

**RELIGIOUS POWER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES: AN EXAMINATION OF
EZEULU'S LEADERSHIP CRISIS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD***

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FACULTY OF ART

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

NOVEMBER 2025

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY'S
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, IN PARTICULAR TO
FULFILL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS(HONS)
DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE**

NOVEMBER 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research was carried out by Mirabel Chijindu CHINEDU, in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Art, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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(Project Supervisor)

Date

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Almighty God for His Grace that sustained me during the course of the programme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Almighty God for guiding me through the ups and downs of my academic journey at the University of Benin, enabling the successful completion of this project. Gratitude is extended to my supervisor Dr. (Mrs.) Esther I. Jamgbadi, for her patience and invaluable constructive feedback throughout the project. Furthermore, thanks are offered to the Head of Department, Prof. (Mrs.) Okolocha, H.O. and other dedicated lectures in the Department of English and Literature for sharing their knowledge and expertise.

Genuine thanks go to my parents for their unwavering love, support and prayers during this project. I am also grateful to my siblings and also to my relatives for their constant love, encouragement, financial support and prayers.

Lastly, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my friends, including Emmanuella, Osarugue, Eghosa, Chidera, among many others; and also, the entirety of the Kingdom Builders Lovelife Church Inc. for their part in this significant achievement, offering them many thanks and blessings.

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ABTRACT

This study examines the exercise and consequences of religious power in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, with particular focus on the character of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu. It explores how Achebe uses Ezeulu's leadership crisis to critique the dangers of absolute spiritual authority and its effects on communal stability within a traditional Igbo society undergoing colonial disruption. The research employs qualitative textual analysis, guided by Postcolonial Theory and Michel Foucault's Power Theory, to interrogate how religious leadership intersects with issues of pride, resistance, and social change. Findings reveal that Achebe presents Ezeulu as a tragic figure whose rigid adherence to divine instruction and unwillingness to adapt to colonial and communal pressures ultimately lead to his downfall and the disintegration of traditional religious order. The study also demonstrates that colonial interference and the rise of Christianity exacerbate the collapse of indigenous authority, signalling the broader cultural shifts from traditionalism to modernity. By highlighting the intersection between religion, power, and politics, the research concludes that Achebe's *Arrow of God* is a profound commentary on leadership, spiritual absolutism, and the fragility of traditional institutions when confronted by internal rigidity and external domination.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how religious power, when concentrated in a single figure, can lead to personal and communal crisis, using the character of Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* as a case study. This research investigates the implications of Ezeulu's dual role as both a spiritual leader and a political actor, and how his interpretation and exercise of religious authority contribute to conflict and eventual breakdown in his community.

Specifically, the study aims to analyze the ways in which Achebe presents religious power as both a sacred trust and a potential source of authoritarianism, particularly when that power is wielded without regard for communal consensus or social flexibility. By exploring the leadership crisis that emerges in the novel, this research seeks to highlight the dangers inherent in rigid, centralized spiritual leadership, especially in a context of colonial disruption and cultural transition.

The study will explore how Achebe critiques traditional leadership structures that resist adaptation, and how colonial influence exacerbates existing tensions within indigenous systems of authority. Ultimately, the research intends to demonstrate that *Arrow of God* is not only a narrative about colonial imposition but also a complex

examination of how internal religious power, when mishandled, can undermine the very community it is meant to protect.

1.2 Scope of Study

This study is limited to an in-depth literary analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, with a particular focus on the character of Ezeulu and the consequences of his religious authority within the Igbo society of Umuaro. The research concentrates on how Ezeulu's role as the chief priest of Ulu intersects with issues of leadership, personal pride, cultural expectations, and colonial interference.

The analysis covers the entire novel, but special attention is given to key events that reflect Ezeulu's exercise of power such as his refusal to name the sacred yam-eating day and his interactions with colonial officials and his community. These events are examined to understand the dynamics of religious power and its impact on traditional governance and social cohesion.

While Achebe has written other novels that explore similar themes such as *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* this study is restricted solely to *Arrow of God*, as it offers a focused and nuanced portrayal of a religious leader caught between tradition and change. Comparative analysis with Achebe's other works is beyond the scope of this research.

Furthermore, the study does not engage with the entire spectrum of religious practices in Igbo cosmology, but rather narrows its lens to the fictional representation of Ulu worship and its sociopolitical implications as presented in the novel. The historical context of colonial Nigeria is considered only in relation to its influence on the central conflict in the text.

1.3 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing textual analysis as its primary method. As a literary investigation, the research is based on a close reading of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, with the aim of uncovering how religious power is constructed, exercised, and challenged within the fictional Igbo community of Umuaro.

The primary data for this study is the novel *Arrow of God*, which serves as the sole text under analysis. Selected excerpts from the novel will be critically examined to highlight key moments in Ezeulu's leadership, particularly those that demonstrate the tensions between spiritual authority, communal expectation, and colonial influence.

The analysis will employ a combination of thematic analysis and character analysis. Thematic analysis will focus on recurring issues such as power, pride, religion, resistance, and crisis, while character analysis will centre on Ezeulu's actions, motivations, and interactions with both his people and colonial forces.

To guide the interpretation, the study will be anchored in Postcolonial Theory and Power Theory, particularly Michel Foucault's concepts on power relations and institutional control. These theoretical tools will help uncover how Achebe critiques not only colonial imposition but also the internal dynamics of traditional leadership when influenced by religious absolutism.

No surveys, interviews, or statistical tools will be used, as the study is entirely text-based and interpretive in nature. All insights will be drawn from the literary content and analysed through a critical and theoretical lens.

1.4 Background of the Study

Religion has always been a central force in African societies, shaping not only spiritual beliefs but also political, social, and cultural structures. In pre-colonial Igbo society, religion served as a moral compass and a system of governance, linking the people to their gods through priests, rituals, and festivals. Religious leaders held immense authority because they acted as mediators between the divine and the community, and their pronouncements were regarded as sacred and binding. However, this concentration of power also made the position of a religious leader complex and precarious, especially when spiritual authority intersected with personal pride, social expectations, and external pressures such as colonial intrusion.

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964) explores these tensions through the character of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, who occupies a position of great spiritual and

moral influence among the six villages of Umuaro. Ezeulu's leadership embodies both the strength and fragility of traditional authority, as his role requires balancing divine commands with communal needs. Achebe presents Ezeulu as a man deeply devoted to his duty but also consumed by pride and an unyielding sense of divine obligation. His refusal to compromise in the face of social and colonial pressures ultimately leads to conflict, isolation, and tragedy. The novel, therefore, becomes a study of how religious power when wielded with rigidity can transform from a unifying force into a source of division and destruction.

The backdrop of British colonialism intensifies Ezeulu's crisis. The arrival of the colonial government and Christian missionaries introduces new systems of authority and belief that challenge the foundations of traditional leadership. Achebe's depiction of Ezeulu's downfall highlights the internal weaknesses within indigenous power structures and exposes how colonial intervention exploits those weaknesses to establish dominance. Thus, *Arrow of God* not only portrays the personal tragedy of a religious leader but also reflects the broader disintegration of African institutions under the pressures of change.

This study emerges from the need to critically examine how Achebe uses Ezeulu's experience to question the nature and limits of religious authority. It explores how power, when rooted in spiritual legitimacy but exercised without flexibility or empathy, can alienate the very community it seeks to guide. The research also situates Achebe's work within the context of postcolonial discourse, analyzing how he reclaims

African perspectives by presenting complex indigenous figures who struggle to maintain dignity in a time of transition. By investigating the relationship between religion, leadership, and colonial disruption, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of Achebe's critique of absolutism and his insight into the human dimensions of authority and belief.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Postcolonial Theory and Michel Foucault's Power Theory, which together provide the conceptual foundation for analyzing the construction and consequences of religious authority in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. These theories are essential for understanding how Achebe interrogates power dynamics within traditional Igbo society and exposes the complex intersections between spirituality, leadership, and colonial influence.

Postcolonial Theory, as articulated by scholars such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), examines the cultural, political, and ideological consequences of colonial domination. It seeks to recover indigenous voices silenced by imperial discourse and to highlight how colonial structures reshape native institutions, including religion. Through this lens, Achebe's novel can be seen as a literary act of reclamation, giving voice to African worldviews that had been distorted by colonial narratives. Postcolonial critics such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) argue that literature becomes a tool for resistance, one that

reasserts African identity and challenges the epistemic violence of colonialism. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe employs this resistance by portraying Ezeulu as a traditional leader whose struggle reflects the broader cultural conflict between indigenous authority and foreign power.

The Power Theory of Michel Foucault, especially as developed in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978), offers an additional interpretive framework for examining the mechanisms of religious control and social order within the novel. Foucault contends that power is not merely hierarchical or repressive but relational; it circulates through institutions, discourses, and practices. Power, therefore, is not something possessed but exercised; it shapes knowledge, behavior, and belief. Applying this perspective to *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu's role as the chief priest of Ulu becomes a focal point for understanding how religious institutions discipline society. His priesthood is both a spiritual office and a regulatory mechanism through which communal life is organized. However, Achebe reveals that when such authority becomes absolutist and detached from communal participation, it transforms into a destructive force rather than a cohesive one.

Foucault's notion that "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 95) further illuminates the tension between Ezeulu and his community. The people of Umuaro resist not only colonial imposition but also Ezeulu's inflexible interpretation of divine authority. This resistance ultimately leads to the erosion of his legitimacy, as the

people turn to Christianity another form of institutional power that appears more responsive to their immediate needs. Thus, power in *Arrow of God* operates in multiple directions: from Ezeulu to his people, from the colonial government to the indigenous population, and from the Christian church as a competing spiritual authority.

The integration of Postcolonial and Foucaultian perspectives enables a nuanced understanding of Achebe's critique. Postcolonial theory foregrounds the external pressures of colonialism that destabilize traditional systems, while Power Theory exposes the internal contradictions within indigenous authority structures. Together, they reveal that Ezeulu's downfall is not merely a result of colonial interference but of the internal misuse and rigidity of religious power itself. Achebe's narrative demonstrates that leadership, when conceived as an instrument of domination rather than service, inevitably collapses under the weight of its own absolutism.

In essence, this theoretical framework provides the analytical tools for interpreting *Arrow of God* as both a postcolonial critique and a philosophical reflection on the nature of authority. By combining Postcolonial Theory and Foucault's Power Theory, the study interprets Achebe's work as a dialogue between tradition and modernity, faith and reason, and autonomy and control revealing that the crisis of leadership in Umuaro mirrors the broader struggles of postcolonial societies to balance power, spirituality, and change.

1.6 Review of Related Scholarship/Justification of Study

The issue of religious authority and leadership crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* has received wide scholarly attention in African literary criticism. The novel, widely considered Achebe's most thematically complex work, examines the intersection of religion, politics, and colonial disruption in traditional Igbo society. Scholars have long been interested in how Achebe constructs Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, as a figure whose devotion to divine duty and unyielding pride contribute to both his greatness and his downfall. This review synthesizes major critical views and highlights the gap that this present study intends to address.

Emmanuel Obiechina, in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, situates Achebe's work within the cultural and political transition of African societies during the colonial encounter. He observes that *Arrow of God* dramatizes "the tension between traditional continuity and foreign imposition," arguing that Ezeulu's predicament mirrors the difficulty of maintaining cultural integrity in the face of colonial interference (Obiechina 112). Similarly, Abiola Irele, in *The African Imagination*, interprets Achebe's presentation of Ezeulu as "a philosophical reflection on African identity and moral order," maintaining that the priest's downfall represents "the tragic consequence of moral absolutism in a changing world" (Irele 75).

Chidi Amuta, in *The Theory of African Literature*, reads *Arrow of God* as an ideological struggle between indigenous theocracy and colonial bureaucracy. He asserts

that Achebe exposes “the inability of traditional authority to survive the encounter with Western administrative power” (Amuta 89). Likewise, Simon Gikandi, in *Reading Chinua Achebe*, emphasizes Achebe’s humanistic portrayal of Ezeulu as both victim and agent of his own tragedy. Gikandi notes that Ezeulu’s failure stems from “his attempt to translate divine authority into personal moral certainty within a society undergoing radical change” (Gikandi 133).

In another significant contribution, Ernest Emenyonu, in his essay “Achebe’s *Arrow of God: The Religious Dimension*,” describes the novel as a “study in spiritual politics,” emphasizing that Ezeulu’s sacred authority collapses once it becomes politicized and detached from communal consent (Emenyonu 42). Florence Stratton, in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, critiques Achebe’s depiction of patriarchal control in the novel, arguing that “religious power in Achebe’s world excludes women’s voices, thereby reinforcing hierarchical structures that sustain male dominance” (Stratton 89). Her intervention widens the discussion by introducing a gendered perspective to the understanding of spiritual power in Igbo society.

G. D. Killam, in *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*, views Ezeulu’s tragedy as primarily moral, asserting that his downfall arises from “the inability to distinguish between divine duty and personal ego,” which transforms his devotion into fanaticism (Killam 102). Ato Quayson, in *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, regards *Arrow of God* as “a symbolic negotiation between myth and history,” highlighting

Achebe's critique of both indigenous rigidity and colonial domination (Quayson 144). Similarly, Charles Nnolim, in "Achebe, Ezeulu, and the Dialectic of Colonial Modernity," argues that Ezeulu represents "a tragic emblem of the conflict between personal integrity and communal adaptability" (Nnolim 121). Pius Adesanmi extends this argument, suggesting that Ezeulu's intransigence "embodies an ideological resistance to hybridization that inevitably results in self-destruction" (Adesanmi 54).

Collectively, these critics reveal Achebe's consistent concern with leadership, religion, and the destructive effects of inflexibility. However, most existing analyses of *Arrow of God* focus broadly on colonial and political interpretations, with less emphasis on the autonomous function of religious power as the root of Ezeulu's crisis. Few studies have examined how Ezeulu's spiritual authority itself becomes a site of tension and collapse, independent of colonial intervention. This research, therefore, fills that critical gap by foregrounding religion not simply as a cultural expression, but as a dynamic institution of power with its own internal contradictions.

Moreover, while Postcolonial Theory has been widely employed in Achebe studies, there has been limited engagement with Michel Foucault's conception of power in interpreting the novel. Foucault's idea that "power circulates through institutions and relationships rather than being possessed" (*Discipline and Punish* 94) provides a valuable lens for analyzing how religious authority operates within and against social structures. Applying both Postcolonial and Foucaultian frameworks enables this study to examine

Arrow of God as a critique of internal authoritarianism as much as a response to colonial domination. Through this dual lens, Ezeulu's priesthood can be understood as a microcosm of broader institutional struggles in precolonial and colonial Africa.

The justification for this study lies, therefore, in its specific focus on the spiritual dimension of power in Achebe's narrative. While many scholars have investigated political leadership and colonial conflict, few have interrogated how religious absolutism functions as a destructive force within indigenous systems. By exploring how Ezeulu's unwavering commitment to divine instruction isolates him from both the gods and the people, this research reveals Achebe's profound critique of sacred authority detached from empathy and adaptability.

Additionally, the study is justified by its interdisciplinary methodology, which bridges literary analysis, postcolonial inquiry, and philosophical reflection on power. By integrating Postcolonial Theory with Foucault's Power Theory, this work reinterprets Achebe's exploration of leadership not merely as political domination but as an ethical question of responsibility and resistance. In this sense, the research contributes fresh insight to African literary scholarship by demonstrating that Achebe's *Arrow of God* is not only a story of cultural conflict, but also a timeless examination of how the misuse of religious power can lead to personal tragedy and communal disintegration.

Ultimately, this study is justified because it deepens our understanding of Achebe's artistic vision—one that warns against the dangers of inflexible leadership and

emphasizes the need for balance between authority and humility. By foregrounding the dynamics of religious power, this research expands the interpretive scope of *Arrow of God* and reaffirms Achebe's position as both a literary craftsman and a philosopher of African moral consciousness.

1.7 Thesis Statement

This study argues that Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* presents religious power as a double-edged force capable of upholding social order yet also prone to personal absolutism and institutional collapse when misapplied.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN *ARROW OF GOD*

This chapter applies the theoretical and methodological frameworks established in Chapter One specifically Postcolonial Theory and Foucault's Power Theory to selected portions of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. The central aim of this chapter is to examine how Ezeulu's religious authority is constructed and how it begins to manifest as a source of conflict within the socio-political landscape of Umuaro.

The analysis focuses primarily on the first half of the novel, particularly Chapters 1 to 8, where Achebe introduces the dynamics of traditional leadership, religious symbolism, and the early tensions between Ezeulu and other power structures, such as the village elders and British colonial agents. These chapters offer insight into how Ezeulu's role as the Chief Priest of Ulu is not only spiritual but deeply political shaping decisions, controlling the agricultural calendar, and influencing social behavior.

By exploring Achebe's use of narrative voice, characterization, and symbolic imagery, the chapter will highlight how religious power is both revered and contested. Attention will be paid to key moments where Ezeulu asserts his authority, resists compromise, and begins to exhibit signs of authoritarian control all of which foreshadow the eventual leadership crisis. The analysis will also consider how external forces,

particularly colonialism and missionary influence, begin to destabilize traditional religious structures.

Through this close reading and critical engagement, the chapter will show how Achebe begins to frame the consequences of spiritual absolutism within a shifting political context. Subheadings will be used to organize the analysis thematically, with each section concluding in brief interpretive insights.

2.1 Ezeulu and the Construction of Religious Authority

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* is set in a time when traditional Igbo society is beginning to face big changes, especially because of colonial influence and Christianity. At the center of the story is Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, who represents religious power and tradition. Before diving into the detailed analysis, it's important to understand how religion worked in traditional Igbo society and why it was so important.

In the Igbo world, religion was not just something people practiced in private it was part of everyday life. The gods were involved in farming, justice, family life, and decision-making. People didn't just worship for spiritual reasons they believed the gods controlled the natural world and had to be respected to keep life in balance. So religious leaders, like Ezeulu, were very powerful because they connected the people to the gods.

Achebe shows this clearly through how the people rely on Ezeulu to announce important festivals like the New Yam Festival, which decides when farmers can harvest. This power makes Ezeulu more than just a priest he becomes a kind of guide for the

whole community. Achebe writes, “The chief priest... was not just the mouth of the god but also his eyes and ears” (Achebe 36), showing how seriously the community took Ezeulu’s role.

However, Achebe also shows that this kind of religious power can be dangerous when it's too rigid. Ezeulu’s decisions affect everyone, and when he refuses to change or compromise, people suffer. His belief in the absolute power of tradition starts to clash with the real needs of the people.

Postcolonial scholar Frantz Fanon once argued that colonizers often take advantage of traditional leaders' authority to gain control, or they break that authority to create confusion (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961). In *Arrow of God*, this happens when the British colonial government begins interfering with how leadership works. Religion, which used to be a unifying force, starts becoming a source of conflict.

The analysis focuses on how Achebe presents religious power how it’s built through tradition, how it gives people like Ezeulu authority, and how it begins to fall apart when challenged by change, pride, and colonial interference.

2.2 Religion and the Politics of Control

In *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe carefully builds the image of Ezeulu as a powerful religious figure. Ezeulu is the chief priest of Ulu, the god worshipped by the six villages of Umuaro. This position gives him not only spiritual respect but also a strong

influence in how the community lives day to day. For example, he announces the dates for planting and harvesting yams, which are central to their way of life.

From the beginning, Achebe shows Ezeulu as someone who takes his role seriously. He believes he speaks for Ulu and is responsible for keeping the traditions of the people. He says, “I am only a servant of the god, a watchman... the god's eye and ear” (Achebe 45). This quote shows how Ezeulu sees his role not as a ruler, but as a messenger of a higher power.

But Achebe also shows that Ezeulu’s view of his own authority makes him proud and unwilling to compromise. He insists on sticking to the rules of his office, even when it causes suffering in the village. This pride creates tension between him and the community. Many begin to feel that Ezeulu is using his position to show personal power rather than serve the people. This tension grows worse after his time in the colonial government’s prison, which makes him more rigid and bitter.

Ezeulu’s authority is based on tradition, but Achebe shows that tradition isn’t enough when the world around is changing. When the villagers need him to be flexible especially during the yam festival he refuses. He believes that if he changes the ritual just once, people will stop respecting the god. But the villagers see his actions as dangerous and selfish.

Postcolonial critics like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o remind us that colonialism disrupted traditional African institutions, including religion. In his book *Decolonising the Mind*,

Ngũgĩ explains that colonial rule created confusion by attacking African cultures while pretending to when caught between colonial power and local needs.

So, Achebe uses Ezeulu to show both the strength and the weakness of religious authority. Ezeulu's power comes from tradition and belief, but when that power is used without care or flexibility, it can lead to conflict and failure.

2.3 Isolation Through Religious Absolutism

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe shows that religion is not just about worship it also plays a big role in controlling society. The character of Ezeulu, as the chief priest of Ulu, doesn't just lead religious ceremonies; he also has real influence over when the people farm, harvest, and celebrate. This gives him serious power in Umuaro.

However, that power also creates conflict. The villagers start to feel like Ezeulu is using his role to control them too much. One key example is when Ezeulu refuses to announce the time for the yam harvest after his return from the colonial office. He believes he is obeying Ulu's will, but the people think he is punishing them out of pride. Achebe writes, "If a man who wears a priest's garment begins to act like a king, he invites trouble" (Achebe 221). This shows that when spiritual leaders start acting like rulers, people may turn against them.

Ezeulu sees his authority as sacred and unchangeable, but the people are more concerned with survival and tradition. His refusal to bend or compromise makes them question his leadership. The politics of control comes in here Ezeulu is trying to keep his

spiritual authority strong, while the people and the colonial government are pulling in other directions.

This struggle becomes even more complicated with the influence of the British. The colonizers want to replace traditional leaders with "warrant chiefs" they can control. When Ezeulu refuses their offer to become a warrant chief, he thinks he's protecting tradition. But the British see him as uncooperative, and the villagers see him as stubborn. Achebe shows that in a time of change, being rigid can turn spiritual power into a weakness.

As Terence Ranger points out in his essay *The Invention of Tradition*, colonial governments often reshaped traditional systems to suit their own needs, sometimes creating new "traditions" that were never truly part of the local culture (Ranger 212). Achebe seems to agree, warning us that when religion and politics mix too closely, both can become tools of oppression instead of unity.

So in this section, Achebe is exploring how Ezeulu's spiritual role becomes political—and how that shift creates problems not just for Ezeulu, but for the entire community. Religion, when used for control instead of guidance, can lose its true meaning.

2.4 Early Signs of Colonial Disruption

In *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe slowly shows how colonial rule begins to interfere with the traditions and culture of Umuaro. At first, the changes seem small like

new roads or the arrival of government workers but they end up causing major problems in how the community is run and how people understand power.

One early sign is when Mr. Winterbottom, a British colonial officer, comes into the story. The British say they want to work with local leaders and keep the peace, but in reality, they are changing the traditional leadership system. For example, they introduce the idea of “warrant chiefs”—leaders chosen by the government instead of by the people. This totally goes against how the Igbo people usually choose leaders based on respect, age, or spiritual authority.

When Ezeulu is invited to become a warrant chief, he refuses. He says, “Tell the white man that I will not be anyone’s chief except Ulu’s” (Achebe 186). This shows that Ezeulu sees himself as a servant of the god Ulu, not of the government. But this decision makes him more isolated, and it also shows how he doesn’t understand the full power of colonial control. At the same time, the British don’t understand Ezeulu’s spiritual role either. This lack of understanding on both sides causes tension.

Another big change is the introduction of Christianity. Ezeulu sends his son Oduche to a mission school so he can learn about the white man’s ways, but it backfires. Oduche ends up going against their traditions, like when he locks a sacred python in a box something that deeply offends the community. Achebe writes, “The white man had a god too... but he was also a man of Government” (Achebe 106), showing how religion and colonial power are connected.

Later, when Ezeulu refuses to announce the time for the yam harvest, the people begin to lose faith in him. Many even turn to Christianity for help. This shows that colonialism doesn't just come from outside it also grows from the cracks within traditional society. Achebe is showing that when a culture is divided or too rigid, it's easier for outside powers to take control.

As Homi Bhabha points out in his book *The Location of Culture*, colonial power often works by creating confusion and making the colonized people adopt some of the colonizer's ways without fully becoming part of them (Bhabha 86). Characters like Oduche are caught in the middle they're neither fully traditional nor fully modern.

In short, Achebe uses this part of the story to show how colonialism doesn't just invade by force. It sneaks in through misunderstandings, new systems, and small changes that slowly weaken traditional ways of life and leadership.

This chapter looked at how religious power is shown in *Arrow of God*, especially through the character of Ezeulu. It explained how Ezeulu, as the chief priest of Ulu, has a lot of spiritual authority, but this also puts pressure on him. His role comes with strict duties that sometimes go against what the people want and also clash with the changes brought by the white colonizers. As the story goes on, Ezeulu becomes more alone because he sticks too strongly to his religious beliefs and refuses to be flexible.

The chapter also showed how colonialism starts affecting the village little by little. Things like the appointment of warrant chiefs and the spread of Christianity make the

situation worse by dividing the community and weakening traditional ways of life. In the end, the analysis shows that Achebe is warning readers that holding too tightly to religious power without adjusting to new realities can lead to a leader's downfall and even damage the whole society.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS POWER AND LEADERSHIP CRISIS IN ACHEBE'S

ARROW OF GOD

This chapter continues the analysis of religious power and its consequences as explored in *Arrow of God*, focusing on the second half of the novel where Ezeulu's leadership crisis deepens. While Chapter Two examined how religious authority is constructed and challenged, this chapter shifts attention to the unraveling of that authority under the pressures of colonial intrusion, communal rejection, and spiritual rigidity.

Achebe presents a more intense conflict between Ezeulu's spiritual role and the changing needs of his society. As tensions rise, the consequences of his strict devotion to tradition and his refusal to compromise become more severe not only for him, but for the entire community. At the same time, colonial forces and Christianity begin to offer alternative systems of power and belief, further destabilizing the role of traditional religion in Umuaro.

By analyzing key moments in the second part of the novel, this chapter explores how Ezeulu's insistence on religious absolutism leads to his eventual isolation and loss of spiritual legitimacy. It also examines how colonial rule and Christian missions take

advantage of this leadership vacuum, offering new forms of control and hope to a desperate people. In doing so, the chapter reveals how Achebe critiques the dangers of inflexible leadership during times.

3.1 The Collapse of Spiritual Legitimacy

In the second half of *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe shows how Ezeulu, once a respected religious figure, begins to lose his authority and spiritual respect among the people of Umuaro. At first, Ezeulu's role as chief priest of Ulu gave him power and trust. The people relied on him to guide their religious calendar, especially for the New Yam Festival, which marks the time for harvesting. But this trust begins to break down when Ezeulu refuses to call the festival after his release from colonial detention.

Ezeulu believes that his authority comes directly from Ulu, and he sees himself as simply carrying out the god's will. When he says, "I am only a messenger of the god," (Achebe 188), he tries to show that the responsibility is not his to change tradition. But to the villagers, this response seems stubborn and dangerous, especially when food is at risk. They begin to question whether Ezeulu is using his religious position to punish the people out of pride or anger.

Achebe uses this tension to show that spiritual legitimacy depends not only on tradition but also on community trust. When Ezeulu refuses to eat the sacred yams (which is needed to begin the harvest), people become frustrated. They feel betrayed because they are starving, and their crops are rotting in the fields. As one elder asks, "Is a god so

unreasonable that he will kill his people because they want to eat what they have grown with their own hands?" (Achebe 205). This shows that the people begin to doubt Ulu and by extension, Ezeulu as the famine gets worse.

The collapse of spiritual authority is made worse by Ezeulu's personal pride. He refuses to change his decision, even when it's clear that the community is turning against him. He starts to believe that the people must suffer in order to understand the seriousness of defying Ulu, saying, "Let them starve... Let them go to the white man's god" (Achebe 215). This statement marks a turning point Ezeulu no longer sees himself as a servant of the people, but as a punisher of their disobedience.

Scholars like Chidi Amuta explain that Achebe's work often shows the failure of traditional leadership in the face of colonial and internal change. In *The Theory of African Literature*, Amuta writes that "Achebe portrays leaders like Ezeulu as tragic figures whose strength becomes their downfall when they fail to adjust to the needs of their community" (Amuta 89). This idea is clear in the novel, where Ezeulu's refusal to adapt leads to his loss of respect and eventual rejection.

By the end of this section of the novel, it is clear that Ezeulu's spiritual authority no longer holds power over the people. Instead, many begin turning to Christianity, which offers both food and a sense of hope. Ezeulu's fall shows that religious power must be flexible and responsive—or it risks becoming irrelevant.

3.2 Clash Between Religious Absolutism and Communal Survival

One of the main turning points in *Arrow of God* is when Ezeulu's strict commitment to religious rules begins to clash with the basic survival needs of his people. As the chief priest of Ulu, Ezeulu believes it is his duty to follow tradition no matter the situation. However, Achebe uses this conflict to show how dangerous it can be when religious beliefs are followed blindly, even when people are suffering.

After returning from his time in colonial custody, Ezeulu refuses to eat the sacred yams that would allow the New Yam Festival to take place. Without this ritual, the harvest cannot begin. He justifies his decision by saying that he cannot change what Ulu has commanded. As he puts it: "I have no right to eat the yam. It is the god's law. If I do it, I die." (Achebe 196). Here, Ezeulu is holding tightly to religious law, but at the cost of his people's well-being.

Meanwhile, the people of Umuaro are desperate. Their crops are ready, but they cannot harvest them because of the tradition. The longer Ezeulu waits, the greater the risk of famine. This situation creates a serious conflict between spiritual duty and the physical need to survive. One of the elders even says: "When a father cooks a snake for his child, he must first remove its fangs" (Achebe 202). This proverb suggests that even powerful customs must be adjusted if they threaten lives.

Ezeulu's refusal to adapt shows what scholars call religious absolutism a belief that spiritual rules should be followed exactly as they are, no matter the context. But

Achebe seems to argue that true leadership must consider both tradition and the changing realities of the people. As critic Ernest Emenyonu notes, “Achebe’s tragic heroes often fail because they cannot balance their personal beliefs with the needs of the society” (Emenyonu 42).

This clash also opens the door for colonial and Christian influences to step in. When the people begin to starve, the local Christian missionaries offer them food and help on the condition that they turn to the Christian faith. Many villagers begin to switch religions, not because of deep belief, but because their traditional system, represented by Ezeulu, no longer supports their survival.

In the end, Achebe uses this part of the novel to ask an important question: What happens when religion becomes more about power and pride than the people it is supposed to serve? Through Ezeulu’s stubbornness, *Arrow of God* shows that spiritual leadership must be flexible and connected to real-life needs—or it will collapse under the weight of its own rules.

3.3 Colonial Disruption and the Undermining of Traditional Authority

In *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe carefully shows how British colonialism plays a major role in breaking down traditional African leadership. One of the biggest ways this happens is through the direct interference of the colonial government in local affairs, especially in how it deals with religious and political power. This section explores how

colonialism weakens the authority of traditional leaders like Ezeulu and makes space for new systems such as Christianity and the warrant chief system to take over.

The most obvious act of colonial disruption comes when Ezeulu is invited to join the British administration as a warrant chief and he refuses. The British District Officer, Winterbottom, doesn't understand Ezeulu's spiritual role and sees him only as a political tool. After Ezeulu rejects the offer, he is punished with imprisonment. Achebe writes, "The white man had put Ezeulu in prison because he refused to be used" (Achebe 175). This moment is important because it shows how the colonial government tries to force traditional leaders to work under them. When Ezeulu resists, they punish him, showing a total lack of respect for indigenous authority.

During Ezeulu's time in prison, the people of Umuaro are left without spiritual guidance. This weakens his position and creates confusion in the community. The colonial authorities don't care about the religious meaning of Ezeulu's absence; they are more focused on controlling the area through their own appointed leaders. By introducing the warrant chief system, the British select leaders who will obey their commands, not those chosen by the people or their gods..

Achebe is very critical of this. He shows that colonial rule not only attacks traditional political structures but also disrespects spiritual ones. Scholar Obi Nwakanma points out that, "Achebe's novel portrays colonialism not just as a physical invasion but a deep cultural and religious disruption that leaves lasting damage" (Nwakanma 67).

Another major way colonialism undermines traditional authority is through the promotion of Christianity. As Ezeulu refuses to allow the yam harvest, Christian missionaries take advantage of the situation. They invite the villagers to convert and promise food and help. Many people, desperate and hungry, start turning to the Christian church. Achebe explains: “The harvest had passed. Those who had eaten the new yam in defiance had not died. The people began to say that Ulu had no power” (Achebe 220). This moment marks the collapse of the people’s faith in both their god and Ezeulu.

Through these events, Achebe shows that colonialism doesn’t destroy traditional religion directly, but uses division, misunderstanding, and manipulation to weaken it from within. Ezeulu, once respected, ends up alone not because he is a bad leader, but because the system around him has changed in ways he cannot control or adapt to.

3.4 The Rise of Christianity as a Response to Religious Failure

In *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe shows how the failure of traditional religious leadership creates the perfect opportunity for Christianity to grow in Umuaro. As the people lose faith in Ezeulu and the god Ulu especially during the food crisis many begin to see Christianity not just as a new religion, but as a way out of suffering. This part of the novel helps us understand how religious change often happens when traditional systems stop meeting the basic needs of the people.

After Ezeulu refuses to call the New Yam Festival, many villagers are stuck. They can’t harvest their crops without breaking spiritual rules. But at the same time, they are

facing hunger. Achebe writes: “Those who had planted new yams and eaten them in defiance had not died. And so the people began to wonder whether Ulu had any power left” (Achebe 220). This moment shows that the people’s trust in Ulu is shaken and so is their respect for Ezeulu.

Christian missionaries take advantage of this situation. They offer food, help, and acceptance to those who join the new religion. This is most clearly seen when Ezeulu’s own son, Oduche, becomes a Christian. Earlier in the novel, Ezeulu had sent Oduche to learn the ways of the white man as a strategy. But this move backfires, as Oduche begins to turn against his father’s religion. He even tries to lock up the sacred python, a clear sign that the younger generation is starting to question traditional beliefs (Achebe 54).

Achebe is making an important point here: religious authority must be flexible and respond to the real needs of people, or it risks being replaced. As hunger grows and Ulu remains silent (through Ezeulu), Christianity begins to look like a more “reliable” option. People are not just converting because they believe in the Christian God, but because the traditional religion has failed to protect and support them.

As literary scholar Charles Nnolim puts it, “Achebe shows that faith is not just about belief, but about results. When the gods fail to deliver, people will seek new gods who will” (Nnolim 121). This is exactly what happens in *Arrow of God*. Christianity grows, not just because of missionary effort, but because Ezeulu’s pride and rigidity make traditional religion seem useless.

By the end of the novel, we see that Ezeulu has not only lost his position, but also his influence. Meanwhile, the Christian church has gained followers and power. Achebe uses this shift to show how religious change is not just spiritual, but social and political. People follow the god who feeds them not just the one who speaks through rituals.

3.5 Ezeulu's Fall and the Collapse of Traditional Authority

In *Arrow of God*, the final blow to traditional authority is symbolized by the tragic downfall of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu. Achebe uses Ezeulu's personal collapse to show how rigid leadership, combined with colonial interference and social change, can destroy a whole system of belief and governance. Ezeulu starts off as a respected spiritual leader, but by the end of the novel, he is completely isolated, mentally unstable, and no longer trusted by his people.

One of the key moments that shows Ezeulu's fall is the death of his son, Obika. Obika is the strongest and most admired of Ezeulu's children. His sudden death right after participating in an important ritual shocks the entire village. Achebe writes: "The god had struck. The Chief Priest's household was broken" (Achebe 228). This moment is very symbolic. The god Ulu, whom Ezeulu serves faithfully, seems to turn against him. This leaves Ezeulu confused, heartbroken, and alone. It also leaves the community questioning whether Ulu has any real power at all.

Earlier in the novel, Ezeulu had already started losing the support of his people. His refusal to call the yam festival led to hunger and doubt. Many villagers began to

secretly eat the new yams, and when nothing bad happened to them, they saw it as proof that Ulu had lost his power (Achebe 219). With the spread of Christianity and the support it gave during the crisis, the traditional religion appeared weak in comparison.

Literary scholar Bernth Lindfors notes that “Ezeulu becomes a tragic hero, destroyed not only by outside forces but also by his own inability to bend or compromise” (Lindfors 83). This means that Ezeulu’s downfall was not caused by colonialism alone it was also because he couldn’t change his ways or see that his people’s needs had changed.

By the end of the book, Achebe shows that Ezeulu’s fall is also the fall of the religious and cultural system he represents. The villagers no longer see him as a true spiritual leader. Christianity has gained ground. Colonial authorities are now choosing new leaders. Ezeulu, once a powerful figure, becomes a lonely, broken man both personally and symbolically.

In simple terms, Achebe uses Ezeulu’s downfall to say that any leader or belief system that refuses to adapt to the times, and ignores the needs of the people, is bound to collapse. It is not just about power it is about relevance and responsibility.

This chapter explored the second phase of analysis by focusing on how colonialism and changing religious beliefs contribute to the breakdown of traditional authority in *Arrow of God*. The analysis showed how colonial officials, like Winterbottom, misinterpret Ezeulu’s role and forcefully interfere with local traditions,

weakening the spiritual system he represents. Achebe highlights how British tools of control such as the warrant chief system and the spread of Christianity create confusion and division within the community.

Through Ezeulu's refusal to call the yam festival and his strict loyalty to religious rules, we see how his rigidity pushes the people away and opens the door for Christianity to gain followers. His failure to respond to the community's needs leads many to question the power of Ulu and seek alternatives. Achebe uses this religious crisis to show that the loss of faith in traditional religion is not sudden, but a slow breakdown caused by both internal failings and outside pressures.

Ezeulu's fall, marked by personal tragedy and social rejection, becomes a symbol of the collapse of traditional African leadership in the face of colonial domination and cultural change. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how Achebe uses Ezeulu's character to show that religious authority must evolve with the people it serves, or risk becoming irrelevant and rejected

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ON RELIGIOUS POWER AND LEADERSHIP IN *ARROW OF GOD*

This chapter continues the analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* by focusing on the deeper consequences and symbolic dimensions of Ezeulu's leadership crisis. While earlier chapters examined the construction of religious authority and its immediate social and political impacts, this chapter moves beyond individual actions to explore how cultural symbols, generational conflicts, and colonial religious pressures further complicate the fall of traditional leadership.

The analysis in this chapter seeks to show how Achebe uses various elements—such as silence from the gods, the role of women, generational shifts, and symbolic objects—to reflect a society in transition. These elements help us understand not just what happens in the novel, but why it happens and what it means for the wider African experience under colonial rule.

By looking at how different characters respond to change, how religious symbols lose their meaning, and how new belief systems take root, this chapter reveals the full extent of the cultural and spiritual disruption in Umuaro. The chapter also highlights Achebe's critique of rigidity in leadership and his warning about the dangers of refusing to adapt in a time of crisis.

4.1 The Clash Between Generations: Tradition vs. Modernity

In *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe shows that one of the main causes of conflict in Umuaro is the difference between the older generation (like Ezeulu) and the younger one (like Oduche). This generational clash is not just about age—it is about values, beliefs, and the future of the community.

Ezeulu, as the chief priest, holds tightly to traditional religion and sees himself as the guardian of Ulu's will. He believes that the customs must be followed exactly, no matter what. However, his son Oduche represents a younger generation that is starting to see things differently. Oduche is sent to live with the missionaries and ends up converting to Christianity. This decision, encouraged by Ezeulu as a strategic move, backfires when Oduche begins to adopt Christian values and challenge the family's traditional beliefs.

A key moment that shows this conflict is when Oduche locks the sacred python in a box, trying to “protect” it, but really showing his rejection of traditional religious values. Achebe writes:

“He had locked up the royal python... not because he hated his people's religion but because he wanted to prove to the white man that he was not like the others” (Achebe 144).

This act deeply offends the community and creates tension in Ezeulu's household. Oduche, influenced by Western religion and education, sees the old customs as backward.

Meanwhile, Ezeulu is hurt and confused by his son's attitude, showing that the family itself becomes a battlefield for cultural change.

This clash between father and son reflects the larger conflict happening in Igbo society at the time: tradition is being questioned, and colonial influence is creating a new generation that does not fully identify with their roots. As critic Ernest Emenyonu notes, “Achebe uses generational conflict to symbolize the wider social shift from indigenous authority to colonial domination” (Emenyonu 101).

This section shows that Achebe uses the tension between Ezeulu and Oduche to explore the painful shift from tradition to modernity. The young are no longer willing to blindly follow the old ways, and this change puts pressure on family ties, cultural identity, and spiritual values. The novel shows that without understanding and adaptation, such clashes can lead to misunderstanding.

4.2 Women, Power, and Silence in Religious Leadership

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe portrays a society where women play important roles in the home and community, yet their voices are mostly absent when it comes to religious and political leadership. This section explores how the silence and exclusion of women from positions of spiritual authority reflects both traditional patriarchal systems and the challenges brought by colonial influence.

Throughout the novel, Ezeulu, as the chief priest of Ulu, holds a central religious role, but there are no female counterparts in the spiritual hierarchy. Even when major

decisions are being made such as whether to call the yam festival or respond to colonial demands women are not consulted. Their role is often limited to following instructions or suffering the consequences of leadership failures. For example, when Ezeulu refuses to announce the New Yam Festival, the entire village, including women and children, suffers from hunger and hardship, yet their opinions are never part of the discussion.

Achebe presents this exclusion not necessarily as a criticism, but as a reflection of how power was traditionally structured. The silence of women in these critical moments shows how much the society is male-dominated. As literary scholar Florence Stratton points out, “Achebe’s early works reflect the historical reality of male-centered Igbo society, where women were often invisible in positions of public authority” (Stratton 89).

However, even though women are not given formal power, Achebe still shows their quiet strength. For example, Ezeulu’s wives often observe and comment on his decisions, and his daughter, Akueke, shows independence and resilience in the face of hardship. These subtle portrayals suggest that women still possess agency, even if it is not openly recognized in the religious structure.

Another way Achebe highlights women’s power is through silence itself. Their absence in leadership becomes a form of protest or commentary on the failure of that leadership. When things fall apart under male religious control, the novel leaves us to wonder: what might have happened if women had been included in the decision-making process?

Achebe uses the silence of women in *Arrow of God* to reveal the gender imbalance in traditional religious systems. At the same time, he gives hints of women's strength and quiet resistance, suggesting that true leadership must include all voices—especially in times of crisis and change.

4.3 Symbols of Authority and Their Collapse

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe uses several powerful symbols to represent traditional authority and spiritual leadership. These symbols such as the yam, the python, and even Ezeulu's title as chief priest carry deep meaning in the community. However, as colonialism and Christianity spread, these symbols begin to lose their value. This section explores how Achebe uses the collapse of these symbols to show that traditional power is weakening under pressure from both within and outside the society.

One of the most important symbols in the novel is the yam, which stands for wealth, strength, and the rhythm of Igbo life. The yam festival, announced by the chief priest, is necessary before anyone can harvest and eat new yams. When Ezeulu refuses to announce the festival as punishment to the people, this long-held tradition is disrupted. The result is hunger, confusion, and frustration. The yam, once a symbol of order and prosperity, becomes a source of suffering. Achebe writes:

“The crops ripened and rotted in the fields because the festival had not been called”
(Achebe 204).

This shows how the spiritual symbol loses its meaning when leadership becomes rigid or selfish.

Another key symbol is the sacred python, which represents the gods and is deeply respected by the people. When Oduche, Ezeulu's son, locks the python in a box (under Christian influence), it creates a major crisis. The python, which no one dares to harm, is treated as an ordinary animal. This act is not just a personal mistake it is a sign that the traditional religion is losing its spiritual hold over the younger generation.

Even Ezeulu's staff of office, which represents his position and authority as chief priest, starts to lose its power. People begin to question his actions and see him as too proud and inflexible. By the end of the novel, Ezeulu is no longer feared or respected. His spiritual title becomes more of a burden than a blessing. As literary critic Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah puts it:

“Achebe presents symbols of power as fragile in the face of change; once the people stop believing in them, their meaning disappears” (Na'Allah 76).

In summary, this analysis shows that Achebe uses these traditional symbols to explore how authority depends on shared belief. Once people stop respecting these symbols due to colonial pressure, internal conflict, or changing values the power they carry disappears. The collapse of these symbols signals the breakdown of the cultural and spiritual structure of Umuaro.

4.4 Ulu and the Silence of the Gods

In *Arrow of God*, Ulu the main god of Umuaro is a central spiritual figure, but one that never speaks directly. Achebe presents Ulu as silent, distant, and mysterious, which adds both power and danger to his image. This silence becomes especially important when Ezeulu, Ulu's chief priest, starts facing serious challenges from the people and the colonial government. At the heart of the crisis is this question: Why doesn't Ulu speak?

Ezeulu often claims he is only carrying out Ulu's will, especially when he refuses to call the New Yam Festival. But the people start to doubt him. They wonder if Ulu really wants them to starve, or if Ezeulu is just using religion to punish them. When things get worse crops rot, hunger increases, and people begin converting to Christianity the god Ulu still does not intervene. Achebe writes:

“Ulu had chosen a madman for a priest... now the god himself was silent” (Achebe 223).

This moment shows how the silence of Ulu becomes a symbol of a failing traditional system. If the god will not speak or act, then the people lose faith. This spiritual silence weakens not just Ezeulu, but the entire religious structure of Umuaro

Literary scholar Emmanuel Obiechina explains it like this:

“Achebe’s gods, like Ulu, are often silent not because they lack power, but because the people themselves have changed; the silence reflects a broken relationship between the community and their beliefs” (Obiechina 111).

As more villagers turn to Christianity, the silence of Ulu becomes even more noticeable. The missionaries, by contrast, bring a god who “answers prayer,” offers forgiveness, and seems more accessible. So while Ezeulu waits for Ulu to speak or act, the people move on to a new religion that feels more active and alive.

In simple terms, Achebe is showing us that when a belief system no longer meets the emotional or social needs of its followers, it begins to collapse. The silence of Ulu is not just about religion it’s about the loss of trust in a tradition that no longer protects or guides its people.

4.5 Collapse of Religious Leadership and the Rise of Christianity

In *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe shows how traditional religious leadership, represented by Ezeulu and the worship of Ulu, starts to fall apart. As this happens, Christianity begins to rise and take over in Umuaro. This shift is not just about religion it’s about power, trust, and survival.

At the start of the novel, Ezeulu holds great respect as the chief priest of Ulu. He speaks for the god, leads festivals, and guides the people spiritually. But by the end, that power breaks down. Ezeulu becomes more isolated and misunderstood. His refusal to call the New Yam Festival causes suffering in the community, and the people begin to turn

against him. Achebe describes how this spiritual confusion creates a chance for the Christian missionaries to step in:

“The white man had come quietly... and the people had accepted him. They had gone to him when their god failed them” (Achebe 230).

This quote shows how the people begin to see Ulu and Ezeulu as no longer helpful. When crops rot and hunger spreads, Christianity offers hope and practical relief. The missionaries bring food, medicine, and a sense of order. They also introduce a god who forgives and promises salvation, unlike Ulu, who is silent and seen as punishing.

Ezeulu’s own family is also affected. His son, Oduche, joins the Christian mission and even locks a sacred python in a box, an act that challenges the traditional religion. Although Ezeulu disagrees with him, he cannot stop the change happening around him.

Literary critic Ernest N. Emenyonu explains this clearly:

“The conflict between traditional religion and Christianity in Arrow of God shows how spiritual authority must adapt or collapse. Achebe presents Ezeulu as a tragic figure caught between two worlds unable to bend and therefore broken” (Emenyonu 142).

By the end of the novel, Ezeulu loses his role, his respect, and his influence. The people now listen to the Christian priest instead. Achebe uses this to show how colonialism didn’t just conquer through guns and government it also used religion to win hearts and minds.

In simple terms, this section shows that the fall of Ezeulu's religious power and the rise of Christianity represent a major shift in culture. Achebe is warning that when leaders become too rigid and ignore the needs of the people, new systems will replace them even if it means losing part of their identity.

4.6 Ezeulu's Tragic Fall and the Breakdown of Tradition

Ezeulu's journey in *Arrow of God* ends in tragedy not just for him personally, but for the traditional system he represents. His fall is symbolic of the larger collapse of indigenous leadership, culture, and religion under colonial pressure and internal conflict.

Throughout the novel, Ezeulu is shown as a proud and stubborn priest who believes he is the only one who can carry out the will of Ulu. He refuses to bend, even when the people beg him to call the New Yam Festival to save their harvest. Achebe writes:

“He had chosen to be the arrow of his god, and like the arrow, he must go forward; he could not turn back” (Achebe 217).

This quote shows that Ezeulu sees himself as a tool of the god, not a man with the power to change decisions. But this stubborn loyalty leads to disaster. The people suffer from hunger, Ezeulu is blamed, and the community begins to see him not as a spiritual leader, but as a problem.

His mental and emotional state also starts to collapse. He becomes paranoid, isolated, and disconnected from reality. Even his own family starts to fear and question him. His son Obika's sudden death is the final blow, and it breaks Ezeulu completely. At this point, the community has already turned to Christianity, and the traditional religion has lost its power.

As literary scholar Chidi Amuta explains:

“Ezeulu becomes a victim of his own rigidity and a symbol of a collapsing tradition that cannot withstand the pressure of modernity and colonial interference” (Amuta 88).

Achebe uses Ezeulu's tragic downfall to show that when cultural systems refuse to adapt, they become vulnerable to external forces. In this case, British colonialism and Christianity step in to replace the old structures.

In simple terms, Achebe is saying that tradition must be flexible if it is to survive. Ezeulu's refusal to change or listen to his people causes not just his personal downfall but the fall of an entire belief system. His tragedy teaches us that leaders must know when to lead, when to listen, and when to adapt.

This chapter focused on the final stages of Ezeulu's leadership crisis and the complete shift from traditional religion to Christianity in *Arrow of God*. Through the analysis, we saw how Ezeulu's role as chief priest slowly crumbles due to his strict beliefs, personal pride, and refusal to adapt to social change. His decision not to call the

New Yam Festival, despite the community's suffering, led to widespread hunger and loss of faith in both him and the god Ulu.

The rise of Christianity is shown as a direct result of this failure. The missionaries step in at a time when the people are spiritually and physically vulnerable, offering practical help and a more accessible form of worship. Ezeulu's isolation becomes more severe, especially after the death of his son, and this marks the breaking point of his power and mental stability.

Achebe uses Ezeulu's downfall to represent a bigger issue the collapse of traditional systems under colonial influence and internal rigidity. The silence of Ulu, the failure of the community to unite behind Ezeulu, and the increasing attraction to Western religion all show how cultural change happens when leadership fails to meet the people's needs.

In short, this chapter reveals that Achebe is not just telling a personal story about one man's failure. He is warning about the dangers of unyielding leadership, and showing how religion, culture, and politics are all deeply connected. When one part breaks, the rest can fall apart too especially in a time of colonial disruption.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the complex relationship between religion, power, and leadership in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, focusing on Ezeulu's role as the chief priest of Ulu and the consequences of his rigid exercise of religious authority. Achebe presents Ezeulu as both a guardian of tradition and a victim of his own inflexibility. Through his character, the novel demonstrates how the concentration of spiritual power in one individual can create conflict, alienation, and ultimately, communal breakdown when that power is used without wisdom or adaptability.

The analysis revealed that Ezeulu's downfall was not solely the result of colonial interference but also of his inability to balance divine duty with the practical needs of his people. His strict obedience to the perceived will of Ulu isolates him from his community, causing widespread suffering and opening the way for the spread of Christianity. Achebe, therefore, portrays Ezeulu's tragedy as symbolic of a larger cultural and institutional collapse brought about by both internal rigidity and external colonial pressure.

Furthermore, the study established that Achebe's use of Postcolonial and Power theories exposes the dual nature of authority both as a means of maintaining order and as a potential source of oppression. The colonial administration's manipulation of traditional institutions, coupled with the rise of Christian influence, reveals how external powers exploit internal weaknesses to assert control. This dual pressure Ezeulu's absolutism on one hand and colonial domination on the other—leads to the eventual erosion of traditional values and leadership structures in Umuaro.

Ultimately, Achebe's *Arrow of God* serves as a warning about the dangers of inflexible leadership and the misuse of religious authority. The novel emphasizes that true leadership requires humility, dialogue, and responsiveness to change. When leaders prioritize pride and divine absolutism over communal welfare, they risk not only their personal downfall but also the disintegration of the society they serve. Thus, Achebe's work remains a timeless reflection on the need for balance between tradition and adaptation, spirituality and reason, authority and empathy in all forms of leadership.

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