



Understanding the Nature and Functions of *Igbe* Priesthood in the Light of Old Testament Priesthood

AMAKA TRACY ISODJE, FESTUS OSOM OMOSOR
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Abstract. *Igbe* religion is one of the variants of African traditional religion that have widespread expression in Urhoboland. It is native to the people of Urhobo the same way Judaism is native to the Jews. One common characteristic of both *Igbe* religion and Judaism is that both are monotheistic in nature; hence the priests are the officiants chosen by the Most High God (*Oghene*, Yahweh) to act as intermediaries between him and the people, particularly adherents. However, *Igbe* religion is often derogatorily criticised as fetish and heathenish by majority of people, particularly Christians who brand *Igbe* priests as witches and wizards. The objective of this paper is to present an expository discourse on *Igbe* priesthood to show its relationship with Old Testament priesthood. The essence is to phenomenologically show that the *Igbe* priest is not necessarily or inherently a witch or wizard, but rather s/he is an officiant divinely chosen or consecrated for service in the temple of God (*Oghene*). To achieve this objective, this paper adopted historical, descriptive and comparative approaches. More so, the phenomenological method was employed to investigate the nature and functions of priesthood in *Igbe* religion. The finding of the paper is that *Igbe* priests are officiants of the Supreme Being (*Oghene*) just like the priest of Yahweh in the Old Testament and their role is to connect the people to God (*Oghene*, Yahweh) and perform the roles of sacrificing, cleansing, healing and revelation of divine will. The recommendation of the paper is that *Igbe* religion should be closely studied to understand its foundations, nature and operations to avoid baseless criticisms, derogatory assertions and false conclusions.

Keywords: *Igbe*, Old Testament, priesthood, nature, functions.

1. Introduction

Igbe religion is a variant of African tradition religion. It was founded in Kokori Land from where it spread to other parts of the world (Afatakpa, 2016). *Igbe* is a

well-recognized and widely practiced religion in Delta State particularly among the Urhobo people. So many people attend their worship and annual festivals. The most prominent officiating minister in *Igbe* religious activities, whether during worship or festivals, is the priest. There is therefore no gainsaying that without the priest, no *Igbe* service will be complete or worthwhile. The impact of *Igbe* religion and the mediatory role of its priests cannot be overemphasized, however many people do not understand the nature *Igbe* religion and its priesthood. Consequently, they treat it with the utmost disdain as fetish. As Omosor (2020) noted in one of his studies, the cultural values, beliefs and practices of the African peoples are often derogated and relegated to the background due to the eroding influence of western culture and civilization of which Christianity is a vehicle. It is the opinion of this study that this lack of understanding should be addressed by a phenomenological study of the religion, particularly to show the nature and function of the priest in relation to the Old Testament priesthood. *Igbe* is a very unique religion that deserves the attention of the world. Apart from Christianity, *Igbe* has the largest number of worshippers in Urhoboland. The religion is found in all parts of Urhoboland.

The objective of this study is to phenomenologically investigate and examine the nature of *Igbe* priesthood priest in *Igbe* religion from the backdrop of the Old Testament priesthood. The essence is to provide understanding of the religious system and appreciate what its priesthood stands for or entails. To achieve this objective the study adopted the historical and phenomenological methods for the study of religion. The historical method was used in gathering data relevant to the origin of Kokori land and the *Igbe* religion. The phenomenological method used mainly oral interviews and participant observation to gather primary data concerning the office of the priest in *Igbe* religion. In terms of scope, the study limited itself to a brief origin of *Igbe* religion and the origin, nature and functions its priesthood. More so, the study only

highlighted the nature and essence of Old Testament priesthood with a view to showing the nexus between *Igbe* priesthood and that of the Old Testament. The significance of this study is underscored by the need to objectively investigate and document the various forms of indigenous religions in Africa, in this case *Igbe* religion, and also compare them with other monotheistic religions such as that of the ancient Israelites as contained in the Old Testament in order to rebut the derogatory remarks that relegate such religious systems as *Igbe* to the background.

2. Priesthood in the Old Testament

The term priest applies to whoever is dedicated to a divinity or deity and thus, is divinely authorized and empowered to perform sacred rites in a particular religion, particularly as a mediator between the people of a land and the deity or God apprehended as the Supreme Being by the people. It is no quite certain when, where and how priesthood originated. However, It is from the oral and documented information about the Ancient Near Eastern peoples, particularly the Semites, whom God chose as priests from among the peoples of the earth that detailed knowledge of the existence of priesthood comes to us. For example, Aaron was specifically chosen by Yahweh to be his priest and serve the people of Israel in that capacity of which his descendants would also inherit such functions (Exodus 28:1, 44; 30:30; 40:13-15; Numbers 3:3). In the Old Testament, priesthood was a fundamental institution that played key roles in the religious, spiritual and even socio-political life of the people of ancient Israel.

It should be noted that the life of the people of the people of ancient Israel was largely a divine affair. The priest in the Old Testament was one of the four cardinal mediators between God and the people of Israel. Others include the kings, the sages and the prophets. Central in the regular routine of worship and the administration of wisdom in the everyday life of the people are the priests and the sages respectively (Neuhaus, 2010). However, the sages are not often referred to or prominently mentioned in discussions about the Old Testament even though their influence and impacts on the socio-religious landscape of Israel could be inferred from the Wisdom books; but the identity, socio-religious functions and the roles of the Old Testament priesthood in the identity formation of the nation of Israel were unequivocally and indubitably established. Therefore, priesthood was an indispensable institution in Israel. As a priest, the individual who held such office served the people in various capacities as he also served God.

The Old Testament priest saw himself as someone chosen or consecrated for the service of the monotheistic God, Yahweh. Thus, the priest of Yahweh was strongly believed to be the true priest, for there were false priests such as of Median in Exodus 18:1, of On in Gen. 41: 45, of Dagon in I Samuel 5:5, of the high places in Kings 12:32 etc. However, the so-called false priests are so labeled because they were not ordained by Yahweh since, according to 2 Chronicles 13:9, they were of them that had no God. Thus, the major determiner of genuineness of a priest in the Old Testament was whether the priest was dedicated to Yahweh or to another god. Therefore, one major characteristics of the priesthood institution in Israel is the fact that it was underlined by the notion of and the consciousness about a monotheistic God to whom the priest was to be dedicated throughout. Yahweh in Israel was conceived as the one and Supreme Being to whom all other must be subject to.

As Neuhaus (2010) aptly stated, in the Old Testament, the Temple was the realm of the priest, worship was the focus of his activity and the peak of his expression was in the sacrificial cult. Hence, the Torah succinctly spelt out the laws of and the criteria for sacrifice and priesthood particularly in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and numbers. Thus, before the establishment and execution of Israel's liturgical life, there were sacrifice and priesthood systems in place. Sacrifice and priesthood were two inseparably laced phenomena in the Old Testament. It is for this reason that holiness and purity were inextricably associated with priesthood. What holiness entails may not be crystal clear in all religious contexts and cultural parlances due to relativeness of concepts, principles and praxis. As Brueggemann (2003) observed, "The term [holiness] has such rich and varied usage precisely because it seeks to articulate what is most characteristic and therefore most hidden and inscrutable about God" (p. 67).

In attempting to understand what holiness could entail in relation to the Old Testament priesthood, the views of Neuhaus (2010) are helpful. He drew attention to the priestly conception that God is wholly other, totally separate not only from the entire world which he created but also from humans whose yearning is to render worship to him. For the Old Testament priests, holiness entails being godly, the quality of being consistent with God. Nevertheless, despite being totally separate from God, humans are called and expected to emulate this quality of being holy. By this priestly conception, sin (whether deliberate or inadvertent contravention of the will of God) and any form of uncleanness suggesting that the human world is imperfect, are incompatible with holiness.

The calling, duty and functions of the Old Testament priest is thus rooted in the theological conception of holinesses and the commitment of such a functionary to lead the people on such part as well as help to restore the unclean to the state of cleanliness through rituals performances and ethical guidance of the people religious and other aspects of their living that have consequence on their worship to God. It is to this end that the book of Leviticus copiously detailed out the functions of the priest such as is stated in Lev. 10: 10 – 11 thus: You are to distinguish (וַיִּלְהַבְדֵּי) between the holy (הַקֹּדֶשׁ) and the common (הַחֹל), and between the unclean (הַטְּמֵא) and the clean (הַטְּהוֹר); and you are to teach (וַיְלַמְדוּ) the people of Israel all the statutes (כָּל-הַחֻקִּים) that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses (Lev 10:10-11). The Hebrew word וַיִּלְהַבְדֵּי translated as “to distinguish” could also be rendered (perhaps more appropriately in the context of this study) as “to separate” while the words הַקֹּדֶשׁ (the holy) and הַחֹל (the common) could as well be translated as “the sacred” and “the profane”. As Wenham (1979) analytically submitted, “everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy when they are sanctified” (p. 19)

From the foregoing, it becomes very clear what the office of a priest of Yahweh in the Old Testament entails, which is primarily to offer holy service or worship to God and raise as he guides a community of people that would relate with both God and fellow humans in a manner that would conform to the holy nature of God. Thus, whatever acts, rituals and/or rites (whether physical, spiritual, social, cultural or religious) performed are to the effect of achieving these objectives. It is against this backdrop that the following functions of an Old Testament priest could be understood. It is important to note that there are usually two classes of priests in the Old Testament, namely the ordinary priests and the High Priest. For the ordinary priests, they are teachers to the people (Lev. 10:8-11), they play the role of a judge as they resolve controversies and crises as recorded in Deut. 21:5, they officiate during sacrifices (Ex. 29:38-42), they assess and determine what constitutes impurity as recorded in Lev. 13-15, they burn incense (Ex. 30:7-8), they bless God and the people (Deut. 10:8, Num. 6:22-27), they keep the and maintain the tabernacle (Num. 3:38; 4:16) and are also keepers of the altar, the lambs and the showbread (Lev. 6:8-13; 24: 1- 9) among other functions. As for the High Priest, he is the Chief Priest who presides over or supervises the activities of the other lower ranking priests and also the Levites. While he might also perform the routine duties of the lower ranking priests, he exclusively

performs the role of consecrating the other priests (Ex. 29:1-37), inquiring from the Lord (Jug 20:28), officiating especially on the Day of Atonement (Heb. 5:1; Lev. 23: 6, 11, 15, 20).

Having hinted at the nature and essence of priesthood in the Old Testament, we shall now focus attention on the nature and functions of priesthood in *Igbe* religion.

3. The Origin of *Igbe* in Kokori Land

Igbe religion popularly known as *Igbe* is an Urhobo word meaning dance. Their major element is dance (Orhero, 2023). Akpojotor (2005) agrees that one of the main components of worship in *Igbe* is dancing. *Igbe* religion was founded by Ubiesha Etarakpo in Kokori Land. They believe that dance brings them closer to the Supreme God (*Oweya*), who is the creator of everything. The adherents of the religion are monotheist in nature. The founder Ubiesha was the first Chief Priest/Prophet of the religion. He is also called *Uku* (Akpojotor 2011). According to Odje (1995) Ubiecha Etarakpo founded the *Igbe* religion in 1858 in kokori, with its headquarters at 11 Egbo Street, kokori Inland, Ethiope East Local Government Area. Ubiesha allegedly saw an apparition of two divine beings who anointed him to preach against immorality and witchcraft. After the alleged apparition, Ubiesha became eccentric and acted insanely as no day passed without him dancing. This scared the people from coming close to him.

According to Akama (1985), when Ubiecha got back to the community, Oniruesi noticed something mysteriously divine about him, unlike others who thought he had gone mad. He stayed with her, they later got married, and he continued dancing each passing day, eating nothing but *Orhen* (Native Chalk), healing people miraculously by praying for them and giving them the same native chalk to consume. Such were the authority and fame of the late founder of the historic African religion, *Igbe* that the reigning Oba of Benin at the time had to travel incognito as a leper to Kokori, Ethiope Local government area of Delta state to validate his power, (Brisibe 2015). Akponwei (2009) adds that three weeks after, the Oba visited Kokori again, this time, he came in full regalia as an Oba and presented gifts and honoured Etarakpo for his spiritual prowess.

Furthermore, Allman (2005) affirms that due to the increase of Ubiecha’s followers, who were trooping to Kokori for consultation and healing, he later built a worship house called *Ogwa*, where he ministered to his devotees and made prophecies with stunning accuracy. He had three children: *Igbe*-Idode, *Igbe*-

Akpokovo and *Igbe*-Emegalise. According to Uku Efe Isievwore (Personal Communication, 2023), “Oghene called Ubiecha when he was working in his farm [and] gave Ubiecha the native Chalk, instructing him to go and heal the people and deliver them from the powers of witchcraft”. According to Johnson Oniovwosa (2023) in an Oral interview, Ubiecha was called by *Oweya*, after series of economic setbacks, he practically failed in every attempt to succeed in life, hence he was forced to answer the call. The *Igbe* religion grew from there to other parts of Urhobo land, across the nation, and overseas (Amoah, 1998).

Nabofa (2005) affirms that:

The fame of Ubiecha spread far and wide because of his ability to heal all types of illness, including leprosy, impotence, blindness, deafness and dumbness, mental illness, bareness through the Orhen (native chalk). His spiritual intervention was also seen as capable of mediating freedom from witchcraft manipulations and all forms of evil spirits. Oral history had it that as a result of the spiritual powers of Ubiecha , people began to patronize him from the nooks and crannies of Urhobo land . When the work became too overwhelming for Ubiecha , legend had it that he appointed his first set of disciples and spiritual leaders which include Omonedo of Orhomuru, Okinedo of Ozoro, Ojanogha of Oweh, Idubor of Benin, Tambowei of Ijaw, as missionaries to propagate the religion beyond Urhobo land (Erivwo, 1973)”

4. Priesthood in *Igbe* Religion

Afatakpa (2016) opines that the *Igbe* religion has a hierarchic leadership structure and a spiritual head that goes by the title *Uku* which means High or Chief Priest. The religion has a unique priesthood order and leadership structure (Afatakpa 2016). In *Igbe* religion, there are high priests, lesser priests and other cultic functionaries. Our focus is on the four categories, which fall broadly under the heads of the different denominations. The priest carries out both spiritual leadership roles such as ritual ceremonies, social and community roles and transmission of knowledge associated with the priestly office in *Igbe* religion, (Afatakpa 2016)

According to Umuze (personal communication, 2023), the Priest of *Igbe* Religion carries out spiritual leadership, rituals and ceremonies, divination and healing practices, social and community roles and transmission of knowledge associated with the priestly office in *Igbe* religion. *Igbe* religion is unique to the people of Kokori land because it was founded in Kokori. The adherents to *Igbe* religion come to the holy land of Kokori for pilgrimage, just as the

Muslims go to Mecca and Christians go to Jerusalem for pilgrimage (Arowolo, 2010)

Non adherents of the religion may not understand the religion and the roles of the office of the priest. This leads to misconception about the religious sect and the role of the priest in *Igbe* religion. This is the present reality, especially with the influence of Christianity cum Western civilization. As Africans, it is important to have a sound knowledge about one’s religion (Ottuh, 2017).

Like every other African religion and priesthood, the *Igbe* religion has been criticized for rejecting conventional medical treatment and also for using the Urhobo language during worship. *Igbe* members believe and administer native chalk for the treatment of ailments. This has been viewed as dangerous, (Akpojoto 2011). While traditional medicine requires carefulness in usage, there is no gain saying that it is an alternative medical system. As Omosor (2019) submitted, traditional medicine which involves spiritual and mystical manipulation of supernatural forces and the use of natural materials is necessary in addressing certain conditions that defy scientific, orthodox medical applications. Also, although there have been objections to the use of Urhobo language during worship sessions by modern adherents of *Igbe*, the language of worship and liturgy has remained largely Urhobo (Ojaide , 2001). This essentially helps to encourage members to learn and use the language; it is common knowledge that many children of Urhobo land cannot speak the language as a result of modernization. The priest communes with the divine being and members only in Urhobo language. Using Urhobo language during fellowship becomes some sort of a communication barrier, especially with non-indigenes and indigenes that cannot speak or understand the language (Olupona, 2014).

It is common knowledge that *Igbe* religion has been labeled with various derogatory names such as idol worship, juju, paganism, witchcraft and so on. The priests are not given their right place of honor recognition in our society. Most Nigerians who are not familiar with the details of the religion may think that it is polytheist because it draws strongly on local beliefs and practices. However, far from being a pagan religion with belief in many gods, the *Igbe* religion believes in a single God known as “Oghene or *Oweya*”. This God is worshipped through dancing and the use of native chalk (Afatakpa 2016).

It is important for both the *Igbe* priest and the worshippers to understand the core elements of *Igbe* worship and liturgy for effectiveness. According to

Panchael (2023), a priest that is not abreast with the liturgy may have issues when faced with challenges. The priest is a traditional leader and traditional leaders like to maintain the Status quo and may be hesitant to adopt a new course of action, it can lead to stagnation and lack of progress. The priest serves as advocate and apologist to the religion; hence it is often the case that some of them become too resistant to other religious systems and what they offer humanity. For example, sometimes the priest may refuse to adopt new technologies in handling health issues, which can affect the members negatively, this happens because he has great influence on members. The adherents believe so much in the *Igbe* priest and as a result the priest can instill fear and intimidation on cult members (Afatakpa, 2016).

5. Categories of Priests in *Igbe* Religion

There are three main categories of priests in *Igbe* religion as discusses below:

The *Uku*

The *Uku* is the earthly embodiment or representative of God. This is reflected in his official status and honor accorded him by his followers. His utterance and advice are highly revered. The congregational head of each *Igbe* assembly is called *Uku* for male and *Omote Uku* for female. No *Igbe* member or non member is allowed to touch the head of the *Uku* or *Omote Uku* willfully. Violation of this is believed to desecrate the *Uku* and consequently leads to very intricate and expensive rituals of cleansing (Afatakpa 2016).

According to Edafe (personal communication, 2023) the chief *Uku* is the representative of *Oghene* or *Oweya*. He is an embodiment of knowledge, always getting messages from the spirit world on how to solve the problems of mankind. with Onoriode (2023), submits that there are also female *Uku* who are known as *Omote Uku*, they also perform the same functions as the Chief *Uku*, in addition to confessions from female members. They are in charge of women affairs. The chief *Uku* performs the highest ritualistic and political ceremonies in the religion. Each of them has a bed as his throne or seat. They perform all major initiation ceremonies, healing process and all serious confessions. Confessions are made to them. They have the final say in every matter in *Igbe* and their words are believed to be as sacred as the sacred *Orhen*.

According Sodje (personal communication), every leader is under the Chief Oku, he is the representative of *Oghene* or *Oweya*. His major function is to direct the hearts of the adherents to *Oweya*, stand in the gap

for the members in times of problems, and provide solutions to the people's problems especially non empirical issues. The *Uku* has an assistant who is known as *Ochuko Uku*, and this in turn has a number of junior Priests, under him. The *Ochuko Uku* performs minor initiations and rituals such as minor confessions and healing as the Chief might delegate to him (Akpojotor, 2011).

The *Olori*

This is a Yoruba word which means the head or chief. In *Igbe*, the *Olori* is the priest that the members confess to in secret (Akpojotor 2011). If the confession is a minor one such as backbiting and grumbling, the *Olori* would just caution and counsel the person concerned and the whole matter would end there. Ikuku (2023) in an oral interview stated that it is only serious offence, such as witchcraft, sorcery, stealing and adultery, that the *Olori* would have to direct the person to the *Uku*, who is considered to be the only one that is competent and has the authority to handle issues pertaining to such grievous offences. An adherent of *Igbe* religion, Baby Efeoto (personal communication 2023) claims that it is the duty of the *Olori* to introduce new converts to the *Uku*, or his assistant for initiation into *Igbe*. The *Olori* usually has his own *Ogwa Igbe* in his own compound and he is the one that directs all acts of worship under his jurisdiction (Ikoba, 2014). According to Edafe (2023), the main duty as the *Olori* is to settle disputes among members and offering spiritual protection to adherents and non-adherents of the religion". According to Afatakpa (2016) the *Uku* is supported by his chief priests in the discharge of his responsibilities.

The *Oni-Igbe*

Divination is a part of the *Igbe* religion like every other African Traditional religion (Ikoro,2016). The *Uku* and some members of the priesthood order are believed to have special prophetic powers to see visions and interpret dreams . Every *Igbe* temple has an *Oni-Igbe*. There can be more than one *Oni-Igbe* in an *Igbe* temple (Afatakpa, 2016). The *Oni-Igbe* is the female prophetess who is always very active in every *Ogwa Igbe*. It is believed that they can dig deep to get every secret because they have been given power by *Oweya*. Confessions are made to them by mostly female cult members (Akpojotor 2011).

However, there is also the concept of referrer when the *Oni-Igbe* encounter some difficult cases. They usually send serious cases to the *Uku*. In some *Igbe* sects they have male and female *Oni-Igbes*. It is a title given to people performing priestly duties in *Igbe* religion.

They in turn bring issues involved to the notice of the *Olori*, who in turn would deal with them or carry them to the *Uku*. In some *Igbe* congregation, there is also male or female *Oni-Igbe* as we have both male and female *Olori*. They are merely official titles attached to people performing specific duties in *Igbe* but not sex titles or gender sensitive.

Furthermore, one of the major duties of the *Oni-Igbe* is that of exorcism. In any healing rituals or spiritual activities, the *Oni-Igbe* plays a very active part. He or she exorcise the evil spirit from the affected person by using his or her fan to tap gently and fan the whole body of the patient and uses the fan to describe several circles round the patient's heads and blows off the evils from the body (Ubrurhe, 2001). It is believed that when the fan is being used to touch all parts of the patient, all impurities in the patient's body which must have caused the ailment, would be attracted into the fan and magnetize or suck into it. Then by blowing or breathing over the ritualistic fan, such impurities would be cleaned off the sick such as ritual bathing, are also carried out by them (Irikefe, 2023).

In an oral interview with Onoriode (2023), an adherent of the religion, the *Oni-Igbe* is like the eyes of *Oweya*, nothing can be hidden from the *Oni-Igbe*, hence members of the cult try to be morally and religiously upright before *Oweya*, to be able to access *Oweya*, and avoid embarrassment. She narrated the story of a female member that committed adultery before coming to the meeting, immediately she entered the *Ogwa* she was exposed by the *Oni-Igbe*. The woman confessed her crime, and ritual sacrifice was done, for her cleansing, because the religion frowns at adultery and doesn't support divorce. Onajite (personal communication) emphasized the efficacy of the treatment of ailments and witchcraft by the *Oni-Igbe*. In other words, the *Oni-Igbe* has been empowered by *Oweya* to provide solutions to problems of both adherents and non-members.

6. The Significance of Priesthood in *Igbe* Religion

Priests are regarded as intermediaries between other humans and specific deities, A Priest serves a particular god or spirit and watches over the behavior and needs of its adherents. An elder member of lineage group may be the priest of the clan's ancestral cult. In *Igbe*, what actually led to the establishment of priesthood is the simple fact that some people possess spiritual powers and this gave them the power of clairvoyance and strong foresight which enabled them to reveal a lot of mysteries (Odje, 1995). The spiritual power of *Ubiesha* enabled him to apprehend the

revelation about the divine *Orhen* and anyone who become an *Igbe* priest should be one thought fit to have acquired some kind of divine inspiration.

The current *Ovie Uku* claims emphatically that the knowledge he has was given to him through divine inspiration and also by attunement with *Oweya*. This spiritual power is found in various grades among the *Igbe* priests and members. They are the liaison officers or intermediaries between the people and the Supreme Being.

7. Functions of *Igbe* Priests

There are many important functions of *Igbe* priests. The priest is fully in charge of offering of sacrifices and handling confessions of members. The priest is responsible to teach members their social responsibilities in terms of moral uprightness, participating in village festivals, and ordination of leaders in the village, He is expected to be the spiritual watchdog to the community. In view of their leadership roles, they are participating actively in the politics of the community in terms of giving proper direction to political leaders in the community (Afatakpa, 2016). By means of divination and prophecy, *Igbe* priests could detect evil fellows and reveal their devilish acts. In the same vein, devotees could also identify such evil doers by means of dreams, visions and even divination or prophecy. The priests of *Igbe* encourage such persons to confess and turn from evil acts and in addition, they conduct purification rites and perform rituals of cleansing to cleanse and restore the blemish individuals and erring communities. Although *Igbe* worshippers believe that justice is ultimate a divine prerogative as God punishes evil people accordingly, the priests could apply strict disciplinary action and impose sanctions on member who engage in evil acts.

Other areas where the significance of *Igbe* religion and priesthood manifest include spiritual or divine connection through which the adherents seek guidance, get protection and acquire blessing; a sense of community and oneness which the collective religious expression under the superintendence of the priest fosters among the adherents; and cultural preservation which is as a result of the priests' use of the cultural materials and resources of the native people to worship God and serve humanity.

8. Conclusion

This study has shown that *Igbe* religion is an indigenous monotheistic religion founded by *Ubiesha* in *Kokori* land. The priests are divinely called as

spiritual intermediaries between the worshippers and the Supreme Being just as it was the case in the Old Testament. The duties or functions of the priests are religious, cultural and social. The study has revealed that the *Igbe* priests are held in very high regard among the worshippers and they play very crucial roles in the practice of the religion. Although there are certainly some key differences and variations, there is no doubt that the essence of *Igbe* religion and the role and significance of its priesthood are not significantly different from that of other religions particularly in ancient Israel as recorded in the Old Testament. Both *Igbe* and the Old Testament religion share the common idea of monotheism; hence, priesthood in both religions is based on the notion of a monotheistic God who selects or consecrates and sets a servant apart to officiate in his temple. Holiness and sacrifice are two inseparable ideas bound up with the priest of God. In both religions, priesthood is meant to offer the people (adherents or worshippers) spiritual guidance, provide ethical and moral precepts as they relate to personal, interpersonal and divine-human relationships in order to create a community that is consistent with God even as they aid the people to navigate and overcome existential challenges. It is recommended that scholarship should focus more attention to indigenous forms of religious experience and expression and investigate the core elements of some of the variants of African Traditional Religion such as *Igbe* religion. This will cure the sickening attitude of derogatory labeling and classification of whatever cultural values or religious expression that does not fit into the criteria of Christian thought.

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Personal Communication

S/N	NAMES	Sex	Age	Occupation	Location	Date
1	Mrs. Rose Ovie Onoriode	F	62yrs	Trader	Idiagbon street Kokori	4/10/2023
2	<i>Uku</i> Efe Isievwore	M	68yrs	Priest	Edeke Street	4/10/2023
3	Sir Michael Sodje	M	75yrs	Business man	Edeke street	4/10/2023
4	Mr. Johnson Onievwosa	M	55yrs	Teacher	Ekrose Street	4/10/2023
5	Mr Richard Edade	M	46yrs	Civil Servant	Ekrose Street	11/11/2023
6	Sir Onome Umuze	M	79yrs	Retired	Egbon Street	11/11/2023
7	Prince Oghenetega Ik <i>Uku</i>	F	44yrs	Business man	Egbon Street	11/11/2023
8	Mrs Baby Efetobo	F	53yrs	Trader	Ekraka Street	11/11/2023
9	Madam Felicia Irikefe	F	57yrs	Trader	Uvwedi Street	11/11/2023
10	Madam EseOghene Onajite	F	68yrs	Trader	Uvwedi Street	11/11/2023
11.	Priest Ovie <i>Uku</i>	M	70yrs	Priest	Uvwedi Street	11/11/2023