

**LOVE (MARK. 12:28-34):  
THE GREATEST VALUE THAT MARKS OUT  
GOOD CHRISTIANS THE IGBO  
CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

**EZEOGAMBA, ANTHONY**

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University  
Anambra State

**Abstract**

*God created mankind for them to experience his love and reciprocate it for their good. He expects mankind to worship him with their whole being. This concern that is shown to God is expected to be reciprocated in their families and by extension, their communities. The general meaning of the Greek word *agapē* as used in Mark 12:28-34 is goodwill, affection, respect, benevolence, and concern for the welfare of the loved. Today, double allegiance is in the increase to the extent that some Christians have turned around to give to deities, shrines, images of animals, and even trees this *agapē* that is due for God and above all there is hatred between believers living together. The problem now is that some Christians have gods instead of God and are in disarray today in their families. This study aims to expose that the above problems persist mainly because there are few authentic Christians who understand the full meaning of the content of Mark 12:28-34. This study adopts textual criticism in the exegesis of Mark 12:28-34 as well as library research to unravel the intentions God expects from mankind towards himself and towards themselves. The study discovers that one of the major causes of the increase in double allegiance is the fact that the Christianity that came to Igbo land was a divided one. It recommends that leaders of the different Christian Churches have to return to the basics to straighten the strayed relationship between them if they are to remain relevant in the world. This study argues that the understanding of the above passage will bring out true worship of God and the harmonious relationship in various Christian families. Significantly, this work will be of immense benefit to Igbo Christians and indeed all Christians.*

**Key words:** Value, Love, Christian, Igbo, Experience.

**Introduction:**

The term *dinwenum* is an Igbo word that has been Christianised and used with capital 'D' when it refers to God. This means that word had been in existence before the advent of the missionaries. Till the advent of the missionaries, it used to be a name an Igbo woman calls her husband. The Hebrews also share a similar world view with Igbo where a wife addresses her husband as "lord/master" '*adon*' (1Peter 3:6; Gen. 18:12) or where a servant addresses his owner as a master. No one can serve two masters at the same time or wife of two husbands at the same time (Luke 16:13-15). It is a taboo among the Igbos, Jews and Christians (Matt. 6:24; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:39). All these are to abhor divided attention when it comes

to marriage. It is only love that assures oneness in any relationship - marriage, relationship with God, fellow human beings. So the concept of "*Dinwenu*" or "*di m*" emphasizes belongingness, the person has no other one except the acclaimed. It was not used originally among Igbos to refer to God because they have gods. Rather, it was used to refer to a husband who is one with the wife.

Before the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the Igbos knew the importance of togetherness which was manifested in the cultural values which they were living out and these cultural values include: a sense of community life; good human relationships; the sacredness of life; hospitality towards visitors; the sense of the sacred and religion; respect for authority and the elders (Onwubiko, 1971, p.13) as well as a sense of '*nwanne*' (brotherhood). Hence the Igbo proverb, *O nuru ube nwanne agbakwala oso* (He who hears the cry of a brother/sister should not keep quiet). These are signs of having been keeping the greatest commandment – love – though not universalised in the same intensity. The coming of the missionaries did not actually strengthen these cultural values generally. But they were strengthened denominationally, which was manifested then strongly among the newly baptised, converts and especially in the Christian villages. Obi, (1985, pp.35-36) says, "The buying back of slaves led to the opening of the Christian village - a temporary compromise between Europe and Africa, where the inmates lived a very strictly regulated life with definite hours for prayers, play and work. The missionaries considered it a most favourable circumstance where the Catholic doctrine could be imparted to the catechumens away from the neutralizing influence of non-Christian neighbours, Protestants and some merchants/civil servants". The above information exposes also the rivalries that existed among the early Christians and thus making their practice of *agapē* questionable. Those that lived in the Christian villages saw one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord who happen to have one "Father who is God" (Obi, 1985, p.3). This implies that when people worship the same God, they tend to see one another as close brothers and sisters.

Unfortunately, this oneness that had existed and manifested through cultural values before the coming of Christianity among the Igbos was not actually strengthened by the implantation of Christianity in Igboland, except denominationally. It is, therefore, waning speedily today among Christians in general and the Igbo in particular. This, no doubt, must have been caused by a lack of understanding of **God and neighbour** in our existence here on earth. Once one understands the above clearly, one will automatically love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength as well as love one's neighbour as one's self. But Igbo Christians seem not to still unanimously believe in one God; there are many gods among the Igbos coupled with the bad economic situation of the Nigerian nation as a whole. Hence, the self is enthroned over neighbour. Though when the majority of Igbo were worshipping gods other than Christian God, they believed that a god can be dropped when its potency is not strong enough to defend one. That is why the Igbo then could move from their town to other towns looking for a more potent god or gods to defend them and wherever such a god(s) is seen, its inhabitants were highly respected lest their god strikes you. Hence, double allegiance was not considered sinful among them then.

### Explication of Some Keywords:

It is good to understand some terms that will help us to appreciate this topic clearly. Value comes from the Greek words *axia*, *timē* and *antimo*. *Axia*, for instance, means value, worth, merit, valuation, denomination, worthiness. Again, the Greek word, *timē* means price, value, cost, honour, rate, fare. Finally, the Greek word, *antimo* simply means value (www.definitions.net). This shows that the word "value" has so many nuances in meaning but all are pointing towards the same thing. Hence, in this write up we shall take value to be, "principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgment of what is important in life" (dictionary.cambridge.org). We listed above the principles or values, which Igbo lived with before the coming of the missionaries though subjectively and not fully universalised among them as a result of the existence of many gods in their community. Hence, it does not mean that Igbo as an ethnic group lived harmoniously with themselves before the missionaries came. Since intertribal wars and even land disputes were prevalent then.

Love is the greatest and centre of all values. It is the source of harmony between mankind and mankind and their maker (God). In the English language, one word stands for love but in the Greek language, there are at least eight words that explain different types of love. Let us, therefore, list them and point out the one we mean whenever we talk of Christian love, which is 'the greatest of all virtues as well as all commandments.' They include: (a) *Eros* which stands for passionate, physical and emotional love based on aesthetic enjoyment; the stereotype of romantic love. This is a type of love prostitutes and harlots indulge in. (b) *Ludus*, which stands for a love that is played as a game or sport; conquest; anyone who exhibits it may have multiple partners at once. It is the type of love unfaithful people and those who worship different gods indulge in. (c) *Storge* meaning an affectionate love that slowly develops from friendship, based on similarity. It is a type of love that a boy and girl or a man and a maiden can be in, in a temporal way. It can also be the type of love that may easily exist between dog owners and their dogs. (d) *Pragma* is a type of love that is driven by the head, not the heart. It is a love that has almost no feeling for the other. It is a love that calculates and it is also selfish. (e) *Mania*: It is obsessive love; anyone that has it experiences great emotional highs and lows; those that have it are very possessive and often they are jealous lovers. People with it can kill anyone who stands in their way to meet their lover. People engaged in this type of love can easily commit suicide especially if their lover rejects them or if the object of their love is taken away. (f) *Philia* love sustains one in a team or a group or in a family. It is the love parents have for their children. Simply put, this is a family type of love. (g) *Philautia* is clearly self-love, being kind to oneself, completely a selfish love. It is a type of love an ouroboros animal has for itself; for it brings itself into existence and removes itself out of existence. (h) The last and the greatest is *agape*. This is a selfless and altruistic love; it is spiritual love, the type of love that unites Christians to Christ. This is the type of love we are really talking about and which Jesus used in Mark 12:28-34 (Reed, 2019). In this work, therefore, whenever we mention Christian 'love' we are talking of *agape*. It is the love that ought to exist between Christians and the type that ought to exist between God and mankind.

Another word that needs explaining is "Christian/Christians" for a clear understanding of the topic under consideration. In the words of Ezeogamba (2019, pp. 6-7),

This name historically was given to the followers of Jesus Christ by those who were outside the community of believers (Acts 11:26) as well as in Acts 26:28), it was used sarcastically by King Agrippa so as to chide Paul. That is, the name was not what the followers of Jesus Christ gave to themselves but what they received derogatorily because they were behaving like Christ. The name in actual fact presents them as people who belong to Christ (1 Peter 4:16).

The emphasis is that the name was given to them because they were behaving like Christ (Phil. 2:8-10). Baptism remains the only gate through which one joins the community of Christians. His followers are happy to answer Christians because he proved to them a true friend and brother by altruistically dying for them when they were still sinners (Rom. 5:8-10; John 15:15; Mark 3:35). The implication of the above is that all the baptized are Christians and they are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and God is the Father of all. They are guided together by the principles of *agape*, which are altruistic in nature. This shows that among Christians, the value that guides them is *agape* in its naturalness. Division, hatred and selfishness are not part of the qualities of Christians and their communities but togetherness, oneness, unity and *agape* are their inseparable qualities, both as individuals and as a community (John 17:21). In summary, Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus thus, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 4:32-5:2). In this work, therefore, Christians are seen as the followers of Christ. Akpovewwe, (2011, p.28) reflecting on the early Christians, is of the opinion that pagans in the early period of the Church used to admire the type of conviviality and joy that used to radiates when a Christian finds oneself in the midst of other Christians; he used just a phrase to summarize the opinions of the pagans as they admired the early Christians thus, "See how they love themselves". Hence, as a result, many came to join them and became Christians.

For the Igbo, they shared some of the above-mentioned qualities of Christians but theirs become weaker in intensity as it goes beyond the family circle, kindred, village, town, etc. Their communal relationship is not the same as it is between people of the same kindred and as it is between people of different kindred. But as for Christians, theirs is universal brotherhood and sisterhood. The Igbos were guided by *philia* love before the coming of the missionaries. That is why they can tell you that "blood is thicker than water." Again, "*onye ya na umunnaya anoghi di ka ukpala e fopuru nku ya nile*" (he who is excommunicated from his kindred is like a grasshopper whose wings had been plucked out). Hence, the concept of *nwanne* (brethren) is very strong among the Igbos. In other words, it is parochial.

Before the advent of the missionaries, Igbos do things in stages. For instance, a dictum that says, "Charity begins at home" is absolutely true among Igbo because of the *philia* love that is very pronounced among them. Hence the Igbo adage, "*Nwanne onye na agba ajo egwu, oko iku an-ako ya,*" (If one's brother dances abnormally, his brethren cover their faces in shame); again, "*There na-eme nwanne onyeara*" (brethren are ashamed whenever a member of their family is mad). This is why family, *umunna* (extended family), kindred, village, and town

see themselves as people of the same stock but the cohesion reduces as the relationship goes beyond the family circle. This is to the extent that the Igbo take care of their indigent family members and even the mentally deranged ones. They even go to the extent of bringing wives for the impotent and mentally deranged members of their family to maintain their lineage. Before the advent of missionaries, one rarely sees a beggar in Igboland as a result of each family taking care of themselves. Wherever there is a dispute between brothers or sisters, it is first of all handled in the family, if the family is not able to settle it, then *umunna* is invited, if not kindred, if not the village and once it reaches the town, then it has reached the final stage of litigation. Disputes handled in the level of town is like the case handled by the present-day supreme court.

Igbo people are not cannibalistic. What is very clear is that even before the advent of the missionaries, it was a taboo for one to cannibalise any member of his family or kindred, it must be someone that is absolutely unknown (Purwarno, 2017). This implies that those principles we mentioned above, which we reported that Igbo had before the coming of the missionaries, were not really universalized among the Igbo then and that the love they had for one another is not *agape* but *philia* love. They were practised efficiently in the family circles and at most on the town level but beyond the town anything is possible. Hence, Igbo believe that one is always free and comfortable in the midst of his kith and kin. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to say that it is a scandal for one to be afraid before his relatives. If it happens, then, know that, that person must have committed one abomination or the other, hence the saying, "*Okuko nyuo aru, ala achuba ya oso*" (when the chicken messes up, the land pursues it).

#### **Exegesis of Mark 12:28-34:**

Let us now exegetically consider the meaning of the instruction Jesus gave in the above passage and see how it is practiced among Igbo Christians of Eastern Nigeria. Here, we consider the following: the remote and immediate context, unity, textual criticism, semantic interpretation, and content interpretation of the text as well as its practicability among Igbo Christians.

#### **Remote and Immediate Context of Mark 12:28-34:**

Remotely, Jesus was discussing several misbehaviours of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes that may deprive them the kingdom of God at the end of life. He used such parable as the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-12). The immediate context of Mark 12:28-34 is question and answer section Jesus engaged in with the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees as one of his methodologies. Thus, he was asked several questions, which included paying or not paying tax (Mark 12:13-17), and the reality of the resurrection of the dead (18-27). It was based on that question and answer that a Scribe who had listened to them debating with Jesus appreciated that Jesus had given good answers as an expert and put a further question to him, thus, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?'(v.28). The unnamed Scribe saw Jesus as wisdom personified, and thus threw the above question to him. He had the impression that Jesus had the answer to all questions because of the way he handled the questions from others.

### Unity of the Text:

Mark 12:28-34 is a unit. It began with a question and ended with the answer to the question. As a result, the text began with the Greek word *epērōtēsen* "questioned" (v.28) and ended with *eperōtēsai* "to question" (v.34); they formed inclusion for the text. In synoptic tradition just as Mark reported this idea in 12:28-34; Matthew has it in 22:35-40; whereas Luke has it in 10:25-28. We shall look at their nuances below but suffice it mention that they are all single units in their various gospels. In resume, from verses 28 to 34 of Mark, the content is about the greatest commandment that can ensure oneness between humans and between humans and God.

### Textual Criticism:

All the verses in this text have one critical problem or the other. Verse 28 has two critical problems namely replacement of a word and transposition of words. The following manuscripts Ƴ2 A B 33 M<sub>1</sub> co replaced *idōn* which is nominative masculine singular, second aorist, active participle from the word *eidon* meaning "of perception by sight, see, perceive" (Peschbacher, 1990, p.118). They replaced *idōn* with another word, *eidōs*, which is also a nominative masculine singular, perfect active participle from the word *oida* meaning "to know/to know-how" (Peschbacher, 1990, p.289). The implication of this replacement is that the Scribe knows with certainty that Jesus has answered correctly the questions that were thrown to him but Nestle-Aland has *idōn* which implies that the Scribe from all standards perceived from the faces of all present and those who asked him questions that Jesus had answered well his question to him. The following manuscripts are in harmony with Nestle-Aland in preferring *idōn* to *eidōs* and they include, Ƴ\* C (D) L W Q Ψ and numerous others. Based on the strength of these manuscripts we align and prefer *idōn* to *eidōs*. In this verse also, there is a transposition of the following words, *apekrithē autois* "he answered them." Manuscripts like A D Ψ have *autois apekrithē*. They mean the same thing.

Verse 29 has two alternative readings of words. In the first set of alternative reading, Nestle-Aland's New Testament Greek Text has *apekrithē ho Iēsous* "Jesus answered" whereas other manuscripts like A C M<sub>1</sub> and others have *ho de Iēsous apekrithē autō* "but Jesus answered to him". It is good to note that the added conjunction "*de*" also means "but"; "*de* is weaker than *alla*, often having no stronger meaning than *and*, being used simply to provide a link with what has gone before" (Jay, 1987, p.56). In light of this, this alternative reading is editorial addition. Since the addition of '*de*' is just for connecting thoughts together, we still accept the content of Nestle-Aland in union with the following manuscripts Ƴ B L D ψ 33. Again, in the second set of an alternative reading of words in this verse, Nestle-Aland has *hoti prōtē estin* "The First is". The word "*hoti*" is "often used pleonastically in reciting another's words" (Peschbacher, 1990, p.299). In this case, it is used herein reciting Jesus' words. It is used in reporting a statement made by another by an author. Manuscripts like A C 33 *al* and others have *hoti prōtē pantōn tōn entolōn* "The first of all the commandments". This no doubt is an exegetical judgment made by the editors of those manuscripts. However, they both mean the same fundamentally.

In verse 30, there are five critical problems namely, three omissions of a word or words, one omission of a clause and one insertion. On the omissions, the manuscripts B D\* X ?13 pc omitted *tēs* "the". These manuscripts cleverly removed this article in all the places it appeared in the text. It is abnormal for a Greek text to omit article before a noun, or even adjective. Greek is very benevolent in the use of the article. Nestle-Aland and all the most ancient manuscripts all retained the article *tēs*. These manuscripts even omitted this phrase, *kai ex holēs tēs dianoias sou* "and with all your mind." Maybe they omitted it taking it to be superfluous. But Nestle-Aland has "with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." The four, no doubt, were used for the sake of emphasis. It brings out the meaning of the sentence. The sentence is more attractive and meaningful as it is than if it is removed. Finally, the following manuscripts W Q pc k A D etc inserted *autē prōtē entolē* "this (is) first commandment". This is a typical example of exegetical misjudgment. It is really irrelevant to add it in this verse. The verse as it is presently constituted gives enough information than following other manuscripts.

Verse 31 has one critical problem, which is an alternative reading of words. Nestle-Aland has *deutera autē* "(the) second (is) this", whereas DΨ3 A and others have *kai deutera omoia autē* "and (the) second (is) like this". Jesus was categorical, he did not use simile in his answer. The following more ancient manuscripts Ξ B L D Ψ and others supported the content of Nestle-Aland. The two commandments cannot be like one another but they are unique in themselves. This implies that what they have in common is that, 'just as you love God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, love your neighbour as yourself with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

There is one critical problem in verse 32, which is an omission of *kai* "and" by the following authorities, *B pc sys.p.* This is conjunction. Its presence in this verse is very important for it links verse 31 and 32 together. Verse 33 has four critical problems and they are omission, two alternative readings and an insertion. B Ψ pc omitted *tēs* "the", maybe, this is intended to have the same harmony with verse 30 above for it is still some of these manuscripts that omitted this article in verse 30 that omitted it here. In place of *suneseōs* "understanding" manuscripts, D Q 563 it, have *dunameōs* "power, strength/ability." This is no doubt a mistake that must have resulted either from an aural mistake or exegetical misjudgement. The word *dunameōs* does not fit in this verse at all since we already have a similar word namely *ischus* "strength", which is a human strength whereas *dunameōs* is mystical power. In the second alternative reading, Nestle-Aland has *ischus* "strength" whereas manuscript D has *psuchēs* "soul". It is also a result of either an aural mistake or exegetical misjudgment or influence of Deut. 6:4-5 where we have it thus, "Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh. You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." In this case, there is nothing like "your mind." Jesus, from every indication, improved on what the Israelites used to know thus he mentioned four things with which one must love God with, namely, "heart, soul, mind and strength." These nuances have nothing to add to this sentence but all to detract from it. Finally, in this verse, there is an insertion made by the following manuscripts, Ξ L D Ψ ? and others. They inserted *tōn* "the". The verse makes a better sense when it is inserted if one should follow the Greek grammatical rule. It is relevant but since what we have in the text makes for a harder reading, we stick to it as being closer to the original.





This does not mean that none of them followed Christ. There were some scribes that followed Christ (Matt. 8:19). Some of them even aligned with Paul against the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead or in the existence of angels or spirit (Acts 23:9). Paul from every indication must have been a scribe before his conversion (Acts 22:3; 26:10-11). So scribes are a knowledgeable, honourable and powerful set of people among the Jews. No one can impress them, or dares to argue with them and indeed no one can easily defeat them in an argument. That is why it is really novel and noble to read in Mark 12:28 that "One of the scribes who had listened to them debating appreciated that Jesus had given a good answer and put a further question to him." The implication is that he has seen someone who is more knowledgeable than all the members of his group.

*Suzētountōn* is what attracted the scribe to Jesus. *Suzētountōn* is a verb, present participle active mood, genitive masculine plural, from the word *suzēteō* meaning, "reasoning together, arguing, debating." The tone of verse 28 indicates that they were reasoning together and superior reasoning carried the day. Jesus' exceptional reasoning made the scribe to come closer and to ask his own question. *Prōtē* is an adjective, nominative, feminine singular meaning, "First". The implication of "first" is the idea of others. There are so many laws to the extent that one does not know the order again. All laws seem to be important, but there ought to be laws that would be more important than the others. Such a question provokes that. This must have been caused by the problems raised by the existence of Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash. "The Mishnah are short explanations of the Torah. The Talmud is long and complex explanations of the Mishnah. The Midrash are commentaries on the Tanach (which include the books of the Torah and the books of prophets)"[<https://www.google.com>]. The implication is that Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash expanded the Torah beyond imagination, hence, the question of which is the first of the commandments? There is no doubt that the questioner was really overwhelmed by the six hundred and thirteen laws (613) [Harrington, 1997], which were the products of the original Ten Commandments that were given to Moses at Mount Sinai which the scribes multiplied.

When he was asking for the first, he was talking of the first *entolē*. *Entolē* is nominative, feminine singular, meaning "commandment." What comes to mind here readily is the Ten Commandments which God wrote on tablets of stone and gave to Moss (Exod. 20:1-26; Deut. 5:1-22). The Ten Commandments, which God gave to mankind through Moses were originally meant to maintain a good relationship between God and neighbour. For mankind to understand that God is the creator of heaven and earth and the one that sustains the world in existence. Every honour and adoration belongs to him and him alone. Since God created all, we are all his children and as a result, we must individually respect one another as brothers in progress. Out of the Ten Commandments, only the first three are directed to the honour of God and numbers four to ten are for good human relationships (Broderick, 2005, p.135). This implies that the commandment can comfortably be divided into two parts as affirmed by Jesus in his answer to what the scribe asked.

Another important word is *heis*, which is an adjective, nominative masculine singular, meaning, "one". That means He God is one and no other; He is the one and only God. This implies that the God who created heaven and earth is one and only God who can never share

His glory with any other creature (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; 32:39; Psalm 18:31; Mark 12:29-34; John 17:3; Rom 3:30; Eph. 4:6; Gal. 3:20; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19 etc) On earth, every child has only one father and in heaven only one God. It pains a father after giving something to his child and the child goes away to thank another man telling him that 'he is his life.' How much more God who gave us life and we go about praising idols as gods.

*Agapēseis* is another important word that throws light to the text. *Agapēseis* is a verb, future indicative active mood, second person singular, from the word, *agapaō* "love". This is what unifies the two relationships - the relationship between God and mankind as well as between humankind themselves. Mankind is mandated to love God with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength and mankind is also required to love their neighbours as themselves (Vv 30-31).

We have yet another connecting word namely, *deutera*, which is an adjective, nominative feminine singular, meaning, "second". Just as we stated above, the fact that there is "one" shows that there are others. In this case, the fact that there is "second" shows that there is "first". The implication is that there is order and that order is the order of importance. Hence, love of God is first and love of neighbour is second, though each is unique in itself; but none can exist without the other (v.31). Hence, no one can love God effectively without loving his neighbour.

*Plēsion* is an adverb meaning "neighbour". This takes care of the centre of the second leg of the two most important of all the commandments. It is clear that once love is shown to God and to neighbour, one has proven to be a Christian worth the name. Neighbour does not just mean a person living next door to us or very near to us or members of my household, village, town, instead, neighbour embraces all the above and includes even more especially according to Ezeogamba, (2013, p. 51) who says, "a person of any nation, who is in need of any kindness, is our neighbour". The implication is that every human being is your neighbour in Christ.

*Seauton* is another word that attracted the attention of the researcher. This is because, Jesus says, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (v. 31). The word *Seauton* is a personal possessive pronoun, accusative case, masculine gender, second person singular, meaning, "yourself". It is a reflexive pronoun without nominative, the original form of the word is *seautou*. The implication is that the love you show to your neighbour can only be Christian when you love your neighbour as much as you love yourself. This is very hard for it advocates the suppression of the self. This is because the majority of people are selfish even without knowing that. This is evident when one considers the way people get employment in institutions owned by either Federal or State Governments, admissions into various universities whether private, state or federal and so many other areas. The dictum of "*imamadu*" (nepotism) is prevalent in all that. The moment everything is subjected to merit and nepotism abhorred, then the love of neighbour as oneself will shine out. This is the reason behind the culture in Igbo land where if there is anything to be shared, for instance, meat, it has to be shared by the youngest person since he will eventually be the last to select at the end of the day. In that case, he will make an honest effort to share it equally unlike the way he would have done it if he were to be the first to select.

**Mark 12:28-34 (Matt 22:35-40; Luke 10:25-28) in Synoptic Tradition:**

The synopsis of the three gospels shows that each presenter used a different context to suit his audience. What is clear and common from the three gospels is that the questioner is a member of the Pharisee sect. Mark named him a scribe, Matthew named him one of the Pharisees, and Luke called him a lawyer. Based on our explanations above, the three gospels used different terminologies to represent the same person. Only Matthew and Luke agree that he was not asking for knowledge but to test Jesus. All three agree that love of God and neighbour are the two most important commandments and that on them hang all others. Only Mark and Matthew divided them into first and second laws, whereas Luke joined them together with a conjunction "kai". Only Mark and Matthew asked, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Whereas Luke was asking "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

In Mark and Matthew, it was Jesus that answered the question quoting the law but numbering them according to their importance whereas in Luke the question was meticulously thrown back to the lawyer and he answered it himself by quoting what is written on the law. Only Mark and Luke have loving God with one's whole heart, soul, mind and strength whereas Matthew have only one's whole heart, soul and mind. It is no exaggeration to say that Matthew and Luke paraphrased Mark, as a result, one could notice some editorial fatigues. The implication is that Mark 12:28-34 is part of Triple Tradition and happens to be the source for Matthew and Luke.

**Thematic Interpretation of Mark 12:28-34:**

For easy interpretation, this passage is divided into three subsections thus: opening remarks and questions (v. 28), answer (vv. 29-31) and evaluation from the scribe and Jesus (vv. 32-34).

**(a) Opening Remarks and Questions (v.28):**

It is not everyone that certain questions are thrown to. Jesus received the question from the scribe because of what he is to people and what he proved to be before the scribe that threw the question to him. Jesus presented himself as a better teacher, one who provides a better interpretation than other rabbis. This is self-evident in Matt 5: 20-48. In these verses, he gave a proper interpretation of the laws as they ought and authoritatively as the owner of the law. In Mark 1:22 Jesus was seen as being greater than the scribes because he teaches with authority beyond the capacity of the scribes. Most probably, in this verse, the scribe had seen Jesus as the superior one. Such a thought must have moved the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees to see him as a great rabbi. Discussing which of the commandment is the greatest is one of the things Rabbis used to do.

**(b) Answer (Vv. 29-31):**

A cursory look on these verses shows that Jesus was asked for the greatest commandment but he gave an answer to the greatest as well as the one that is closely following it since he knows actually what the questioner had wanted to hear and know. Mentioning them together does not

in any way show equality of the two but he provided them in their descending order of importance, first and second. In answering the question, Jesus followed the Jewish understanding of the law and thus combined two laws together namely Deut 6:4-5; and Lev. 19:18. It is not really a new law but none had ever seen them as the greatest of the commandments. Following Jesus, Paul exposed in 1 Cor. 13:13 that "three things last, faith, hope and charity, but the greatest is charity." It is good to know that the principle of these two laws Jesus named 'first and second' is "love" (Keener, 1993, p.169). Jesus in answering the question goes back to the root and thus confirm his statement elsewhere, "I came not to abolish but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17). What Jesus answered is really an impeccably orthodox answer, which is the love of God and neighbour known as the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18) [Black, 2010. p.671]. In the same way, Howard, and Peabody, (1998, pp.1424-1425) said, in answering the question,

Jesus does not seek to prioritize among the six hundred and thirteen acknowledged commandments. Instead, he goes again to a more fundamental level, to the commandment on which all other commandments are based, the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5), the prayer prayed daily by Jews (vv. 29-30). Unbidden, he adds the second, again quoting Scripture, this time from Lev. 19:18b, and concludes that no commandment is greater than the commands to love God and love the neighbour, a sentiment not unknown in Judaism.

In the love of God, it was pointed out that one must love God with the four nouns namely, heart, soul, mind and strength. These refer not to different parts of the body "but are a way of stressing that the whole person should love God with all available resources" (Harrington, 1997, p.622). In the love of God, there should be no distraction and that is why it is emphasised that there is one God. The two commandments are predicated with love. Love is their underlying strengths. To give credence to the above two commandments, Peter admonished Christians thus, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:8-10).

(c) **Evaluation from both the scribe and Jesus (Vv.32-34).** The questioner did not just commend Jesus for answering him properly, he even amplifies his assessment of what Jesus said using the following passages Deut. 4:35; 1 Sam 15:22; Isa 45:5, 21; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8. The implication is that the scribe even added other passages to solidify and authenticate what Jesus had answered. He spoke as if he was trying to repeat what had already been said by Jesus but in actual fact, he was manifesting his satisfaction. Simply put, he affirmed what Jesus answered and showed that he was satisfied. The response of this scribe made Jesus make an enigmatic response to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (v.34). The implication is that he is not yet complete. Knowledge is not enough; one must put what he knows into practice before one can fully be part of the kingdom. That is why medical doctors agree that naming your sickness is the first stage of getting cured or closest road to one's cure (Black, 2010). Howard and Peabody, (p.1425) are of the opinion that, "The nearness of this scribe to

the Reign of God with this understanding of the Law signals a form of Judaism in which Gentile Christians could easily see the roots of their own faith". Hence, anyone who knows the above greatest commandment is on the road already to the destination. As a result of this, no one asked him any question again.

#### **Igbo on the Love of God and Neighbour:**

The Igbo people had some cultural values that showed that they practiced love of neighbour among themselves before the advent of missionaries in eastern Nigeria. The mentioned cultural values were not actually upheld by the missionaries except denominationally. This is because the Christianity they brought to Nigeria was a divided Christianity. The missionaries seemed to have only four things in common, namely, Christ, Bible, the name 'Christians' and denominational love, that is, love that is not universal. The picture of the family Jesus left behind has "love of God and love of neighbour" as a badge. The picture of this family/community of believers which Jesus left behind in the world can be seen in Acts 2:42-47. It shows that the early Christians truly lived like a body. According to the above passage, "the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). This was when the Church was still truly one, apostolic, holy, universal and guided by the *agapē*. This is a verse that is packed with meaning. It challenges and offers direction for the Church of today. For instance, then, "they devoted themselves:" The word devoted comes from the Greek present participle *proskarterountes* which means "continue faithfully", "remain constant", "continuing steadfastly". All these nuances point out the idea of total submission and acceptance to what the apostles were doing with them and for them. Obedience and devotion in following seemed to be the watchword of the early Christians. Because *agapē* has disappeared, this spirit of devotion to the teachings of the apostles is dying today and needs to be revived. Another word is 'teaching' which comes from the Greek word *didachē*, which means, the compendium of the teachings of the apostles that originates from what they learnt from Christ. The message has been watered down today hence very many denominations in Christendom which are making it impossible to practice *agapē*.

Another character of the early Church is fellowship - *koinōnia* which means "sharing", "association", "fellowship". This is more than sitting together; it is fellowship in friendship or in love, sharing life together or experiences. Early Christians were also noted to fellowship also in the breaking of Bread. Breaking of Bread refers either to an ordinary meal or to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist). We gather on Sundays and weekdays to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and leave the celebration to enter into the world to love and serve others through the breaking of ourselves not literally but spiritually for the welfare of others. If this was sustained and informed missionary enterprises in Igboland, their cultural values would have been sustained. Thus, Christianity would have been stronger in Igboland than any other place.

Hence, before the arrival of the missionaries to the Eastern Nigeria, the above qualities, namely *proskarterountes*, *didachē*, *koinōnia* as well as *agapē* have all waned but domiciled in various denominations. This is to the extent that the missionaries were quarrelling among themselves as they were evangelising the Igbos. In Igboland, there are two main groups of

Christian bodies that evangelised it and they include the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), the Church Missionary Society (CMS). By 1857 the CMS mission was fully engaged and a diocese of CMS was established in 1864 in Eastern Nigeria (<https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu>). On the other hand, RCM established properly in Onitsha on 29th December 1885 (Obi, 1985, p.3). These two groups despite the fact that they are Christians were quarrelling continuously among themselves, in short, they were rivals. They struggled continuously as they were looking for converts. That rivalry has persisted today in Igboland to the extent that political offices are determined by the Christian denomination a particular candidate comes from especially in Anambra State. The implication is that in any family, kindred, village, town where people attend the same Christian denomination, they see one another as brothers and sisters and others as enemies. This is to the extent that Catholics see Anglicans as people who are queer in their behaviour. Hence, the derogatory remark, "*I na-akpa agwa ka ndi ceremesi*" (You are behaving like a member of CMS).

This ugly behaviour of the early missionaries that evangelised Igboland helped in no small way in weakening all the known cultural values that would have helped in the propagation of the Christian message, hence, Igboland was divided into Pagans, Catholics, Anglicans/Protestants religious bodies. Such affected the unity of *Umunna* (kindred members), *umunne* (family members), especially where the above three main religious affiliations exist. Had it been that the Christianity that came to Igbo land was to be the type that respected the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 and the qualities of Acts 2:42-47 then the God-given cultural values of Igbos would have been strengthened and promoted as Christian values. It would have helped to change their orientation of running from time to time back to pagan practices.

**Conclusion:** We have been able to discover from the above that "Love of God and Love of Neighbour" is indigenous to the Igbo but not really universalized among them. The Christian Church that was fully united from the beginning allowed division to arise in their midst and this division destroyed the *agapē* that guided from the beginning the relationship that ought to exist between God and mankind and between humans. Thus Christianity entered into Nigeria as denominations. With that spirit, they weakened what they would have strengthened in their midst. The researcher recommends that Christians should return back to the basics and remain one.

## REFERENCES

- Akponeywe, P. (2011). *Church: Reflection of the Triune God, an introduction to Trinitarian Ecclesiology*. ASA: West Bow.
- Black, C. (2010). *The new interpreter's Bible, one volume commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press
- Broderick, R. ed. (2005). *A to Z guide to the Catholic faith*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- STANDS4LLC, (2020). "Value." [www.definitions.net/translate/value](http://www.definitions.net/translate/value).
- Ezeogamba, A. (2013). Identification of a Neighbour (Luke 10:25-37) in Nigerian Multi-Cultural Context. In *Areopagus, Journal of Church & State Relations*. Port Harcourt: Heb-Unit Tech Global Pub.
- Ezeogamba, A. (2019). *Christianity of Christians: An Exegetical interpretation of Matt. 5:13-16 and its challenges to Christians in Nigerian context*. Awka: Fides Media.
- Jay, E. (1987). *New Testament Greek: An introductory grammar*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Harrington, D.J. (1997). *The Gospel according to Mark in the new Jerome Biblical commentary*. London, Strand: Bath Press.
- Howard, V. & Peabody, D. B. (1998). "Mark" in *The international Bible commentary*. Bangalore: Theological publication.
- Keener, C. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary, New Testament*. Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- Nestle-Aland, (2001). *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Deutsche: Biblegesellschaft.
- Obi, C. (1985). *A hundred years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria*. Onitsha: Africana.
- Onwubiko, O. (1991). *African thought, religion & culture*. Enugu: Snaap Press.
- Packer, J. and Tenny, M. (Eds). (1980). *Illustrated manners and customs of the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Perschbacher, W. (Ed.). (1990). *The new analytical Greek lexicon*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub.
- Purwarno, P. (2017). *Cannibalistic Okonkwo: A deconstructive perspective of Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"*. Retrieved from [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net).
- Reed, J. (2020). *Unconditional Love*. Retrieved from [authorjoannereed.net](http://authorjoannereed.net).
- Robinson, E. (2005). "Scribe" in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson pub.
- \_\_\_\_\_The Igbo People- Origins & History. Retrieved from [www.newworidencyclopedia.org](http://www.newworidencyclopedia.org).
- STANDS4LLC, (2020). Value. Retrieved from [www.definitions.net/translate/value](http://www.definitions.net/translate/value).
- Watts, R.E. (2007). "Mark" in *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*. England: Baker Academic.