscript{40}

They were required to dress, talk and behave like the missionaries. They had no choice but to obey the instruction of the church without question.

The hold of the Church on schools was strengthened when it was decided that the circuit\textsuperscript{41} ministers should serve as inspectors and managers of schools that were in their circuits\textsuperscript{42} The ministers were also empowered to employ, discipline or even dismiss teachers. The headmasters of schools reported directly to the ministers. This

\textsuperscript{38}Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Archives, MCN/BD/Minutes of Synod, 1925.
\textsuperscript{39}Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Archives, MCN/BD/Conditions of Service For Teachers Serving in Methodist Schools, 1925
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41}A Circuit of the Methodist Church is when one or more local churches come together under the Pastoral care of one or more Ministers. According to Methodist Church Nigeria Constitution, 1990, “a Circuit is a distinct authoritative unit, within the Diocese, in which usually several churches, conveniently situated for the purpose, are banded together for Pastoral oversight, mutual support and Christian Service”. For further details, see p.73ff of The Methodist Church Nigeria Constitution 1990.
\textsuperscript{42}Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Archives, MCN/BD/Education/ 1/5.
in my view placed the teachers under great stress in their attempt to please the church leaders in order to keep their jobs.

With the headmaster as the catechist of the local church, teachers as key players in the church, and ministers as schools inspectors and managers, the focus of the life of school was not in doubt. Pupils were prepared for baptism by staff; some so-called “Christian” names\(^{43}\) were imposed on the school pupils who were prepared for baptism.

Confirmation into the full membership of the church became mandatory for pupils in senior school, i.e., primaries six and seven that were usually over 15 and 18 years of age then, and became one of the criteria for entrance into the secondary school. Church attendance was compulsory for primaries six and seven, and Sunday school for primaries one to five. The school pupils would usually congregate in the school and march under the command and supervision of the school teacher in their school uniforms to the church. They would all be seated in a special place, and after the service, roll calls taken and then marched back to the school before dispersing to their various homes. The following Monday was usually not a very happy day for many of the pupils, especially those who were absent from the church service and the Sunday school, as the attendance at both the church service and the Sunday school would be scrupulously checked and all the absentees severely punished\(^{44}\). Some children would

\(^{43}\) For example, Abu would become Andrew or Oko become Peter. Ene would become Grace, while Onyiloko become Mary. Edo would become Simon. Some later reverted to their Idéma names. These names had remained with some till the time of this writing, but others reverted to their Idéma names.

\(^{44}\) In most cases, the punishment will be left to the discretion of the teacher on duty or the Headmaster. But the punishment was usually caning or weeding a portion of a football field or school farm, or the missionaries’ garden while others would be in class studying. A school prefect or the teacher on duty would closely supervise those serving the punishment. If it were discovered that the pupil serving the punishment was not putting the required effort into the weeding, the size of the original portion he was
therefore, attend the church only for the sake of avoiding heavy punishment on
Monday. The wife of the missionary usually gave sweets to the children who
faithfully attend Church services and Sunday school. It is worth noting the contrast
here between coming to the services and the Sunday school, and absenting one’s self
from them. While not coming to the services and the Sunday school meant pain as
result of caning, blistered hands as a result of hard labour, coming to the Church
services and the Sunday school on the other hand meant a taste of English sweets
which was a rare treat in Idźma.

It could be seen from the discussions so far, that schools were seen in Idźma as an
important agency in the Church’s evangelism. From the first day the children were
enrolled in the mission school, till the day they left, systematic attempts were made by
the missionaries to give them a Christian orientation and to make them members of
the church. While the missionaries to some large extent were successful, as some of
the pupils that went to the church remained as members of the church, in other
instances they were not successful in using any of the Idźma pupils that passed
through the mission schools as teachers or evangelists to their own Idźma people.
This was noted by Albert Nwosu when leading a discussion at the Circuit Council
meeting on the subject of the slow pace of church growth in Idźma as compared with
the Eastern part of Nigeria. He said,

the most distressing thing of all was the indifference of the Idźma boys whom
the school had educated. Having left school for positions in the local
government departments they had become ‘well off’, bought several wives
and become a bad influence among their own people. Very few boys had felt
the call to devote their lives to the uplifting of their own people.  

given to weed would be increased. He may have to stay behind after the normal school hour to
complete his punishment, while other pupils go home.

45 Norcross Journal, p.38; also cited by I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p.17, and M. M. Familusi,
Methodism in Nigeria, p. 98.
Albert Nwosu’s observations in our view failed to take into consideration our earlier observation as to why the Idoma young men were interested in the school programme of the church. Their intention was never to be trained as evangelists to their own people, but, rather to work as court clerks and in other government offices instead of the Hausa boys, replacing them in such positions in Idoma.46

It is equally important to note here that, the school system was largely responsible for the nominalism and lukewarmness now prevalent, in some of the churches in Idoma at the time of this writing. There is a large number of Idoma people who have been through missions schools, baptised in the various mission schools, and bear the so-called “Christian” names, and therefore are assumed to be Christians, but are not active in the church, while others without pretence have broken any link with the church completely.

With the missionary policy of education as an agency for the spread of Christianity in Idoma, the work of spreading Christianity in Idoma took the following forms and phases:

5.2.1 The Early Stage 1924-1934

Prior to 1924, very little was known about Idoma. Idoma was believed to be an extension of Ibo land beyond Igwumale47. After the exploration trip of the Revs. Banham, Dodds and Finlay in early 1924, it was discovered that the Idoma were different from the Igbo, and that no word of the gospel had reached them yet. They

46 See earlier discussion in chapter 4, especially the section on the Idoma response.
dreamed of churches and schools in every village in the land, where now not one exists, of people in spiritual torment, fear of bodies racked with pain and knowing no sort of healing, of woman freed, set in her rightful place, of little children saved to live. There is no single Mission school or church in the whole area.

By the middle of September 1924, Norcross and Albert Nwosu arrived in Igwumale, settled, and started a school. Three years later the school was officially “opened with fifty children on 9th January 1928, with Daniel Mba as headteacher”\(^49\). The Igwumale people who responded to the missionaries’ opening of a school, hailed this, by going to the church services, resulting in the later opening of the Norcross church at Igwumale in 1928\(^50\). It is worth noting at this point that, in naming this church in Igwumale as ‘Norcross Church’, the missionaries, perhaps, were only concerned with the memorial implications of such name. But this was later used as a point of resentment against the church, which the Idoma people saw as belonging to Norcross and not them.

The demand for schools increased in the 1930s, as the result of the Government’s decision to recruit and employ Idoma young men as court clerks instead of Hausa men. This resulted in the opening of schools and consequently churches in Otukpo Ico, Upu, Edikwu, Otukpo Nobi, and Ito in Igede in 1931\(^51\). An Igbo man Alfred Uche\(^52\) was appointed as teacher and catechist for this area. Later in the same year more schools were opened at Ijami in Oglewu district, Ugboju in Otukpo district, Iga

\(^48\) Ibid.
\(^50\) Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Church Planting / 1/3
\(^51\) Norcross Diary, 157.
\(^52\) Alfred Uche was a railway points worker in Otobi. In 1931, he was found lying down reading a book by Albert Nwosu who at every railway station would asked if there was an educated man there whom they could appoint as a teacher. Alfred was asked to join the mission work. With the encouragement of the stationmaster, Alfred joined the mission work. And travelled with them immediately to Otukpo. For full details on the life of Alfred, see Igwe, 1998, *Men who gave their lives to God*, an unpublished manuscript.
Okpaya in Ochekwu district, Adumoko and Adumleayimna in Otukpa district\(^\text{53}\).

Towards the end of 1931, the missionaries began to experience, the feel good factor and understandably became very happy with the progress that was made. This feel good factor resulted in Norcross moving house and the mission headquarters from Igwumale to Otukpo the new political capital of Idoma in 1932\(^\text{54}\), leaving Hutchinson to oversee the work in the Igwumale area. This was significant for the missionary work in Idoma, as Otukpo at that period had just been made the new capital of Idoma by the Government of the northern region.\(^\text{55}\)

1933 saw a very important development in the spread of Christianity in Idoma, which had a very valuable contribution to the interaction between Idoma and Christianity. This was the establishment of the first Circuit\(^\text{56}\) Council, in which lay people were given some say in the running of the schools and the church in Idoma\(^\text{57}\). It is noted that none of these lay men were Idoma, but Igbos. After nine years of missionary presence in Idoma, the Idoma were not involved in any way in the running of either the schools or the churches in Idoma. While some may argue that it was too early to involve the Idoma at that point, it is the view of the writer that they should have been involved from the onset of mission work in Idoma at certain level no matter how inexperienced they were by whatever missionary standard. Doing so would have averted the later problems of 1966 in which Idoma workers were needed to replace the Igbos who left Idoma because of the Nigerian civil war and the rush for the training of Idoma workers in 1974 to replace the missionaries who were finally

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\(^{53}\) See the Idoma 22 district map on page ix for the locations of these towns.

\(^{54}\) Norcross Diary, p 158.


\(^{56}\) See earlier note on page 172.
leaving Idoma. Just as the Idoma itα\textsuperscript{58}-saying puts it, ᵗेⁿ \textit{ọbụnụ} \textit{we ụnụ na ọ} \textit{kwa}
\textit{a} ‘you can only coil fish when it is fresh, when you allow it to dry, any attempt to coil it will result in the fish breaking’. Early training and the involvement of indigenous people in any mission work in their locality are absolutely essential. If these are left too late, as in the Idoma case, they may create a very big problem of continuity, and a big danger of total collapse.

Secondly, even though progress was made in the areas of schools and church planting, the mass Idoma response, or commitment to Christianity was very limited. For example, Norcross’s statistics showed that prior to 1931 5 people were baptised, 3 more in 1932, and 3 in 1933, making a total of only 11 Idoma people that were baptised after nine years of church planting through schools.\textsuperscript{59}

In January 1934, the first local preacher was commissioned in Idoma at the second Circuit Council meeting held in Otukpo. He was an Igbo man, Ephraim Omeiko of Taraku.\textsuperscript{60} However it was reported at this council meeting, that “four Idoma youth had applied but were advised to wait, since two of them were not even baptised, and none of them was a Full Member”\textsuperscript{61}. In order for one of these applicants to raise enough money to pay his class fees and be accepted as a lay preacher, he had to sell his chicken to raise the money. During this period, lack of money or financial support from the mission office in London was becoming a gradual problem and hindrance to the work of the missionaries in Idoma. For example, the request by the Adoka

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ita is an Idoma proverb or saying.
\textsuperscript{59} Norcross Journal, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{60} I. G. Chetwynd, \textit{Seed Time}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 10-11.
villages for schools and teachers was turned down due to lack of funds. 62 Therefore, the commitment of such Idoma youth would certainly move Hutchinson, who prior to this incident had applied unsuccessfully to London for more funds for the mission work in Idoma. 63 This young man's situation became a perfect opportunity for him to emphasise his appeal for more funds for the Idoma work. He reported this young man's dedication to London office of the Methodist Missionary society in his quarterly report as follows

Last market one young Idoma who is eager to be a Local Preacher took a fowl-all he had- to sell so that he could raise a few pennies for his class money. With such a spirit abroad we carry on in high hope and confidence. 64

It is pointed out that this case is not representative of the entire Idoma response or dedication to the gospel even though they remained friendly to the missionaries, and very agreeable to any move towards the establishment of schools in their villages. Their friendliness encouraged Hutchinson who by 1933 could claim that “Our work in this area is not now merely tolerated or looked on with some suspicion but is being recognised by all to be becoming a vital part of the life of the tribe”. 65

It still remained unclear what Hutchinson meant by this claim of the mission work becoming vital to the Idoma cultural life, when there was a constant conflict between the Idoma culture and the educational programme of the church, as will be illustrated in our later discussion of the Igwumale conflict that resulted in the Idoma withdrawing their children from school and refusing to go to church. 66

62 Ibid., p. 10.
63 Hutchinson Journal 1934.
64 Ibid., p. 11.
65 Norcross Journal, p 17, also cited by I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 11.
5.2.2 Spreading ‘Deeper and wider’ 1934-1945

Although the next phase of the spread of Christianity in Idɔma 1934 – 1945 had been described by Norcross as a period of penetrating Idɔma, ‘deeper and wider’\(^{67}\), it was a period that witnessed some progress, some set backs and gospel - culture conflict.

In 1934 F. L. Lloyd, a man with a special interest in education, joined the work in Idɔma. Norcross who strongly viewed education as an agency of evangelism in Idɔma happily welcomed his joining the work in Idɔma. However, such happy feelings did not last long. As Lloyd began to study the Idɔma culture and traditions, he became fascinated with the polygamous life style of the Idɔma. He soon began to suggest that the Idɔma could still be Christians with their polygamous life style. Such ideas did not go down well with his missionary colleagues, who up to this point had taken a stand against polygamy. They viewed and preached against polygamy as sin.

As a result of this, the polygamists were not accepted for baptism or confirmation. They were not allowed to hold any leadership role in the church. It was the missionary policy that only the first wife of a polygamous husband who applied for baptism and confirmation should be allowed to be baptised and confirmed, and only she could hold leadership position in the church\(^{68}\). The men had a special bench at the back of the church because of their status as polygamists. There was great ill feeling and a sense of isolation among these men, more so that they had to sit in a place specially designated for them. They were not allowed to have any official say in the life of the church.

\(^{66}\) See later discussion on page 183-184.
\(^{67}\) Norcross Journal, p 18.
\(^{68}\) Norcross Journal, p. 45.
The missionary stand created a lot of discrimination and hypocrisy in the church.

Some certainly felt discriminated against, as they were legally, culturally and properly married to their wives before they ever made contact with Christianity. Some of these polygamists who were adherent members of the church had to leave the church as they could not put up with the missionary stand on polygamy. Those who decided to stay became hypocrites because some men only registered one wife to enable them qualify for full membership, but still kept other women as wives in the traditional way. It also created animosity among wives because as soon as they realised that one had been registered with the church, the others became very embittered.

This problem was dealt with when the missionaries later left Idemalaland as chapter seven will highlight. Lloyd at that period felt his colleagues were wrong in imposing their western culture of the so called “one man one wife” on the Idemma polygamous culture. He demonstrated his opposition by marrying three Idemma women. The London office of the Methodist missionary society was very unhappy with these marriages, which eventually, resulted in his been called home in 1939. The Idemma understandably, on their part were very happy with his decision to marry three Idemma girls. As a result, attendance at church services increased by 200%, but declined when Lloyd was recalled to Britain. Lloyd had two daughters by one of these women.

69 Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Archives, MCN/BD/ Church Membership/1/2.
70 See chapter seven on Idemma Christianity Today.
71 All these women are dead now, but their children and grand children are in Otukpo, the capital of Idemma. Contacts were made with them during fieldwork in Otukpo, 20th August 1997. But, for some special reasons, the writer was not permitted to discuss the matter in details, or allowed to fully disclose their full identity in this writing. However, suffice to say at this point, that, one of these children is married to an Ex army Colonel in Otukpo, and she is also a teacher in a Methodist school. Their father left Nigeria for London when recalled home, but continued to support his children and wives in absentia.
Another difficulty that held up the rapid spread of Christianity through schools in Idoma at this period was lack of finance. As Chetwynd pointed out,

During the 1930s the whole world was in the grip of an economic depression, and this naturally affected the amount of money available for missionary work. In Idoma it became more and more necessary for churches to support their own teachers, which they were often unwilling to do.\(^\text{73}\)

Chetwynd was not entirely right that the Idoma were not prepared to support their teachers. The cost of supporting the teacher at the period was a very expensive venture that was beyond the financial capabilities of the villages that were looking for teachers. For example, in a village where a young man will have to sell a “fowl – all he had...so that he could raise few pennies for his class money”\(^\text{74}\) how do you expect people of such village to raise enough money to support a teacher? The writer is of the view that, although, the Idoma were willing to support a teacher, they just didn’t have the financial capability to do so.

Despite these difficulties, the gospel continued to spread in Idoma, with the Igbo catechists such as Albert Nwosu, Zephaniah Unaigwe, Alfred Uche, Peter Agwu and Fred Enelama doing most of the pastoral work in Idoma\(^\text{75}\). Fred Enelama was however accepted as a candidate for the ministry in 1944, and left Idoma a year later to begin his training as a minister. The training of Fred Enelama was a significant development not only for the spread of Christianity in Idoma but the whole of Eastern Region. His candidature for training for the ordained ministry of the Methodist Church marked the beginning of the process of the training of indigenous ministers.

\(^{73}\) I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 12.
\(^{74}\) Ibid., p. 11.
\(^{75}\) Norcross Journal, p 159.
The third difficulty that was responsible for the slow spread of the gospel in Idrøma at this period was the movement of Albert Nnwasu from Igwumale to Igede. After ten years of pastoral work in Igwumale, Albert Nwasu left Igwumale for Oju in Igede local government area about 40 miles from Igwumale, to open up the place for Christ. There had been war in Igede in 1927. Albert built the mission house on the stumps of the soldiers' houses. He found the Igede people strange, and their language different from Idrøma. As a result of this experience Albert, turned to God in prayer on the way forward. He prayed:

O God, I am now in another strange land and as Thou hast touched the Heart of Agbani and Igwumale, so do with this people and turn their faces to Thy Cross, and Help me.

Albert Nwasu after this prayer settled down to learning the Igede language and when he had done so translated St. Mark into it. He also produced a primer and fifty hymns. While Albert Nwasu's move from Igwumale to Oju was a big gain for the Igede people in having such an experienced catechist to start the work of spreading the gospel in Igede, it was a huge loss for the Igwumale people among whom Nwasu first settled and worked and from there took the gospel to other parts of Idrøma.

Chetwynd is correct in suggesting that even as late as 1941 "The church had little impression on the life of the town, where traditional religion was still very strong".

He illustrated this view in the following story:

In 1941 two Igwumale men, one pagan and Christian, stole yams. When the theft was discovered the whole village was called together, and everyone was to swear an oath on the ju-ju to prove his innocence. The Christians all refused to swear. The pagan thief later confessed to the crime, and he and his

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76 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 12.
78 Egemba Igwe, 1997, Life Given to God, p 10, unpublished manuscript.
79 For details of Albert Nwasu's work in Igede and other parts of Idrøma, see Norcross "Native Workers - A worker", The Advance Magazine, September 1927, p 166.
accomplice were both imprisoned. After this many of the Igwumale towns people refused to send their children to school. “If our children become Christian,” they said, “they will be free to steal or commit any crime because there will be no oath to prevent them”81

Prior to the Idoma society making any contact with Christianity, it was a society that was and still is very concerned with issues of morality and the societal public order. As discussed earlier, apart from using *ěka* 82 at the entrance of their sacred shrine as a prove of innocence, there were other bodies such as *ayi uta* 83 that see to the execution of moral justice.

From the story cited above, it appears that the Christians refused to subject themselves to this cultural practice. That brought a lot of concern among the people resulting in their deep suspicion of both the mission school and the church. Their suspicion was that, the more they send their children to school, the greater the probability of such children becoming Christians, which was the case at that time. As soon as their children became Christians, they would follow the footsteps of their predecessors, who would not subject themselves to religious cultural institution of the people such as *ěka* the case in our discussion. They therefore, and rightly so, because of their concerns for morality and public order refused to send their children to school.84

Instead of the missionaries closely studying this serious development, they came up with an attitude of the supremacy of one religious practice over the other. They sadly

81 Ibid.
82 *ěka* is the Idoma word for oath taking, See also chapter one for the bodies that were responsible for the discharge of moral justice in Idoma.
83 *Ayi uta* is a traditional title for those elected by the community to see to the execution of moral justice in Idoma.
84 Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives, MCN/BD/ Education/1/1928.*
failed to learn from this situation and presented Christianity as the only answer to the Id Stout morality and public disorder problems. Chetwynd sadly argued,

But in the new, wider world which education, trade, railway and roads were bringing to Id Stout, the universal religion of Christianity could provide a stronger and deeper morality than that of traditional religion and society. The thief stands condemned by the almighty God who created all things, not just by the spirits of one small village. And that almighty God also offers the thief forgiveness and the power to reform his life and become a useful man again.

This raises the whole question in our earlier chapter of the missionary attitude towards the African world and past values. The missionary response to a big problem which divided the community, such as this, did not come as a surprise from missionaries; through whom, as Westermann, when discussing the aims of missionary education in Africa as a whole, rightly suggested, “Schools have been started, and mission work has been carried on without any consideration for the state of mind of those who were to be educated or evangelized”. This view can be applied to the Id Stout position. In a like situation, even though the writer is not in agreement with John Colenso’s use of the word ‘heathen’, his general advice on witnessing to others outside one’s own culture would have been the appropriate response to the Igwumale situation. He said,

I believe that, by thus meeting the heathen, half way, as it were, upon the ground of our common humanity, and with the recollection that humanity is now blessed and redeemed in Christ....We may look for far greater success in missionary labours, and far more of stability in the converts that may be made, than by seeking to make all things new to them – to uproot altogether their old religion, scoffing at the things which they held most sacred, deriding the fears, which alone have stood to them, for so many years long, as the representatives of the spiritual world.

86 See chapter four, p. 146-151.
The Idoma as already indicated, after a period of initial enthusiasm, became disillusioned and demonstrated unwillingness to send their children to school. Despite this and other difficulties, it was still reported,

The Church was spreading the gospel wider throughout Idoma, and, perhaps more important was helping it to penetrate deeper into the lives of individuals and of local society.

It may be partially true that the church was spreading to other parts of Idoma, for example, Albert Nwosu moved to Igede to start the work of spreading the gospel there. Also, some individuals may have opened up their lives to the Christian message, such as those who refused to subject themselves to *aka* - oath swearing in Igwumale. However, it would be an unsustainable argument to suggest that Christianity between 1933-1945 was penetrating the societal lives of the people as claimed by the missionaries. Rather, the people were beginning to turn their back not only on Christianity at this time, but even on the schools that they had willingly supported and accepted up to this point. The writer is of the view that Chetwynd’s claim at the period in question was limited to a very small proportion of the Idoma people.

The gap between the missionaries and what they had to offer and the local people continued to widen. So much so that “the need for greater depth of understanding and fellowship led Amos Edwards to introduce a practice which he considered to be his most important contribution to the work in Idoma.” This was to gather all teachers

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89 See earlier discussion on pages 180-182 of this chapter. Also see earlier discussion in chapter four on the Idoma response.
90 I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p.16.
91 Amos Edwards was an Igbo catechist that was working in Idoma at that period.
92 Norcross Journal, 162.
and catechists together once in a month on account days\textsuperscript{93} for periods of Bible study and discussions on the problems facing the growth of Christianity in Ickoma.

At one such meeting in 1944 Alfred Uche, an Igbo catechist, led a discussion on the twenty years progress of the mission work in Ickoma since Norcross and others first visited Igwumale\textsuperscript{94}. The slow growth of Christianity was compared with the rapid growth of Christianity during the first twenty years of the mission work among the Igbo people. Three main reasons were given as to why the spread of Christianity in Ickoma was slow. The first was "the unresponsiveness of the village people, who were unwilling to send their children to school or to give up their juju"\textsuperscript{95}. The reasons why the Ickoma became hesitant in sending their children to school were earlier given. Fundamentally, these were the unwillingness of the new Ickoma Christians in Igwumale to subject themselves to the general Ickoma cultural practice of oath taking to prove innocence in the community, and the missionary insistence that the Ickoma give up their primal religion, which the missionaries saw and described as juju\textsuperscript{96}, and argued for the supremacy of Christianity over traditional religious practice. Up to this point the Ickoma had seen nothing in Christianity that would enable them to give up their beliefs. The situation was worsened by the confrontational attitude of both the missionaries and the local Christians towards the religious practices of the people.

\textsuperscript{93} On these account days, all the offerings for the month from all the churches and schools were brought together, to be lodged in the Circuit account, from where money was centrally paid to the circuit staffs. Most circuits in Ickoma still carry on with the practice started by Amos in 1944. However, while some view the gathering up of money centrally on account days as a good thing, as weaker churches were supported financially by the funds brought in by the more viable churches, others see this practice as lack of trust on the part of the missionaries on the local churches to manage their own church account.

\textsuperscript{94} Norcross Journal, p. 162, see also I. G. Chetwynd, \textit{Seed Time}, p.17; M. M. Familusi, \textit{Methodism in Nigeria}, p. 98.

\textsuperscript{95} I. G. Chetwynd, \textit{Seed Time}, p. 17.
The further reason was given as lack of leadership on the part of the Id̩ma young men who had passed through mission schools. It was recorded,

the most distressing thing of all was the indifference of the Idoma boys whom the school had educated. Having left school for positions in the local government departments they had become ‘well off’, bought several wives and become a bad influence among their own people. Very few boys felt the call to devote their lives to the uplifting of their own people.97

It is natural for the missionaries to feel discouraged, when after twenty years of work in a given area, the progress was not what they anticipated, more so, when earlier experiences in another environment had given them much success and growth.

However, it should have been remembered when a conclusion such as the one cited above was stated, that right from the outset, the Id̩ma interest in the missionary and what he had to offer was on the economic side and not on the religious side. Secondly, their support for the education programme of the church was just for the purpose of enabling the Id̩ma youths to get the required qualification for government jobs such as clerks of the court instead of those posts being occupied by the Hausa boys98.

Thirdly, Id̩ma had been a polygamous society, where a man could legally marry more than one wife. They saw nothing in Christianity at this point that was contrary to their cultural practice, apart from the imposition of the western culture of the so-called ‘one man one wife’. Therefore, even those who had gone through mission schools had the problem of accepting this western culture. Although a later chapter will discuss this issue of polygamy in detail, it is important to state at this point that it is not true as reported above that the Id̩ma ‘buy wives’. The Id̩ma marry wives, they do not buy them. Neither do the Id̩ma sell their daughters, but only accept bride price for their

96 Earlier studies have sufficiently dealt with the errors of such terminologies, such as the one above and others. For detail discussions on this, see Idowu, African Traditional Religion: A definition, SMC Press 1973, especially the Chapter on Errors of terminology.
97 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p.17, also cited by M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 98.
daughter’s marriage. It was not part of Idzorna culture to believe in or practise selling their daughters to men. This again demonstrates, the lack of understanding of both the missionaries and some of the Igbo catechists of the Idzorna cultural marriage ceremonies.\textsuperscript{99} It also appears that up to this point, the missionary emphasis on the work in Idzorna had been on education to the detriment of the actual preaching of the gospel.

The fourth, and probably, the most credible reason that was given at this meeting which was responsible for the slow growth of the church in Idzorna, was that “The Ibo teachers had difficulty learning the Idoma language and customs and because of low pay, were often more interested in cultivating their farms and trading than teaching”\textsuperscript{100}. Without understanding the language of the people, it is very difficult to effectively communicate the Gospel to those people. Language was and continues to be of extreme importance, both in the educational and evangelistic work in Idzorna. As the Igbo catechists and the missionaries did not know the language of their field, they were like a man who “is standing behind a closed door, ... deprived of the most effective means of approach”.\textsuperscript{101} Missionaries must be able not only to appreciate the educational and religious values hidden in the vernacular of the people among whom they work, but also to use them.

However, the missionaries must be credited at this point for not being content with what they had done, or giving up at that point and returning to Igboland and

\textsuperscript{98} See earlier discussion in chapter four, p. 158.  
\textsuperscript{99} See earlier discussion in Chapter two , p. 53 ff, for full discussions on the Idzorna marriage ceremonies.  
\textsuperscript{100} M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 98-99.  
continuing their work in an area, where they had considerable success. But they continued to evaluate their work in Idoma from time to time and sought for the best ways to strengthen their work and move forward.

5.2.3 A New Day 1945 – 1960

Their determination to move forward took them to the next phase of their work during 1945-1960 which according to the missionaries was a period of ‘A New Day’ . This period was significant to the missionaries for three reasons. First it marked the period of expatriate missionary staff increase. Rev. Amos Edwards, Rev. Procter Dougdale and Rev Joe Wood joined the missionary staff in Idoma for a brief period. 1950 saw the arrival of Rev. T. K Johnston who remained in Idoma for the next twenty years. Second, this period marked the involvement of a Nigerian minister in the mission work in Idoma, when in 1952 Rev. Fred Enelamah who was a catechist in Idoma, returned to Idoma as the first Nigerian minister to ever work in Idoma. Third, this year also witnessed for the first time, the full time involvement of an expatriate woman in the mission work in Idoma with the arrival of Miss Muriel Thomas in Otukpo for the opening of the women’s Housecraft Centre. She remained in Otukpo until 1957, when Miss Marjorie Weeks came to replace her. Miss Weeks spent ten years in Otukpo. Prior to this period, the emphasis of the missionary work in Idoma had been on the male. Only the men were sent to school, appointed as teachers and local church catechists. But during this period, with the special efforts of Miss Weeks

102 I. G. Chewynd, Seed Time, p. 18. See also our earlier discussion on the missionary’s periodisation of African history in page 165 ff.
103 Fred Enelamah, died few years before the writing of this thesis as the Bishop of Umuahia.
104 Miss Weeks currently lives in High Wycombe, Bucks, UK. She is fondly remembered by the Idoma women for her campaign for women education, and her interest in the Idoma language, which we will later consider in our later discussion on Idoma Bible translation.
the education of women was being seriously thought of and the missionaries began to seek ways to reach the Idoma women through education.

Rev Tom Johnston, the longest serving missionary in Idoma came from Belfast to Otukpo in 1954, and remained in Idoma for the next twenty-eight years. Later in 1954 Rev. Jonathan David came to Otukpo to replace Rev Fred Enelamah who was transferred to the eastern part of Nigeria to serve among his own Igbo people. After one year, he too was replaced by Rev. H. Kelso who also came from Belfast.

Rev. Tom Johnston, who had served in the British Army adopted two strategies to further enhance the growth and spread of Christianity in Idoma. One was his strong emphasis on visitation. Although, prior to Johnston's arrival visitation had been considered to be of great importance in reaching the people, it however, took more prominence at the time of Johnston, who would spend many days trekking from one Idoma village to the next. This was how he described one of such visits, which typified many more,

I went to one CRI school last Sunday, 50 miles away, and was the first minister ever to enter their village. I found it was not really one village as we thought, but a group of seven villages, each two or three miles apart. They had put up a mud building at a convenient centre and here the teacher we sent to them some months ago has to cope with over one hundred children. They all came for service and a few men also but not one woman. They had no hymn books and knew no hymns, so we sang over and over again the choruses they had been taught: 'Follow follow, I would follow Jesus', and 'I have a saviour who's mighty to keep'. I read St. Luke chapter 15, and as simply as possible told them the gospel story. The children sat absolutely silent and motionless with their big eyes fixed on me. One would like to think they were absorbed in the message but it is more likely that they were petrified at what was for most of them their first sight of a white man at close quarters.

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106 Norcross Diary, 163, also cited by I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 19.
It is observed that Johnston and the other ministers visited only the villages where the Igbo catechists had been posted either as teachers or catechists. Looking at this very closely, it raised the question of who actually evangelised the Idoma people? Was it the expatriate missionaries that brought the gospel to Idoma or the Igbo early Christians and catechists? Was the seed of the gospel planted in Idoma by the Igbo Christians before the missionaries came to water such seeds or were the missionaries the pioneers that took Christianity to the Idoma? The concluding chapter will examine this argument in detail and conclude that the seed of the gospel was planted in Idomaliland before the expatriate missionaries made contact with the Idoma people. This view can be convincingly sustained by the pattern of events in Idoma. The spread of Christianity in Idoma seemed to follow a consistent pattern of sending an Igbo catechist into an Idoma village to start a school and church, then the expatriate minister would later make a visit. It may be correct to also suggest that there was hardly any situation in Idoma, in which the European missionaries ventured out on their own to evangelise the Idoma, without the advance party of the Igbo catechists. Johnston’s observation as cited above, that these children were not taking in the gospel, is in our view right, due to the lack of understanding and communication between Johnston and those Idoma children. The likely thing that must have caught the attention of those children was the sight of some one outside their cultural setting and background with a different language, colour of skin, hair and eyes and a strange outfit. All these would naturally attract the Idoma children.

Johnston quickly saw the need of posting ministers outside Otukpo, the mission headquarters. While Rev. T. K Johnson\(^{107}\) was posted to Igede, Rev. Leslie Dawson

\(^{107}\) Rev & Mrs. T. K. Johnson reside currently in Newcastle upon Tyne, and still serve as a supernumerary minister in the Newcastle Circuit.
was posted to Iga Okpaya in Ochekwu District of Apa Local Government Area. Rev. Dawson sadly had to return to England due to ill health, and was replaced by Rev. Alan Skipsey. Rev Herbert Kelso was stationed in Odoba. With these postings, the mission work was fully represented in the four corners of Icampa from north to south, east to west.

Another significant contribution by Johnston to the speedy growth of the church in Icampa at this period was the organisation of evangelistic campaigns and open air services which concluded with an open parade around the village. Various evangelistic campaigns were held at this period, but the one that best illustrates our point was the one that was organised by Miss Thomas in 1957 in Otukpo led by some tutors from The Methodist College at Uzakoli in Eastern Nigeria, which ended on Easter Sunday with an open air service for all the Methodist churches in and around Otukpo, with an estimated attendance of over one thousand eight hundred people.

Afterwards, Tom Johnston reported,

The whole congregation formed into a procession to have a march of witness through the main streets of the town. It was led by a Local Preacher carrying high an empty cross. Then came the ministers, followed by the choir in their white robes singing 'Christ the Lord is risen today' so that the whole town was aware that for Christians it was a very special occasion.

A parade of this nature was completely new to the Icampa people and bound to attract a lot of attention. It became a popular means of gathering people, especially children.

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108 Parades were very special and meant much to Johnston for probably, two main reasons, first as ex-British Army and secondly, from his home cultural background in Belfast where parades are central to his cultural upbringing.
110 Ibid.
for Christian meetings. Johnston and the rest of the ministers maximised the use of campaigns and parades to spread Christianity in Idoma.

In 1959 the American evangelist Billy Graham visited Enugu in the current Enugu State, about two hundred and four kilometres from Otukpo. Johnson encouraged all the missionary staff in Idoma to attend. Follow up campaigns were later organised in Idoma for the purpose of evangelising the people. Chetwynd reported that, “In all these campaigns men and women were led to accept Jesus as their Saviour. Many jujus were burnt, and many people began on the road to Baptism and Full Membership of the Church”. In 1957 Johnston recorded in his journal an experience that was very special to him in one of such baptismal service, which was also the first Baptism of forty-three Idoma boys from the Native Authority Boarding School in Otobi.

The Church could not hold all who came that morning, and we had to conduct the first part of the service under the shade of some trees in the church compound. Then we formed into a procession and singing ‘forward Christian Soldiers’ marched through the village to the river. Here we continued the service, with the congregation on the banks, now augmented by many of the heathen people of the village who came to see what was happening. The boys publicly made their promise to be faithful followers of Christ, and one by one they stepped into the water and were baptised by immersion.

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111 For example, the use of parades was later extended to the burial ceremonies of Christians in which, the church carpenter will build a coffin, and the corpe placed inside, and covered with white cloth, and a brocade of flower placed on the coffin. The coffin will then be carried shoulder high by about four or five people. The ministers will march in front of the coffin, followed by the church choir in their white robes, and the rest. He will be paraded round the town with choruses and hymns to the grave site where he will be buried, with the cross at the centre of the grave. While others were attracted by such practices to Christianity, some viewed such practice as a violation of the cultural burial rites of the Idoma people, who even today will not bury their people in a coffin.

112 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 21.

113 This is the first government mission assisted established school in Idoma.

114 Otobi is a very small village in the current Otukpo Local Government Area. Though, these tribes are classified as Idoma, and they speak and understand Idoma, they have a very different language of their own called Akpa. The origin of this language still remains a subject of research in Idoma. Up to the time of this writing, no scholar has been able to identify the origin of Akpa that are within the Idoma people.

Here we observe Johnston again, making maximum use of his cultural background of parades and his experience of military parades and even the use of the military song implying the confrontation between the Christian faith and the primal religion of the Idoma people, to reach the local people. Even though this seemed to have paid off in the attendance of the Otobi people many of whom probably only came to observe what was happening, and whom Johnston unfortunately described as ‘heathen’.

Though there were no dramatic conversions to Christianity after these parades and baptisms, one of the young men involved in that Otobi baptism, Mr Omadachi Eka, was asked during fieldwork in Otobi about the effect of such event in Otobi. This was his reply,

\[ \text{"\text{èšì ìmà wè èšì nèùì} \text{that day was a great day} } \\
\text{\text{nè ècè àlèwà} \text{that many people} } \\
\text{\text{kò èù cè ìwècò.} \text{put their trust in God} } \\
\text{\text{Ama àfì. ufi} \text{but for fear} } \\
\text{\text{I cèla ècè àlèwà cè tà ècè àfì} \text{they could not declare it openly.116} } \]

Despite this claim of mass conversion by one of the participants of this baptismal event, not one example of the those claimed to have came to Christianity as result of the parade or the baptism could be found during fieldwork in Otobi.

The period of Tom Johnston and some of his colleagues that worked with him from 1954 to 1960 was a period of considerable growth for the church in Idoma.117 For example, it was recorded that, “In 1954, there were forty eight stations in the whole of Idoma. By 1960, the number increased to two hundred. Visitation became necessary; the missionaries spent many days trekking from village to village”.118 The

\begin{footnotes}
\item Omadchi Eka, \textit{Field work interview}, Otobi, 20\textsuperscript{th} August 1997.
\item I. G. Chetwynd, \textit{Seed Time}, p. 18.
\item M. M. Familusi, \textit{Methodism in Nigeria}, p. 99.
\end{footnotes}
missionaries were very happy about what was happening during this period that in 1957, they reported, “Many doors have opened to us in untouched villages”.119

The period of 1954 – 1960 witnessed some very significant developments and growth of the church in Idoma, for which the mission had prayed for years. Some of these developments were the establishment and growth of the women’s fellowship that was encouraged by the presence of a female missionary, and the work of the women’s Housecraft Centre, the establishment of a Girls’ Senior Primary School in 1958120. The opening of Norcross Methodist Church in Otupko, the first Methodist Church building in Idoma. The need to train more teachers who would also serve as catechists led to the founding of a Teacher Training College in Otukpo. This college was called Jesus College Otukpo. The name was symbolic of all that the college stood for. Both the communal and academic life of the college were patterned on the principle of training Christian teachers and local evangelists for the Church. Grace Igwe one of the early staff of Jesus College was asked during field work in Hitchin about the purpose and mission of the college. She replied: “To train teachers who would go and evangelise, preach and teach their people the Gospel, and live the Christian life in the community”.121 The college started with twenty-one students, seventeen of which were Idoma boys and no girls and the other four Igbo boys, with Mr Trevor Keeves as principal, and Mr. O A Onazi122 as the other member of staff.

119 Methodist Church in Great Britain, MSS Archives, M. S. S. Report, 1957.
120 Norcross Journal, p. 166.
121 Grace Igwe, field work Tape interview, Hitchin 14th July 1998.
122 Mr. O. A. Onazi was one of the earliest sets of the Idoma people to accept Christianity in Igwumale. He had served the Methodist church both in Idoma and the national level in several capacities, such as being the Circuit Steward, Diocesan Lay President, Conference Lay President, currently, the Trustee of Methodist Church Nigeria, and an accredited Lay preacher since 1938. For further details of Mr Onazi’s services to the church see, M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 102.
The other exciting event at this period to the credit of the missionaries, was the establishment of the new Girls' Boarding School in Otukpo in 1958, with Mrs. Grace Igwe as principal. This was what Grace had to say about this exciting development in the life of the Church:

For so long, the Church seemed to have forgotten women in the education and evangelisation programme of the Church. Thank God, the opportunity came at last for us to train and reach the Idoma women. We can now train Christian teachers, evangelists and Christian families. No better summary could be found to sum up this exciting phase of the church in Idoma, than that of Chetwynd when he wrote:

The Church was growing in numbers and was developing its institutions and other means by which it could enable Christians to grow in faith and understanding, and could help to raise the whole Idoma people to a fuller life in the modern world. The Church was reaching new areas, and in some of the older areas revival came too. Ijigbam was the scene of one such awakening, and after a tour of villages by Rev. T. A. Johnston and H. Kelso and Mr. Neville McElderry, several schools and churches were opened among the Idomas and the IZis.

5.2.4. “A Decade of Unprecedented Turbulence” 1960 –1969

The next phase 1960 –1969 of the mission work and the spread of Christianity in Idoma was not an easy one. Norcross described this period, and rightly too, as “a decade of unprecedented turbulence” for the church in Idoma. This period had some serious implications not only for the mission in Idoma, but for the Idoma people in general. This was a period in which the educational work of the mission and the spread of Christianity in Idoma had some serious set backs due to the political changes in Nigeria, which was followed by the autonomy of the Methodist church in Nigeria from the British Conference. Other reasons were the changes introduced in

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123 Grace Igwe, field work, Tape interview, Hitchin 14th July 1998.
124 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 22-23, also cited by M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 102.
the Nigerian church as the result of these autonomies and the tragic Nigerian civil war which forced the Igbos to flee Idzjma; thereby leaving the work of education as a tool of evangelism in Idzjma in serious difficulties.

Nigeria became an independent nation on the 1st October 1960. This was followed two years later by the Methodist Church Nigeria becoming autonomous from the British Conference. The implication of this for the Nigerian Methodist church, was that henceforth, the Nigerian conference and the affairs of the Methodist church Nigeria would be directed by the new autonomous Nigerian Conference. Rev. Dr. Soremekun was appointed and inducted by the Nigerian Conference as its first President, with an Idzjma Bible translator Rev. Dr. Egemba Igwe as the first Secretary of conference.

These national and ecclesiastical autonomies had a lot of implications for the Methodist church in Idzjma. First was the reorganisation of the Nigerian Districts in

126 The Most Rev. Dr. Soremekun, now the Archbishop Emeritus of Lagos ArchDiocese, was born on 12th August 1906 into a Christian home. His parents were members of Itesi Methodist Church Abeokuta. He attended Itesi Primary school, and was admitted into the Wesley Training Institute in Ibadan in 1921. After training, he worked as Sub-Pastor in Ijebu Circuit. In 1932, he entered Wesley College to be trained for the minister of the Methodist Church. In 1934, he became a probationary minister. In 1936, he was transferred to Olowogbowo Circuit. Later in the same year he won a scholarship for Bachelor of Divinity Course at Richmond College Surrey. Having passed his course, he was ordained on the 19th July 1938 and returned to Nigeria in 1939 and appointed to Wesley College Ibadan. He was appointed Synod Secretary of the Western District in 1944, Principal Wesley College in 1950. In 1954 he was on the staff of Remo Secondary School Shagamu until 1962 when he was appointed the first Nigerian President of the Conference of Methodist Church Nigeria.

127 Rev. Dr. Igwe was born on 20th December 1925 at Isingwu in Umuahia. He was educated at Methodist Primary School and Methodist College Uzakoli where he also served as a tutor on the completion of his course. He was later seconded to the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London from 1947-1950 as an Assistant in the West African Department of the School. He later went to Cambridge and studied English Literature and Theology. He candidated for the ministry of the Methodist Church and was trained at Wesley House Cambridge. He returned to Nigeria and was stationed in Otukpo in 1955, where he was engaged in his translation of the Idzjma New Testament. He later was transferred to Abia in 1958, and ordained a year later in 1959. After this he was transferred to the Trinity Union College Umuahia as the Methodist representative and the first African tutor on the staff of the College, and later appointed Secretary of Conference in 1962.
which Idoma became part of the new Northern District, instead of belonging to the old Eastern District, which was the cradle of her contact with Christianity. This resulted in Idoma losing all the benefits she derived from belonging to the Eastern District. Rev. T.A. Johnston under whose leadership the church had a considerable growth in Idoma, had to move from Idoma to Kaduna, the headquarters of the new Northern District as chairman of the District. This too, was a big loss to the Idoma Church.

Secondly, Idoma, which previously consisted of one circuit was in 1963 divided and became four circuits and two sections. The circuits were Otukpo, Igede, Iga and Odoba, with Igwumale and Makurdi remaining as sections. It is important to note at this point that, even though Igwumale was the first to make contact with Christianity in Idoma land, yet as the time of the creation of the Idoma circuits, the commitment to Christianity of the Igwumale was so weak that they were not viable to be considered as a circuit. The unresponsiveness of the Igwumale people to Christianity was as earlier discussed, due to the confrontational attitudes of the missionaries and some of the early Igwumale Christians to the religion and religious practices of the people. Makurdi could not be a circuit at that time, because it was outside the Idoma area. And the S.U.M missionaries were working in that area with considerable success.

Despite these difficulties, the church in Idoma continued to grow, with the opening of St. Peter’s school and the extension of Norcross and St Peters churches in order to

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128 Norcross Journal, p. 35.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
accommodate the growing numbers of worshippers. A new school and a church were opened at Iga Okpaya in 1963\textsuperscript{131}. 1963 also witnessed the rebuilding of Jericho church in Otukpo after its destruction by a storm. Otukpa, Odoba, Ibila and Igwumale churches were built at this period. Jesus College continued to expand with the building of the college chapel in the same year.\textsuperscript{132} This year also saw the replacement of the college principal Mr. Douglas Jenkinson by Mr Roland Hughes.\textsuperscript{133} The following year witnessed the opening of Wesley High School, Otupko, which was the first ever Methodist secondary school to be opened not only in Idoma, but also in the whole of the Benue Province.\textsuperscript{134} As it was rightly reported during this period

The “ordinary” pastoral and evangelistic work of the church continued. The Methodist Church in Idoma began to co-operate in the New Life For All Movement which was holding evangelistic campaigns throughout West Africa. Catechists continued faithfully to strengthen the household of God. Many teachers also gave valuable service to the church\textsuperscript{135}

With all these activities as stated above, the work of the mission continued to quietly progress in Idoma, especially with the teachers and the catechists seeking through visitation, prayer meetings and church services to build the spiritual lives of the Idoma people.\textsuperscript{136}

The witness of the Methodist Church in Idoma between 1965-1966 was described in Norcross Journal “as one of light and shade”.\textsuperscript{137} It was so described because those two years witnessed some considerable growth of the Church in Idoma land with many of the Idoma people giving their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, and receiving training

\textsuperscript{131} M. M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Mr. R. Hughes who came from Bangor in Wales was the longest serving principal of Jesus College. He died two years before the writing of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{134} G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 25-26.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 26
\textsuperscript{136} Norcross Journal 169
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
through the New Life For All Campaign programme on how to witness. There were signs of great hope with the Idoma people being trained in how to witness to their own very people\textsuperscript{138}

The moment of shade for the period, however, came when the scheme that was designed for the Protestant Churches in Nigeria – Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians to come together as a United Church of Nigeria broke down in the last hour. Various reasons\textsuperscript{139} were given for the break up, but the most notable ones were lack of proper communication, where the committee on the union failed, to thoroughly inform the lay members of the church. Secondly, those who were to be bishops both from the Methodists, Presbyterian and Anglican Churches were seriously mindful of their seniority. For example, there was a proposal to appoint as bishops some ministers who were junior in ordination to their counterparts. That move did not go down well with some of the senior ministers. The Methodists during this period, were concerned about their new autonomy from the British Conference of the Methodist church, which they feared by the proposed union, they may not have the opportunity to consolidate.\textsuperscript{140} Finally,

There was in-built laxity in the constitution because, by implication of Article 14 of the ‘Basis of Church Union’, The relations of the United Church as a corporate body with other churches’ the Anglican Church would keep its membership of the Lambeth Conference, the Methodist Church its ties with the British Conference, and the Presbyterian Church its overseas connections.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{139} For further details as to the reasons for the break up of the Nigerian Church union, see Kalu. O. U. \textit{Divided People of God}, NOK Publishers, Lagos, 1978.

\textsuperscript{140} M. M. Familusi, \textit{Methodism in Nigeria}, p.132.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
As the result of this and other reasons\textsuperscript{142} much opposition began to rise at the local level of the church, which eventually led to the break up and the final collapse of the proposals for the Union. It was a disappointing moment for the Church in Nigeria, and the Id\textsuperscript{ma} Methodist church in particular as this break up robbed them of the chance of their superintendent minister, Rev. T. A. Johnston from becoming a Bishop.

Lamenting the break down of the scheme for the Nigerian Church Union, Chetwynd said,

> It was a great disappointment to many people throughout the world, not just in Nigeria, when this unity scheme broke down at the last minute. It is sad that Church divisions, which originated from historical events in Europe cannot be overcome in Africa, where they are largely irrelevant.\textsuperscript{143}

This disappointment was little compared to the sad and terrible political events that led to the Nigerian civil war 1966-1970. This unpleasant milestone in the historical development of Nigeria as a whole, had far-reaching effects or consequences not only on the political face of Nigeria, but also on the religious life of the entire people of the country, especially the Id\textsuperscript{ma} people who bordered the Igbo people. As the trouble started in the northern part of the country, many of the Igbo catechists and teachers that were working in Id\textsuperscript{ma} had to flee to their homes in the east, leaving the Id\textsuperscript{ma} with virtually no teachers or catechists. This caused a major disruption to the education work of the church and to both church life and the spread of Christianity in Id\textsuperscript{ma} as there were no teachers to continue the education programme of the mission, and equally no pastors for the existing churches.\textsuperscript{144} The missionaries were forced by this situation to introduce a ‘Crash Programme’ that would enable them train the

\textsuperscript{142} For detail discussions and reasons for the break up of the Church Union in Nigeria, see M. M. Familusi, \textit{Methodism in Nigeria}, especially, Chapter Nine on The Church Union; Kalu, O.U \textit{Divided People of God}, NOK Publishers, Lagos, 1978.

\textsuperscript{143} I. G. Chetwynd, \textit{Seed Time}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{144} Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese \textit{Archives}, MCN/ BD/ Id\textsuperscript{ma} workers 1967.
Ichoma workers who would fill the gap that was created by the departure of the Igbo workers as the result of the civil war.\textsuperscript{145}

The Igbos during this war attacked Igwumale and Agila.\textsuperscript{146} Many Ichoma people were killed by this war, and thousands fled Igwumale, Agila, Ijigban to Utonkon\textsuperscript{147} in the current Ado Local Government Area. Many of the Igbo congregations lost their entire membership, thereby affecting the personnel and the financial life of the circuit. The churches in Makurdi, Lafia Akwanga and Keffi areas were destroyed and looted by the Hausas\textsuperscript{148} as a result of the war due to their Igbo majority membership.

During this difficult period in the history of Christianity in Ichoma, while some of the Ichoma Christians fell into the temptation of looting Igbo properties, others showed good examples of Christian brotherhood by harbouring and sheltering their Igbo brothers and sisters and helping them to escape to the east.\textsuperscript{149} Although it was recorded that some of the Ichoma Christians “fell into the temptation to loot and even kill, some confessed in prayer meetings afterwards, seeking forgiveness and peace”.\textsuperscript{150} There was no evidence in Ichoma then or now that the Ichoma Christians generally were involved in the killing of the Igbos. During field interviews in Ichoma, July – September 1997, all the people who were eye witness of the Nigerian civil war that were interviewed, such as, the Most Rev. B.A Achigili\textsuperscript{151}, the current Archbishop, of the North Archdiocese of the Methodist Church, and Mr. O A Onazi\textsuperscript{152}, one of the

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Igwumale and Agila live at the boarder between the Ichoma and the Igbo people.
\textsuperscript{147} Otukpo Local Government Archives, qfu aghɔ, 1966-1970.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} I. G. Chewynd, \textit{Seed Time}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{151} Archbishop Achigili was interviewed in Kaduna on the 27th July 1997.
\textsuperscript{152} Mr. Onazi, personal interview, 4th August 1997.
earliest Christians in Igwumale, could not confirm such allegations either as eye witnesses of the war or church workers at that time.

Although in the course of war, it is possible some Igbos may have been maltreated or killed, but in general, the balance of probability is that the Idoma were not involved in the killing of the Igbos. It would be very difficult to sustain Chetwynd’s general assumption, given above that the Idoma Christians were involved in the killing of the Igbos in the light of the Idoma history, either oral or written.

Although no good is expected from distressing and tragic events like the Nigerian civil war, some good however developed out of it for the Idoma church. With all the Igbo Church workers gone, the missionaries were forced to think of the Idoma involvement in the running of the Churches and schools in Idoma. This led to the emergency opening of a Bible school in Otukpo with Rev. G.C Gardener\textsuperscript{153} as principal in order to train Idoma as catechists for the four circuits in Idoma.\textsuperscript{154} One of such students was the late Rev. R. U Ikpeme, the first Idoma minister; another was the current Archbishop of the North, The Most Rev. B.A. Achigili. During this time also, a second Methodist high school for refugees from Igwumale was opened in exile at Otukpo with Mr N.McElderry as principal. With this encouraging development in the training of the Idoma people to be involved in the affairs and running of the Church in Idoma, and the unshrinking efforts of the missionaries to continue their policy of education as an agency of evangelism in opening more schools, despite all the pains and difficulties caused by the tragic civil war; no summary better sums up

\textsuperscript{153} Rev. Gardener is currently, the circuit Minister of Ashford Circuit in Middlesex, England.

\textsuperscript{154} Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Archives, MCN/BD/IDK/Idoma workers 1967.
the state of the church in Idoma at this period, than that of Miss Weeks in 1967 when she said, “The Idoma Church is in good heart”.155

5.2.5 Labourers Together 1970 –1974

The next period, 1970 -1974 of the spread of Christianity in Idoma seriously took into consideration the involvement of the indigenous people in the running of the church. The later stage of this period could be described as the era of labourers together and also a period of moratorium156 for the Methodist missionaries in Idoma as later discussions would highlight.

During this period the educational and evangelistic work of the Church was extended to the Izis157 part of the Igbo people, who were the former enemies of the Idoma people in the current Enugu State under the leadership of an Idoma catechist Mr Agbese. This was a positive hopeful sign of a peaceful future and reconciliation between the Idoma and the Igbos, who became estranged and bitter towards each other as the result of the Nigerian civil war–1966-1970.

156 Although Rev.Azariah hinted at the idea of Moratorium at the Edinburgh Conference in his speech title, ‘The Problem of Co-operation between the Foreign and Native Workers’ in page 306-315 in The History and Records of the World Missionary Conference 1910. it was Dr. John Gatu at a conference in America in 1971, when he was called to give a speech in which he called for moratorium on sending of missionary from the West to the Third World for five years. But the moratorium on the American missionaries had no time limit, but as long as it is necessary. The idea since then spread to all part of the World and becomes a subject of debate in mission studies. In a leaflet prepared by the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) that meet in the Lusaka Assembly for use in the Churches in Africa, moratorium was defined to mean ‘a pause or halt to something that is happening. The suggestion is that Churches of Africa should consider calling a halt to the flow of missionary personnel and funds from other countries at least for a period. It was hoped that the moratorium would be a strategy that would allow the Churches of Africa to make sure of their own identity and integrity as responsible communions of Christians. Should Moratorium be considered? Can it work? Has it worked anywhere? What would be the outcome? For answers to questions like this, see Dr. Jack Thompson, “Missionaries Go Home: The Case for Moratorium”, Lecture note, 16th October 1995.
157 The Izis were the Igbo people who came and attacked, and destroyed the Igwumale and Agila people during the Nigerian Civil War.
The missionaries at this period felt that a higher institution of learning was needed in the Igwumale area in order to solidify their policy of education as an agency of evangelism and to enable them to produce more teachers for the schools in Idoma. As a result of this desire the Methodist High School at Igwumale that was started at this period in exile in Lafia, and later moved Otukpo as the result of the war was moved to Igwumale in 1970 at the end of the war. This was a welcome event as it gradually brought life to Igwumale again after the destruction ruins and devastation of the War.

In 1971, the first Nigerian Chairman for the Northern District, The Rev. J.D. Aluko, a Yoruba man from Ifaki in the then Ondo State was appointed at the Synod.159 1972 ushered in a big boost to the Methodist witness in Idoma, in the stationing of the Rev. B.A. Achigili160 an indigenous Idoma minister in Igwumale where the church had been six years without a resident church worker being under the care of the Odoba circuit minister.161

Another exciting thing that happened during this period was the opening in Otukpo of the biggest, and most impressive church building by The Eedma, the Agaba Idu of Idoma, His Royal Highness, Dr Abraham Ajene Okpabi in 1972. This Church was named after Rev. Norcross who had died a few years earlier. Currently, it is regarded as the Mother Church for all the Churches in Idoma, and the current seat of the Bishop of Benue.

158 J.D Aluko, later became the Methodist Bishop of The Northern Diocese and later translated to Ifaki where he retired from the active ministry of the Church.
159 Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Minutes of synod 1971.
160 Achigilii is currently the Methodist Archbishop of the Northern Arch Diocese and also the Bishop of the North.
In 1973, it was decided by the Benue State Government, that all institutions of higher education in the State were to have Nigerian principals.\textsuperscript{162} This was a very difficult time for the missionaries for two reasons. First they had no plan for Nigerian principals to replace them in the running of the Methodist colleges in Id\textsuperscript{ma} at this period. Secondly, the timing of this change was too sudden for them. However, since this was a State law, they had to comply. Mr Roland Hughes after serving for ten years as principal of Jesus College Otukpo had to retire and handed over to Mr Oga, an Id\textsuperscript{ma} man from Igwumale. Mr Holmes handed over Wesley High School to Mr. Ajonye who later became the Lay President of Benue Diocese and also the Conference Lay President of the Methodist Church Nigeria. Igwumale High School was handed over by Mr. McElderry to Mr. Ikenberry.

Towards the end of 1973, a number of young people became interested in the church. Chewynd\textsuperscript{163} suggested that these young people were attracted to the Church through the church choirs, and their colourful processional march to the church in their white uniforms with blue and green trimmings\textsuperscript{164}. The involvement of the young people in the life of the church was a very hopeful sign for the life of the church in Id\textsuperscript{ma} as they, would eventually become the future leaders of the church in Id\textsuperscript{ma}.

While the church looked forward with hope, this was also a moratorium year for the missionaries serving with Methodist Church Nigeria, and in Id\textsuperscript{ma} in particular, as they had to quickly leave the Methodist Church Nigeria in the hands of Nigerians. It all began with the appointment of the Rev. Professor Bolaji Idowu as president of the

\textsuperscript{161} Norcross Jounal, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{163} I. G. Chetwyned, \textit{Seed Time}, p 37
autonomous Nigerian Methodist Church on 4th October 1972. After less than six months in office he started the process of a major change that history will tell whether that was the best thing for the Methodist Church Nigeria or not.165

During his investiture and consecration at Trinity Methodist Church Tinubu, Nigeria on Sunday 20th January 1973 Idowu re-echoed his earlier statement after his election. This was what he said

We must undertake the review of our Constitution in a way that would reflect and emphasise that ours is an autonomous Church in Nigeria; there is a task of ordering the life of the Church in such a way that she will minister effectively and adequately to the needs of our people in their native context; here we are faced with the delicate but urgent undertaking of the indigenisation of the Church, which embraces a thorough review of our liturgy; reconciliation throughout Nigeria is a necessity laid upon us. This will tax our spiritual and moral energy – but it is the work into which we have been called and we must fulfil our assignment166

He soon introduced some major constitutional changes in the church that heavily affected the structural and the administrative set up of the church. For example, while districts became known as Diocese, ordained ministers’ status changed to Priests. Superintendent ministers became Presbyters, and district chairmen became Bishops. New offices of Archbishops were created, with the President of Conference becoming Patriarch and overall head of the Methodist Church Nigeria.167 These changes brought thirteen years of shameful bitter conflict and internal fighting among members of the church resulting in court litigation, mental, emotional and physical assault of members. In the writer’s view, it was a period in which the church could be described in the Idoma idiom ‘Alacce’ – meaning the glory is departed, ruins

164 See earlier note on p. 192-193.
165 These changes affected the hierarchical and ecclesiastical structural set of the church, resulting in 13 years of bitter feud and fights in the Methodist Church Nigeria, and over 120-court litigations. For details of these changes and their implications for the Methodist Church Nigeria, see Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria (1842-1992), Nigeria, NPS Educational Publishers Limited.
166 Methodist Church Nigeria Conference 1972 Minutes, p. 11-12.
devastations, and shame. While the writer is in complete agreement with Idowu’s view that the Church life, theology, liturgy and worship should be ordered in such a way as to reflect the Nigerian context, which would enable her to minister to the Nigerian church in her indigenous context, the question was, did the change truly reflect the Nigerian context or was it more of a mixture of other church traditions such as Greek and Russian eastern orthodox churches? In the writer’s view, while Idowu is to be commended for his efforts towards the indigenisation of the Church, it is yet to be seen if the Nigerian Methodist Church truly reflects the Nigerian context.

Secondly, although the changes Idowu introduced into the Methodist church Nigeria were accepted by the Nigerian Conference of the church as a whole, such changes were however not good for the Idoma at that period in which the Idoma church was not prepared for local leadership.

The European missionaries including the ones serving in Nigeria found these changes very difficult to handle. They had to leave the Nigerian Conference. In Idoma, 1974 marked the end of a missionary presence as the Rev. T. A Johnston the longest serving missionary in Idoma left and handed over the running of the Church to Rev Akinbo, and Rev. B.A. Achigili, an Idoma man. As the missionaries were leaving a lot of Idoma people were becoming interested in the Church, especially with the presence of an Idoma minister. This gave the missionaries some hope for continuity and growth of God’s work in Idoma. Chetwynd prophetically commented on the coming of these young Idoma people to the Church as follows,

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167 For full details of these constitutional changes, see Methodist Church Nigeria, Constitution, 1976.
168 For further details of the introduction of Idowu’s change in the Methodist Church Nigeria, and its consequences for the church, and efforts to heal the wounds and reconcile the church, see Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria (1842-1992), Chapters 8-12, especially chapter 12.
These young people are the Church Leaders of tomorrow and their singing, dancing and drumming is essential if the Church is to be truly African. And the Church in Idoma must be truly African if it is to offer to God the sacrifice He wants, which is the whole life of the Idoma people.\(^{169}\)

It is important to note at this point that as the missionaries were leaving the work in Idoma they came to realise that up till 1974, the Church in Idoma was not an Idoma Church, but probably the Methodist Church Great Britain in Idoma. And that the Church was alien to Idoma life, culture and her response to God in worship and sacrifice. The yearnings as they were leaving was for the Church to be truly Idoma Church, which the Idoma could call their own and not alien. They longed to see Idoma people leading other Idoma to Christ. Rev Hutchinson had earlier hoped for this great Idoma involvement in the life of the Church when he said in 1931, “Doubtless there will be a great awakening one day. May it come soon”.\(^{170}\) Writing 42 years later, Chetwynd said,

Despite the considerable growth of the Church, especially in the 1950s, we are still waiting for that great awakening. It will come when God calls an Idoma Prophet who can set his people’s heart on fire with the holy Spirit’s Love, so that they give themselves to Jesus in the very deepest part of their lives.\(^{171}\)

This, in the writer’s view came into fulfilment as from 1975 onwards when the Idoma took over the affairs of the Methodist church in Idoma and made Christianity adaptable to the Idoma context. They developed and reshaped Christianity to suit the Idoma needs, culture and tradition and spread it among themselves and beyond. We will further discuss this in chapter seven.

\(^{169}\) I.G.Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 32.
\(^{170}\) Hutchinson Journal, p. 12.
We have observed in this chapter the spread of Christianity with specific reference to education as an agency of evangelism. We also noted the other strategies that were used by Methodist missionaries to spread Christianity in Idoma, such as open-air meetings, parades, and New life for All programmes. We observed that, though the Methodist missionaries were probably aware of the concerns of missionary bodies in the 1920s about the aims, objectives and methods of mission education in African, they failed to take into serious consideration any of these concerns in their educational policy in Idoma. The Idoma needs, language, culture and village or local situations were left out in their educational activities in Idoma. We equally observed how at the initial stage, the Idoma were very enthusiastic about receiving the missionary education, but later cooled as a result of the missionary’s attitude toward their cultural practice of oath taking, which they feared would be introduced to their children should they continue to send their children to school. We finally pointed out the traumatic events of the 1960s Nigerian civil war and the 1970s Idowu’s changes introduced into the church. All these had one major consequence for the Idoma church. That was the Igbos and the missionaries left and the Idoma came to the leadership of the Church.

Having discussed the spread of Christianity in Idoma with special reference to education as an agency of evangelism in Idoma, and the various phases of church growth in Idoma, let us leave it here for a moment and shift our focus to the next chapter on Bible translation as an agency for the spread of Christianity in Idoma.
CHAPTER 6

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN IDOMA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BIBLE TRANSLATION

6.1. Bible Translation

Language is part of the culture of a people, a people without a language, have lost their Identity.... The Church must present Christ to the people in their culture, not a Jewish Christ in European culture. This is why the Bible is being translated into the Idoma language.¹

Bishop Achigili’s observations, in his welcome address to the participants of the seminar/workshop on ‘The Systematic Way of Writing Idoma’ held in Jesus College, Otupko Nigeria in January 1985 was accurate and appropriate in relation to the Idoma situation. Prior to this time, the Idoma had only known and heard of the Gospel in either Western or Igbo cultural terms. If Christ is to be truly part of the Idoma people, He must be given to the Idoma in their tongue and culture, until this is done, Christianity is still standing behind a closed door in Idoma. One of the ways to do this according to the Bishop Achigili is through the translation of the Bible into the Idoma tongue.

Many scholars had already highlighted the value of Bible translation in the spread of Christianity among any given tribe or group of people.² As an example, a famous Scottish missionary David Livingstone who dominated the world of mission during his period, reflected on the value of language as a bearer of Christianity among any given tribe or group of people. He was of the view that, scriptural translation would

¹ The Rt. Rev. B.A. Achigili, “A welcome Address to the Attendants at the Seminar/Workshop on the Systematic Way of Writing Idoma”, Held At Jesus College Otukpo on Friday 25th/1/85.
activate the wider Christian process and help preserve the people’s culture before and after it had come into contact with Christianity.\textsuperscript{3} We are in complete agreement with Barrett, when in his seminal work on Christian renewal in Africa, he correctly identified the value of mother tongue translation to the growth and understanding of Christianity among the people, and its contribution to their cultural identity. He argued,

\begin{quote}
Vernacular scriptures have far greater power to communicate and create religious dynamic than versions of lingua franca such as...French, English which have been in circulation in many areas long before the onset of independency without fomenting disaffection. The vernacular translation enables the ethnic group concerned to grasp the inner meanings of profound and intricate doctrines....Further, it is clear that these vernacular translations – with all its attendant expenditure of effort on orthography, grammars, dictionaries, and studies of tribal cultures – have contributed markedly to the recovery by Africans of cultural identity of their tribe.... \textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

Although Barrett was talking specifically about the causes of independent churches in Africa in his seminal paper, his observation on the contribution vernacular translation makes to the culture and the identity of a given group of people is relevant to our Id\textsuperscript{maal} situation.

Rev. Norcross was one of the pioneer missionaries to the Id\textsuperscript{maal} people who himself had to learn their language as best as he could, and then reduce it to writing, for never before had it been written down. Later the translation of the Scripture into the Id\textsuperscript{maal} language began. Reflecting on his experience in Igwumale, this is what he had to say on the value of language and translation work in the spread of Christianity among a given people:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{3} For full details of this view, see David Livingstone, \textit{Missionary Researches and Travels in South Africa}, London: John Murray, 1857, especially p. 114.
\end{flushright}
Here was presented a fine opportunity for effective application of all phases of missionary endeavour, evangelisation, educational activities... But we could not talk to them... That is the immediate problem of every missionary going... to a new tribe... which had no literature was not conscious of anything in the shape of alphabet or grammar, or even writing.... So, then, is this all-important task of learning a new language, and an effort to write it down phonetically! One of the great needs of Africa is literature, literature of the right kind, and for young Africans the need in the main is for a literature in their own tongues. To write a language for a backward people can do so much, not alone in the priceless boon of good books it may ultimately provide, and most especially the sacred Scriptures, but it can also give in permanent form what is the mind and heart of the people. A language can enshrine all the secret of struggle and hope, all the intricacy of social and political organisation, of religious custom and belief. There is so much that is good that only the written tongue can preserve.\(^5\)

According to Norcross's view, if Christianity is to have any grip and preservation in Idorma at all, it can only do so in the translation of the Scripture into the Idorma language. As late as 1960, a French missionary in Africa was claiming a unique normative status for European culture, saying it possessed the "high degree of perfection which the entire world recognizes".\(^6\) However, for the missionaries that worked in Idorma, the Bible was the greatest authority and they believed that it should for that reason become the living truth for the Idorma people to whom they brought the Christian message. Therefore, they set out to translate it into the mother tongue. By doing this, they unintentionally gave the Idorma people the standard by which to question claims of western cultural superiority and the Christian message that the missionaries brought to Idorma. These will be discussed later in detail in chapter seven on Idorma Christianity.

\(^5\) Norcross, "How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to Writing", *Advance*, June 1933, p. 130-131.
6.1.1 The History of Idóma Bible Translation

Language and translation work was a matter of high priority at the very beginning of the missionary work in Idóma, and has remained so till the time of this writing. But where could they begin? Were any resources available to them? The only help they had came through one Mr Dibia\(^7\) who was “a bi-lingual Idoma-Ibo”\(^8\). Although, this man was not a paid church worker, he attached himself to the original deputation that went to Idóma, and to Norcross when he later came to settle in Igwumale.\(^9\) Another helper to Norcross was Albert Nwosu the Igbo catechist, with his own knowledge of Igbo and Efik. Their principle was to learn Idóma via Dibia to Albert and Albert to Norcross who would phonetically write it down based on his prior knowledge of Igbo and Efik phonetic sounds\(^10\). The rectangular formula below illustrates their techniques of learning and writing the Idóma language,

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{Norcross} \\
3 \quad \text{Albert} \\
\text{Dibia} \\
2^{11}
\end{array}\]

\[\text{Idóma} \quad 1\]

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\(^7\) see earlier note on the identity of Dibia in chapter 4, p. 138.

\(^8\) Norcross, *Learning a New Language*, p. 131.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid., p. 130-131.

\(^11\) This formula was thought out by the present writer.
Their working plan to learning the Icfama language "was to be asking the same question at any time and in any place. The question was "Enema iyine?" This was intended to mean ‘What is this’? Norcross and Albert would then write the answers down according to the sound. However, because of the way it was written, it could also mean ‘mother born what’? As we may discover later in this chapter, such ambiguity followed them throughout their works on the Icfama language.

Another of their strategies to learn the Icfama language was through constant visitation to the people either in their homes or on their farms, asking questions through the helpers as charted above, and returning to the manse to master the correct pronunciations of the sounds they heard from the people and phonetically write them down. The "Rule of the house is that until noon only native tongue is to be spoken no English".

The efforts of Norcross and his assistants in learning the Icfama language, and making it a priority in their missionary work in Icfama, were and still are very commendable. However, it is noted that some of the words that were written down during this period and after were not Icfama words, but rather Igbo. The reason for this was simple as Norcross had to heavily rely on the third transliteration from his right hand catechist Mr Albert Nwosu who was an Igbo man. The temptation to represent some of the sounds he heard in Icfama with Igbo orthography was therefore, very strong. This was first due to his fair knowledge of the Igbo language, and secondly, since the Icfama

\[12\] Ibid.
\[13\] Haswell Journal, p. 49. For full details of a typical day’s visit in learning the Icfama language by the missionaries, see Primitive Missionary Society (PMMS) Annual report, 1928, pp 39-40.
did not have any form of writing at this period, it was a case of presenting them with any symbol or form of writing system as representing their language.

In his article ‘Sunday Morning at Igumale’ (sic), Norcross openly admitted that: “There is no Okpoto literature, not even so much as an alphabet, so our hymnbook is, of necessity, Ibo.”\(^{14}\) The implication of Norcross’s statement was that, as the Id\(\alpha\)ma people had no written language at that period, an Igbo writing system was therefore, imposed on them instead of the Id\(\alpha\)ma language. The Id\(\alpha\)ma had to sing in the Igbo tongue instead of their own tongue. However, the doggedness of these early missionaries\(^{15}\) in learning the Id\(\alpha\)ma language bore fruit when at the end of six months learning the language, Norcross had collected a vocabulary of 11,500 words. After which he completed the foundation of the Id\(\alpha\)ma grammar.\(^{16}\) Norcross and his colleagues then ventured to start the translation of the Gospel of Mark. They worked on the Gospel of Mark for eighteen months and within that period reviewed it five times.\(^{17}\) Simultaneously work continued on hymn translations and the primer. In September 1927 the Gospel of Mark, and an Id\(\alpha\)ma Primer and hymnbook were published.\(^{18}\) These were commendable efforts on the part of the missionaries.

However, it was difficult to understand that when no Id\(\alpha\)ma had learned to read or write at this time, it was reported that, “Within five months 400 copies were sold”\(^{19}\). Norcross was very pleased with this sale. In reporting this to his home church in London, he inflated the number of the copies that were sold. This was how he put it,

\[^{14}\text{Norcross, “Sunday morning in Igwumale”, Advance, March 1926, p. 50. The Id\(\alpha\)ma were wrongly referred to as Okpoto or Akp\(\alpha\)ma by the missionaries. See earlier note in chapter two, p. 31.}\]
\[^{15}\text{This refers to Norcross and his colleagues.}\]
\[^{16}\text{Primitive Methodist Missionary Society, Synod Reports Okpoto 1925.}\]
\[^{17}\text{Norcross, Learning a New Language, p. 131.}\]
\[^{18}\text{The writer made every effort during fieldwork in Id\(\alpha\)ma in July-September 1997 to lay hand on any of these early publications, none were found. He was sadly told that they were part of the books eaten by ants in the Bishop’s office in Otukpo.}\]
"It is interesting at this juncture to note that we have sold about 700 Idoma books, or nearly one half of the original issue. That is to be regarded as extremely gratifying. The question is who were buying these books? Were they the Idoma people who could not read or write at that period or the Igbo workers? On the balance of probability, it could be the Igbo workers in whose language, as indicated earlier the Idoma translation was structured, that were buying these books.

In 1928, a Methodist Catechism, that was translated from the Igbo language by Albert Nwosu, himself an Igbo man, was published. Translation work on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles was continued by Hutchinson and Albert with Mr Nwosu playing a dominant role. This was completed in 1929 and given to the Methodist Missionary Society for publication.

At this stage of the translation work in Idoma, there were many intricacies such as the Idoma idiom, poetry, word formation, construction, and grammar that were not dealt with or taken into consideration, nor was there any attempt to establish any standard orthography for the Idoma. There was no attempt either to structure the Idoma translation on any translation theory. This resulted in the later difficulties that were experienced in the reading and writing of the Idoma language, a problem that contributed immensely to the unreadability of the Idoma New Testament which will be discussed later in this chapter. Norcross himself was aware of some of these unsolved problems that relate to their work on the Idoma language. He admitted

19 Norcross Journal, p.11.
20 Norcross Journal 9th July, 1929.
21 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 6.
22 Hutchinson Journal, 13th December 1928.
23 Norcross Journal, 10th October 1929.
There are intricacies of idiom... the grammar is not easy, whilst the verb has a baffling difficulty we had ever met with elsewhere. There are words for which Idoma speech has no word equivalents... 24

Yet no steps were taken to solve these problems or to resolve some of the difficulties professionally or linguistically in this early stage of the translation of the Idoma Bible. Norcross humbly admitted again,

this sort of work... should only be undertaken by an expert, by those who have had special training... and where an expert can be found for the task, it ought to be his. But it so often happens that the expert is not available. Then one is put under the necessity of doing one's best without being in possession of expert knowledge, save that which has come not through the schools, but through the sheer practice of living among Africans, to note their ways. 25

Here we find Norcross graciously accepting his limitations in the work of the Idoma Bible translation. As far as Norcross was concerned, an expert in this field should have done the work, but in the absence of one, he had to use his field experiences and suggests a translation for the Idoma people. This may explain some of the later problems of the unnaturalness, and unreadability of the Idoma New Testament, which were later dealt with in the Old Testament translation26

It is also observed that despite this early interest in the Idoma language and the value of the vernacular Scripture in the spread of Christianity in Idoma, no effort was made at any stage to introduce the learning of the Idoma language in the school programme of the church, but rather, speaking of the Idoma language attracted a fine27

24 Norcross, “How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to Writing”, Advance, June 1933, p. 131.
26 See our later discussion on p. 233 ff.
27 See earlier discussion in chapter 5, p. 169-170.
By 1931, the translation work in Idzma had expanded with the translation of a booklet ‘God hath spoken’. This was published by the Scripture Gift Mission who sent 1000 copies of it for free distribution in Idzma. Norcross had hoped that “the wider circulation of the primer is going to make for a mild kind of happy revolution in the heart and mind of young Idoma”. [He pondered], “There is never a copy goes forth but we wonder to what great and grave issues it would have in Idoma”. Norcross was absolutely right, and his fears proved to be right. As the young Idzma began to struggle to read what had been translated, they came out with such insurgent reactions from all the Idzma districts, especially from the zkhwu area that the whole primer and whatever work was done on the translation of the Bible had to be changed to reflect the entire Idzma language instead of the mixture of Igbo and Igwumale dialect in which the work was done.

Such reactions led to a meeting in 1944 at which the church started to review its literature policy. Prior to this period all literature work was said to have been done in the Igwumale dialect. The missionaries from this point began to apply some of their reasons for moving the mission headquarter from Igwumale to Otukpo to the Idzma language as well. Edwards told a story to illustrate this mood of change, when three boys came from Ojantele in the current Agatu Local Government Area, 49 miles from the mission centre in Otukpo, to buy the translated copies of Luke, Acts and the catechisms, two Idzma primers and hymn books, with the intention of applying for a teacher from the mission who would come to their village and teach them these

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28 Hutchinson Journal, 29th January 1933.
30 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 15.
Norcross at this point felt that, they should have been sold what they could read and understand in their own day to day language. He wrote:

Personally, I would feel happier about this if the books which I sold them were written in a dialect which is nearer their own dialect than the Igwumale dialect in which all our literature at present is written.\(^{31}\)

Later in the same year, the issue was extensively discussed at the Circuit Council meeting that was held in Otukpo. It was reported at this meeting that

One teacher from Igumale (sic) objected to the (translation) work being done by Otukpo teachers, and suggested that it ought to be based on the old Igumale(sic) dialect which had been in use so long, rather than on a dialect which had never been used in translation.

An Adoka (Northern Idoma) representative said that his people could hear the Otukpo dialect but not the Igumale(sic) dialect. He pointed out that whenever his people visited Otukpo they never used an interpreter, which was not the case if any of his people went to the Igumale (sic) area.

Mr. A.O (an uncertificated teacher) a native of Western Idoma, spoke for his people. He said that though the mission was not at present working in his area he hoped that any translation that was done would take the western dialect into account\(^{32}\)

However, it was later agreed at the Circuit Council meeting of October 12-13\(^{th}\) 1944, that was held at Utonkon in the current Ado Local Government Area, that firstly the Id\(\bar{\text{z}}\)ma language committee should be enlarged to include members from the various dialects areas and secondly that since the Id\(\bar{\text{z}}\)ma spoken by the Otupko and those around them seemed to be more central and familiar to all the Id\(\bar{\text{z}}\)ma people, it should, hence forth, be the basis of future translation work.\(^{33}\) It was also agreed that the concerns of other dialects be taken into consideration as the translation work

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\(^{31}\) Norcross Journal, p. 34


\(^{33}\) The Ocobo, Ugoju, oglewu, Onyagede, and most parts of Ocekwu speak the central Id\(\bar{\text{z}}\)ma. See earlier map on p. viii for the areas of these towns.
progressed.\textsuperscript{34} This issue however remained unsolved until 1981 when the present writer started the translation of the Id\textsuperscript{m}a Old Testament.\textsuperscript{35}

### 6.2 The New Testament Translation

The translation work was slowly and gradually continued from these earlier publications\textsuperscript{36} until 1955, when the Rev. Egemma Igwe was transferred to Otukpo. After teaching at the school of African Languages in London, following the Second World War, Egemma was ordained to the Methodist ministry. At Methodist International House London, he met Grace, also a Nigerian teacher, who became his wife. Called by the Methodist church to move north from his own Igbo homeland to translate the New Testament into Id\textsuperscript{m}a, Egemma and Grace settled in Otukpo the capital of Id\textsuperscript{m}a, twenty miles north of Igwumale which had become the main government centre in Id\textsuperscript{m}a.\textsuperscript{37}

After they settled down, Egemma began the awesome task of translating the New Testament into Id\textsuperscript{m}a. As he himself admitted, he had a lot of difficulties starting this work. He said, “How do I begin? Where do I start? I knew nothing about Id\textsuperscript{m}a language and culture. How can I translate the Bible into Id\textsuperscript{m}a? There was no body around to teach me the language, no paper to write on, no typewriter to use, what do I do?”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} Rev Amos Edwards’ report, 30\textsuperscript{th} November 1944.
\textsuperscript{35} See later discussions on p. 232 ff.
\textsuperscript{37} Egemma, Fieldwork Tape interview, Hitchin, 14\textsuperscript{th} July 1998.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
From what seemed to be a very hopeless situation in which Egemba and Grace found themselves, they had to make a start. With the help of Rev. Tom Johnston some help came from the Methodist central school Otukpo, where some students were asked to come and teach Egemba some Idóma language. He was very pleased with this development and constituted this group as the Idóma translation team which was made up of the following: Mr. Odumu Ocheibi, Mr. Victor Ameh, Mr. Egboche, Mr. B.A. Achigili, Mr O A Ochaba, Mr Peter Adogo, Mr. I. Ikwue, Mr. R.U Ikpeme and Miss. Alache Ogwiji. Egemba chose the Gospel of John to begin with, and sat with this team to work together as a group. He soon discovered that this was not working. This was how he put it,

We had to quash this idea, as it was not working. All in the group had their own idea on what and how to translate it, with each arguing very strongly from his or her dialectical position I then had to send every body away to work separately and bring their work to me which I will put together what each individual had done and checked it out with Rev. Johnston who was our great encourager in continuing the work no matter how difficult.

Egemba, soon realised that something had to be done about developing a consistent way of writing Idóma. He strongly supported the Norcross view that the Bible had to be translated into the central Idóma tongue, which is spoken by the largest number of the Idóma people. Also he and his helpers thought they had to prepare a scientific alphabet in central Idóma, which is slightly different from the old Igwumale orthography, rather than the mixture of Igbo and Igwumale alphabet, they were using. He admitted “the only primer for teaching, reading Idóma was not consistent with

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39 Mr. Ocheibi died five years before the writing of this thesis after leaving the Methodist Church because of the church’s stand on polygamy. Egoche is still an Elder in the Methodist church; B.A. Achigili, is the current Methodist Archbishop of the North and the General chairman of the Idóma Translation committee. Mr. Ochaba is the current principal of Methodist High school Obagaji in Agatu Local Government Area. R.U Ikpeme later became a Methodist Minister, served in Iga, Otukpo and Kaduna. He died during the writing of this thesis. Alache Ogwiji, the only female member of the team is currently married to Mr. Adoba, and they are both in the Anglican Church Makurdi now.

40 Egemba, Fieldwork Interview, Hitchin, 14th July 1998
either dialect and did not differentiate between the various spoken sounds, e.g. o and ò, e and ε which were vital to the meaning of Ìdàma words".41 This admission by Egemba confirms our earlier view that the Ìdàma had nothing written down in their language and there was none to teach the missionaries the language they were very anxious to use for the translation of the Ìdàma Bible. They gave the Ìdàma a writing system which in our view, was a mixture of Igbo and Effik which, neither represent Igwumale nor central Ìdàma dialects. Therefore, Egemba had to suggest a new orthography, which in his view represented both the correct phonetical sounds and meaning in Ìdàma. However, as later discussion will highlight, even his new orthography of Ìdàma again fell short of representing accurately the Ìdàma sounds, words and meanings. Nevertheless, his determination to pursue this New Testament translation despite all these difficulties is commendable. He continued with the translation with the fear that it could take some years in translating and that it might come to a people who could not read, or were not prepared for the new dialect and orthography being used.42

In 1958, Egemba and Grace were transferred to an Igbo Circuit in Aba in the current Abia state of Nigeria, and later to Trinity College Umuahia in 1959. They later moved to the university of Ibadan and the department of linguistics where he was a researcher in African linguistics. This move to Ibadan was very helpful to Egemba in his Ìdàma translation, as he was then more exposed to the principles of Bible translation.43 From Ibadan he was moved to Lagos as the first African Secretary of the Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria. Despite these moves he worked

42 Egemba, Fieldwork Tape Interview, Hitchin, 14th July 1998.
constantly on the translation of the Idoma New Testament visiting Idoma during holiday times to work with Idoma translation helpers.\textsuperscript{44} He later moved to the University of Nigeria at Nsuka where he completed the translation work. About two weeks before the start of the Nigerian Civil War in 1966, Egemba’s house was set on fire and nothing except the manuscripts of the Idoma New Testament came out of the fire.\textsuperscript{45}

Just before the Nigerian civil and the political disturbances intensified, Egemba, who up till then was not a fluent Idoma speaker checked the translated Idoma manuscripts and dispatched it to Bible House in London. This was shortly before Nsuka was bombed by Federal troops and Egemba and other staff of the University of Nsukka fled, losing all their possessions.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1967, Miss Majorie Weeks, a lay missionary in Idoma came to England on holiday. She went to Bible House London to enquire about the progress of the Idoma New Testament. She found out that not much progress had been made, as there was no longer any contact with Egemba who was in Biafra\textsuperscript{47}. She eventually, with her little knowledge of Idoma helped in the preparation of the final manuscript for printing.\textsuperscript{48} The New Testament was finally published and reached Idoma in 1970, the year the Nigerian civil war ended. It was received with great joy and excitement by many who were ready and able to read it. It was dedicated and launched at a

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} See earlier note, p. 222.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Even though Biafra was an old name in the map of Africa, it was the new name the Eastern part of Nigeria gave to themselves as a country during the Nigerian Civil War. Currently the use of the name is prohibited by a military decree.
\textsuperscript{48} Norcross Journal, p35.
thanksgiving service at which the writer was present. This was held at the Ọce IDOMA’s palace and led by the Rev. T. A Johnston the Chairman of the Northern District of the Methodist Church. The service was attended by all other denominations in IDOMA land, including the Roman Catholic Bishop of Makurdi. The presence of His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of IDOMA was the climax of that happy day. In his welcome address to the ecumenical service of the dedication of the IDOMA New Testament, he gave credit to the work of the missionaries, both European and African in the translation of the IDOMA New Testament and the development of the IDOMA language. He viewed their contributions as constituting a cultural resource of unequalled merit. Here is his testimony.

Ọ we Ọdzadá ndaabco ọhọ It is not a small thing
Ka aubeké k'ọ for the missionaries to
Wá ọmá Ọdzé iwuá come from their home
Wá I nwú aló to teach us
ọkpa oogé mla ọọta reading and writing
ofío ọdút a and above all
‘e k'la le dá ku Ọwọ ọcọ t‘ they wrote God’s word
okónu ku aécé-de t‘aló in the tongue of our people

49 Ọcídoma is an IDOMA compound word for the chief of IDOMA.
50 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 31-32. Although, The Roman Catholic Church was not involved at any stage in the translation of the IDOMA New Testament due to the uneasy friendship between the Catholic and Methodist Church at that time. However, the presence of the Catholic Bishop at the dedication service of the IDOMA New Testament signals a sign of new hope, friendship and better relationship.
As Miss. M. Weeks reported with regards to the publication and the dedication of the Iddma New Testament, “This enables the Iddma church to grow and a further literacy programme was being undertaken.”52 The Rev. Paul Kingston, a veteran missionary and himself the translator of the Ogoni Bible of Eastern Nigeria, said after thirty years there: “The church with the word is the church that stands”.53

While the Rev. Kingston may be right in his statement, it is however, observed that, such a church with God’s Word would only be able to stand, if the word that was made available to such a group of people was their own, and understood by them in their everyday language and in the context of their culture. The question then, is, was that the case with the Iddma New Testament? Was it readable, understandable, and an accurate clear, natural dynamic equivalent of the Iddma language and culture?

This, in the writer’s view was far from being the case, which resulted in the problem of the unreadability of the Iddma New Testament today. This problem, was and still is with, the Iddma church today as the result of the Igbo language being enveloped in the Iddma language. The Iddma New Testament to the Iddma people today is like an unwelcome child that cannot be thrown away, but can neither be happily kept. God’s Word should be put into the speech of everyday life of the Iddma just like the New Testament itself which, as Nida observed, was “not written in the high-flown Asian style of the schoolmaster of the first and second centuries A.D”, but, “couched in the words of the common people”.54

53 The Reverend Paul Kingston, Norcross Journal, p. 37
54 E. A. Nida, God’s Word in Man’s Language, p. 23, also cited in Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message, p. 192.
As Nida suggested, missionary translators such as Norcross and Egemba should have been giving the Idmma people the word of God in their own language, no matter how strange the idioms might seem.\textsuperscript{55} The distinguishing mark of any vernacular Scriptural translation, in the writer's view, is the effort of such translation to come as close as possible to the day to day speech of the common people. The writer is aware from his own experience as a translator that the principles of organising, explaining, interpreting, translating and utilising a hitherto unwritten language are complicated and difficult matters. Yet the unexpected and incalculable happens when a mother tongue is furnished with a new transcription and launched under its own steam. This seemed not to be the case with the Idmma New Testament, resulting in some problems that are experienced with the Idmma New Testament even today. We will examine two such problems to illustrate our point. The first being:


In this section we shall look at a few examples from the translation of Egemba, and supplement them with the personal experience of the present writer as an Idmma bible translator. Sanneh is perhaps accurate in his observation when he said,

\begin{quote}
Long before anthropology made field work an indispensable part of scientific inquiry, the agents of scriptural translation had blazed trails in that world, making connections that often illuminated hitherto inaccessible worlds of thought and life. Sometimes – perhaps – often the price paid was the committing of gratuitous errors or a blind persistence that elicited completely different responses from what the Bible translator expected. Whatever the case, translators had no way to acquit themselves other than through the canons of local idiom.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

The writer remembers a childhood experience when in a service the phrase, 'may the peace of the Lord be upon you all', was translated in Idmma as \emph{Ondu ko rmo iceenyi kla aa eyi kpecomm} – meaning, 'may the Lord urinate on all your heads'.

\textsuperscript{55} For details of this view, see E. A. Nida, \textit{God's Word in Man's Language}, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{56} Lamin Sanneh, \textit{Translating the Message}, p. 193.
The translator at this point mixed up the Nigerian Pidgin English in which to ‘pice’ means to urinate with the phonetic sound of peace in Standard English.

The literal translation of a sentence “Behold I stand at the door and knock” in the Idoma New Testament is Ma m mahayi odungwuoge le ab du ws - meaning ‘I Stand on the door panel and keep knocking’, implied that Christ was declaring Himself as an invader and destroyer who will force his way in no matter what. Scarcely the intended aim of the Idoma New Testament translator. In Idoma, a friendly family visitor will not stand on the door panel and knock, but will come to the house and call the name of the person inside at intervals for three times and in this way identifying himself by voice. The correct translation should have been “Behold I stand at the door and call”, especially in view of the following verse.

Secondly, the Idoma have no idea of ship or anchor as about 95% of the Idoma people had never seen a ship or lived near a sea. To therefore, translate literally “...so le la tu beka zg oje nshi ku ugbenyi - God is a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” would not only confuse and confound rather than enlighten, but would portray no meaning in Idoma. And to translate “anchor” as zg oje - “a metal fork-stick” creates more confusion and wonder followed with the question, ‘what is he talking about’? And when ‘grace and truth’ is translated eyinyinyi mla kwesyi - “mercy and truth”, the Idoma wonders what has happened to the Idoma word for grace - shi? Surely, there is a clear difference between eyinyinyi - mercy

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57 Revelation 3:20.
58 For a similar translation problem of unnaturalness, see E. A. Nida, God’s Word in Man’s Language, p. 47.
60 Hebrews 6:9.
and *shi* - grace in Idźma. When things like these examples begin to happen, they demonstrate clearly, that any missionary to Idźma, European or African would have been unprepared for a language such as Idźma, which has more than three to five different ways to speak and describe and distinguish the same word that mean many things. These are just some of many examples, where lack of knowledge of vernacular Idźma and the tendency towards literalness have resulted in a translation which is at best strained and at worst incomprehensible.

The writer is in complete agreement with the Catholic Bishop of Enugu, Nigeria, the Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye, who when addressing the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture in 1973, called into question the desirability of literalism in translation, arguing that, it is not helpful to lift words from the Greek or Latin and implant them in Igbo. Rather he appealed for flexibility and the freedom to represent ideas and things in the day to day language and the cultural context of the people.62

The same argument applies to the Idźma situation as well. Instead of transplanting some Igbo words in the Idźma New Testament, such words should be structured in such a way as to reflect the Idźma receptor cultural context.

6.2. 2. The Factor of the Idźma Recipiency

A very strong precondition for any effective translation in any given language, is the translator’s complete surrender to the terms of the receptor culture. No matter how much the translator knows, or whatever glorious notion the translator may have about faithfulness to the original forms of the text, such surrender is of paramount

61 John 1:14.
importance in any translation work. In his excellent and masterly account of the scientific basis of translation Eugene Nida has articulated the receptor cultural premises upon which translation proceeds. As he puts it, a

Translation must conform to the grammatical tradition of the language...a translation in order to be effective must represent the way people speak. 63

But this was hardly the case in the Id dispro ma New Testament translation as a few examples have already indicated. As the translation failed completely to represent the Id dispro ma grammar, it created the problem of unreadability, literalism and unnaturalness of the New Testament text, which had to be later dealt with in the Old Testament translation of the Id dispro ma Bible. As Sanneh correctly observes, "It is hard to exaggerate the importance of 'recipiency' in determining what is or what is not a successful translation". 64 This is why the writer had to do a major revision to bring the Id dispro ma New Testament into line with the day to day language of the Id dispro ma people. We pressed very hard for natural Id dispro ma translation, which will in great part help resolve the present awkward literalism of the New Testament, which deters many people from reading the Id dispro ma New Testament. The Id dispro ma Bible would as a result, become a good example on interchange of cultural values.

Finally, in his article, "Why are Foreigners So Queer?" a Socio-anthropological Approach to Cultural Pluralism" in International Bulletin of Missionary Research, July 1981, p. 102-106, Eugene Nida observed that, "the truth of the gospel, if communicated verbally in an accurate form, would be so convincing that the results

63 E.A Nida, God’s Word in Man’s Language, p. 34.
64 Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message, p. 199.
would be assured". While this view may not be probably true in all cases, it would be a correct observation in the Idzoma situation.

In Idzoma, despite the valuable efforts of Norcross and his colleagues to master the unwritten Idzoma language, and the considerable success that they initially seemed to have in doing so, their verbal communication had been poor and to some extent misleading. This is why the Idzoma New Testament had been found to be difficult. It is so literal that the Idzoma found it difficult to read and understand. The writer had a personal experience in 1987 when at the Norcross Methodist Cathedral Otukpo a geography teacher in the Mission school was given a New Testament passage to read during the service. He was meant to read this from the Idzoma New Testament. But to the writer’s surprise, he had to read the passage in English in order to know what was meant in his own mother tongue the Idzoma language.

Linguistic inadequacy and improper training on translation theories and principles as earlier admitted by Norcross were responsible for some of the mistakes that were made in the Idzoma New Testament. For example, despite that fact that the Idzoma language has tonal distinctions that are extremely important, not only in distinguishing words but in marking the Idzoma grammatical relationships, Norcross and his colleagues never learned to use tone in the Idzoma Bible translation. And despite the fact that Major R.C Abraham, a former examiner in African Languages for Oxford, London and Edinburgh Universities, and a former anthropological Officer in Nigeria had as early as 1935 called attention to the use of tone in the Idzoma

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language, his appeal was never heeded by the Idoma New Testament translators.

The failure to heed such a call, has been particularly serious in a language such as Idoma in which the only difference, for example, between 'mother', 'yesterday', 'four' and the name of a particular tree in the Idoma word ans is simply a distinction in tone.

6.3. The Old Testament Translation

In his annual report on the Igwumale station to his home church in London in 1934, Norcross expressed a desire that was identical with the desire of the present writer which eventually led him to become the Idoma Bible translator. This was how Norcross expressed his craving, "Isn't it desirable that all the Bible shall be translated into Idoma?"

The present writer was at the dedication and thanksgiving service of the Idoma New Testament in 1970, during which he bought his copy of the newly translated Idoma New Testament. Just looking at its outer cover, he was struck in confusion within the title of the Idoma New Testament, which was eka ayiphe - which was intended to mean 'The New Covenant'. But in reality, could equally mean 'New Monkey' or 'A New Carrying Pad' due to the way that it was written. As the writer flipped through the pages of the newly translated Idoma New Testament, his problem became more compounded due to the unnaturalness of the New Testament translation. This was

66 See earlier discussion on p. 218.
68 There are many such words, such as, Ada, ewa, ege, Aje, just to mention a few in which the difference between their meanings lies in tonal distinctions.
69 Norcross, Igwumale Station Annual Report, 1934.
followed with a personal prayer, “Lord raise somebody to help re-translate this New Testament and the whole Bible into natural Idoma language”.71

Ten years later, this prayer that was intended to be fulfilled by someone else, was fulfilled in the present writer. This happened in 1980 at Immanuel College of Theology and Christian Education Ibadan, an affiliate school of the University of Ibadan Nigeria, in an Old Testament lecture on the book of Job that was dealing specifically with the philosophical problem of the suffering of the innocent. During this lecture, the Very Rev. Dr S.K. Solanke72 introduced to the class, The Rev. Professor Eugene Bunkowske, the then United Bible Society Africa Co-ordinator of Translations. He was asked to briefly talk to the students on United Bible Society translation work. This he convincingly did with gladness. He ended his talk with an open invitation to any one who would like to become a Bible translator. It was at this point that the present writer could no longer hold out, but put up his hand, and offered himself as the Idoma Bible translator. Both Professor Bunkowske and the College Principal, The Very Rev. A.A Omodunbi73 speedily took up this offer, and both informed the writer's home Bishop The Most Rev. B. A. Achigili, the Archbishop of The North, the Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria and the United Bible Society and the Bible Society of Nigeria. The stage was now set for an Idoma mother tongue speaker to be involved in any substantive capacity in the translation of the Idoma Bible for the first time.

70 This is a piece of cloth rolled together, and placed on the head before the loads are placed on. The Idoma people carry their loads on their heads.
72 Rev. Dr. S.K Solanke is the current Methodist Bishop of Kwara, Kwara state, Nigeria.
73 Omodunbi is currently The Methodist Archbishop of The Lagos Archdiocese of the Methodist Church Nigeria.
At the end of the writer's training in Ibadan in 1981 he was surprisingly posted to teach at Methodist Theological Institute Shagamu on the insistence of the current Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria, His Eminence Sunday Mbang, who was then the Patriarch's chaplain. The posting created a lot of unhappiness at the stationing committee among the Icfama representatives, and particularly the Bishop of Benue, The Rt. Rev. B. A. Achigili had hoped that the writer was returning home to continue the translation of the Icfama Bible. However, the writer in obedience to the Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria reported at his station in Shagamu in July 1981 but with a protest letter from the Bishop of Benue to the Patriarch of the Methodist Church Nigeria, His Pre-Eminence, Bolaji Idowu. On reading the letter from the Bishop of Benue, the Patriarch Idowu overruled the stationing committee and the writer was returned back the following day to his own Icfama people to translate the Bible into their language.

The question was where and how do we begin the translation of the Old Testament? As noted in our discussion in the sections of the New Testament translation, many factors may contribute to making a translation of the Bible in any language less than satisfactory, such as inadequate training of the translator on translation theories. If such mistakes were to be avoided in the Old Testament translation, then the work must be started with a serious focus on training and on Bible translation theories. According to Smalley, "Assumptions about what constitutes translation, the purpose of translation, what translation should be like, and how translation should be done are...called theories of translation".

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74 For further details, see The Methodist Church Nigeria, Minutes of the Stationing Committee, 1981.
75 W. A. Smalley "Language and Culture in the Development of Bible Society Translation theory and Practice" International Bulletin of Missionary Research, April, 1995, p. 16
These translation theories, however, differ from one individual translator to another. While some translators’ theories may grow out of cultural attitudes, education and experience, others may come from personal predisposition, as when some translators are cautious, others innovative. Theological assumptions, particularly those about the inspiration, composition, nature and the use of the Bible may be fundamental to some translators, while to some, the views of the language and culture are critical to their translation theories.\(^6\)

In the Idɔma example, the New Testament translators started with a predisposition toward literal translation. This may be out of their convictions, but more likely, they did not know what else to do.\(^7\) The Idɔma vernacular was used in their translation, but not the Idɔma idiom. They seemed also less sensitive to the Idɔma receptor culture and language. They also lacked the broad cross-linguistic and cross-cultural criteria, which would have helped them judge whether what they had done in the Idɔma New Testament was both natural to the Idɔma and faithful to the original text of the Bible.\(^8\)

In the Old Testament translation, therefore, the writer had to deviate from the practice of the missionary translators of the New Testament in which, their commitment was literally to the text itself rather than the Idɔma context. This was done by focusing on and investigating the Idɔma context, which is their history, language, religion, economy, anthropology, music, arts and their physical environment before tackling...

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\(^6\) For further details of these different translation theories, see Nida Eugene A., *God’s Word in Man’s Language*. New York, Harper and Brothers, 1952.

\(^7\) See Norcross as earlier cited on p. 215.
the concrete task of the Old Testament translation. The adoption of the Id¬ma context helped the writer to shift radically from the literalness of the text to a fresh contextual translation. The goal was to engage in the Old Testament translation taking into serious consideration, the two sets of languages and cultures. That is, those of the original set also called the ‘source language’ and culture, and the Id¬ma set called the ‘receptor language’ and culture that are involved in the Id¬ma Bible translation. The overall goal was to produce an Id¬ma Bible that would meet the criteria of the theory of dynamic natural equivalence translation.

6. 3. 1. Dynamic Natural Equivalence Translation

This theory, as our discussion will indicate, had its roots in linguistics, anthropology, communication and biblical studies. Nida first called it dynamic equivalence translation, and later switched the name to functional equivalence translation in the 1980s. Others such as Mildred L. Larson and Katharine Barnwell call it meaning-based translation. The writer, in applying this principle tackled the Id¬ma Old Testament translation on the following premises:

First, the translator would do everything possible to arrive at and translate a well-founded understanding of the meaning of the text, based on the best resources from biblical studies. This however, was not easy as the text to be translated may create some problem on how to translate it in the light of the complexity of the Bible

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78 Ibid.
composition and transmissions. Therefore, what or whose interpretation of the meaning is to be followed? While the edited Hebrew text by the United Bible Societies and other Old Testament Hebrew scholars may take care of problem one, the second question may be taken care of with the use of the translator’s handbook on the various books of the Bible.

The second premise, was not only to understand the meaning of the source text to be translated, ‘but also to express that meaning in the clear’ natural Icfama equivalents. As earlier discussed, the Icfama New Testament did not meet this standard due to its literalness. And as Smalley rightly argued, “…literalness does not lead to naturalness”. This unfortunately was the case with the Icfama New Testament. However, the greatest care would be required in the application of this premise as one is faced with the problem of faithfulness to the text when confronted by Icfama cultural and linguistic differences.

The third premise was that the Icfama Bible should be communicative to all and missiologically focused. By this it is meant, that the translated Icfama Bible must be accessible to all kinds of people with a very clear and convincing meaning to all levels of the Icfama people. It should be read and understood by both the Icfama

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82 Various translators have different levels of competence biblical studies and therefore make use of different resources. In the Icfama case, the translator had an added advantage due to his advanced research in Semitics at Queens’ University of Belfast.
84 These are specially prepared handbooks on each of the books of the Bible, by the United Bible Society in which, some translation problems such as the one cited above are tackled and discussed in detail with some probable general solutions for each translation projects to apply to their situation as the need may be.
85 What is meant by the ‘meaning’ would be discussed later.
Christians and the interested non-Idoma Christians alike. The reading should be smooth and suitable to hearing. No other argument best illustrates this third assumption than the statement of Smalley when he said,

The ultimate measure of any translation is to compare what varied readers of the translation actually understand with what the original readers are believed to have understood, and what the modern readers feel with what the original readers probably felt.\(^88\)

The difficulty with an assumption such as this is the question of how the natural equivalence translation would be brought about in a different cultural receptor context? Dr. Barnwell's accurate advice is worth noting with regards to problems such as this. She said,

The Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The translator has a very serious responsibility not to change the meaning in any way. He must be careful not to add to the meaning, or to leave any part of the meaning untranslated. The Bible...is a book with a message that is meant to be understood. When it was first written, it was written in the everyday language that people of that time spoke. All languages are different. Each language has its own grammar, its own words and expressions. In order to express the meaning of the message he is translating, the translator often has to use grammatical forms and words that are different from those of the language he is translating from. That does not matter. The important thing is that the meaning of the message is unchanged.\(^89\)

The fourth premise was to structure the translated text in such a way that equivalency would apply to some degree to the meaning of each structure of the translated text, but more so on the coherent meaning of the text.\(^90\) By this we meant, what was the overall meaning of the text? Was it reflected in the translation?\(^91\)

\(^{87}\) Ibid., W. A Smalley, *Language and Culture* p. 64.

\(^{88}\) W. A. Smalley, *Language and Culture*, p. 64.

\(^{89}\) Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, p. 12.


As Smalley rightly observed, “the Bible in the original languages had grammatical structures, meaning structures, the structural organisation of ideas, poetry/prose structures, rhetorical structures, genre structures”\(^92\), which a literal translation like the Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma New Testament restricted by its consideration of equivalency of phrases and words. The Old Testament translation, however, in applying the principle of natural dynamic equivalence tried to deviate from this and ask for example, such questions as, is the translation of the book of Proverbs an equivalent translation of the original proverb. How does the Hebrew poetry equate to the natural poetry in Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma?

The fifth premise was that in translating the Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma Old Testament the cultural behaviour that is depicted in the Bible is not misrepresented or misinterpreted in the Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma cultural behaviour. For example what does cultural behaviours like ‘beating one’s breast or putting on of sack cloth’, imply or mean in Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma? The translation should enable the Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma readers to understand the cultural events that the Bible depicted.

The sixth and the final premise was for the Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma Bible to adequately convey the meaning of the source text in the receptor language. For effective implementation of these assumptions, and in order to achieve the desired translation result, the translator had to be trained as argued earlier in this chapter.\(^93\)

\(^92\) W. A. Smalley, *Language and Culture*, p. 64.

\(^93\) See earlier discussion, p. 237 ff. Also, while the ideal situation is to have more than one translator in a translation project, in the Id\(\Rightarrow\)ma situation, we had just the one.
6. 3. 2. The Training of the Old Testament Translator

In his stress on the importance of a specially trained person to handle a very delicate and complex work such as the translation of the Idoma Old Testament Norcross rightly said, “this sort of work…should only be undertaken by an expert, by those who have had special training…”94. The translator’s training would help him not only to gain an in-depth understanding of the principles of Bible translation but would help him apply these principles effectively in order to achieve an accurate, natural and meaningful translation. The training was done in three parts, as discussed below:

6. 3. 2. 1 Translation Principles, Problems, and Practice

The training was undertaken in the months of July to September 1980, in which the writer was sent to The Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, an affiliate institution of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, in Dallas U.S.A and of the Wycliffe Translation Centre in High Wycombe, Bucks, England, to attend an introductory course on translation principles. The course was organised by the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The United Bible Societies and the Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue paid for this training. Katharine Barnwell and Eugene Bunkowske led the course.95 Others such as Robert Koops and John Adive, also took part in the organisation and running of the course. Participants attended the course from sixteen other translation projects from different parts of the country.

95 Katharine Barnwell is currently the of International Translation Department of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Dallas U.S.A. Bunkowske was the United Bible Society Translations Consultant for Nigeria at that time, and currently The Director of Graduate school of missions, in Reformed Theological Seminary, in Jackson Mississippi, U.S.A.
One of the aims of the Wycliff Bible Translators, and the United Bible Society during this training was to help the various translation project translators to understand what Bible translation is. It was defined as the "re-telling, as exactly as possible, the meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the language into which the translation is being made". This is very crucial in the Idɔma situation where the New Testament already exists, but in an unreadable form, because in our view as earlier discussed, it does not communicate the meaning of the original message in Idɔma. It kept too closely to the grammar and words of the original language, and does not take the difference in the Idɔma language into serious consideration. This resulted in some of the wrong meanings that are found in the Idɔma New Testament.

Our attentions were also focused on the various kinds of translation, with special emphasis on the two principal types of translation, which were a 'literal' and 'dynamic equivalence' or 'meaning-based' translation. A literal translation is the one according to Katharine Barnwell "that follows as closely as possible the form of the language which is used in the original message". She equally, defined 'a meaning-based' translation as "the one that aims to express the exact meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the new language".

In the meaning-based translation or dynamic natural equivalence translation, the order of words may change. This principle may use the order that is most clear and natural in the language in which the translation is being made. For example, it is

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96 Workshop Note, July 1980; and Katharine Barnwell, Bible Translation, p. 8.
natural in English to say ‘two houses’ but unnatural in Idmma whose natural order would be ‘houses two’. In translation therefore, to literally follow the original language order would result in a meaningless translation in Idmma, while to revert the order of the original text to inu ska – ‘houses two’ would clearly and naturally communicate the message in Idmma. This principle also advocated the use of the natural idiom of the people in whose language the Bible is being translated.

The participants were also taught on how to translate idioms. An idiom is an expression where the words taken together mean something different from the individual meaning of the word or group of words. Thus an idiomatic expression is a phrase that is natural and meaningful in a particular language, although not necessarily in other languages. In English for example, the phrases ‘to break the silence’, ‘caught red-handed’, scatter brained’ are all examples of idiom that have meaning for the English speaking people.

However, idioms cannot be translated literally into another language as the meaning of an idiom differs from one language to another. But the meaning of such idioms can be translated from one language to another by an equivalent idiom that would give the true meaning in a direct way. For example, the idiom ‘his mother kept all these things in her heart’ was literally translated in the Idmma New Testament as anen le sici sda nyaa kpotu ipu zu ku nu – his mother put all these things in her heart’. In Idmma, ‘to keep something in your heart’ means to bear a grudge about something. In translating this verse into Idmma, the translator should have expressed the true

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99 Ibid., p.19
100 Luke 2:52
meaning directly such as ‘his mother went on thinking about these things’, or had the translator gone on and used a natural Idoma idiom, the translation should have been, ḍen mi kwụ àdà nỳà i kpó tù àbàtẹ̀ṣiṣẹ̀ ṣù nì – ‘his mother kept all these things in the palm of her left hand’, meaning she keeps thinking and reflecting on these things.

Using ones own idiom to translate from the idiom of the source language makes the translation interesting, lively and natural. For example the idiomatic expression in the Acts of Apostles ‘your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent’ was literally translated in the Idoma New Testament as oyì ku aà ka o ce aà ikpọṣì! N le siya dùùma ẹ̀ – your blood be upon your head, I have no fault’. A better, natural Idoma idiomatic translation should have been ọnyàṣì kù aà ka o tù aà abàtẹ̀ṣiṣẹ̀ ikpọ kù um ìyè ànù ṣẹ̀nẹ̀ àbà ọ̀ mì ìyè ìámì ẹ̀ – ‘Your hair is in your hand. My hand and foot is not there’.

In the Old Testament translation therefore, we were taught to be alert in recognising idioms in the text and aimed at translating such idiom in a way that communicates the true meaning of the text naturally to the Idoma people, either by translating the meaning directly or using the idiom of Idoma that has the same meaning. Using one’s idiom in translation as Barnwell rightly noted, “makes the translation style lively and interesting”.

As earlier discussed in the section on translation premises a good translation must be accurate. This is brought about as the translator re-expresses the meaning of the

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101 Acts 18:6 (RSV)
102 Katharine Barnwell, Bible Translation, p. 22.
103 See earlier discussion on pages 236-240 of this chapter.
original message as exactly as possible in the language into which he is translating. Secondly, it must be clear and understandable. It was our aim in the Old Testament translation to communicate the message in a way that all classes of the Id-ма people at various levels could readily understand. Thirdly, it must be natural. It was our paramount objective not to sound ‘foreign’, but to use the natural every day Id-ма language. For the Id-ма Old Testament therefore, to be truly an Id-ма translation and avoid the earlier mistakes of the New Testament, it must meet these three criteria, of accuracy, clarity and naturalness.

Given this theory of dynamic equivalence, the concept of accuracy is not as simple as it seems. However, it is practically possible to have a precise, apparent, explicit and natural or inherent translation. But how do we judge a translation to be accurate, clear and natural or not? If the translated text communicates the exact meaning of the source language and meaning, then it is accurate. But if the meaning is different in any way from the original message, then it is inaccurate. This may include omission – that is when part of the source text is missing, or addition – if anything has been added to the meaning or change – if the meaning has been twisted in any way. It is a clear translation if the message is communicated in such a way that is possibly understandable by all. It is natural when it is in the kind of language that the people use. As Katharine Barnwell put it, “Is it sweet? Is it lively and Interesting?” If the answers to these questions are in the affirmative, then it is a natural translation.

The second training exercise was organised by the Wycliffe Bible translators and the United Bible Societies in February-April 1981. This was an intermediate course on

104 Katharine Barnwell, Bible Translation, p.24.
translation principles. This course, among other things covered steps in translation; translating some unknown ideas, names, weights, measurements, money, and special biblical terms. Of special interest to the Id≫ma Old Testament translation were the sections on the steps in translation, and how to study the grammar of one’s own language.

It was discovered during this course, that the first thing to do in translation is to study the meaning of the source text to be translated. When the translator became clear of the meaning of the text, the second step is to re-express the meaning clearly and naturally in the receptor language. However, as the source language cannot be translated word for word in order to avoid an unnatural literal translation, one has to think of the meaning of the message he is translating. The following diagram illustrates the two steps that were taken in the translation of the Id≫ma Old Testament:

105 The source text is the text, which is being translated. Related to this is the source language, which is the language of the text, being translated.
106 See later discussion on the current debates on ‘what is meant by meaning’.
107 The receptor language is the language into which the translation is being done.
Discover the Meaning

STEP A.

From this diagram it is observed that it is not possible to leave out step A in any translation. The meaning of a text which is trans-cultural must be studied, understood before re-expressing the meaning in the receptor language. Failure to systematically follow these steps would result possibly in a literal translation. The analysis of this chart is that, the text in the source language requires a coherent understanding as illustrated in the circle. When the translator understands the whole meaning of the text as represented in the second circle, that whole meaning is then re-expressed in the source language in the octagon. The whole meaning of the text is presented within the octagon of the source language, because, it is not possible to translate the source text literally into the receptor language. The octagon therefore represents the different ways of re-expressing the meaning of the text in the receptor language.

This brings us to the current controversy among biblical scholars on the meaning of a text. These scholars ask various questions, such as 'what do we mean by the meaning of a text? How should a text be understood and interpreted and from whose

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108 Nigeria Bible Translation Trust, Workshop on Bible Translation, 1981.
perspective?\textsuperscript{109} These biblical scholars have advocated various ways of approaching a biblical text for the desired meaning. For example, Vanhoozer in approaching the ‘meaning of the text’ from hermeneutical perspectives in his book, \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text}, challenged the views that see “meaning as relative to the encounter of text and reader [and argued] that meaning is independent of our attempts to interpret it”.\textsuperscript{110} In other words, the meaning of the text does not depend on who is reading or how one reads. He would rather have us view meaning in terms of communicative action. He argued strongly that there is a meaning in the text, which can be known with relative adequacy and that the reader has the responsibility to do so by cultivating interpretative virtues. According to Vanhoozer, meaning and interpretation are grounded in God’s communicative action in creation. His overall argument was based on author-oriented interpretation and understanding of the meaning of the text. While the act of understanding the meaning of the text from a translation perspective is different from that of his hermenetical approach to the meaning of the text, we however share a common view with Vanhoozer that there is meaning in the text, for all languages of the world if that text is approached from the author-oriented meaning.

Prior to Vanhoozer’s publication, other scholars have earlier advocated several ways of approaching a biblical text for a coherent meaning. A Dutch scholar, J.P. Fokkelman, in his book, \textit{Narrative Arts in Genesis}, which was published in 1975, argues for the right of biblical scholarship to give the text a chance to speak for itself.

through the rhetorical analysis of its style and structure. He develops a synchronic, as opposed to diachronic, reading of the text for the desired meaning. He does this by a close reading of the text which enables him to discover the language patterns, mostly repetition and especially concentric symmetry which uncover the themes of the narrative, resulting in the coherent understanding of the text.\(^{111}\) Michael Fishbane, in his book *Text and Texture: Close Reading of Selected Biblical Texts*, published in 1979, provides us with a series of close readings of various biblical texts in which he “seeks to allow the reader [of biblical] texts to engage the texts... not through the tangled history of exegesis”.\(^{112}\) He argues that as one reads the biblical text, the meaning unfolds. In this process of reading, we are told to be aware of the several stylistic conventions such as theme words that would help our overall understanding of the meaning of the text. Another contribution to the pursuit of the meaning of biblical texts comes from the Israeli scholar, Yehuda. T. Radday, in his essay entitled “Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative”, in which he argues for a chiastic approach to unfolding the whole meaning of the text.\(^{113}\) In 1985 Meir Sternberg published a major book on the strategies of reading the narratives of the Bible, entitled *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, in which he wants us to understand “the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect”.\(^{114}\) As readers of the Bible he suggests we are to make purposive sense of it and be able to explain the sense of the Bible in terms of the communicative skill of the narrator. We must take into consideration the distinctive features of the narrator’s communication in order to be able to understand what he wants to accomplish. Sternberg wants Bible readers to focus on the literary structure and the

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\(^{111}\) For details of his argument, see J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Arts in Genesis*, Amsterdam, 1975.


meaning of the text as it stands, rather than its historical background. All these biblical scholars have advocated various approaches in uncovering the meaning of text. While all these approaches have their advantages and disadvantages, in Igbo Bible translation, our approach is based on the author-oriented meaning.

The second thing to do is to study one’s culture. In order to be able to clearly communicate the meaning of the source text accurately in the receptor language, it is important to study carefully the culture of the area and the people into whose language the Bible is being translated. Translators in most cases are well-educated people who have generally learnt other languages and cultures such as Hebrew, Greek, English, and have been exposed to cultures other than their own. There is need therefore, for them to return to their own culture and their own people, and rediscover the way their own people think, live, speak and use words. For example, one of the translators in Nigeria, when preparing to translate ‘Christ’ into his language studied the meaning of Christ, which literally means ‘the anointed one’. In his own language, there is an expression for the anointed one; therefore he decided to use it for the translation of Christ. But as he later studied the use of the term in his culture, he discovered that the term ‘anointed one’ refers to a new bride on whom oil had been poured before marriage. He then realised that the term was not a suitable term to translate Christ. Had he not studied the use of this term in his culture, he might have made a serious mistake.

115 Ibid.
116 The story cited in this example was given at the Workshop on ‘What is my Culture? Do I Know it?’ at the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria in April 1981.
The final stage of this training featured predominantly on discovering the grammar of one's own language. This was held in June-July 1981 in the same place. This led to some discussions in establishing a standard orthography for the Iedxma language, which up till this point had been a matter of controversy. If the Old Testament translation was to avoid the problem of literalness of the New Testament, then the Iedxma orthography had to be established. The issue of Iedxma orthography will be discussed later in the thesis. But suffice it to say at this point that the studying of one's own language helps the translator to appreciate the wealth and potential of his language, and enables him to use all the richness of his own language in the translation.

6.3. 2. 2. Planning and Organising the Iedxma Old Testament Translation

As discussed earlier, the translation of the Iedxma New Testament did not follow any organised plan, nor were the Iedxma community and other denominations involved in the translation. It was rather a work of single-handed pioneer missionary translation beginning with Norcross and Albert Nwosu climaxing in the single effort of Rev. Dr. Egemba Igwe. This had some adverse consequences for the translated text, as it could not be properly read, nor understood by the community. It is the writer's view that the work of completing a translation of the Bible into any language is something that no person can do alone. It is a job for all the people who belong to that language area and the entire community into whose language the Bible is being translated. The Iedxma Old Testament translation, therefore was organised and planned based on the Wycliffe Bible Translators, and United Bible Society’s translation principles and process of Bible translation as set out on the next page:
This chart was specific to the Iduma situation only as each translation work has to be planned according to their local situations. Although the idea was based on the Wycliffe and United Bible Society’s translation theories and principles on planning and organising a translation project, the writer thought out the chart.
From the above chart, it could be seen that the Idɔma translation work followed four blocks of working plans with thirty sub-sections in the overall plan.

6.3.2.2.1 The Church and The Community

First, we have the church and the Idɔma community. The Idɔma Bible belongs both to the Church and the community. The Idɔma Bible translation needed many supporting members from the church to pray regularly for the translator, the project’s entire needs and for the entire aspects of the Bible translation work. Both the Church and the community were also needed to give money to meet the various needs of the numerous expenses that are involved in Bible translation. Above all, the involvement of the community was very essential in areas of consultation in matters of language and culture and the acceptability of the translated Bible when completed. Therefore, they were both brought in, as they both serve as the cradle of the translation work. ¹¹³

6.3.2.2.2 The Translation Team.

As the task of translating the Old Testament was viewed as belonging to the whole Churches in Idɔma land, and the Idɔma community, there must be a team of people both from the church and the community and outside the Idɔma community ¹¹⁹ sharing in the work. It was the view of the writer that, the Idɔma Old Testament could only be completed successfully, if the whole team that were involved works together, with each member of the team knowing his part in the task, and faithfully fulfilling it. The Old Testament translation team was then set up with the following nine sub-teams

¹¹³ For the detail roles of the Church and the community in a Bible Translation project, see Nida E. A. and Taber C. R., The Theory and Practice of Translation, United Bible Societies, 1969.
¹¹⁹ These are translation consultants and advisors.
6.3.2.2.1 The Planning Committee.

The work of this committee was to be responsible for the organisation of the entire translation project. The membership was drawn from all the different denominations\textsuperscript{120} in Idźma, each of the Local Governments areas of Idźma, and the various dialects areas of Idźma, and representatives from the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Language and Culture of Benue State Government. This committee was responsible for the appointment of the translator, reviewers and others who would be involved in the work. It was their job to publicise the project both in the community and in the churches, and be responsible for raising and handling finances for the translation work. They were also responsible for the decisions affecting the orthography and the publication of the Bible.

6.3.2.2.2 The Translator

The translator in this translation team who though officially appointed by the planning committee, was seconded by the Methodist Church Nigeria, with full stipend and accommodation to the Idźma Bible translation work.\textsuperscript{121} The translator was responsible for the translation work. In addition to this, he was to train some helpers as reviewers and testers. The translator must have spiritual commitment and show a life of a mature Christian, with good knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Technically, he should have a good knowledge of his mother tongue and of his own culture and the understanding of other languages such as English. He should also have a good knowledge of the source languages such as Hebrew and Greek. He must be a

\textsuperscript{120} These are the Methodists, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Cherubim and Seraphim, The Apostolic Church, Faith Apostolic, Holiness Church, Jesus People’s Unity, Four Square Gospel, The Assemblies of God Church, The Last Day Messengers, and Divine love churches. Since the formation of the translation committee, other denomination has sprung up in Idźma, who has been involved in the translation work but not on a committee level.

\textsuperscript{121} See Methodist Church Nigeria, Minutes of Conference 1981.
person of a humble, teachable and persevering character. He will then give all his working time to the preparation of the draft of the translation, test, receive, study and assess all comments with regard to the translation. His individual on-the-job training continued through the working with the translation consultants until the translation was published.122

6.3.2.2.2.3. The Typist

Another member of the team is a full time typist who will work specifically with the translator only. In accordance to the United Bible Society translation policy, the typist must be trained in Bible manuscript preparations. Ideally it is preferable to have someone from outside the language area as in the Idroma Old Testament translation project, who does not understand the language. Getting someone from outside the language area would help avoid the temptation of correcting, adding, or taking away from what the translator had translated. On the other hand, getting someone within the language area could be of great editorial benefit to the translator. However the United Bible Society’s position was to have someone from outside the language area.

6.3.2.2.2.4 The Testers

These were four in number and of two categories: Those with formal education, and the ones without formal education. Both basically must have a good knowledge of the Bible and the language and culture of the people. Their job is to test out the translated text, for clarity and naturalness in Idroma. Listening in most cases to people read the text and observing areas of difficulties and noting them carefully for the translator.

They will ask for meanings of the text as well. They are to take each draft of the translation to the ordinary people of the language area, to find out whether the translation can be understood clearly by them, and whether it communicates the message accurately. They will also read the translation to non-Christians, and will gather suggestions for improving the translation. The overall aim of this arm of the team is to help make the translation more accurate, clearer and more natural.

6.3.2.2.5. The Reviewers.

These are people who were carefully appointed to receive the translated drafts of the translation for the purpose of making some comment and recommending some possible improvements to the translator. There were twenty people selected for the IdΣma Old Testament translation on the basis of their interest in the translation, their willingness to give the required time to the work, their denominational representation and their dialectical areas. They were made up of various people across the community, men and women, some well educated others less educated, others with good knowledge of the Bible, and some with less knowledge of the Bible. These people had the very difficult task of studying the translation drafts carefully, and sending written comments to the translator. In order to carry out their work as reviewers, they attended a reviewers training course where they learnt the basic principles of translation, and accurate writing of their own language. They also received some training on what to look for when they got the translated drafts. Only then were they allowed to review the work which covered each book of the Bible.

123 Katharine Barnwell, Bible Translation, p. 220. For a good description of the work of the testers, see Rev. Samuel Iyoku, “Check the Word” The Bible Translator, October 1977.

124 We had to select these people from the cross-section of the IdΣma community because, our working assumption is for an Old Testament translation that would be read and understood by all classes of people of the community.
6.3.2.2.6 Pastors, Evangelists and Church Leaders

They had an important role to play in the Idɔma Old Testament translation. They were responsible for the regular reading of the translated portions in the churches during worship and preaching. They also encouraged the people to use such translated portions for example, in Bible Study groups, in family devotions and personal study, and kept the church informed about the stages of the translation work. Their roles like others were very important, as their work helped the translator to get reaction, comments and observations on the translation from the ordinary people.

6.3.2.2.7 The Linguist/ Exegete or Advisor

This member of the team was not himself a mother tongue speaker of the receptor language, but a member of the United Bible Society, with some training in linguistics and biblical studies. He was there to give advice on the planning and the organisation of the work and assist in the training of the translator and in helping the translator, if needed, in the correct exegesis of the Biblical text and in matters of style of writing. He also assisted in the final checking of the translation.

6.3.2.2.8 The Consultant

The translation consultant, with advanced knowledge in linguistics, of the translation principles, of biblical languages and biblical studies was the final member of the translation team. He was there to give advice and help in all matters of the translation work. His main job was to give the overall help and guidance until the Bible is published and distributed among the Idɔma people. In the Idɔma case, we had the advantage of not only having an official consultant from the United Bible Societies,  

\[\text{125 For further details on the reviewers' training, see "On Running a Training Course for Reviewers" a Technical Aids prepared by the Africa Area Translation Department, SIL, Nairobi Kenya.}\]
but other consultants from the Nigerian Bible translation Trust, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3 The Other Aspects of the Translation Project.
There were six things that were considered in this stage of the United Bible Society's policy of organising and planning a translation project.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 1. Financing a Translation Work
The detailed financial expenses of the translation work, such as the translator’s stipend\textsuperscript{126}, salary for the typist, money to attend courses, workshops and travelling expenses, translation equipment etc., were met to a large extent by the United Bible Societies through a special translation finance team that deal specifically with the finance of translation work. Their job included organising a fund raising event for the translation project and also making all the necessary payments on behalf of the translation committee.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 2. Publication
As the Itima Old Testament translation progressed, a publication sub-committee made sure that a smaller number of all the books of the Old Testament were reproduced in trial versions. Such copies were sent to reviewers, testers and the pastors who would use them and give the translator feedback. This helped identify mistakes and suggestions for improvements before the printing of the final copy.
6. 3. 2. 3. 3. Literacy

As Barnwell correctly put it, "Even when a translation of the Bible has been printed, it is of no use unless people can read".\textsuperscript{127} It was, therefore, decided at the beginning of the Old Testament translation, that a literacy sub-committee be established to teach the Idomma people how to read and write Idomma. They had the difficult task of teaching two classes of people: those who could not read at all, and those who could already read other languages, in our situation English, but could not read their mother-tongue Idomma. Their job was made more difficult due to lack of teaching materials outside the translation, and trained personnel apart from the translator to train them in their work. After much effort, through the various Churches’ literacy classes, approximately 40% of the Idomma Christians were taught, prepared and ready to read the Idomma Bible.

6. 3. 2. 3. 4. Timing

The work of this group was to see to the proper timing of the translation work. However, their work could only flow very well if there was an agreed orthography of the language, which was not the case with the Idomma bible at that time, and a good translation team with each arm of the team faithfully playing their part.

6. 3. 2. 3. 5 The Use of the Translated Bible

As the goal of the Idomma Bible translation project was not just to translate and publish the scripture in Idomma, but to see the Idomma Bible in use among the people, and having effects in the lives of the people to God’s honour and glory, it was

\textsuperscript{126} The translator’s stipend in the Old Testament translation work was paid by the Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese.
\textsuperscript{127} Katharine Barnwell, \textit{Bible Translation}, p. 224.
necessary to set up a sub-committee on the use of the Bible in order to make sure the desired goal was achieved. They were to make sure the Bible was easily available in all the areas where Idmma is spoken. They were to do this by distributing the Bible through churches, schools bookshops and through the government Ministry of Information, Youths, Sport, Language and Culture.

6. 3. 2. 3. 6. Other Means of Communicating the Idmma Scripture

There were and still are many Idmma people who do not and cannot read books. It was felt that other ways must be found in order to communicate the Idmma Bible to them. This was done mostly through the local Radio Benue, and on National Television on the local channel 10 for Benue State.128

Having put in place this entire organisational chart up to this stage, we then moved to the final stage of our planning block.

6. 3. 2. 2. 4 The Stages of the Idmma Old Testament Translation

The aim here was to give in summary form the stages each of the Old Testament books must pass through before they could be ready for printing. Showing the translation team the different stages that need to be covered in the overall translation exercise helped the team to be aware of the difficulties of the work and the amount of prayers and support the translator needed. There are fifteen stages in all, as outlined below:

128 The writer was given an hour programme on Radio Benue every Sunday afternoon 2-3 p.m. to conduct religious programmes in Idmma language titled Oyeyi oyipe - New Life, and 30 minutes on the Nigerian television, Channel 10, Makurdi, every Friday to teach how to read and write Idmma. All these programmes contributed immensely to reading of the Idmma Old Testament translation.
1. The translator’s studying of the text, in order to be sure of the meaning. This may take days or months, depending on the length of the book being studied and the cultural issues related to such text.

2. The translator makes the first hand-written draft of the text.

3. The first draft is then discussed with other members of the translation team, especially with the linguist/ exegete or advisor.

4. The translated text is typed after the discussion on point 3 above.

5. It is tested by the testers with at least three to four people.

6. It is revised, and a second draft prepared.

7. The translation is checked with the help of the translation consultant.

8. There are further revisions, and trial copies prepared and sent to the reviewers.

9. Another testing is done.

10. The translator gathers comments and suggestions, corrections and makes a further revised draft translation.

11. The translation would be checked for consistency in key words, parallel passages spellings, punctuation, format and lay outs.

12. The corrections would be entered in the manuscript and double-checked.

13. The translator makes a ‘final read through’ to check that every thing is correct.

14. The text is sent for typesetting at the translation centre. The centre will produce a final ‘photo-ready’ copy which is sent back to the translator to be checked for the final time.

15. If the translator is happy with the ‘photo-ready’ copy, then it is sent to the printer. After passing these stages, the Idɔma Bible would be ready for distribution in all the Idɔma areas and wherever the Idɔma language is spoken.
With the above organisational plan in place, we returned to the earlier mentioned issue of a standard writing system for the Idoma people. This in our view was very crucial to the whole of the Idoma Bible translation and the development of the Idoma language.

6. 4. Idoma Orthography

Norcross, Egemba and later Armstrong and R.C Abraham took Idoma down in phonetic transcription without any attempt to suggest the actual number of contrastive units that would be needed to systematically write Idoma. Abraham later attempted to mark both stress and tone. Both his stress and tone were basically an imposition of normal Western intonation patterns upon the Idoma word no matter what the basic tonal patterns may have been in Idoma. What is worse, even this attempt was dropped as these early writers were writing Igbo mixed up with western intonation or Igbo and a mixture of Hausa as R.C. Abraham in 1949 in the introductory note to Idoma language confessed:

The orthography used is a modified version of that of The International Phonetic association, but the tone-marking follows the one used in my “Dictionary of The Hausa Language” 1949. 129

The first attempts at a practical writing system for the Idoma were produced by the Methodist missionaries in the 1930s and 50s and the result of their efforts can most easily be studied in the hymn books, catechism and the Idoma New Testament of 1970. It is unclear if they ever saw the work of Abraham or deliberately ignored it.130

130 Ibid.
Their writing system was ambiguous and non-systematic. For example, while Abraham recognised that Idźma is a tonal language,\textsuperscript{131} they did not mark tone. Tone marking in the writer’s view is a central determining factor as far as meaning of words is concerned in Idźma. For example, without the tone, the Idźma word Ada could mean ‘father’, ‘hut’, ‘trap’, ‘pot’ or ‘first daughter’, likewise could ena mean ‘four’, ‘yesterday’, ‘and’, ‘mother’ or a ‘tree’. swa could equally mean, ‘crowd’, ‘knife’, a ‘bird’ or a ‘cow’s tail’.

Forms were often written with two different spellings in the same sentence and it is not possible to discover any logic for their divisions of words, which was often done in different ways in the same sentence. The result was disastrous. No one could read anything until it had first been memorised.

The current orthography of the Idźma language grew out of the work of the present author and his co-workers in the Idźma Bible translation project. It was used extensively in teaching and reading in the Idźma primary schools and secondary schools, and teacher training colleges. It is the standard orthography in the Idźma primers, Government publications, Scripture portions and in Bible translation. This writing system has proven itself practical for the task for which it was designed and capable of opening the world of reading and literature for the people who speak Idźma as their first language. Our aim here is not to give detailed analysis of the Idźma language on which, hopefully a later study will focus. We would, however, highlight some of the basic elements of the Idźma language that are central to our discussion on the orthography of the Idźma Bible translation. This also illustrates,

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
how the earlier problem of the unreadability and unnaturalness in the earlier Idɔma New Testament due to its writing system and non Idɔma contextual issues were dealt with.

6. 4. 1. The Basic elements of The Idɔma Language

Every language is made up of elements and of the process of linking those elements into meaningful sentences. The major element in the Idɔma language is the words. Idɔma words are constructed of either a single syllable or combination of syllables.

6. 4. 1. 1. The Tone

In the Idɔma language, the tone is the heart or the centre of the syllable. The vowel or syllabic nasal is the vehicle that carries the tone and the consonant when present is the shockabsorber that prevents the syllables from collapsing into each other. The Idɔma tones are as follows: high tone which is marked with an apostrophe (’ ) above the syllable nucleus that carries it. Example, ’ ō, the mid tone which is marked with a dash above the syllable nucleus that carries it. Example, ō ŉ and the low tone which is left unmarked. Example, A ė.

122 Bunkowske, E.W. “Workshop notes on Idɔma language”, EWB/dnb/ 15/85, January 24th 1985
6. 4. 1. 2 The IdiDma vowels

The IdiDma language has seven vowels as illustrated by the vowels in the following words:

\[ 
\begin{array}{lcl}
\text{I} & \text{i} & \text{O} \\
\text{e} & \text{E} & \text{\textcircled{}} \\
\text{u} & \text{u} & \text{\circled{}} \\
\end{array} 
\]

\text{Eje-} beans \quad \text{i} \quad \text{u} \quad \text{umu-} grain \quad \text{flour}

\text{\textcircled{}} \quad \text{o} \quad \text{odo-} \quad \text{yellow}

\text{apa} \quad \text{a} \quad \text{Lizard}

The IdiDma language has two syllabic nasal illustrated in the following words

1. \text{N} - \text{I} \\
2. \text{H} - \text{not} \\
3. \text{N} - \text{Ese} - \text{small}

6. 4. 1. 3. The IdiDma Consonants

There are twenty-four consonants in IdiDma as illustrated in the following words:

\text{b} \quad \text{ab} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{hand} \quad \text{j} \quad \text{aje} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{ground} \quad \text{n} \quad \text{e} \text{hv} \text{u} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{no}\text{s}e

\text{c} \quad \text{ak} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{stone} \quad \text{k} \quad \text{ak} \text{a} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{monkey} \quad \text{\eta} \quad \text{\varepsilon} \text{m} \text{a} \text{-} \quad \text{Woman's}

\text{d} \quad \text{ad} \text{a} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{father} \quad \text{kp} \quad \text{ak} \text{p} \text{a} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{pocket} \quad \text{\eta} \quad \text{\varepsilon} \text{m} \text{e} \text{-} \quad \text{Exhibition}

\text{f} \quad \text{ofu} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{twenty} \quad \text{kw} \quad \text{ik} \text{w} \text{u} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{death} \quad \text{\eta} \quad \text{\varepsilon} \text{m} \\text{a} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{woman}

\text{g} \quad \text{g} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{hole} \quad \text{I} \quad \text{\textcircled{}} \quad \text{cloth} \quad \text{p} \quad \text{\textcircled{}} \quad \text{forest}

\text{gb} \quad \text{agh} \text{a} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{chain} \quad \text{m} \quad \text{\textcircled{}} \quad \text{salt} \quad \text{t} \quad \text{\textcircled{}} \text{hunting}

\text{gw} \quad \text{agw} \text{u} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{leprosy} \quad \text{my} \quad \text{\varepsilon} \text{m} \text{y} \text{e} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{hunger} \quad \text{w} \quad \text{\textcircled{}} \text{w} \quad \text{owu} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{wind}

\text{h} \quad \text{ikh} \text{a} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{yam} \quad \text{n} \quad \text{\textcircled{}} \quad \text{pounded} \quad \text{yam} \quad \text{y} \quad \text{\textcircled{}} \text{y} \quad \text{\varepsilon} \text{i} \quad \text{-} \quad \text{child}
6. 4. 1. 4. Assimilation in the Idṣma language

In many cases in the Idṣma language noun assimilation or automatic change take place at the boundaries where words in Idṣma come together. For example, Ode ke Iwa ice - contrary to what you think Ode will come today. However, in some situations, when the conditions are favourable assimilation takes place automatically in Idṣma. The necessary favourable condition is an open syllable followed by another open syllable. “An open syllable is the one that has no consonant to protect it from the previous or following syllable”.

Assimilation in Idṣma takes place in a number of different environments. Since the translation of the Idṣma Old Testament, the following thirteen environments have been discovered to date.

1. Basic Verbs and their objects, e. g., Ode md ewo - ode saw a dog.
2. Prepositions and their objects, e. g., swù kù Ada wa - Father's goat came.
3. A Conjunction and the following noun e.g., Ode mla Okọ wa - Ode and Oko came.
4. A relative pronoun and the following clause e.g., swù nɛ Abu wi a' it is goat that Abu untied.
5. The associative marker and its object e.g., ọga iy ọta ọgù - our place is good.
6. A noun and a following noun e.g., ọyi Ada wa father's son came.
7. A noun and a following descriptive word e.g., ɛɛ ol ọtụ wa A courageous person came.
8. A noun and a following pronoun e.g., ọya um wa My friend came.

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132 Bunkowske E. W “Assimilation (Automatic Change) At Word Boundaries In The Idṣma Language” A seminar Paper on the systematic way of writing Idṣma, Advanced Teachers College, Katsina Ala, 24th January, 1985. Since this seminar, Bunkowske who is currently the Professor of
9. A noun and a following number e.g., $Acswgə$ $wa$ ten people came.

10. A number and a following number $Igwə$ $spa$ $wa$ twelve came.

11. A pronoun and a following verbal auxiliary e.g., $\tilde{A}$ $I$ $wa$ $\tilde{η}$ You didn’t come.

12. A basic verb and the following associative marker, e.g., $Ada$ $y\z\ipu$ Ada is pregnant.

13. A noun and a following associative marker $\zke$ $kū$ $Ode$ $Lc$ $hī$ Ode’s voice is good.

When the ld$ə$ma tones, vowels consonants, assimilation and the rules or environment of assimilation have been thoroughly mastered a solid foundation for the systematic writing of ld$ə$ma will be in place. It was on this foundation that the ld$ə$ma Old Testament translation work started in July 1981, after a public ecumenical inaugural service attended by over fifty thousand people, with the ld$ə$ma representatives from all over the States of Nigeria, The Benue State Military Governor and His Royal Highness Dr Abrahah Ajene Okpabi, the Agaidu of ld$ə$ma, at the Norcross Cathedral compound on the29th of June 1981.

The translation work continued until 1985, when in April of that year a seminar/workshop on the Systematic Way of Writing ld$ə$ma was organised by the present writer in consultation with Benue State University, Universities of Jos, Ibadan, Zaria and Advanced Teachers College Katisina Ala, and the United Bible Societies and the Bible Society of Nigeria. Various papers were presented at this workshop/seminar by various scholars who have interest in the ld$ə$ma language, such as Professor

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World Mission at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson Mississippi, had not done any further work on the ld$ə$ma language.
Armstrong of the Institute of Linguistics, University of Ibadan, Dr Oko the head of Language studies Advanced Teacher's College Katsina Ala, Dr. Koops the Id̄ma Bible translation consultant, Professor Bunkowske, The United Bible Society Africa Co-ordinator of Translations, and the writer, on various aspects of the Id̄ma language.

6. 4. 1. 5. The Id̄ma Writing Rules

The seminar/workshop ended with the following writing rules that are based on the internal genius of the Id̄ma language and were intended to be helpful in assisting both the Old Testament translation and the Id̄ma people with the development of a systematic and standardised way of writing Id̄ma:

1. The tone should be fully marked in Id̄ma

2. Since the low tone (\) is most frequent and the least likely to be reinforced in the assimilating situations, it can advantageously be indicated by the absence of a tone mark.

3. So that there is differential between high and mid tone, it is suggested that high tone be marked with vertical stroke (') and the mid tone with a horizontal stroke (-).

4. Two tones should never be written on a single vowel.

5. Vowel length is to be shown by two vowels of the same quality with the same tone, for example, Ó we ñyñyñye it is only sweetness.

6. The seven vowels of Id̄ma should normally be represented by i, e, æ, a, ð, o and u.

7. The syllabic nasals which function like vowels should be written with the appropriate tone. For example, ṁiwenence I am not small
8. The basic consonants of Idoma should normally be represented as follows: b, c, d, f, g, gb, h, j, k, kp, l, m, n, ny, n, n, p, s (mainly in borrowed words), t, w, and y.

9. Labialized consonants should normally be represented by a w following a basic consonant, e.g., agwu - leprosy, ikwu - death and ipwe - exhibition.

10. Lateralized consonants should normally be represented by an l following the basic consonant, for example, kplakpl, nplpl, klélé - quick, smooth and bites.

11. Following the constant visual image principle each word in Idoma should be spelled just one way. For example, um for my, not m or im, or am, but always um.

12. A basic verb and its object are written as separate words when another word separates them in an alternative construction, for example, while the pattern is O ca xad he abused, the diagnostic is O ca um xad he abused me.

13. A basic verb and its object which have the same meaning are written together unless a word can separate them, e.g., O nunu (nu unu) he fought.

14. In other cases the basic verb and the object should be written as separate word when the verb appears in open form in the object front focus construction, for example, owu nö o kwu a - it is goat that he caught.

15. In those cases where the verb does not appear in open form in the object focus construction the verb and the object are written together as one word. O yeyi ne o yeyi a it is life that he lived.

16. Words like the preposition ku, the conjunction mla, the relative pronoun ne and the associative marker yi, should be written separate from their objects, for example, i yi nū le zhi his situation is good., owu ne oode wi a it is goat that Ode untied, Ode mla okō wa Ode and Oko came, owu kū adā wa father’s goat came.
17 A noun should be written from a following numbers, pronoun, descriptive word or noun unless the two have become crystallised. For example, *Acsigwo* wa, ten people came, *yum* wa my friend came. *ce olætj* wa a courageous person came.

- It is Abu's house. Crystallised title *csidma* ne it is the *csidma*.

18 The constrative markers: comma (,), dash (-), period (.), question mark (?), exclamation point (!) and special concern or completive markers such as (a,i,o, and η) are used to signal contrastive syntactic forms and Semantic functions at the phrase, clause and sentence level.

19 *Idama* words must begin and end in a vowel. No *Idama* word begins or ends in a consonant.\(^{\text{134}}\)

These rules were agreed upon and accepted as the writing rules for writing the *Idama* language by all the participants at the workshop, the Benue State Government and later by all the Churches in *Idama*. The translation of the *Idama* Old Testament was continued using this standard *Idama* orthography until April 1987, when the first draft\(^{\text{135}}\) was completed. Currently the *Idama* Old Testament is on stage 15 of the translation stages\(^{\text{136}}\) and the revision of the New Testament is in progress. One wonders why after 17 years of work the complete *Idama* Bible is still not published?

There are several factors that are responsible for the long delay in publishing the *Idama* Bible. First was, and still is the ill-health of the Very Rev. P.A. Udenyi who is currently co-ordinating this final phase of the translation. Second is the translator's study programme, which has taken longer than the expected period. The third and the

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\(^{\text{134}}\) The *Idama* writing rules are taking from the concluding paper, "The Writing Rules for *Idama*," presented by Professor Bunkowske, at the Seminar/Workshop on the Systematic Way of writing *Idama*. Jesus College Otukpo, January 1995.

\(^{\text{135}}\) By the 'first draft' it is meant all the books of the old Testament have passed through stages 1-14 of the translation stages described on pages 261 – 263 of this chapter.
most significant reason were the further revisions that had to be made to the existing
New Testament due to its literalness.

We have in this chapter examined the value of Bible translation in the spread of
Christianity and the efforts of the missionaries to spread Christianity in Idɔma
through the translation of the Bible into the Idɔma language. We noted some of the
difficulties they had, such as, their lack of the knowledge of the Idɔma context, and
their inadequate training in linguistics, Bible translation principles and theories. We
also noted the problem of an acceptable Idɔma orthography. These problems and
others, we concluded, were responsible for the literalness and the unnaturalness of
their translations right from 1924 to 1970 in which, the unreadable and ambiguous
Idɔma New Testament was published.

While their efforts were commended and appreciated by the Idɔma people, there was
still a great need to re-translate the Idɔma New Testament and translate the Old
Testament into an accurate, clear and natural Idɔma. This led to the involvement of
the present writer in the Idɔma Bible translation, in which the earlier mistakes of
literalness that resulted in the unreadability of the New Testament were corrected
through the establishment of an acceptable Idɔma orthography. That orthography
took into consideration the various dialectical factors in the Idɔma language.

With an organised working plan as illustrated by the chart137 in our discussion, the
Old Testament translation was completed in April of 1987, and is now at the final

136 See page 260-261.
137 See page 251 for the chart.
phase for publication. Even though, the entire Bible is not printed yet, both the process of the translation and the translated texts which were circulated to the churches, schools and Government institutions had made, and continues to make a profound impact both on Idoma Christianity and the Idoma community. Such impact, for example could be measured in terms of many Idoma Christians and non-Christians who can now read and write the Idoma language, and also read some portions of the translated Scripture as the result of the translation work. The translation of the Idoma Bible also led to the Benue State Government’s re-newed interest in the promotion of the Idoma language through Radio and Television, and the approval of the Idoma language as a subject to be taught in primary and post primary institutions throughout out Benue State. All these came into being as a result of the Idoma Bible translation project. Further effects of the Idoma Bible translation the Idoma Christianity and the Idoma community will be examined in the next chapter on Idoma Christianity today.
CHAPTER SEVEN

IDENTITY: CHRISTIANITY TODAY

Dietrich Westermann in his Duff Lectures of 1937 that were subsequently published as *Africa and Christianity*, was of the view that, in Africa the transposition of Christianity should involve the complete extermination of all that constituted the formation of the African pre-Christian experience or religious tradition. This was his advice to missionaries working in Africa,

However anxious a missionary may be to appreciate and retain indigenous social and moral values, in the case of religion he has to be ruthless...he has to admit and even emphasize that the Religion he teaches is opposed to the existing one and the one has to cede to the other.

As far as Westermann was concerned, “giving the new means taking away the old”.

Thirty years later, Kenneth Cragg in his series of lectures at Cambridge University which were subsequently published as *Christianity in World Perspective*, countered Westermann’s view and argued that,

On the contrary: it means harnessing its possibilities [i.e., of the old] and setting up within it the revolution that will both fulfil and transform it. For if the old is taken away, to whom will the new be given?

Westermann was not the only one who felt concerned or troubled as what to do with the pre-Christian religious and cultural tradition of the Africans. Most missionaries that came to Africa as a whole, Iduma inclusive, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries took the general western view or that of the *Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910*, which sadly, concluded and described the primal African religious experience as ‘Animism’ that contained “no preparation for Christianity”.

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2 Ibid.
However, seventy years after the Edinburgh Conference, some African theologians, began to refer to Africa as Christian Africa. By the 1980s African Christians were struggling with how to relate the pre-Christian primal religious experience to the new message that Christianity is bombarding them with. Even some missionaries were beginning to worry about what to do with African past religious experience. Should it be exterminated, or got rid of or not? Would the new Christian faith make sense to the Africans without their primal religious experience?

Scholars like Adrian Hastings for example, ventured to suggest “something of a dialogue between the African Christian…and the perennial religious spiritualities of Africa”\(^5\). He was beginning to feel that the “areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalised”\(^6\).

Hastings’s observations were confirmed by the Ghanaian theologian, Kwesi Dickson in his survey article on *Research in the History of Religion in West Africa*\(^7\); he lamented the lack of research in the area of “biblical studies and customs”\(^8\) in West Africa. Since then, interest has shifted from viewing the African primal religious experience as of “Scant theological significance” to the “very centre of academic stage”\(^9\). Andrew Walls argued that such a shift came about because the Africans who were trained in theology with a western syllabus, were turning away from the unsympathetic western missionary interpretation of the African primal religious past

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\(^6\) Ibid.


\(^8\) Ibid.

to a more basic cultural, primal religious past of their own and their people’s present theological presumptions10

There couldn’t be a more eloquent statement as regards the need of a constructive interaction between Christianity and the African culture than the appraisal at the 1975 *Jos Nigeria Conference on Christianity in Independent Africa*, by Archbishop [then Bishop] Desmond Tutu when he correctly stated,

> It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with the deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as a pale imitation of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith.11

If, as argued by E. Fashole-Luke “that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity”12, then it becomes mandatory for the African Christians and the Idema Christians in particular to draw together the various Idema content which makes up the Idema total primal religious and cultural experience into a coherent and meaningful partner that can be called and described as Idema Christianity. As correctly argued by Walls, “a past is vital for all of us –without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are”13. The pre-eminent or fundamental concern of the Idema Christians at the moment is this: what is the past of the Idema Christian? How does the Idema past relate to the Idema now? Or, what are the relationships of their primal religious faith with the present one? It is suggested that if Christianity is to be said to belong to the Idema, a bridge must be found between the old—that is the

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Idoma past context and the new-Christianity. There should be such integration between the two that Idoma Christianity should in the words of Idowu bear “the distinctive stamp of indigenous originality”\textsuperscript{14} in terms of beliefs, practices, rituals and liturgies. The Idoma must be able to say that Christianity has become real and at home with them. In order for them to achieve this, the Idoma have to reshape and develop Christianity to suit their needs. Christianity must be made to adapt to the Idoma cultural context.\textsuperscript{15}

The principal aim of this chapter therefore, is to examine among other things, how the Idoma reshaped and developed Christianity in order to adapt it to the Idoma context, thus making it Idoma Christianity. Even though, Christianity had been in Idomaland since 1924\textsuperscript{16}, it could be and perhaps, rightly suggested or argued that Christianity has never really made a decisive penetration into the Idoma life and context until after 1974 when the missionaries finally left Idoma. Various reasons could be suggested as to why, though present in Idoma, Christianity was not Idoma but alien. For instance, Christianity may not have been communicated to the Idoma in their concrete historical situations. The Idoma Christians have not been taught by the missionaries on how to live their new-found faith -Christianity in the midst of the Idoma culture, context, rituals and traditions. On the contrary, they were taught to discontinue the practice of certain customs and festivals such as the Alekwu festival\textsuperscript{17}. For the Idoma Christians, the question of Alekwu has always been a problem.

\textsuperscript{13} A. F Walls, Christian Identity, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{15} For the definition of Idoma context, See earlier discussion in chapter 1, p. 6-8.
\textsuperscript{16} See earlier discussion in Chapter four, p. 125-128.
Are there certain Id¬ma customs or cultural practice and rituals that could be rightly adapted by Christianity or the church in Id¬ma to express the Christian message? In illustrating our point, we will be focusing among other issues on three main cultural practices: the child naming ceremony, marriage and burial rites which Christianity adapted in Id¬ma to suit the Id¬ma needs and in doing so, translated itself into the Id¬ma context, thus, creating an Id¬ma Christianity and not an alien faith.

It is the writer’s view that a precedent had been set from church history in a way, when the early church institutionalised Easter and Christmas. Both seasons were non-Christian festivals, but now became occasions to express some key elements of the Christian faith. As various cultures differ, so must the presentation of Christianity in the various cultures. The anthropologist, Charles Kraft in his book Christianity in Culture tells how some missionaries were asked to give the main point of Joseph’s story in the Hebrew Bible. While the expatriate missionaries all painted Joseph as a man who remained faithful to God and his master no matter what happened to him, the Africans on their part portrayed Joseph as a man who never forgot his family tie, no matter how far, he travelled away from home. He then drew a conclusion that, “Both of these meanings are legitimate understandings of the passage. But differing cultural backgrounds led one group to one interpretation and the other group to another interpretation”18. It holds therefore, that if any meaningful interaction is to take place between the Id¬ma and Christianity, the socio-historical and the religio-cultural context of the Id¬ma must be taken into serious consideration and fully appreciated.

17 See earlier discussion in Chapter 3, p. 101-104.
This chapter, among other things will therefore, examine such cultural process through which the Idumma came to terms with Christianity and accepted it as an essential factor of their culture and tried to reshape and develop Christianity to suit their needs, customs and traditions. This chapter will ask what has Christianity done to the Idumma? Have the Idumma been robbed of their life, culture and traditions or have the Idumma been able to persuade Christianity to translate itself into the Idumma culture and life as it did in the Aramaic and Hellenistic cultures philosophies and world views? In addition to using the Idumma birth rites, marriage ceremonies and burial rites to illustrate our point, we will also draw out the theological implications of life after death for Idumma Christianity based on the latter illustration. We will also examine the liturgical life of the Idumma Christians today that enabled Christianity to take root in the soil of the Idumma culture in which they are planted and how it grew in structure and institution of her own and not something alien. This chapter will conclude with a specific reference to the effect of the Idumma Bible translation on the Idumma. This in our view is crucial to the later theological developments of the Idumma Christianity, especially in relation to issues such as polygamy and bride price.

When the missionaries left Idumma in 1974, the mantle of leadership fell on the only Idumma minister the church had then, Rev. B.A. Achigili [then Igwumale circuit minister, later bishop of Benue, and current Archbishop of the north]. He was left with an enormous responsibility of the continuity of the mission work in Idumma. He was equally aware of the problems the Idumma had with Christianity, due to its antagonistic

and unsympathetic view of the Icfama cultural practices. Archbishop Achigili tackled these problems head-on, first by embarking on an intensive programme of training some indigenous workers for the church in Icfama. Second, and to some extent, more significantly by persuading the church leaders that the church must adapt to the Icfama culture in order to make Christianity more genuinely Icfama.

On the first point, Achigili opened a Bible school in Igwumale, where local church catechists were trained to take the place of the Igbo catechists who fled Icfama as a result of the war and the final departure of the missionaries from Icfama. The Bible school had 24 students with Mr Obochi as principal. It was a one-year training school for local church workers. The students after graduation were posted to various churches as catechists. This was very profitable to the church, as some of these students later became ministers in the church. As a result of the training programme the staff strength of the church increased, and more efficient works were done, as these set of workers began to communicate with the Icfama directly in their own idiom.

When the missionaries left Icfama, there was only one Icfama minister and two catechists. But today Icfama has one Archbishop, two Bishops, ten Presbyters, thirty-four ministers, twenty sub-pastors, and eight deaconesses.

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21 See earlier discussion in chapter four, p. 145-150.
22 Even though, the war was over, the Igbos did not have that confidence to return to Icfama just four years after the war, more so that the Icfama were directly attacked by the Igbos during the Nigerian civil war.
23 This Bible school was moved to Otukpo and later to Igede, where grew in size and was upgraded to a full theological institution of the Methodist Church Nigeria, where she train her ministers and sub-Pastors and Deaconness across the country today.
24 The present writer, Very Rev. Andrew Ameh, the current minister of Makurdi Circuit, and others such as The Rev. J.I Ino, Atama, Oko were all students of the Igwumale Bible college.
25 See Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Archives MCN/BD/ Church workers/ 1/1.
26 Ibid.
Achigili continued with modification, the missionary policy of using education as a strategy for church growth in Idoma. He did this by involving the community leaders in the running of the affairs of the schools. As a result of the involvement of the various Idoma community leaders and the indigenous workers in the leadership and running of the schools, the number of primary schools grew from 24 to 280 and secondary schools from 5 to 18, in seven years between 1974-1981. The subsequent year witnessed the establishment of the school for the physically handicapped and the Agricultural and Bible school in Obobu Ikachi in the current Diocese of Igede. The establishment of more schools, and especially, the school for the physically handicapped helped the church to expand and penetrate deeper into the Idoma community, life and culture.

There had been a tremendous increase in church growth and attendance as the result of this. For example, by 1974, there were 200 churches, in four Idoma circuits with one Idoma minister and three Yoruba ministers. But today, there are over 600 churches in Idoma, with 2 Dioceses, 1 Archbishop, 2 Bishops, 10 Presbyters, 34 Idoma ministers, 8 deaconess and over 20 sub-pastors. What were the reasons behind the Idoma suddenly flocking to the schools and churches immediately after 1974, when our earlier discussion noted the problems they had with Christianity?

27 see earlier discussion in Chapter two, p 38-44 for the types and roles of these leaders in the Idoma community.
29 This was the first of such school to be established in the whole of Benue State.
30 The Bible School have grown to a full theological college today where Methodist Church and other denominations train their church ministers and lay workers.
Several factors were responsible for this phenomenal growth of the Church in Idoma, such as the Idoma involvement in the leadership of the Church. This Idoma factor in the mission and life of the church helped to shift the emphasis or the view of mission as a specialised department, which is the sole responsibility of expatriates. The Idoma experience of responsible flexibility in the church life has made a positive contribution to the growth of the church in Idoma. The African leadership have the advantage over the missionaries in the appreciation of the deeper nuances of their own language and local resource such as \( eg \)-'age group', which was used for the growth of the church. However, the main principal factor that contributed to such growth was the adaptation of some of the Idoma cultural practice by Christianity as will be illustrated later in this chapter. We could have discussed all these factors in detail, but due to the limitation and the specific focus of this chapter, we will briefly mention some of them and discuss in detail the latter, which is the principal focus of this chapter.

7.1 Idoma Elders

Archbishop Achigili quickly realised that in order for the church to be truly Idoma, in addition to his own indigenous leadership skills, he had to bring in the collective traditional leadership of the Idoma community and that of the church into the running and the spread of the church in Idoma. In 1975, in the \( z\)\( \ell \)\( Id\)\( ma \)\(^{34}\)'s palace in Otukpo, he called a meeting of the various \( z\)\( pu \)\(^{35}\) and \( ipu\)\( ma \)\(^{36}\) in which he invited all

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33 See later discussion for the use of \( eg \) in Idoma Christianity.
34 \( z\)\( el\)\( Id\)\( ma \) is the paramount first class chief of the Idoma. He is both the political and spiritual head of the Idoma people.
35 For the definition of \( z\)\( pu \), see earlier discussion in chapter 2, p. 37.
36 Ibid.
the title holders in the Idoma society, and consulted with them on how and what to do in order to make Christianity Idoma and not something alien. Such recognition of these traditional title holders and their views with regard to the life of the church in Idoma after being brushed aside for 50 years by the missionaries, made them feel for the first time part of what was happening in Idoma in relation to Christianity. Their involvement in the life of the church enabled them to remove some of the restrictions they placed on their children in attending church meetings. For example, during fieldwork in Ocobo on the 18th of August 1996, Chief Oko the Agbo of Ocobo was asked why his children were more involved in the church in comparison to other chiefs, children? This was his reply,

\[Ayì um gád wè icèce\]
\[eko nè fì um zègàdà\]
\[ku in àkpd aa\]
\[Abùn le eyì kù um kwu ajè\]
\[yìmà zà dà dàdùtù a\]
\[úkùlù kì icèce I kla daobù tà um gε tù\]
\[Abù um mà kà òlézìhi a\]
\[Anù um kò ayì tu à\]

Chief Oko's reply illustrates our argument. Had he not been appointed as the Chairman for the community school, his children wouldn't have been involved in the

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37 These title holders included: The Anyakwu - the Elders; Òcaliya - Counsellors; Acadu - the royal undertaker and the kingmaker; Òcefu - the commander in chief; Òkpacu - the land administrator and the Òcolohi - he who holds the crowd together.

38 Chief Oko the Agbo of Ocobo, fieldwork interview, 18th August 1996.
church and the church in Idoma would have lost their immense contribution in terms of personnel and finance to the church today. As he was brought into the leadership and the running of the local school, he felt he was no longer in the dark about what the church was doing in his area, and as result, he allowed his children to join the church. Chief Oko’s example in one of many such examples in the story of the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity. Their second significant role was the impartation or transmission of the church message and views to the Idoma people at the various levels of their jurisdiction, thus enhancing church growth and membership in Idoma.

7. 2. $\text{eg} \rightarrow$

The next move was the church’s full adoption of $\text{eg} \rightarrow$ for collective social activities of the church in Idoma. The church members were divided into $\text{eg} \rightarrow$ age groups for the collective social activities of the church. The use of $\text{eg} \rightarrow$ in meeting the social needs of Idoma Christianity was reinforced as they began to read the translated texts of the Idoma Bible, especially, as they read $\text{Ukúl} \rightarrow \text{Ku Ac} \rightarrow \text{Otúd} \rightarrow 2:42-44$ – Acts 2:42-44, they soon realised that they were embarking on an exercise that was practised by the early Christians in the Bible. For example, the activities of the early Christians in the above mentioned chapter included meeting in each other’s homes, praying together, breaking of bread, having fellowship with one another and sharing with each other according to each others’ needs. Such practices had similarities with the activities of $\text{eg} \rightarrow$ in Idoma. Such encouragement led to an official motion by the Elder of Iga Okpaya Circuit Mr Ogbe at the 1979 Synod of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese which was held at the Methodist High School in Iga Okpaya, calling
for the official adoption of *e* as part of the functional arm of the social and communal life of the church in Idma. After some intensive debates\(^{40}\) the Synod resolved that:

Whereas *e*-age groups had been the long standing cultural practice in the Idma society for mutual collective aid and social activities of the Idma people,

Whereas some of the activities of *e* conform to the practises of the early church in Acts 2:42-44, and the activities of house churches in Corinthians,

Whereas the adoption of *e* as a social functional arm of the Church in Idma would enhance mutual fellowship in the church and ease the administration of the church, and lead to closer fellowship among the members of the church,

It is resolved that *e* be adapted by the church as an arm of her social aid group.\(^{41}\)

The resolution was unanimously adopted. Since then, the church has benefited socially, administratively and spiritually from the activities of this social aid group.

For example, some such benefits include the dividing up of church members into *e*-age groups for communal labour in the church. Second, each group is chosen in turn to attend distant church funeral services and in representing the church at various levels of inter church meetings. It became very easy for the church hierarchy to assign specific duties to any of the *e* age groups. It was a case as the Idma *ita* \(^{42}\) puts it, *ṣọ́ ọ́lọ́wá lè ọ́yọ́ yá fẹ́kèe*, that, is many heads makes the load lighter\(^{43}\) As earlier indicated\(^{44}\), let us shift our focus to the more crucial roles that the Idma cultural practices of naming ceremonies, marriage and burial rites played in the Idma reception and development of Christianity.

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\(^{39}\) *e* is a very highly developed age group aid or club society for social need of the community.

\(^{40}\) For details of such debates, see Methodist church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, MCN/BD/ minuets of Synod, 1979.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) See earlier note on *ita* in chapter 3, p. 84.

\(^{43}\) This proverb is very meaningful to the Idma, as the Idma carry their loads on their heads.
7.3. CHILD NAMING CEREMONY

The birth of a child has a lot of significance for the Idma people. For example, the birth of a child in the Idma tradition signifies the time that it pleased the Idma ancestor to return to the earthly family in a child. This would be a very exciting moment for the whole family as they anxiously expect this reunion in the birth of a child. The birth of a child as earlier discussed has both a religious and theological significance for the Idma people. From a religious point of view, both the dead and the living are united again for an earthly family life. This in most cases would be celebrated in sacrifice and worship. Theologically, it shows the Idma concept of life after death and reincarnation. To the Idma people, death is only a transition stage between this life and the next. The death of a man does not mean the end to his life.

Death in Idma as the Idma saying goes, agwa hila ohi ku nu fofuru na - that is: the snake only changes his skin. As earlier observed, they epitomised this in the names they gave to their children at birth, such as nyil kwu, nyil wa, nyil igbingbili, for boys and nkuku le - the mother of the house is back for the girls.

Because of the religious and theological significance that the birth of a child has for the Idma people, the naming of that child involves a very elaborate and careful process in Idma. A lot of these events that have some significant contribution to the Idma development of Christianity take place during the naming ceremony.

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44 See p.279 of this chapter.
45 This traditional belief is not unique to the Idma only, but also to other tribes such as the Yoruba, Igbo, Igala, Nupe and Edo of Nigeria.
46 See earlier discussion in chapter 2, p. 47 ff.
47 See earlier discussion in chapter 3, on Idma theology.
48 Ibid.
49 This means a man dies and a man comes, travels and returns like igbingbili that does not die. Igbingbili is a seed of a tree that never dies no matter what.
50 For details of these naming ceremony process, see earlier discussion in chapter 2, p. 49-53
Prior to 1974, the missionaries described the rituals of the Id\-ma child naming ceremony as “idol worship, evil and satanic”\(^5\(^\)\(^2\) which every Id\-ma Christians was instructed not to take part in. Not only did the missionaries forbid Id\-ma Christians from the practice of child naming ceremony, they did all the could possibly do to stop this practice in the whole of Id\-ma. Their first approach was to eradicate this custom as they viewed it as sinful and contrary to the word of God.\(^5\(^\)\(^3\) Their second attempt was what Groves in his book *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* described as “deferred probation”.\(^5\(^\)\(^4\) That is, the missionaries had hoped that through education the Id\-ma would themselves prohibit this rite. The missionary antagonistic attitude toward this important cultural practice, resulted in producing many hypocritical Id\-ma Christians at that time, as many of them would secretly undertake the cultural practise of the naming ceremony\(^5\(^\)\(^5\) before bringing such children to the missionaries for baptism.

However, as soon as the missionaries left Id\-ma in 1974, the Id\-ma Christians began to think seriously about ways in which Christianity could be made to adapt to this Id\-ma cultural practice of naming ceremony. This quest on what to do with regards to this matter continued until 1982 when at the annual synod of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese that was held in Methodist Church Ipu\-le Otukpa that a solution was found when the synod unanimously voted for the adaptation of the cultural rites of the Id\-ma naming ceremony in place of the service of child

\(^{51}\) Ibid.,
\(^{52}\) Hutchinson Journal 1928.
\(^{53}\) Ibid.
dedication and thanksgiving of mothers in the Church. A Diocesan Faith and Order Committee was requested to suggest an order of service for the naming ceremony of the child for the following synod. Their recommendations were presented at the next synod in Otukpo in 1983. This was accepted by the synod, resulting in the Order of Service for the Child Naming Ceremony in Iduma. The result of what happened in Iduma spread to other parts of the Conference Area of the Methodist Church Nigeria resulting in the Conference and Order Committee of the Methodist Church Nigeria drawing an order of service for child naming ceremony for the whole country.

The following chart illustrates how Christianity was reshaped to adapt to the Iduma cultural practice of child naming ceremony, thereby making itself at home with the Iduma.

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55 See chapter 2, p. 49ff for details of these ceremonies.
56 See Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese Minutes of synod, 1982.
57 The writer thought out this Chart and the subsequent ones in this chapter. In order to fully understand the sequence of events in this chart, see earlier discussion in chapter two, p. 50 ff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Sequence of Events in Idọma Traditional Child Naming Ceremony</th>
<th>How Christianity Adapted and Developed these Traditional Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The elders gather in semi circle early in the morning on the day the child is to be named&lt;sup&gt;58&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The Church elders and Community elders gather in semi circle early in the morning of the naming ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The soothsayer requested by the elders to consult the world of the Spirit if it is right for the child to be brought out for the ceremony. Libation poured to the ancestors.</td>
<td>The Minister is requested to pray before before the child is brought out. No libation, but further prayers are made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Child is brought out of the mother's room by a family friend.</td>
<td>Child brought out of the mother's room by one of the elders that is specially related to the child's parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The holy man consults the oracle for the name of the ancestor that returned to the family in the child.</td>
<td>The minister asks for the child's name from the parents of the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The child is named in the following order.</td>
<td>The child is named and dedicated in the following order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1. Child lifted up by the priest or the most senior elder.</td>
<td>Child lifted by the Minister or an elder in the absence of a minister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2. The child while still in the arms of the Priest is given the following symbolic gifts with some words and prayers.</td>
<td>While in the arms of the minister, the child is given the following symbolic gifts with some words and prayers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 <em>Ikponuta</em> - symbol of fertility and multiplicity&lt;sup&gt;59&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><em>Ikponuta</em> – prayer of fertility and multiplicity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 <em>Ije</em> - symbol of wealth</td>
<td><em>Ije</em> - prayer for wealth and fame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3 <em>Een rkp</em> - symbol of friendship</td>
<td><em>Een rkp</em> - for friendship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.4 <em>An zoole</em> symbol for peace and healing</td>
<td><em>An zoole</em> prayer for peace and healing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>58</sup> This would normally take place on the seventh day that the child was born.

<sup>59</sup> These traditional objects used in 5.2.1 to 5.2.6 above are *Ikponuta* this is a traditional alligator pepper. Others are *Ije* money; *Een rkp* water, *An zoole* a traditional palm oil; *ọma* salt, and *Enme* is bitter kolanut.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5.2.5 ̄mā</th>
<th>symbol of sweetness and preservation of the Idêmà society from decay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2.6 ĝrmè</td>
<td>symbol of life, the bitter and sweet aspect of our human life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ̄mà- prayer for preservation from evil the world, corruption, and a life of holiness in the Idêmà community |
| ĝrmè- prayer for life and all the struggles of life |

| 6 | The child is shown to the elders, named, and his name repeated three times by all that are present. |
| 7 | The priest dedicate the child at Ipó ̄mà. |
| 8 | The child is circumcised, or her ears pierced if she is a girl. |
| 9 | Feasting and celebration |

The repetition on the name three times, traditionally signifies the Idêmà recognition of the presence of ̄wéiko supreme God, the Ancestors and those in the world of the spirit, and the people present at the occasion. The Christians on their part interpret this to mean the acknowledgement of the Triune God or the Trinity, Father Son and The Holy Ghost.

Ikó ̄mà is the family religious shrine.

In facing the east, the minister identifies with the Idêmà belief that life begins in the east, just like sunrise.
Nevertheless, the Idoma Christians did not allow this difference to destroy the major agreement they have reached over this matter. This difference showed how difficult the process on contextualisation could be.

The adaptation of this Idoma naming ceremony by Christianity to translate herself into Idoma context not only resulted in increased church attendance and membership, but contributed immensely to the entire liturgy of the Methodist church Nigeria in the publication of the Order of the Service of Child Naming Ceremony by the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church Nigeria.⁶³

A closer examination of this Idoma cultural practice with the biblical traditions reveals something of similarity rather than diversity.⁶⁴ This led us to conclude that had the missionaries to Idoma handled this aspect of Idoma culture and traditions sympathetically, they would have provided a foundation for a positive and effective interaction between Christianity and the Idoma, which would have resulted in an earlier and bigger growth of the Church in Idoma.

7. 4. MARRIAGE

This is the second major contributing factor to Idoma Christianity today. As earlier indicated a lot of work and preparation, coupled with extreme care, is put into marriage process in Idoma.⁶⁵ The missionaries that came to Idoma had a lot of difficulties in accepting or recognising the Idoma traditional marriage and marriage

⁶⁴ See for example the presentation of Jesus in the Temple with the accompanying gifts in Luke 2:21-39 in which Jesus was presented in the Temple on the eight day according to the Jewish tradition of child’s naming ceremony and presentation, and that of John the Baptist in Luke 1:59 on the eight day.
⁶⁵ See earlier discussion in Chapter 2, p. 54-63 for the various stages of the Idoma marriage ceremonies.
ceremonies. They described it as “an idol worship which is not in line with the scripture”. They described bride price paid to parents as “selling of the Idroma daughters”, and the men who paid the bride price were viewed as “buying” and not marrying their wives. They therefore insisted that in order for the Idroma young people, who married in the traditional manner to remain Christians, they must not live together as husband and wives even after the traditional marriage ceremonies as permitted within the Idroma culture. They could only do so when they were brought to the church in white western wedding gowns and suits and the western so called ‘ordinance of marriage’ vows were taken. The missionaries took such a position despite the fact that a church wedding is neither a necessary part of Christian faith, nor was it an integral part of Idroma. Even though the teaching in the New Testament about Christian marriage is without the slightest allusion to a church wedding ceremony, the missionaries insisted on church weddings in Idroma where such practice is very strange. Failure to carry out a church wedding would result in such marriage not being recognised by the church and the couple concerned would be branded as living in sin. They also stood the danger of being suspended and consequently expelled from the fellowship of the church until such a marriage was regularised in the church according to the missionary standard of marriage

This created a lot of problems for the Idroma Christians and raised some very serious questions as to when is a marriage a marriage in Idroma? Was it when the Idroma young people are married in accordance with the Idroma traditional marriage system or when a western cultural practice of church wedding, that was introduced into

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66 Hutchinson Diary, 1928.
67 Ibid., 1930.
Christianity is adhered to by the church in Iduma? The Iduma people were not the only Christians in Africa that were facing this problem of missionaries not recognising their marriage rites and ceremonies. For example, the missionaries that worked in some parts of eastern, central and southern Africa had problems with African traditional marriage. The Anglican churches in these parts of Africa discovered that, the vast problem of suspension from church membership has to do with marriage cases. The so-called ‘Christian marriage’ was not working in Africa. This led to the commissioning of a special report on Christian marriage in Africa by the Anglican Archbishops of Cape Town, Central Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda chaired by Adrian Hastings at the Lusaka Conference of Archbishops in February 1970 to look at a wider problem of African marriage, such as sex, marriage ceremonies and polygamy.

In his report on Christian marriage in Africa, published as *Christian Marriage in Africa*, in 1973, Adrian Hastings, in locating the missionary problems with African traditional marriage within the historical perspective, suggested that, this problem had been with the church for 144 years at the time of his report. He cited an example in which J.H. Oldham, the first editor on the *International Review of Missions* enquired about the most pressing problem missionaries had throughout the world. The majority of the missionaries, mostly from Africa mentioned the marriage problem.68 In such an enquiry a female missionary wrote, “Not only the most pressing, but the most puzzling, the most insistent, the most far reaching of the problems, is that of Christian marriage in the heathen world. It is ever present”.69 Hastings concluded, “In the

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decades before 1914 and the decades since, the same thing has been reported time after time".70

Prior to the Methodist missionaries setting foot on Idzoma soil in 1924, they were already aware of the complexity and the perplexity of the issue of the ‘ecclesiastical absolutization of marriage norms which had developed in the course of the centuries in the western church and were now being applied in a very different social and cultural context’71 such as Idzoma. These western marriage norms were monogamy, absolute indissolubility, and the celebration of marriage by Christians in a form recognised by the church.72

While it may be argued that the Christian teaching on marriage from the very beginning was conceived in terms of monogamy, there is no clear condemnation of the African polygamous marriage or polygamy in general any where either in the Old or the New Testaments. There were little cases of polygamy in Apostolic times.73 There were no allusions to church weddings any where in the New Testament.

Before the missionaries came to Idzoma, Christian marriage in Africa as a whole had been given a legal status in most colonial territories by the civil law as “marriage under the ordinance” withdrawn from the authorities of the customary courts.74 Any marriage outside this was regarded as not valid. The question that constantly disturbed

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70 A. Hastings, Christian Marriage, p. 4.
71 Ibid.
72 For classic discussions on these three issues, see Adrian Hastings, Christian Marriage in Africa, SPCK, 1973, especially chapter 1. It is however pointed out that, the concept of ‘absolute indissolubility’ of marriage is not a general western norm of Christian marriage. This is only unique to the Catholic and Anglican Churches.
73 See 1Thim 3:2.
the Iduma people was, if two Christians sincerely enter into marriage in a clear, traditional Iduma marriage ceremony and openly or publicly manifested such marriage, how could an outsider deny that this is not a valid Christians marriage? Does the presence or absence of white western wedding gown and the church’s blessing effect the validity of a marriage? What were the Iduma doing or practising in their traditional marriage rites that would not be found in the Bible, which is the normative and final authority as far as the Iduma Christians are concerned in matters of faith, doctrine, practice or practical Christian living?

The Iduma Christians were not the only Christians in Africa that were concerned about the awkward role of the culturally inappropriate church wedding in African Christianity. For example, in his paper, “For The Sake of Christian Marriage: Abolish Church Wedding” which was later published in Rites Of Passages in Contemporary Africa, Klaus Fiedler a lecturer in Church History and Missiology in Chancellor College, University of Malawi, strongly suggested that church wedding should be abolish in African Christianity. He argued, and perhaps, rightly too, that “No Church wedding is needed to make a Christian marriage”. In place of church weddings, he advocated an African tradition marriage to be accepted as a valid Christian marriage. He said, “…Churches should accept any genuine African marriage as valid marriage”. This he further argued would result in what he described as “real inculturation” of Christianity in Africa. As noted in our earlier discussion the marriage practice in Iduma was based on parental relationships, family relationships

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 See chapter 2, p. 69-61.
or ties, rituals and religious ceremonies, moral attitudes, hard work, social responsibilities and dowry payments or bride price. Also Idoma marriage is intended to be a permanent union between the man and the woman, the two parental families and relations. It is also related to the continuance of the society, therefore, having as many children as possible is of paramount importance. Childlessness can be a serious problem in Idoma marriage. The same could be said of most of the marriage ceremonies in the Scripture. Why were the Idoma people treated differently by the missionaries who claimed to be custodians of the scripture being brought to the Idoma people? There is no justification in the scripture for the imposition of western form of marriage on the Idoma people. The battles that were constantly going on in the minds of Idoma young men and women during the missionary period, were as to how they understand themselves as Idoma in relation to marriage, and as to how they realise the missionary ideal of Christian marriage within the their own Idoma society and cultural traditional value? From our discussions so far, we observed that as far as the missionaries were concerned, a wedding in the church has been the only symbol of Christian marriage. In keeping the tradition of church wedding in Idoma, the missionaries have pleased only a few at most and truly burdened the majority of Idoma Christians. Idoma Christians who never wed in the church even though they may have lived sound Christian married lives within their cultural context, were considered in the eyes of the missionaries as not being properly married. They were seen to be living in sin and deserved to be cut off from the fellowship and the communion of the church.

79 See for example, Isaac’s marriage ceremonies that involved family ties, bride price and religious ceremonies in genesis Chapter 24.
A completely dualized pattern of marriage was imposed on the Idoma to the
detriment of the credibility of the Idoma traditional marriage rites and ceremonies.
This led many Idoma Christians to reject the church marriage and as result were
deprived of communion and full fellowship in the church for having no valid
marriage. As a result of the missionary stand on the Idoma traditional marriage, most
of the young people in Idoma rejected church marriages in whatever form, and those
who accepted the church marriage became hypocrites as they would first of all partake
in the traditional marriage rites before turning to the church for the western wedding
ceremonies. Once discovered by the church authorities as having subjected
themselves to the traditional marriage rites before the church marriage, they would
consequently be suspended from the fellowship of the church. The Idoma Christians
became very anxious as what to do in resolving this problem, that would enable
Idoma Christians to believe and hold their marriages as Christian marriages.

As soon as the missionaries left Idoma in 1974\textsuperscript{80}, the Idoma set out very quickly to
try to resolve this problem by persuading the church to adapt the Idoma cultural
marriage rites and ceremonies in order to solve this painful problem that has been a
bottle neck in the life of the church in Idoma. How was this done? At the annual
synod of the northern district [now dioceses of the Benue and the North] held in Jos,
Plateau State Nigeria this problem was extensively debated after which the synod
recommended three options for the church in Idoma as follows,
First, that a formula be found where church blessing or marriage vows be inserted within the Idzoma customary marriage rites and ceremonies at the home of the bride or the bridegroom with the minister and the representatives of the church present.

Second was for the Idzoma traditional cultural marriage ceremonies to be fused with the church service to be held on the day the bride price is being paid at the home of the bride.

The third would be for a church blessing to be given to the couple in the church on some subsequent day.81

The Church chose the second option and produced the following formula that is illustrated below based on the Idzoma cultural context82 and their studies of marriages in the Bible.83

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81 Methodist Church Nigeria, Northern District [now Diocese of Benue], Minutes of Synod 1975.
82 See earlier discussions on the Idzoma marriage in Chapter 2, p. 52 ff.
83 These were the marriages of Isaac in Genesis chapter 24, and that of Jacob in chapters 29 and 30 and the marriage ceremony in John chapter 2, which the committee studied before making their recommendations to the synod. In all of these marriages, especially the ones in the Old Testament, there were parental and family relationship ties that were involved. They also included bride price, religious ceremonies and feasting and celebrations.
The man consults parents when woman of choice is found

Parental investigations

Intended couple brought together in the presence of both mothers, during which a proposal is made to the woman in a gift of two kobo, which she accepts, and pass on to her mother if she consents to the marriage

Date fixed for dowry payment

Dowry paid in a ceremony that involved the both families and relatives. Woman given to the father of the man to give to his son, elders pronounce blessings, followed with feast, celebration and dances and gifts to the couple.

Animal or bird sacrifice at Ikpo

Man consults parents and church elders when woman of choice is found

Parental and church elders investigations

Intended couple brought together in the presence of both mothers and women’s fellowship president, during which a proposal is made to the woman in a gift of two kobo, which the woman accepts and passes on to her mother if she consents to marrying her suitor.

Date fixed for dowry payment

Dowry paid in a ceremony that involved both families, relatives, the minister and elders of the church. Woman given to the man’s father to give to his son, elders pronounce blessings the minister called in and made the couple to reaffirm their commitment to one another and promise to live together for life no matter what in the presence of God, relatives, friends and church elders. This is followed with feast, celebrations, dances and gifts to the couple. 84

No animal or bird sacrifice.

This formula seemed in our view to have provided the required bridge between the Idọma and Christianity as far as marriage and marriage ceremony, rites and the validity of marriage were concerned. The Idọma Christians were very pleased with this formula, as they gave away nothing in their cultural marriage practices, except

84 During the dowry payment and in all the marriage rites that followed the couple would be dressed in their traditional cloths. For full details of all the sequence of events in the Idọma traditional marriage ceremonies which were adapted by Idọma Christianity, see chapter 2, p.52-61.
that they had to let go with the practice of animal or bird sacrifice at the *ikpo*$w*$

This formula recognised the use of Idɔma traditional cloths at marriages, and there was no insistence on extra church wedding ceremonies. However, there were some older conservative Idɔma Christians who would insist on the western style of wedding. Those are in the minority and will hopefully fade away with time from the Idɔma church.

It is observed from the chart above that the church was able to adapt the Idɔma cultural marriage rites and ceremonies almost in full in order to translate herself into the Idɔma context, thereby making herself Idɔma Christianity. Such adaptation of the Idɔma cultural marriage ceremony by Idɔma Christians has many advantages for the church in Idɔma. First, it enabled the church to resolve her old missionary problem of the long-standing conflict between the Idɔma cultural marriage ceremonies and the western marriage custom that was introduced by the missionaries into Christianity in Idɔma. Secondly, the Idɔma young men and women who are married under this formula could now live together as husband and wife without any stigma of living in sin hanging over their head, nor were they any longer threatened with being cut off from the fellowship of the church as the result of their marriage, nor were they in any danger of expulsion from church membership. Thirdly, it had economical advantage for the couple and their parents as they would now be hosting only one reception or marriage feast instead of the previous two. Fourthly, there was a 95% reduction in cases of church discipline as a result of the so-called improper marriage according to the missionary ideal of Christian marriage through church wedding. The church was

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$^85$ This is a family shrine built under a specific tree called $w*$ meaning source being before which family and other religious sacrifices are performed, giving it the name $ikpo$- that is the foot of the
able to translate into the Idmma culture as it had been in the other cultures before it reached the Idmma people. Finally, the community became more involved in the church as their culture was respected and accepted as a pattern of Christian practice and rites, resulting in increased church membership by over eighty percent over a period of seven years.36

7.4.1 POLYGAMY

Closely related to the marriage problem is the problem of polygamy. As earlier discussed, the Idmma are a polygamous society.37 The problem of polygamy is not specific to Idmma Christianity. Adrian Hastings in his report on Christian marriage correctly noted that, “polygamy has been at the heart of the whole marriage debate within the church in Africa from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1970s...”38 In his classic discussion of the matter, he outlined this debate in chapter one of his book, and gave a considerable time to the part that polygamy plays in an African society.39

Among the Idmma people polygamy is viewed and accepted as permanent union contracted under the Idmma customary rites of marriage and under a form of law. It is recognised by the people as a legitimate marriage that is entered upon with a life-long intention, providing a permanent home for the woman and legitimate status for her children.

source being.
37 See earlier discussion in chapter two, p. 53 ff.
But this was not the position of the missionaries that worked in Idmaf. Though, they recognised the problem that polygamy posed in the Christian culture conflict in Idmaf, yet no attempts were made to build a bridge between these views. Rather the missionaries in Idmaf in line with all other western missionaries of this period emphasised that monogamous marriage is the only one within God’s will and should be for all mankind including the Idmaf polygamous society.90

They therefore, viewed polygamy as sin and adultery. The Idmaf on their part viewed polygamy as one form of marriage and monogamy another, with each having their advantages and disadvantages, and they are appropriate to the different societies concerned. Even though the Idmaf viewed and accepted polygamy as a normal marriage specific to their society, it was the will of the missionaries that prevailed, resulting in the problem of hypocrisy on the part of Idmaf Christians as noted earlier in our discussion.91 How does Idmaf Christianity respond to this issue of polygamy?

At the annual synod of the church in March 1977, held at Jesus College Otukpo, it was resolved that, “detailed attention should be given to the issue of polygamy, with much emphasis on the scriptural position on the matter”.92 A committee of eight with two members each drawn from the four Idmaf Circuits was set up by the synod for this purpose.93 Mr. Agbiti, a school headmaster, chaired the committee94. The committee was to carry out some study of the situation having in mind the biblical

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90 Norcross Journal 1932.
91 See earlier discussion in chapter 5. P. 188 ff.
92 Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Minutes of Synod, 1977.
93 These are Otukpo, Iga, Odoba and Igede Circuits. Two of these Circuits have become a Diocese of their own today; these are Otukpo and Igede.
94 Mr Agbiti sadly died in 1997 of a heart attack.
position on the matter, and the Idoma cultural context and report their finding to the synod the following year.95

After extensive study and consultation throughout Idomaland, the committee came up with the following findings and recommendations,

That the Old Testament presents the Idoma Christians with a number of examples of polygamous marriage, such as the marriages of Abraham, Solomon, Jacob and David. In no place in the Old Testament was the practice of polygamy condemned, but accepted by the Israelite society that practised it.

There is no clear explicit word in the New Testament recognising the existence of polygamy or condemning it.

The committee, therefore reject the missionary position that viewed polygamy as sin, comparable to adultery, and consequently forbade polygamists from baptism, communion and full membership of the church.

The committee affirms that, polygamy is one form of marriage, especially as it applies to the Idoma people, while monogamy is another form of marriage peculiar to the... missionary culture. Each has their advantages and disadvantages and is essential to the different types of societies and cultures. Therefore, to impose on the Idoma Christians who have accepted life long obligations by plural or polygamous marriage, which he is not entitled to withdraw is unscriptural and it is a strange way of preparing people for baptism. Women and children suffer in enforced separation of marriages to meet the missionary baptismal criteria.

To end a polygamous marriage in the name of Christ who said nothing especially to condemn it, at the expense of effecting a divorce, which Christ explicitly forbade, is to pay too high price to adhere to a missionary conformity with one part of the Christian marriage pattern. And to argue that, polygamy makes it impossible for those who believe in Christ to be baptised is not in conformity with the Bible. We recommend that a believing polygamy can be baptised with his wives and children while fully continuing in his polygamous marriage.

However, those who have adhered to the Church’s teaching on monogamy and married as such should remain within the bounds of their commitment and not take a second wife for any reason, except for a sympathetic case for Idoma Christians who at present in conformity with their custom decide with the willing agreement of the first wife to take a second wife in the circumstances of childlessness and the widowhood of a sister-in-law.96

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95 For full details of their term of reference, see Methodist Church Nigeria, Minutes of Synod, 1977.
These findings and recommendations were accepted by the Synod for implementation after careful deliberations and prayers. However, the practice of these recommendations has some advantages and disadvantages for the church. It caused a lot of Idzama people for whom the issue of polygamy had been a stumbling block to their accepting Christianity, to become Christians and thereby increased the church numerically. It also enabled some polygamists who have been denied baptism to accept baptism, and helped eradicate hypocrisy from the church. It also became a divisive issue in the church that resulted in many members leaving the membership of the Methodist church for other denominations that are completely opposed to polygamy. At the Otukpo synod in 1983 the conflict was finally resolved five years later by the church adopting a position in which polygamists are accepted as adherents, but not full members, while the wife and the children of a polygamous marriage are accorded full fellowship and leadership roles in the church.

7.5 BURIAL RITES

Another area in which the church adapted to the Idzama people and their culture is in the area of the Idzama rites of Ikpo daokwuoka. Before the Idzama ever made contact with Christianity, they would not bury their dead unless there was an oracle in which the ancestors and other divinities are consulted to determine the cause of death. An elaborate ritual of ikpo daokwuoka would follow this. For the missionaries that worked in Idzama, ikpo daokwuoka and its ritualistic practices were nothing but “an idol worship, veneration of the dead and superstitious beliefs and practices that must

97 See Methodist Church Nigeria, Minutes of Synod, 1978.
98 These denominations are, The Church of God in Many Lands CMML, and The Assemblies of God Church.
99 See Methodist Church Nigeria, Minutes of Synod, 1983.
100 See earlier notes in chapter 2, p. 65.
not be given any place in the Christian church”. Such reaction from Hutchinson did not come as a surprise. Attitudes of many mainline missionary bodies had been hostile towards Christians taking part in such rituals, even though they were aware that such rituals or related ones were very widely practised in Africa. For the Iduma this was a very crucial and significant practice as it enabled them to uncover the cause of death within their community and provided them with ways of handling the problems that are related to death, such as witchcraft. It allowed the imposition of the appropriate judgement or penalty or fine on whoever the elders judged to be the cause of the death. The Iduma sometimes looked at death as unreal or even unnatural. They express this in the common Iduma idiom when death is reported as Ikwu nwa nke o kwu a ọụ, meaning he or she did not die a natural death. Therefore, a solution must be found as to what or who was responsible for such a death. Ikpodaaawoooka became the only means of finding this out. This practice also helped them to accept the Iduma person’s journey of life from one stage to another.

In 1928, at the missionary consultation meeting in Igwumale, it was decided that Christians should not be allowed to take part in the Ikpodawoooka. This created a lot of tension right at the elementary stage of the mission work in Iduma. The missionaries took this stand perhaps, knowing full well that they have little hope of succeeding as this practice forms part of the basic cultural practice that forms the very foundation and the identity of the Iduma people.

The Iduma traditionalists responded by not allowing the Iduma Christians to come to their burials nor participate in any form in the process of grieving or mourning. Even

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101 Hutchinson Journal 1928.
when some of the people who died were Christians before their death, Christians would be driven away and in some cases beaten from where the corpse was being buried. There is a popular saying in Idzima, especially among the Otukpo people’s elders in relation to this tension between the local people and the Christians,

\[
\begin{align*}
edo \, ne \, zi \, yi \, al \, z, \, y \, zeyi \, a & \quad \text{when our child was alive} \\
o \, we \, aku \, aa & \quad \text{he or she belongs to you} \\
Ama \, na \, ab \, z, \, al \, \bar{b}anya & \quad \text{but now} \\
o \, we \, aku \, al \, z^{104} & \quad \text{he or she is ours}
\end{align*}
\]

What the elders meant by this saying was that when our child\textsuperscript{105} was living, he disobeyed us and came to you, but now that he is dead he is ours and we will bury him or her according to our burial rites.

Various attempts\textsuperscript{106} were made by the church to try and resolve this issue, but it continued to worsen. The questions that come to mind in a situation such as this are, what is a Christian burial? What pattern of burial did the scripture lay down for Christians? Was Christ Himself buried according to the Jewish burial ceremonies or not? What happened at the burial of Christians in the Hellenistic, and Roman world? Was the burial of Christians at that time according to the culture of the people or not? Due to the limitation of this chapter, we could not investigate the scripture in detail in

\textsuperscript{102} For a detailed discussion of this argument, see for example, James L Cox, (ed.,) \textit{Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa.} Cardiff, Cardiff academic Press, 1998.

\textsuperscript{103} Albert Nwosu’s Journal, 1928.

\textsuperscript{104} The sayings of the Idzima elders were intended to drive away Christians from their burials. The moment the Christians heard this saying, they had to leave or risked being forcefully driven away.

\textsuperscript{105} A child is not understood in terms of age in Idzima. So long as your father is still living you are considered as a child in Idzima. Children are used here to refer to both adults and young people.

\textsuperscript{106} Some of these attempts included Christians giving a verbal will to their relatives that when they die, the church would bury them. But, in a situation where the Christians were not even allowed to come to the burial place who would implement such verbal will? Therefore the conflict continues. For example, the writer recalls an experience in 1975 when Mrs \(\ddot{\text{N}}\text{ma} \) Obande, whose son was a medical doctor trained in England gave a verbal will to her relatives for her to be buried as a Christian. The attempts to implement such will resulted in an open fight, where we were beaten up and driven away in disgrace.
order to suggest answers to these questions. However, if the answers to these questions are affirmative, why was the Idọma treated differently?

This tension between the Idọma and Christianity in terms of burial rites continued for 50 years until 1978, when at the annual synod of the Church that was held in Methodist High School, Igwumale the matter was finally resolved. After an extensive debate on this issue of constant and sometimes violent clashes between Christians and the Idọma people over burial rites and ceremonies, it was resolved at the 1978 synod of the church that, “a committee be set up to review the Idọma burial rites and find ways in which the church and the Idọma community could come to an agreement.”

The committee had one year to report their finding to the synod.

At the Iga Okpaya Synod of 1979, the committee reported to the synod that, “there were open windows of give and take, which if explored, the matter of burial rites in Idọma could be resolved and the church could be seen as belonging to the Idọma people”,. This resulted in a bigger committee being set up with membership drawn from all parts of Idọma land and given two years to present their findings to the synod of the church.

After two years of the committee’s work, their recommendations and a working structure were presented to the annual synod of the Church that met at the Methodist High School, Igede in March 1981 as follows,
The committee recommends that, no Christian or non-Christian burial should take place in Idomaland with the ucolo [rituals] of Ikpoelaokwuooka, except the burial of an infant.

We also recommend the following working structure and procedure in the Ikpoelaokwuooka, which in our view took into consideration the Idomalma cultural rites of burial and that of the Christian faith that has come to Idomalma.¹⁰⁹

A comparative table is provided overleaf.

¹⁰⁷ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, Minutes of Synod, 1978.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1979.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1981.
### The Ìdòma Traditional Burial Rites

- **Messages sent round at the news of death, and elders gather in the home of the deceased**
- **The corpse dressed and seated on ògàda** in ìtákpa with women seated round the corpse, some crying others singing farewell songs
- **Elders and Òjìlìa** gather at ùpu
- **Corpse in ìtákpa, gifts of money and cloths given to the deceased to use in the next world. Various relatives send messages through the deceased for their relations in the next world**
- **Elders give thanks to the Alekwu and ancestors for the life of the deceased**
- **Icìca songs, and some elderly women sing farewell songs and dance round the ìtákpa with their hands on each others waist**
- **Òwùnàekwù appears and demonstrates**
- **Ìko'dàòkwùòoka takes place as described on pages 68-74 of chapter two**

### Ìdòma Christianity Burial Rites

- **Church bell rings at news of the death of a Christian, messages sent round to relatives and near by churches, church elders gather in the home of the deceased**
- **Corpse dressed up, and seated on ògàda in ìtákpa, surrounded by relatives and women’s fellowship members, singing choruses and dancing**
- **Elders, Òjìlìa and Christians gather at ùpu**
- **Dead body in ìtákpa, gifts of money and cloths given, messages sent through the corpse to the other relations in the next world.**
- **The minister’s opening prayer of thanksgiving for the life of the Christian**
- **Women fellowship sings and dances with other Christians, both male and female round ìtákpa. A song of comfort and farewell is sung**
- **Òwùnàekwù appears and demonstrates but mindful of Christians**
- **Ìko'dàòkwùòoka takes place as described on pages 68-74 but with slight variations, for example, no slaughtering of the ram on the grave, but rather cook it for those who came to attend the funeral for them to eat before they return to their homes**

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10 Ògàda is a traditional Ìdòma chair that only the most senior elder seats on.
11 Ìtákpa is the traditional assembly hall at the centre of the compound.
12 Òjìlìa is the assembly of the people.
13 The meeting place of the community.
14 For details of Alekwu, see earlier discussion in chapter three, p. 101-104.
15 See chapter 2 p. 69 for details of Òwùnàekwù. 
Corpse placed in \(\text{\textit{jpa}}\)\(^{116}\) and akplata and taken for burial in the grave that is traditionally prepared

Corpse placed in \(\text{\textit{jpa}}\) or coffin and taken for burial in the grave that is traditionally prepared

Buried with some sacrifices of either a fowl or ram or tortoise

Body buried with no sacrifice, except animals that are killed for food for those who attended the burial.

\(\text{\textit{Ci}}\text{-\textit{du}}\) planted at the centre of the grave.\(^{117}\)

Cross planted at the centre of the grave

The recommendation and the working structure were accepted and adapted by the Synod for implementation. It is observed that both rites involved sending messages to those concerned at the news of death, the gathering of the people, the dressing and seating of the deceased in \(\text{\textit{Itakpa}},\) talking to the deceased, songs, sending of messages to relatives in the world of the living dead, thanksgiving, and \(\text{\textit{ikpelaokwuoka}}\).\(^{118}\)

However, there are slight differences between the both patterns. For example, while in the traditional burial rites, the deceased are buried in \(\text{\textit{jpa}}\); in the Christian rites, they are buried either in \(\text{\textit{jpa}}\) or coffin. Secondly, in the traditional rites, there were either animal, bird or reptile sacrifices, in the Christian rites there were no such sacrifices. In place of \(\text{\textit{xi}}\text{-\textit{du}}\) in the traditional rites we have the cross in the Christian rites. This is very significant, as \(\text{\textit{xi}}\text{-\textit{du}}\) is usually taken from a tree called \(\text{\textit{vw}}\), a shrine where children are named at a certain location called \(\text{\textit{ikpo}}\text{-\textit{vw}}\) meaning the foot of the source being. According to \(\text{\textit{Idema}}\) tradition, the planting of \(\text{\textit{xi}}\text{-\textit{du}}\) on the grave symbolically signifies that one would return to him who is the creator. On the

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\(^{116}\) \(\text{\textit{jpa}}\) is the \(\text{\textit{Idema}}\) traditional burial cloth.

\(^{117}\) Report of the Committee on Burial to the Annual Synod of Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese that was held at the Methodist High School Amin Igede, March 1982.

\(^{118}\) The practice of \(\text{\textit{ikpelaokwuoka}}\) is not entirely unique to the \(\text{\textit{Idema}}\) people only, but other African countries as well. For example, professor Jude Ongong’a of Kenyatta University, Nairobi Kenya, observed a similar practice among the Luo in his article, “The River-Lake Luo Phenomenon of
Christian part, the Cross among other things symbolises a life of sacrifice, a life that is given in order that others can live. At the burial of Christians in Id∴ma, a cross is planted at the centre of the grave to symbolise a life given to the deceased and the deceased in turn has to give up this earthly physical life in order to live with Christ. The adaptation of this central cultural issue in the life of the Id∴ma by the Christians demonstrates yet again how the church was able to translate itself into the Id∴ma context..

From the chart above, it is observed that Christianity has adapted over 90% of the Id∴ma traditional burial procedures and events. The Id∴ma people on their part became comfortable with Christianity and allowed it to penetrate deeper into the society and the Id∴ma life and culture. For example, they were willing to give up the ritual of animal, bird, or tortoise sacrifice at the burial ceremony of Christians in order to accommodate Christianity.

After the initial burial in Id∴ma, there are still third day, seventh day, fourteenth day and twenty-first day burial ceremonies. Id∴ma Christianity was able to match this in their third, seventh, fourteenth, and twenty-first day remembrance services of praise and celebrating the life of the Christian whom had gone to be with the Lord.

The final issue we will consider in this process of the Id∴ma development of Christianity is the Id∴ma Christian liturgy.

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119 There are still people who would not give up this sacrifice for anything.
7. 6. LITURGY

What do we mean by the Liturgy of Idzma Christianity? For the purpose of our working definition, we would define Idzma liturgy as the Idzma contextual way of approaching >wecio\(^{120}\) ‘God’. It is the means by which the Idzma Christians express themselves, especially in a congregational setting before >wecio in their acts of worship. It is also the means by which the Idzma Christians find a link with >wecio and communicate with Him. Taking all these definitions together, by Idzma liturgy, we mean the total Idzma contextual way of worshipping, communicating and approaching >wecio-God.

From the Idzma first made contact with Christianity until 1974 their liturgy fell short of our definitions above. This was because the Idzma liturgy up to 1974 was a simple loyalty to the foreign patterns of worship based on the Methodist Book of Offices imported to Idzma by the missionaries which the Idzma used in their worship without understanding. It was a very frustrating liturgy that did not spring originally from the cultic needs and spiritual temperament or realities of the Idzma people. Consequently, it failed to meet the liturgical needs of the Idzma Christians who became undernourished as result. Just as Idowu when speaking on a related issue about Nigeria in his book, *Towards An Indigenous Church*, which is also applicable to the Idzma situation, correctly noted,

> Spiritual suitability for Nigerians is not found in...the Methodist recession of it according to the Book of Offices, as it is imported intact into Nigeria. To the generality of Nigerians, it is fast becoming little more than cold formalism and directed away from their needs.... It was not written for Nigeria and the Nigerians. It was not intended originally ‘for export’ except probably in so far as it would serve colonists of specific outreaches of England. That is why its

\(^{120}\) See earlier discussion on >wecio in chapter 3, p 83-92.
language, its phraseology, its particular references, all proclaim its origin and the end for which it was designed.\textsuperscript{121}

Christianity in Æma should be the faith that affords the Æma the means of worshipping Æico- God as Æma, that is, in a way which is compatible with the Æma spiritual temperament of singing to the glory of God in the Æma way, such as singing with dancing, clapping of hands, shouts of praise and drums and playing of Æma musical instruments to the worship of their God. This also includes praying to God and hearing God’s word in the Æma idiom, which is natural and intelligible to them. It should be a faith which is the spiritual home of Æma Christians, in which they can be said to breathe an atmosphere of Æma contextual spiritual freedom.

In discussing this section on liturgy, we will be focusing on one example of the hymnody of the church, in illustrating the weakness of the Western liturgies imported into Æma, and how Æma developed her hymnody to make her liturgy distinctively Æma Christian liturgy.

7.6. 1 Æma Hymnody

For fifty years the missionaries had imposed on Æma Christians western music, which they tried fruitlessly to make Æma appreciate in the singing of such hymns. Time and again, young Æma Christians have been constituted into an English style choir and have been made to sing complicated English anthems in English which they hardly understand themselves. Perhaps, it would be correct to suggest that, in some of such cases, both the choir and the congregation and even the minister could not comprehend what the song was all about. As Idowu rightly noted, “When hymns,
psalms or canticles are translated from English into Nigerian languages and then sung in European tunes, then we find ourselves attaining the limit of cultic atrocity.\textsuperscript{122}

Various reasons could be given as to the reasons why Idowu reached such conclusions, such as not conveying the right meaning and above all, some of these songs that were imported to Nigeria, Ìdàma inclusive were poorly translated into Ìdàma in the Òku ìeso ye Ògwú Kráisi\textsuperscript{122} the songs of those who follow Christ are not meant for Ìdàma. For example, what use is a song such as

From Greenland’s icy mountains
From India’s coral strand,
Where Africa’s sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand.
From many an ancient river
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error’s chain.

What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft O’er Ceylon’s isle.
Though every prospect pleases
And only man is vile:
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strewn,
The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.\textsuperscript{124}

that is lustily sung in Ìdàma congregations for the wholesale consumption of the Ìdàma worshippers. A song such as the one cited above is certainly not suitable for Ìdàma Christianity not only as result of its deflative nuance, but also of its doubtful theology and geography. It is very questionable if it would be suitable anywhere either.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{123} This is a portion of selected hymns taken from the Methodist Hymnbook of and translated into Ìdàma.
\textsuperscript{124} See Methodist Hymn Book.
The question that comes to mind is what was wrong with the Idzoma music that it cannot be used regularly in worship in the church in Idzoma? What is the matter with Idzoma musical instruments such as *uba, dzkanga, umolo, ope, oke, engwu, dzgalumpe* that they cannot be used for worship in Idzoma? Why can't the Idzoma worship God with the freedom of the spirit and be totally free to worship with their language, body and emotion and really praise God as Idzoma rather than the cold motionless, upright standard position of moving up and down on the heels like the missionaries? Why must the Idzoma worship God outside the warmth of Idzoma context? While it is good to accept some heritage from the cultic life of churches in other parts of the world, such as the Methodist Church in Britain, from which the Idzoma church was grown, must we accept what may become thorns and choke the valuable good seed of our own indigenous culture? Are the Idzoma not endowed with the capacity to worship God in the beauty of holiness with their own Idzoma indigenous gifts and instruments?

When the missionaries left Idzoma in 1974, the time then came for the Idzoma to make a careful study of what was available on this subject and plan "carefully, reverently, meditatively, and constructively" \(^{126}\) to the end that, the best in Idzoma culture may be dedicated to the worship of wọlò. In our view, the Idzoma can only "worship in spirit and in truth" \(^{127}\) when such worship is carried out in their own idiom.

Ivan Chetwynd in his late realisation of the importance of the Idzoma's own songs and the life that those songs bring to the worship life of the Church and Christianity in Idzoma said,

\(^{125}\) These are drums, stringed instruments, and horn.

\(^{126}\) Idowu 1973:
One hopeful sign for the future is the number of young people being attracted into the church, ... their singing of choruses brings life to the church’s worship...and their...dancing and drumming is essential, if the church is to be truly African....the Church in Idoma must be truly African if it is to offer God the sacrifice He wants, which is the whole life of the Idoma people.128

Chetwynd was absolutely right in this observation that up to the time of his writing, after 49 years of the church’s presence in Idoma, the church life and worship were yet to be Idoma. And that the whole life of the Idoma people was still outside the church. Something had to be done in this regard, but by whom and how?

Many young Idoma Christians soon discovered by themselves that the way to truly worship God in Idoma was through the Idoma context. This realisation led many young Idoma Christians to contextually compose some indigenous Idoma Christian songs for worship. In matters of these indigenous Idoma church music, Alechenu Obiabo129, Peter Otulu, Cecilia Daniel and Rev. Ngbede and hosts of others have led the Idoma Christians to the achievement of liturgical worship in indigenous idiom. Some of their inspired contributions form a worthy model for aspirants in other African countries in the field of indigenous hymnography. We have now available in Idoma Christianity indigenous songs suitable for all occasions of church life in Idoma and for regular worship of the church. For example, at the coming of Christ for the Christians we have songs such as

128 I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 32.
the book of Isaiah chapter nine
verse six said to us
for our sake, a child is born for us
a child is born for us (twice)
a child that will free us
his name is the one that works wonders
He is a king, and a person that is forever
in His hand is every thing.\textsuperscript{120}

For the social problems of poverty, sufferings and pains in this world, the uselessness
of the pursuit of material things, the helpless and hopeless situation of the poor, and
life after death the Id\textsuperscript{ma} hope is raised beyond this current world and the next one
and the final absolute peace and satisfaction which only \textsuperscript{121}w\textsuperscript{ico}-God gives in the
following song

\textsuperscript{120} Alechemu Obiabo sadly died in a tragic motor accident on the 30th of October in 1987, but prior to
his death, he had composed many Id\textsuperscript{ma} indigenous songs for worship.
\textsuperscript{121} This song was composed by Mrs. C Daniel in 1976, and later reduced into writing by the Id\textsuperscript{ma}
Bible translation office. She has since then composed over two hundred indigenous Id\textsuperscript{ma} Christian
songs. This particular song is used during advent.
I went up and down in this world
I went to the east and the west
I went everywhere
I went up and down in this world
I went before trees and rivers
Looking for a place of rest, and pleasure
But there is no place of rest in the world.
The world has problems. (2 X)
Who is in the world that is happy, has joy without problem
that is totally trouble free?
The book of Job 14:2
Who ever is born into this world is in trouble all round.

Some truth in this matter.
The rich man lay in his room, he did not sleep but listening,
because of his vehicles that are running on the road.
Because of his wealth evil people plan toward him.
In his presence, they praise him but behind him he is an enemy to all of them, leading him to hire guards.

His guards speak evil of him sometimes.

If God does not guard a person who is to guard that person?

If God does not build a house and a man build, it will collapse.

Resting-place is what am asking for if you ask a wealthy person that has he peace? He will not agree.

The poor has no money.

He is without a person to help, he has problems.

who knows the poor that has peace?

Any time you see the poor he is in sorrow, and in deep thoughts day and night on how his children will eat food
before he himself will eat and clothe himself; his thoughts are many

sometimes he sits and cries and grumbles:

when will I be free of all these that I will rest and eat and drink

and chart with white heart

and sleep in peace?

That I will be fully dressed with otogwo, shoes

and perfumed myself?

But what the poor lacks fills the market and spills.

The person who is rich and not poor his money and cloths are enough for him.

But he stills has problems, sometimes he is sick, looks ahead

and pursues greater wealth with poverty pursuing behind.

There are three beds in this world.

One is a bed of suffering,

the other is bed of pleasure.

But the bed of death is the biggest of all.
But there is a time that a person would
lie in a bed of suffering
and sometimes bed of pleasure,
there are three place to live in life,
the house built with human hand
that people live inside,
in which people are sighing;
where people are shouting, God thou art
powerful!
If you go to the hospital and prison
you will hear this words
The third place, is home of the dead
in the grave and home of the ancestors
And heaven
where both poor and rich live
whatever you are, you will live
in this house
the big fat, fat kings of the world
have gone.
If ants eat a clay pot, when you see
a calabash, you fear for it
The wind has carried the stone for ever

I have been looking, and watching

to hear the voice that will say

I am completely free and peaceful

I have no problem, death is my friend

I have not heard any voice

The world has problems

It is beyond death

that we hope that there is rest and peace

For us.

The analysis of this song revealed many things about Idoma Christianity. From this song and other related ones, we observed that Idoma Christianity relied very heavily on the scripture for their liturgy and some of their theological articulations. It is very difficult generally to find an indigenous Idoma Christian song that will not take you directly to the scripture, or without making reference to the scripture. Most of the songs that were contextually composed were based on the Idoma concrete historical situations and the Bible. It could be convincingly suggested that the Idoma Christians are Bible-believing Christians. Those who couldn’t read the translated Idoma Bible kept the Bible text in the power of their memory. Although one is aware of the likelihood or potential failure of the power of memory sometimes, however in the

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131 This song is a literal transcript of a tape recording during fieldwork in Otukpo with Mr. Peter Otulu on the 26th August 1997. Though, this song and many more of its type are not published in book form yet, they are in wide circulation in all the churches of all denominations in Idoma. It is retained in the memory of the worshippers so they don’t need the written form at the moment. But as the power of memory sometimes fails, it is hoped that this song and others will soon be published in a book form and circulated in all the churches in Idoma.
Idọma situation it is a very effective means of holding on to what the Idọma Christians call *dë lëw* -ico-the word of God.

Secondly, we observe in these songs some articulations of Idọma Christian theology. For example, in the first song, we observed the Idọma through their indigenous Christian song enunciating that Christ has come to free them. We must be however cautious here as the theme of freedom has been a matter of theological controversy among scholars. For example, while the South African Christians in most cases perceived such freedom from the political perspective and viewed freedom in terms of freedom from apartheid oppression, the Idọma in most cases viewed such freedom that Christ brought at his coming as freedom from witches and witchcraft, pains and sickness, sufferings and economic hardships and all the ills that surround them.

From the second song it is noted that, only God has the ultimate ability to solve human problems. This was reflected in such idioms as *w* -ico *l gbâ cee n' *; *Nvs l gab *w* -ico *l gwô *I'noo, *ce le gwô o le ca.* The Idọma therefore perceived God as the final answer to all their problems. One may however ask what of the Idọma ancestors? What use are they to the Idọma Christians? Have they any role to play in the life of the Idọma Christians? Although the Idọma generally believed in the social, economic, defensive, protective, preventive and productive benefits of the ancestors, and other blessings they bring to the Idọma society, they perceived their ancestors as a link between them and *w* -ico as well. The Idọma

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132 That is if God did not guard a person who else is there to guard a person, if God does not build, no matter a man’s effort it will fail.

133 See earlier discussion in chapter three for full details of this view.
ancestors, perhaps as in other African countries, were not viewed as an end in themselves, but a means to an end.\textsuperscript{134}

And such “end” as far as the Id\textcircled{ma} are concerned is \textcircled{w}c\textcircled{ico}-the supreme God.

We finally observed from this song that, the Id\textcircled{ma} Christians viewed this physical world as a temporal world that is full of trouble and difficulties of which no one is free from, not matter one’s class or status. However, beyond this temporal physical world there is the next world into which all human beings enter only through the transitional death. In that world \textcircled{w}c\textcircled{ico} gives us absolute peace, rest and happiness.

In Id\textcircled{ma} today, there is a lot of indigenous music being produced by enthusiasts of church music in Id\textcircled{ma}.\textsuperscript{135} Many of the songs they sing take us straight to the scriptures as we read or sing them. In most cases, the songs are paraphrases of Bible stories or a believer’s commentaries on the great themes of the Bible. Others as already described are testimonies to the saving power of Jesus Christ and prayer at the same time such as \textcircled{A}d\textcircled{a}, \textcircled{L}e\textcircled{a}\textcircled{z}\textcircled{nya} Father deliver us by Alechenu Obiabo and for God’s providence \textcircled{O}\textcircled{e}\textcircled{y}a \textcircled{g}a\textcircled{m} ee-He has done it for me by late Mrs. \textcircled{b}ai\textcircled{ya} Kwukwura.

Worship in the church in Id\textcircled{ma} today in most cases has become spontaneous as a result of these songs, which are joyous with an unmistakable note of assurance and  

\textsuperscript{134}See earlier discussion in Chapter 3.p.101-105, for the Id\textcircled{ma} belief on the Ancestors.
\textsuperscript{135}For example, in times of sickness, there is a song based on the narrative of Hezekiah in Isaiah by Mr Adigwuri. During marriages, we have \textcircled{z}ba \textcircled{m}la \textcircled{ny}a-husband and wife by the same man. For testimonies of the great things \textcircled{w}c\textcircled{ico} has done, we have songs such as \textcircled{A}a \textcircled{w}a \textcircled{g}aa \textcircled{m}a \textcircled{z}da \textcircled{n}e\textcircled{o}\textcircled{ya} ga \textcircled{u}m \textcircled{a}a- You come and see what he has done for me, and during Child naming ceremony, we have \textcircled{z}a\textcircled{w}e\textcircled{k}u \textcircled{z}w\textcircled{ico}-Child is a gift of God. In times of difficulties and spiritual battles, we have \textcircled{z}w\textcircled{ico} \textcircled{A}d\textcircled{a} \textcircled{e}e\textcircled{e}e \textcircled{A}d\textcircled{a} \textcircled{le}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{z}\textcircled{nya}-God our father, father deliver us by Alechenu Obiabo.
victory that God has given them, over Satan, the forces of evil, witches and witchcraft; victory in fact over all that has been holding the soul in spiritual thraldom. This assurance has overcome the dissatisfaction which the Idɔma felt as a consequence of the sterility, and coldness of the church’s liturgical life as introduced or imported into the Idɔma church by the missionaries.

The Idɔma had a certain emotional depth, which, in the words of Idowu, “the prefabricated imported liturgies did not reach”. Therefore, when the missionaries left, the Idɔma Christians became free to express their faith within the Idɔma context, which manifested itself in hymns, choruses composed in the Idɔma idiom and music with Idɔma musical instruments augmented with clapping and dancing. Such hymns and worship in our view will naturally strike the appropriate tone in the Idɔma heart; they spread like bush fire and became sources of day to day encouragement and inspiration among the Idɔma Christians. When worshipping in such an atmosphere, the Idɔma are deeply stirred or moved and engrossed in their worship. Here we have at last in Idɔma Christianity, a worship that touched those Idɔma intellectual, spiritual and emotional depths, which the alien liturgies introduced by the missionaries, could not reach. These latest developments in Idɔma Christianity were enhanced by the impact or effect of the Idɔma Bible translation.

136 E. B. Idowu, Indigenous Church, p. 43.
137 For some of these musical instruments, see earlier note on p. 313.
7.7. A specific reference to the Effect of the Idôma Bible Translation

This section had already been briefly discussed in our earlier discussion on the value of Bible translation and the Idôma language in chapters three and six the latter being specifically on translation. As a result we will not be discussing this section in great detail, other than arguing that the impact of the Idôma Bible translation has helped Idôma church to adopt the indigenous terms, concepts, customs and idioms for the central categories of Christianity in Idôma, such as theology, liturgy and worship as discussed in this chapter. It also enabled the Idôma Christians to challenge some of the western interpretation of Christianity, and contextually move to develop Christianity that suits the Idôma needs.¹³⁸

The Idôma Bible translation has helped the Idôma Christians to criticise the western form of worship and church services, with the Idôma churches maintaining that the missionaries were unfaithful to the scriptures, which call for dancing, clapping of hands and music in worship and praise as recorded for example in 1 Samuel 18:6; Psalms 149:3; and Psalm 150. In the Scripture, the Idôma Christians were enabled to find a stream in full spate and no amount of missionary upbringing or resistance could stand on their way in their liturgical development and the contextualisation of Christianity that suit the Idôma needs. The Idôma church, though retaining some aspects of the worship pattern they have inherited from the missionaries such as singing from the hymn book, scripture lessons, and sermon, has introduced a lot of indigenous elements in their worship pattern today. These include, shouting alleluia during worship, dancing and clapping of hands, drumming and using other indigenous
musical instruments in worship, open testimony of the Lord’s victory over Satan by
the worshippers during service, saying ‘amen’ as much as possible in the middle of
prayers and a loud final ‘amen’ at the end of prayer and preaching of longer sermons.

The scriptural translation helped Idzo ma to preserve their name for God ñwíco and
the religious and social words that depended on that. All these and others as earlier
discussed highlighted the fact that instead of Christianity changing or robbing Idzo ma
of their way of life, the Idzo ma people succeeded in uniting Christianity with their
indigenous culture involving language, burial, naming ceremony, marriage and
theological reflections and interpretations.

This chapter began by arguing that Idzo ma Christianity should bear the distinctive
stamps of indigenous originality, in terms of primal beliefs, cultural practices,
customs, rituals and liturgy. We noted that, even though, the church was present in
Idzo ma since 1924, it never penetrated the Idzo ma life and context until after 1974
when the missionaries left Idzo ma and the leadership of the church in Idzo ma fell on
the indigenous minister.

We examined the cultural process through which the Idzo ma came to terms with
Christianity. To illustrate our discussion on how the Idzo ma people re-shaped
Christianity to suit their Idzo ma needs, three rites of passages: child naming ceremony,
marrige and burial rites were examined. In discussing these rites, we highlighted the
problem of contextualising Christianity in a given culture. We noted that the

138 See for an example our earlier discussions on Child naming ceremony, burial and marriage
 ceremonies, and other related issues such as polygamy, in which the Idzo ma were able to turn to the
adaptation of these rites by the church in Idoma not only enabled the church to translate itself into the Idoma life, culture and traditions, it contributed immensely to the liturgy of the church in the publication of the Order of Service of Child Naming Ceremony for the entire Methodist Church Nigeria.

In our discussion of liturgy, we argued that the western imported liturgies into Idoma were not compatible with the Idoma spiritual temperament of worshipping such as singing with dancing, clapping of hands, shouts of praise, drumming and playing of other indigenous musical instruments. We noted, how the Idoma developed her hymnody to make her church music distinctively Idoma. The Idoma church by doing so overcame the dissatisfaction, which they felt, as a consequence of the sterility and coldness of the church’s liturgical life imported into Idoma by the missionaries.

We concluded that at last there is in Idoma Christianity a liturgy that touched the Idoma intellectual, spiritual and emotional depths, which the imported alien liturgies could not reach, resulting in a considerable growth of the church in Idoma today. The average church services and worship life of the church in Idoma today differs considerably from that of 20 years ago in terms of church music that is specific to the Idoma style of singing, longer sermons, and the overall worship structure of the Church, that is not only limited to the Methodist church, but applicable to all the other denominations in Idoma today. We argued that all these latter developments in Idoma contemporary Christianity was influenced by the effect of the Idoma Bible translation.

scripture for answers to their problems.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

As we approach the end of the 20th century, we have got to remember that Christianity was introduced to the Idoma as recently as 1924 by the Methodist missionaries.1

Since the missionaries left Idoma in 19742 a lot of changes have taken place in the church, which have made it fundamentally different from the type of Christianity that was introduced to the Idoma people. Some of these changes can be seen in the pattern of church worship, liturgy, church music, and the use of the Idoma language in the Idoma church today.3

Before we later return to these changes4 let us briefly draw our attention to preceding discussions in this thesis. The introduction of this thesis began by noting that the records of the 19th century inflow of missionaries to Nigeria had been preoccupied predominantly, with the history, reception and development of Christianity among the Yorubas, Igbos and Hausas, and other southern parts of Nigeria to the utter neglect of the middle belt area and especially the Idoma people. Where we have any account at all of the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity, such stories would stem from the missionary perspectives, resulting in a Euro-centric understanding of Idoma and what happened in Idoma in the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity.5

We argued for the need for the Idoma historical and cultural understanding in the

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1 See chapter 4, p. 125-128.
2 See chapter 5 & 7.
3 See chapters 6, 7.
4 See pages 297-323.
5 See chapter 1, p. 2ff
Ichoma reception and development of Christianity, which emphasised the Ichoma point of view in the interaction between the Ichoma and Christianity.⁶

We also noted the lack of cultural cohesion, which the Ichoma people needed to adapt Ichoma Christianity. The Methodist missionaries treated the Ichoma, we observed, as having no religion, language, tradition, institution and racial character. And as a result, the Ichoma people felt deculturised and denationalised as Ichoma in embracing Christianity, which was presented to them by the Methodist missionaries as an inseparable part of the western cultural inheritance.⁷

We argued that the adaptation of the Ichoma culture as the only viable means of rendering God's message in the Ichoma context, would result in an effective indigenous reception and development of Christianity among the Ichoma people.⁸ It was argued that Christianity should be part of the Ichoma culture, rather than adopting a foreign culture to put Christianity into Ichoma. If Christianity is to take hold in Ichoma, we argued it could only do so in and through the Ichoma receptor culture.⁹

Attention was drawn to the need to view the important role of the Ichoma people not merely as objects of evangelism by the overseas missionaries, but subjects in a process of dynamic religious change, who should be able to initiate policies as well as following those introduced by the missionaries.

⁶ See chapter 1, p. 6-7.
⁷ See Chapter 1, p. 4-5 and chapter 4; See also, chapter 5, p. 167-171.
⁸ See Chapter 7.
⁹ Ibid.
In our discussion of Icfama ethnicity, and the cultural characteristics which are unique and common to the Icfama people,\textsuperscript{10} the discussion focused on the problems of the development of ethnicity and how to understand a non-literate society whose identity is based mainly in memory, the language, social culture and traditions of the people. We argued that, the question of origin could not be satisfactorily answered from sociological and anthropological investigations, but rather through the active participation in the life and culture of one’s own people.\textsuperscript{11}

In locating the Icfama people, we observed that, the Icfama live on a strip of land that stretches from the southern bank of river Benue to the northern fringes of Igbooland, with a population of over one million people. The Icfama we argued have a common tradition that recognises Apa as their ancestral homeland.\textsuperscript{12} We rejected Dr. Erim’s “Idu putative father” \textsuperscript{13}theory of the Icfama on the grounds that his theory was not based on the Icfama context, either written or oral, but rather on some early colonial anthropologists who collected the so called Icfama genealogies which have no historical or contextual support or oral evidence in nineteen of the twenty two Icfama districts. We examined an authentic Icfama oral history-the Alekwu Ab\textsuperscript{14}chant in order to establish the Icfama pre-colonial identity and origin. We concluded that the Icfama came from Apa in the defunct Kwararafa Jukun Kingdom, and settled at different periods in history in the present day Icfamaland.

\textsuperscript{10} See chapter 2, p. 21ff.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} See earlier discussion on 26ff.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., See also E. O. Erim, Idoma Nationality, p. 9ff.
\textsuperscript{14} See, pp. 35-37 for details of the Alekwu Abochje chant.
Our attention was turned to the religious, metaphysical and philosophical factors that helped us identify Idoma theology which we defined, discussed, explained, evaluated and compared to other forms of primal theology. We argued that the Idoma primal theology had its sources in Idoma history, language, culture, arts and music with its basic creeds and beliefs that are traditionally passed on from one generation to another.

We examined the basic structures of Idoma primal theology, which we argued consisted of a belief in $\omega\omega\omega$-the Supreme God. In discussing $\omega\omega\omega$, we argued that God was present in the Idoma world view, religious beliefs and practices, arts, music and epistemology before the Idoma ever made contact with Christianity. Belief in divinities such as $\omega\omega\omega\ Aje, Alekwu$ etc., with each of these divinities being concerned with the Idoma local situations in the ordering of the Idoma total communal life. The world of the spirit, worship and sacrifice, life after death and reincarnation.

In discussing worship, which we defined as Idoma’s acts of turning to God, we observed seven main features of Idoma worship. These are: liturgies, Inalegwu-prayers, $\omega\omega\omega$-sacrifice, $\omega\omega\omega$-offering, the objects of worship which is $\omega\omega\omega$-the supreme God and Alekwu-the ancestors, the place of worship and sacrifice, and the participants which included the worshippers, the divinities and the supernaturals.

15 See chapter 3, p. 80-83.
16 See chapter 3, p. 108
In our examination of the Idźma world, life after death and reincarnation, we noted that the Idźma world in all its totality has two aspects, namely: the world of man and the world of the spirit. We observed that to the Idźma, death does not “write ‘the end’ to human life, but reopens to the hereafter” 17. And as a result, the departed relatives can return again to this visible world in a baby.

The Idźma as discussed, 18 are solid and unshaken in their religious beliefs. To the Idźma people, their religious beliefs are objective and unquestionable truths. It could be suggested that these are much more than objective. Religion to the Idźma is life, comfort, power and blessing. We argued that these Idźma religious experiences are realities that must be appreciated in the Idźma interaction with Christianity.

This Idźma primal theology contains a coherent body of belief and an interpretation of life, which alone can provide the foundation for the true or genuine interaction between the Idźma and Christianity. An awareness and appreciation of the Idźma primal theology, we argued, would provide us with the main vehicle for the Idźma reception and development of Christianity.

In discussing the first point of contact between the Idźma and the Methodist missionaries, 19 we noted two areas of difficulties: these were language and the site of the missionary residence. While the efforts of the Methodist missionaries in learning, reducing into writing some aspects of Idźma language, and venturing a translation in the Idźma language were highly commendable, the choice of the first site, we argued,

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18 See chapter 3.
was intentionally situated at the religious site of the locals, resulting in the relocation of the people’s sacred shrine for the missionary residence. This, as we noted, resulted not only in the first conflict between the missionaries and the Idoma, but also in many of the locals turning their back on Christianity. 20

In our evaluation of the missionary perception of the Idoma people, we observed that the missionary image of the Idoma, their religion, past values and culture was very negative, and received a very unsympathetic dismissive, and condemnatory attitude from the missionaries.21 These Methodist missionaries, we argued, seemed possessed by such an unbounded feeling of cultural superiority over the Idoma, that they were unable to understand and appreciate any cultural value in Idoma. They failed to understand that there is an Idoma state of mind and Idoma perception of life. It was a mistake, as we noted, on the part of these Methodist missionaries to purposefully stamp out with some degree of success, the Idoma past values and replace them with their own. We argued that the Idoma individuality, community, mental and emotional attitude, past heritage and cultural practices would form the best basis for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.22

We suggested that these negative missionary feelings toward the Idoma people, their culture and traditions, were perhaps a carry over of the general feelings that existed about Africans in the western world at that time and the social situations of the lower

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19 See chapter 4, p. 133-137.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., See also chapter 1 & 7.
working class in their home country at that time that were imported and transferred to the Idoma people their culture, religion, context and past values.23

The missionary failure in understanding the Idoma past values and culture, and their insistence on the Idoma replacing their culture, traditions and values with that of the western missionaries, created a state of tension between Christianity and the Idoma people, whose lives lie in their primal religion and their cultural practices. We argued that, for Christianity to better and effectively interact with the Idoma people, it must realise that the Idoma had their own past, religion, culture and tradition, which must be respected and appreciated. The Idoma past is very important for a comprehensive understanding of the Idoma now and their new religious experience.24

In our examination of the spread of Christianity in Idoma and the use of mission education between 1924-1974 as an agency for evangelism,25 we evaluated in particular the aims and methods of mission education in Idoma in its various stages. We observed that the Methodist missionaries who were responsible for the Idoma education seemed to have intentionally destroyed all forms of Idoma life for their mission success story. For example, we noticed in Idoma, both teachers and pupils were forbidden from the use of the Idoma language in the school.26

The Idoma language was completely banned as a medium of education, and what is worse, Idoma school pupils were encouraged to lay aside their Idoma names, dress,

24 See chapter 7.
25 See chapter 5, p. 165 ff.
and way of living for western ones. They were taught to view their social ideals, traditions, music arts and religion as ridiculous and sinful. Perhaps, the Methodist missionaries did this in the belief that only the disintegrated, denationalised and deculturised Indoma person would be a suitable object of mission work. This we argued was a mistake on the part of the Methodist missionaries. The later Indoma response to and development of Christianity\textsuperscript{27} has proven the missionaries wrong in their attempt to take the Indoma people out of their context in embracing Christianity.

We argued that by and large, the aims and methods of missionary education in Indoma in teaching the Indoma children mathematics, biology, European history, English and French, and in imposing fines for the use of the Indoma language in schools were to break up as much as possible the Indoma traditional way of life, culture and language, and replace it with that of the west. It would be a sad situation and great pity if in the tide of mission education in Indoma, the Indoma life, and culture and past values were lost in the imitation of the western methods. There is nothing more untidy than to see an Indoma person dressed in European cast off clothing or more sickening than a young Indoma person trying to be an Englishman, when he should be an Indoma and proud of his Indoma nationality and identity. As correctly argued by Fraser in our earlier discussion, the Indoma should have been educated without taking them out of their African culture and environment.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} See discussion in chapter, seven, especially, p. 278 ff.
\textsuperscript{28} Fraser, “Aims and Methods of Missionary Education”, International Review of Missions, 1925, p. 517.
Ironically, while the Methodist missionaries were thinking of education in Idzoma, the entire western missionary body was debating and thinking about what to do with education in Africa. The educational conferences of the 1920s about the aims and methods of mission education in Africa, came up with valuable suggestions on the adaptation of an African educational programme that would take into consideration the African situation in focusing mainly on the African character, health, agriculture, skill and family life. An educational programme that would be tailored to the African needs as against the unsuitable western style of education. But sadly the Methodist missionaries to Idzoma who, probably, were aware of these concerns before they made contact with the Idzoma failed completely in the next fifty years of their educational programme in Idzoma to take into serious consideration any of these concerns in their educational policy in Idzoma. The Idzoma needs, language, culture, village or local situations we argued, were left out of the missionary educational activities in Idzoma, which they tailored primarily at producing teachers, preachers and local missionaries who would spread Christianity in Idzoma.

We focused on contextual factors in the Idzoma reception and development of Christianity. The analysis focused mainly of Bible translation. We argued in this chapter that the effective cultural contextualisation that the process of the Idzoma reception and development of Christianity required could only be achieved by a culturally attuned re-translation of the Bible using the principle of dynamic cultural

29 See T. Jack Thompson, Northern Malawi, p. 239ff; K.J. King, Pan Africanism and Education, Oxford 1971.
30 Ibid.
31 See Chapter 5, p. 165-166.
32 See chapter 6, especially, p. 214-250.
equivalence.33 This we argued would “invest Idzoma Christianity with indigenous solidity”.34

We pointed out that if Christianity is to be truly part of the Idzoma people, it must be presented to the Idzoma in their tongue and culture, without which, Christianity would be standing behind a closed door in Idzoma.35 We then went on to observe the value of Bible translation in the spread of Christianity and the contribution it makes in the recovery and preservation of the cultural identity of the people. We argued that, if Christianity is to have any form of grip and preservation in Idzoma at all, it could only do so in and through the translation of the Bible into the Idzoma language.36

In discussing the history of the Idzoma Bible translation, apart from giving a descriptive account of the events that took place, we critically evaluated how the Idzoma New Testament was translated. We noted the problems of literalness, unreadability and clear natural meaning in Idzoma. We argued that while we commended the efforts of the missionary translators of the Idzoma New Testament, we however noticed that they did not base their translation on any principles of translation, nor did they take into any serious consideration the problem of inculinating Christianity into Idzoma.37 These we believed were not sufficiently looked at either scientifically, ethnographically, linguistically, historically or in cultural terms, resulting in the failure of execution of the Idzoma New Testament.

33 See chapter 6, p. 236-239.
34 Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message, p. 70.
35 See chapter 6 & 7.
36 Ibid.
37 See for example, Norcross’s admission as discussed on p, 218-219.
In our discussion of the Old Testament translation, we noted and examined the problem of the interaction between the source language and the receptor language, text and meaning. We argued for the translation of the Old Testament on the principle of natural dynamic cultural equivalence. In applying this principle in translating the Bible, we however, cautioned that care must be exercised when translating, especially the meaning of the text in order to distinguish what the authors of the biblical text are really saying from forms of expression, idioms, imageries of the receptor language. A careful study of languages and historical contexts, we argued, are foundational to correct translation of the scripture into a given language on the principle of dynamic cultural equivalence. The constant question to be asked would be, 'what would this text have meant to a person living at the time of the source language and culture', before re-expressing it in the receptor language and culture and concluding, 'this is what is said now in the receptor language and culture?'

We further discussed how the unreadability of the New Testament was corrected through the establishment of the Idɔma orthography that took into consideration the various dialectical factors of the Idɔma language. With the orthography in place, and following the United Bible Society’s organising and working plans of Bible translation project we observed how the translation was completed in the Idɔma cultural receptor language with a notable impact and effects on Idɔma Christianity and the Idɔma community as a whole in liturgical, theological and cultural terms.

38 See chapter 6, p. 236-239.
39 See chapter 6, p. 250 ff.
40 See our discussion in Chapter seven.
Our examination of Idzo ma Christianity today, focused on the cultural process through which the Idzo ma re-shaped, developed, and came to terms with Christianity within their cultural context that suited the Idzo ma needs, customs and traditions.\(^{41}\) We highlighted how the Idzo ma were able to persuade the church to translate itself into the Idzo ma culture and life. In doing this we argued, the Idzo ma regained the cultural cohesion they earlier lacked in adapting Christianity and spreading it among themselves.

We asked, why, for fifty years, the Idzo ma people were treated differently by the missionaries in comparison with God’s people in the Bible who shared with other ancient peoples many customs and traditions that were unique to those cultures?\(^{42}\) For example, in the Old Testament, \(\text{apiooh}^\text{4}\)-circumcision\(^{43}\), marriages and bride price\(^{44}\), and similarly \(ikpoona\)-washing of feet were current cultural practices. In other instances, the Biblical writers used existing cultural materials to express their messages. Leviathan a Babylonian mythological sea monster is mentioned five times in the Old Testament.\(^{45}\) And in the New Testament, many Greek words and images were taken over by the Apostles to express Christian concepts, for example, \(kurios\)-Lord and \(logos\)-Word;\(^{46}\) \(musterion\) was used by mystery religions to refer to the initiating process by which adherents could gain divine knowledge. Paul took hold of this word and christianised it.\(^{47}\) From these examples, it is obvious that God takes human culture seriously. We are in complete agreement with the Indian theologian

\(^{41}\) See chapter 7.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid.  
\(^{43}\) Genesis 17:10-14.  
\(^{44}\) Genesis 24; 28; and 32.  
\(^{45}\) Job 3:8; 41:1ff; Psalm 74:14; 104:26; Isaiah 27:1.  
\(^{46}\) St John’s Gospel chapter 1.  
\(^{47}\) Ephesians 1:9; 3:3; 6:19.
Ananda Kumar, when in a paper, “Culture and the Old Testament” presented at the Willowbank Consultation he stated,

Culture, with all its merits and limitations, has played a fundamental role in God’s self-disclosure in human history. Divine revelation does not come in a vacuum. It can only come with reference to culture, that is in relation to the religious environment, language and understanding of man; otherwise we could not understand it. It is the greatness of God’s mercy that he voluntarily limits himself to the vehicles of human culture to make himself known.48

Kumar’s view did not run counter to the Bible. Christianity as whole has been a translatable religion as Lamin Sanneh in his discussion on the translatability of Christianity into various cultures in his book, Encountering The West and Translating the Message, made us to understand.49 Christianity took its root in Palestine from where it translated itself to Africa, Asia Minor and Europe. It therefore cannot be doubted that the Idzoma life, context, language and culture, was for us the mother soil into which the seed of the gospel should be planted especially through Bible translation and out of which a Christian society would grow in Idzoma.

However, in using the existing Idzoma culture to express the Christian message in Idzoma, we must be cautious in our approach. It is not always very easy to find a dynamic cultural equivalence or practices in putting Christianity into that given culture. Richard H. Niebuhr’s three basic positions of Christ against culture, Christ in culture and Christ above culture50 should be our guide on how we view and use culture in putting the Christian message among a given people.

50 For details of this argument, see Richard, H Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, New York, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1953.
We argued that, even though, Christianity was present in Idmalian since 1924, it had never really made a decisive penetration into the Idma life, culture and context until after 1974 when the missionaries finally left Idma, and the leadership of the church came to the Idma indigenes. Kenneth S. Latourette was right in his observation when he convincingly noted, in his article, “Indigenous Christianity in the Light of History” in International Review of Missions, that “When the leadership [of the church] continues to be foreign...Christianity at best is passive. If Christianity is to become ‘indigenous’ among any people it is through the evoking and training of...[indigenous] leadership”.

Since the leadership of the church in Idma came to the Idma people, we argued that the Idma discovered their selfhood and began to articulate and develop Christianity in their own Idma concrete historical, cultural context and situations. In given western-dominated structures within which the Idma church grew, it is clear that the Methodist missionary policies in general and Archbishop Achigili’s contribution in particular, played an important part in the reshaping and development of the Idma Christianity which emerged. Achigili’s influence on the Idma church may be seen mainly from his general attitudes toward the gospel and the Idma culture. He argued and worked for the relating of Christianity to the Idma culture, religious beliefs and past values. Achigili’s concern with Idma Christianity that reflected the traditional Idma values can be seen in several points in our discussion. These include the inclusion of the community Elders in the leadership of the Church

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51 See chapter 7, p. 277 ff.  
53 See chapter 6 & 7.
and the establishment of a local Bible school for the training of indigenous church workers. Others are his earlier role as a member of the Idɔma Bible translation team, and later as the overall chairman of the Idɔma Bible Committee, the adaptation of agɔ as the social aid group for the church. The introduction of Idɔma indigenous music with the Idɔma musical instruments in the worship of the church, and the inclusion of certain rites of passages in the liturgical pattern of the church in Idɔma.

In this direction, we noted the adaptation of certain Idɔma customs and cultural practice and rituals by the church in Idɔma to express the Christian message, namely: child naming ceremony, marriage and burial rites. These, we argued, the church adapted in order to translate itself into the Idɔma context, thus making it Idɔma Christianity and not an alien faith.

We also examined the liturgical life of the Idɔma church that enabled Christianity to take root in the soil of the Idɔma culture in which it is planted, and how it grew in structure and as an institution on its own and not something alien. We concluded our discussion with some specific effect of the Bible translation on the Idɔma Christianity. We argued that these were responsible for the later cultural, theological and liturgical developments of the Idɔma Christianity.

Finally, we observed in this thesis that, for many years Idɔma Christians were made to deny their cultural heritage. Their children at mission schools were forced to acculturate into the so-called ‘Christian culture’, which was predominantly the

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54 See chapter 7, p. 282-283.
55 Ibid., p. 284 ff.
‘western’ culture.\textsuperscript{57} They were prohibited from speaking the Idɔma language at schools\textsuperscript{58} and were looked down on because of diet and sometimes ridiculed for their physical characteristics. To become a Christian in Idɔma is to give up your indigenous name for the so-called European biblical name, as though, God does not know what he was doing when he gave us Idɔma names.

The process of forced acculturation was however resisted in Idɔma Christianity by adapting and re-shaping Christianity as an indigenous institution, which enabled the Idɔma tradition, language, and values to survive in Idɔma Christianity.\textsuperscript{59} For example, the Bible had to be re-translated, worship pattern changed, Idɔma music and musical instruments brought into the worship life of the Church, rites of passages were brought into Idɔma Christianity.\textsuperscript{60} All these made Christianity to effectively translate into the Idɔma life, culture and tradition.

We advocated in this thesis that conversion to Christianity, by the Africans; the Idɔma people in particular or any other group of persons, must be coupled with their cultural continuity. It is therefore mandatory in the Idɔma situation for the various facets of Idɔma context, which make up the total Idɔma primal religious and cultural experiences to be drawn into a coherent and meaningful pattern that can be called and described as Idɔma Christianity.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{57} See chapter seven.  
\textsuperscript{58} See chapter 5.  
\textsuperscript{59} See chapter 6 & 7.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
It could be claimed that Idmma Christianity is a distinctive cultural expression of Christianity in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria, which has made some positive contribution to mission scholarship, the reception and development of Christianity in West Africa and African Christianity as a whole, and western Christianity. For example, Idmma Christianity can serve as a mirror for the critical self-understanding of the western Christians. The Idmma Christianity has given the western Christians a vision of themselves from their cultural milieu.

Secondly, Idmma Christianity has offered models of authentic contextualization to mission scholarship. They have offered from their examples: e.g., birth, marriage and burial, an authentic process that would make church and theology in Africa critically responsible to the cultural and contextual issues of any society. What World Christianity needs today is not an artificial form of uncritical contextualization, but an authentic process that will make the church and theology and mission responsible for the fundamental issues of the society and the place to witness such a process today is in the Idmma situation. Idmma Christianity may not be able to provide the big finance and personnel required for mission scholarship today, but they can provide models of critical insertions in their culture and society that have given prophetic depth to their life and witness.

Idmma Christianity offers a partnership for radical discipleship. This, Idmma Christianity did by embarking on a radical course even to the very root of biblical faith and to the philosophical foundation of the Idmma cultural milieu.
As a result of the distinctive character of Idroma Christianity, and its size, the Idroma church was able to make a significant contribution to the overall development of Christianity in Benue and in particular the Methodist Church Nigeria. For example, the nature of almost all the denominations in Idroma today is influenced by the pattern of the Idroma Methodism. The most obvious one is in the field of church music and dancing during worship. Although, the contribution of the written Idroma music is very limited, there is, however, a wide circulation of Idroma music in the Idroma churches today which, are retained in the mental power and memory of the Idroma Christians across all the denominations in Idomaland.

It was not my intention in this thesis to offer an alternative approach to mission scholarship, or a substitute to other approaches, such as historical or thematic approaches, but rather to call attention to an approach which takes seriously the culture, language and religious beliefs of a given people as essential components of their reception and development of Christianity. I advocated an approach, which takes seriously, the culture, religious beliefs, past values and the concrete historical situations in our discussion, which are believed to underlie the reception, and development of Christianity as discussed in this thesis. As we give persistent and painstaking attention to the cultural heritage from which the Idroma or any other group of persons have grown, we should come to a better understanding of those people, and thereby become aware of the kind of response the new Christian situation demands: both the roles of churches and missionaries in the new situation as they seek new and better avenues of service to God among those people.
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