

AN INTERCULTURAL STUDY OF THE  
CHURCH-AS-FAMILY AMONG THE IGBO  
OF ENUGU STATE, SOUTHEASTERN  
NIGERIA AND ITS THEOLOGICAL  
IMPORT

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the established models of the Church-as-family among the Igbo of Enugu State, Southeastern Nigeria, and determined the nature of the relationship between the Igbo family culture and the Christian Church culture. It also showed the relevance of the concept of the Church-as-family in the context of Igbo Christianity with a view to defining a theology of the Church-as-family in the context of the developing Christian religion among the Igbo of Enugu State, Nigeria.

The study adopted an intercultural hermeneutical approach. The qualitative data were collected through unstructured oral interviews and observations, while the quantitative data were collected by means of questionnaire. In all, sixty Igbo families in Enugu State were selected for the study. Twenty families were purposively selected from each of the middle, lower and upper classes. They were grouped into three age-brackets, namely 70-79 years, 50-59 years, and 20-29 years. The families whose ages ranged between 70 and 79 years were considered traditional, while families in the other two age-brackets were considered modern. The data were analyzed hermeneutically.

The results from a historical study of the Igbo family showed that the Igbo understanding of the family was very elastic. It could refer to a whole clan, kindred or nuclear family. In other words, it was more of the extended family. From the results it could also be seen that the Igbo and Church conceptions of family indicated a great sense of solidarity and progress in the firm bond of oneness. However, it was discovered that both the Church and the Igbo differed significantly in the areas of family size and the type of relationship, because in terms of size, the universal Church comprises of people from every part of the world, while the Igbo family was restricted to the constituent members of the clan, kindred, or town. They also differed on the type of relationship because the members

of the Church were bound by a "spiritual" relationship, namely their faith, while the Igbo family was strongly based on blood ties.

The study concluded that traditional Igbo family identified with the principle of the Church-as-Family, but the incursion of Western civilization and technological advancement of modern times had distorted the concept.