

## EKPEYE TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL AND THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

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### **Abstract**

*African culture is essentially a religious culture as we see it. African customs and their behaviour are geared toward the religious concept, almost completely (K.O. Dike). Just as the missionaries were trying to convert to a new religion they could not escape condemning Ekpeye traditional festival as heathenish. What else could the missionary do but attack the Ekpeye traditional cultural festival which represents the rival religion they were trying to supplant? However, missionaries could not bring to Nigeria the “pure milk of the Gospel”. But unlike major people of the world human beings were unable to emancipate themselves from the cultural, emotional and social frame in which they were accustomed to living and expressing their religious life. Some lived in an age when European civilization and Christianity were believed to hang together as cause and effect, as root and branch. Regrettably early in the 19th century, many Africans were becoming deluded with the idea that the less African they were the more Christian they become. Therefore this study became necessary to investigate the Ekpeye Traditional Festival an important aspect of Matzoth Fest. The purpose is to understand why the missionaries condemned Ekpeye traditional festival without first understanding the cultural heritage of the Ekpeye traditional festival they were denouncing. This study employed the Library research method and reviewed critical literature on the subject as well as relying heavily on information deduced based on the researcher's elaborate reading. The study concludes that the cultural awakening among educated Africans in the 19th century did not owe its origins to any external influence but was spontaneous. The study recommends that African study indigenous religions themselves; the white missionaries had lived in a valley of delusion by assuming that Christians were a higher exponent of the Deity than the Nigerian “pagans”*

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## **Introduction**

Without much ado, Christ has been presented with the question a white man would ask, the solution to the white man's problem, (the missionary knows that); Christ the Savior of the World of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historical Christian. But what we have not answered is that if Christ were to stand in front of us now to answer the questions that Ekpeye-man is asking what would he look like? To answer this question Africans need to understand some Christian affirmations about Jesus Christ such as his priestly role as Mediator and His Lordship as king. In this way, Christianity becomes a doctrine in the African context.

This challenging interpretation of Christ from an African/Ekpeye context needs to be read by all persons with any kind of concern for the presence of the church in Africa. The question must be faced by African/Ekpeye churches and African/Ekpeye Christians of today who are convinced that Jesus Christ is the Universal Saviour and thus that the Saviour of the African/Ekpeye world and who feel that the teaching they have so far received is inadequate. We must come to terms that the negative side of missionary history in Africa must not be exaggerated for reasons. Firstly the vitality of our Christian communities bears witness to the fact that the Gospel was communicated. Missionary activity is a communication enterprise in which the Gospel is the Message and the prospective convert is the receiver (J.N.K.Mugambi 2002, 1) however inadequate we may now consider that communication to have been.

There is always more to the “hearing” of the Word of God than can be contained in the actual preaching of it by human agents, the Holy Spirit is also present to interpret the Word directly to the hearer. Therefore let us allow the mercy and providence of God to override the shortcoming of human achievement. The shortcoming of the white man was to introduce a new God unrelated to the tradition of our past, but to One who brings fulfilment all the highest religious and cultural aspirations of our heritage. In this manner, missionaries' past need no longer hinder the growth of Christian understanding today. African/Ekpeye for this reason touches on the nature of African/Ekpeye traditional religion itself and its encounter with the Christen faith.

The missionaries viewed Ekpeye's Traditional religion that it formed “the religious beliefs of more or less backward and degraded people all over the world and it held no “preparation for Christianity. Yet in more recent years it has shown that Christianity has spread most rapidly in societies with a primal religious system that is a religious system akin to Ekpeye Traditional Religion. But now the failure of Christianity to be deeply rooted in Ekpeye people impelled educated Ekpeye to study Ekpeye traditional festival to see how much features of indigenous worship could be grafted on the “pure milk of the

Gospel. The objective of this study is to understand why the missionaries condemned Ekpeye traditional festival without first understanding the cultural heritage of the Ekpeye traditional festival they were denouncing.

### **Festival in Retrospect**

We see fear as a feeling which determines our time; fear narrows our vision, reduces thoughts and emotions and blocks the way to communicate with others effectively. Fear robs one of the future and also hinders the perception of the possibilities of the present. Fear doubts the meaning of the individual life as all life in general (Eckart Otto and Tim Schramm 1980, 7).

Ultimately fear will be replaced by joy. Joy cannot be commanded, rather it must be established. The basis of joy is meaning. And meaning is experienced and communicated in festivity. There are so many festivities recorded in the Old Testament which speak of the experience of overcoming fear. The joy which overcomes fear occurs in the Old Testament almost always in the cultic fest, while in the New Testament, it takes place in the everyday world. The biblical witness tells us that festivity and Joy contend always anew and once and for all against fear, sorrow and death. Faith sees within that festivity God's intention for salvation and rejoices at its closeness (Eckart Otto and Tim Schramm 1980, 7). To encounter such faith and hear its demands seem to us to be a very promising venture.

### **History of Ekpeye People**

Ekpeye is a language, a people, a culture and an ethnic kingdom in Nigeria. The Ekpeye people are among over a dozen Ekpeye-speaking ethnic groups situated on the Eastern edge of Rivers State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Today they have a population of over 700,000 (Seven hundred thousand) people groups. The Rivers State in Nigeria where the Ekpeye people are found is linguistically among the most heterogeneous areas in Nigeria.

The Ekpeye clan is one such clan with kings and Rulers. This institution is historical and highly resourceful. Kingship in Ekpeye is barely a new development. This makes it a learning and developing process. Though this process has lasted for a century, the Ekpeye people are yet to perfect the entire customs and tradition. Truly it was entirely a story of trade, war, slavery, capitalism and imperialism and resistance. This experience is common to Africa since the invasion of the Colonial Masters and the advent of missionaries on African soil. These events culminated in the crowning of a legend and a man of high reputation, king Nworisa as the first king of Ekpeye.

Nworisa was first appointed leader, later as chief before he was made a king. This happened in about the 19th century, just the same time this part of the World received European occupation. This position became necessary to protect the empire, the people and the culture of the Ekpeye from foreign invaders. Today this institution has continued to survive the difficulties of time and cultural heritage sustained.

Ekpeye people lived in a village which must have become towns recently in a structural design family settlement of either one of some or all the Seven original distinct families title in Ekpeye namely—Imu-shi, Uchi, Agolo, Uzhi, Ishikoloko, Edyiwulu and Umu-Akpa. This distinction did not in any way alter the individual right to his or her clan.

Ekpeye gave birth to four sons namely—Ubie, Akoh, Igbuuya, and Upata constituting the current clan of Ekpeye people. The name given to each of these children is significant portraying in each circumstance the experience of the man Ekpeye. The first son who happens to be Ubie meaning where I now live is significant. The same was with Igbuduiya who happens to be the third meaning the bush where I hide my things. The remaining other two Akio and Upata became the second and the last son respectively.

His expertise in military strategy is demonstrated in how he positioned the four children in their current geographical position. You can easily link up these villages in a set of a network providing a buffer in times of attack. What the people need is to develop these networks of the road for easy accessibility. Each of these children of Ekpeye has given birth to a total of 80 villages and each has had its respective clan head.

These clan heads are traditionally responsible to the ruler or the king of Ekpeye who holds the highest insignia of cultural or political authority in the entire Ekpeye community or kingdom. Just as Aborisade said in 1979 and continued in 1985, a traditional ruler means the traditional head of an Ethnic unit or clan, who for the time is the holder of the highest traditional authority. The king or a Traditional Ruler of Ekpeye land holds in high esteem all his people's ways of life. He parades all the regalia of his people's culture, customs, tradition, history, belief, proverbs, folklore, poems etc as legendary. He also represents the head of the traditional religion. However, there is a spiritual diviner who usually consults the gods and ancestors for the way forward and this is the Chief Priest.

The coming of Christianity and civilization has not changed anything in this form but may have only modified them. This is because; these believers are deep-seated norms. A strong believer in “Totem Animal” as the Spirit Beings of the Ancestors as the Edeoha Sacred Being” a totem scared sculpture which appears once in seven years. The events for the appearance of this sculpture are usually very overwhelming.

An Ekpeye king or Ruler may die but the stool or title remains. Through royal ancestors' traditions and regalia, these positions are immortalised. These regalia are usually sacred ancestral objects that identify and epitomized the totality of the culture. However, this creates problems most times. The king or Ruler becomes a source of punishment, judgment and rewards. To fill these roles, social groups, clan heads, royal kin and others are co-opted into rulership.

Ekpeye people are perhaps the most dynamic in southern Nigeria people. Its culture is a complex mix of Ekpeye and neighbour Ijaw. Ekpeye culture is unique and most people recently have begun to admire it by seeking to draw affiliation with the people. The colourful display of their Egbukele with a distinctive feature for horizontal fish-shape headdress and animal representative and Owu masks with Aarugu is currently attracting many that are now seeking affinity.

The most appreciable food of the people is Ogbolo made from Cassava with melechi–ede as sup to go with. This item used to cook is natural coco-yam pounded and added to make it delicious, alongside palm oil etc. The egusi of today is a foreign and recent development.

Suffice it to note that the focus of this paper is not to write an encyclopedia history of the Ekpeye people but because her historical record is currently receiving an attack from misguided elements who are seeking to link Igbo people to Ekpeye as if they are of the same ethnic group, rushing to print houses and social media to re-write a history of Ekpeye people without their consent. Regrettably, some ambitious people will stop at nothing to bring Ekpeye to the Igbo tribe, and then I wonder how strange will that be to rise and be writing a history of ethnicity without their consent. It is only ignorant people that can associate the Ekpeye language with the Igbo language and such ignorant is heightening as a result of greed. No right thinking of an Ekpeye indigene will remain comfortable with these reckless abuses of intelligence. This Igbo-affiliated element has developed mostly those seeking political patronage and recognition that could not be guided by wisdom, portraying their ignorance to the admiration of fools that love to hear them.

Ekpeye people trace their origin from migration from Benin Empire to their present location in Rivers State, Nigeria. Politically they occupied two local government areas in Rivers State namely-Aheoda –East and Aheaoda –West. They fall within the Orash River in the Niger Delta region. They have their unique tradition and cultural resemblance to the Old Benin Empire. There is still some traceable element of the Ekpeye language in some parts of the Benin Empire. Among other traditions and customs, the Ogwu-Ekpeye cultural festival is one most celebrated customs and traditions of the Ekpeye people. It is

yearly rituals aim at pleasing God for an anticipated favour and blessing believe to be granted by God.

The Ekpeye people have their origin in a man called AKALAKA, a warrior in the Old Benin Empire who migrated down towards the Niger Delta Region with his son Ekpeye, Ogba and Ihuoda, escaping from the reigning Oba who has put his life under a threat. The news got to Akalaka through his sister who was evident in the palace that the Oba has severe suspicions of him and some others close to him for a possible plan of assignation. The sister had secretly told him to save his life and for possible escape. Akalaka quickly fled to Agbo with his family and there he married a second wife to gain the love of the people. The wife gave birth to a son who he named Ogba. Still, at Agbo the first wife Ekpeye's mother gave birth to another son and he called Ihuoda (Ikwere)

Akalaka a warrior and a great hunter and a notorious herbalist who became very prosperous was jealous and hated by the people for his bold approach to issues which resulted in open confrontation. The Oba of Agbo planned to conscript the able men of his kingdom for his service, and Ekpeye was listed as one of them. Akalaka having had his experience in his home in Benin kingdom stealthily left Agbo with his family. He moves southwards following River Niger where he finally settles down in the present-day Ekpeye settlement. The writer happens to be an indigene of Ekpeye with relevant information.

### **Origin of Matzoth Festival**

Stories of the bible are among the most timeless and moving narratives ever written about the human condition and man's relationship with God. These stories have long shaped the Jews; Christians and lesser degree the Muslim notions of morality and continue to stir the conscience and imagination of believers and sceptics alike. Biblical Matzoth festival stories are universally told in the Old Testament.

Religious activities have involved so many kinds of feasts and festivals which is difficult to trace all their origin. But the historical account of the Matzoth festival reveals that just as the proto-Israelite tribe from the desert became established in the cultivated land, another group leaving Egypt composed of Israelite tribes honouring Yahweh of Sinai encounter them. These groups are related refugees from Egypt who settled in Palestine and viewed themselves as delivered from their Egyptian oppressors by a miraculous event. Yahweh of Sinai was understood then in the sea of Reed's miracle as the God of deliverance. Thus he was experienced as a God who reached into history reality and change it. The confession of the Exodus from Egypt became the primitive confession of

the tribes of Israel which came into being in the cultivated land ( Eckart Otto & Tim Schramm1980, 18-19).

These two groups who were formally shepherds became farmers. The problem of land increased; for the land they farmed was not their own. Is not supposed that the inhabitants who had lived there for a decade have the exclusive right to the land. Is it not the gods of the inhabitants the lords of the land, not Yahweh the God of Sinai? This issue must have been pressing in the minds of the Israelites as they encounter or mixed up with the inhabitants of the land.

This eventually led to a struggle for the possession of the land; meanwhile, all the Israelites settled only in the thinly inhabited mountain ranges. These areas are covered with hills and mountains, so the land became scarce. What is left for them was to move to the fruitful plains but there are more militarily Canaanite city-states that ruled the territory. How this political situation could be addressed with the knowledge that Yahweh was the Lord of the Land. We see how these problems were addressed to the Holy One of Israel in this Matzoth fest event of the pre-monarchical period.

In looking at the problem; the tradition of the Matzoth festival in Joshua 3-5 is key. We read in Joshua 5:10; as the Israelites encamped in Gilgal they kept their Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening in the plains of Jericho. In verse 11 in the morning just after the Passover on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. Now verse 12 and the manna stop falling on the morrow when they ate the food of the land and the Israelites stop having manna coming from heaven till date but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

From the above definition Eckart Otto & Tim Schramm1980, 18-19) argue that the Gilgal Matzoth tradition seen in Joshua5:10-12 from its language clearly shows that it belongs in the pre-Deuteronomiac time. They both clearly state that right from the point of view of the history of tradition, this is secondary and has been expanded by the Passover theme. This very tradition of the Matzoth festival in Gilgal rests on a certain ground in the history of tradition (Eckart Otto & Tim Schramm1980, 18-19).

The tradition mention above perhaps was Haag H., (Vom alten zum neuen pascha, 1971) which more cautiously in Laaf (70.80) would like to see the mention of Gilgal in Joshua 5:10-12 eliminated, although he views it as very old in its basic form. It is evident that already in Joshua 4:19 b it is said that the Israelites encamped at Gilgal. Yet Joshua 4:19 b and Joshua 5:10 belong to different literary connections. The Matzoth festival had its origin in Israel the land of culture. Thus any dependence on a Canaanite harvest festival is doomed to failure due to the dating; the first of Abid which Otto and Schramm-festival and joy page 195 to be the most likely date for the beginning of the Matzoth in Exodus23 and

34, in contrast to the rules concerning the festival of Weeks and the festival of ingathering not indicate an agrarian connection. Much more essential for the Matzoth festival was taken of the land and the relation to Exodus. This shows that the Matzoth festival was formulated in the framework of the Israelite tribes in the land of culture in which Gilga took on enormous significance.

In this regard, we have to reckon with a blending of various motifs. Thus the adaptation of the heilegeschichtlichen theme of the unleavened bread, we encounter a custom which goes back to the unleavened bread of the nomads which was eaten just before setting forth. In Joshua 5:10-12 we find no recognized connection to the harvest of the land which in turn was related to the offering of the firstborn in the Matzoth festival. Here a Canaanite agrarian motif has been adopted which can be explained by the desire of taking away from the Canaanites the responsibility for the gods of the fertility of the land and in turn attribute it to Yahweh.

I joined Eckart Otto & Tim Schramm to disagree with Halbe (38.324) in seeing the origin of the Matzoth ritual in the Passover. There is no pre-Deuteronomic proof that Matzoth bread was eaten in the course of the Passover before it was connected with the matzoth festival. Thus Joshua 5:10-12 is not supporting the tendency found in Deuteronomy 16 of replacing the Passover with the matzoth festival but rather demonstrates the tendency of linking the two together as found in Deuteronomy 16.

### **Origin of Fest of Passover in Israel**

The history of the development of the feast of Passover as described in the OT and later Jewish writings present us with various features which do not belong to its original form. After tracing this history back and denuding the celebration of the fest of those parts which can be proved to be later developments or modification W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson was able to indicate those elements which even though they may not all have belonged to the fest as originally celebrated can with certitude be stated to have been its essential features at the period when it formed one and probably the most important of the religious observation of the Hebrews in the nomadic state (W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, 1930, 129-132).

The features are first, the sacrifice of a victim. Second, it was a night celebration which took place between sunset and sunrise, the earliest laws do not define the darkness had sent in. Third, the blood of the victim was smeared on the outside of the dwelling-place of the worshippers-- Matthew 27:22;25 (W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson 1930, 129-130).



In the history of religion, it is frequently observed that a ritual is carried out in a new historical and social context as a rite but receives a new interpretation. The reinterpretation of the Passover ritual in the realm of salvation history about Yahweh shows a changing understanding of reality (ECKART Otto and Tim Schramm1980, 82-83) and a new level of cultic perceiving and dealing with reality. The magical (ECKART Otto and Tim Schramm1980, 21-22) effect was no longer sought in the blood ritual but rather was realized culturally in the unique event of salvation history, grounded in the past and made present in Yahweh's reaching into history to bring salvation(ECKART Otto and Tim Schramm1980, 19-20).

Thus in the blood ritual of the Passover, the Salvation effect of Exodus was realized in the everyday life of Israel in the cultivated Land. If therefore the tribes of Israel occupying the land slaughtered the Passover lamb every year in the spring and completed the blood ritual, then the deliverance from Egypt became a cultic reality in the cultivated land. In the year this was realized and preserved as deliverance to salvation. The protection that Israel experienced through Yahweh in the Exodus was reenacted every year in the cultivated land through Passover. The fulfilment of this festival in the life of Jesus is so dramatic, here the Pascal lamb and Jesus are put to death. The audience learns that Jesus' death is the work of his opponents.

### **Ekpeye Traditional Festival and Biblical Response**

Religion in Ekpeye society is an unquestioned cultural reality. It is an integral expression of the African cultural background and as such determines the thoughts and actions of the educated professional in modern cities and towns as well as the peasant farmer in the village. Religion permeates every aspect of an Ekpeye man's life so that any dichotomy between religious and social-political concerns is false (John Corrie, 2007, 11).

Primarily Ekpeye people, unlike Africans, knew God traditionally right from the pre-Christian era. The challenge now is how to live the sort of life which is freely given as much as we can respond to (God) Him. The old ways notwithstanding; we need spiritual guidance which is a relationship between a spiritual guide and a seeker that is focused on the growth of the seeker. The relationship is maintained between two mature people differing in competence but not authority.

Guides place their knowledge and experience of the spiritual life at the service of seekers who wish to grow in the life of faith. The seekers in turn are open and responsive but must never abandon their critical judgment and their sense of personal responsibility. In spiritual guidance, the central relationship is not between the seeker and the guide but between the seeker and God. The guide assists the seeker, helps the seeker discover

patterns, articulate insights, and remain faithful (Carol Ochs and Kerry M.Olitzky 1997, 11).

### **Ekpeye Traditional Festival Biblical Perspective**

Amid Ekpeye people's quest for authenticity, the Church of Jesus Christ desperately needs a wholesome balance, stressing both the positive and the negative from a biblical perspective. The scripture becomes the normative standard whereby we judge truth and error (.Gehman 1989, 11). It is on these bases we engage Ekpeye Traditional festival in the light of the Bible. Our aim, therefore, is to examine carefully some of the crucial issues in the Ekpeye traditional festival in the spotlight of God's Word so that we may discern between truth and error. Our focus is primarily on Ekpeye traditional festival and not on African Traditional Religion in general.

It is wordy of note that from a biblical perspective, we affirm that the fundamental elements of ATR, as well as Ekpeye traditional religion, are not unique to Ekpeye land. Belief in God, divinities, spirits, ancestors, etc are universal. There have been people who believed and practised all of these around the world from antiquity past until the present. To achieve this we shall give attention to four fundamental issues in the Ogu-Ekpeye traditional festival Ancestors; sacrifices; realise and free of the bond and ritual as it relates to biblical Christianity.

*Ancestors:* Subordination is owed to God by all creation on account of the rank God holds as the first of all existence as Ancestor par excellence (Megesa, L1998, 51). It is believed that the Ogu-Ekpeye festival served as a medium in which the people and their traditional chief priests and other functionaries lead others in prayers to the gods and their ancestors. Besides the lack of ATR books nor text on Ekpeye traditional festival that relate the Bible's teaching to traditional beliefs, the problem of people's identity and self-image that find their spiritual and physical roots in the same place failing because spiritual roots outside faith in Christ have gone astray and lead to destruction. We need to go farther back and become the offspring of Abraham. Abraham made a break with his ancestors and became the ancestor of a new tradition. "Genesis 12:1-7.

All Abraham's descendants including Ekpeye Christians were asked to follow the God of Abraham not the gods of their previous fathers just like Abraham. The New Testament Gentiles believers did not join Jewish culture but they did see themselves as being the spiritual heirs of Abraham (Rom.11:17-24). Abraham and Jesus become Ekpeye's new traditional ancestors whom they worship and at the Ekpeye festival, they offer their sacrifices to them. Giving Jesus African titles such as Ancestor or Doctor enables Christ's

song to ring out in the Ekpeye language giving them the ultimate solution Ekpeye people are looking for in religion.

Looking at Jesus our great Ancestor from the very fact that He, God in our traditional concepts lives in another mode of existence, separated from ours, He became one of us and we can become one with Him. The mystery of the Incarnation is therefore illuminated as the mystery of the mutual indwelling of God and Man in which no department is segregated or left out. Strengthening this fact Lois Fuller citing both Kwsii Dickson and Kwame Bediako argued that Jesus never ceased to be one of the living dead because there always will be people alive who knew Him, whose lives were irreversibly affected by His work. If we do not have the ancestors there in the spirit world to help, guide, protect and discipline us, we have someone even better that is Jesus Christ our Savior. The ancestors are trusted because they are one of us. They had no choice about this since they were born into our family (Fuller 2013, 69-70).

But Jesus voluntarily and willingly became one of (Ekpeye-man's Ancestor) us. He was not ashamed to call us brothers. He cares about the Ekpeye people and knows Ekpeye people more than any human ancestors to which Ekpeye people directed their prayers and sacrifices during the Ogu-Ekpeye festival.

*Sacrifices:* Ogu-Ekpeye traditional festival is Ekpeye's form of turning to God in worship having supplied them with rain, good harvest, healing and deliverance. The King of Ekpeye land assisted by the Chief priest in conjunction with other functionaries mostly the elders are present at the slaughtering of the sacrificial animal at the main shrine which takes place early in the morning to mark the begging of the whole ceremony. They all gather at the shrine of the founding fathers of Ekpeye land believed to have settled in a particular village shrine called Ula-Ubie to perform this sacrifice. According to Ugwu, he asserted: in some cases, sacrifices are directed to one or more of the following: God; spirits; and ancestors. The recipients in both the second and third categories are regarded as intermediaries between God and men so that God is the ultimate recipient whether or not the worshipers are aware of that ( Ugwu 2004, 78-79). In this instance, Jesus becomes the Ekpeye people's sacrificial lamb. Hebrew10:12 But this man, (Jesus) after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God;

*Realise and be freed of the bond:* People that hired house maid that has stayed with them for one year and above set out to realise their housemaids to return to their families with gift items. This is a replica of the scriptural injunction in Deuteronomy 15:12-13 ¶ and if thy brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shall let him go free from thee. 13 And when thou send him out free from thee, thou shall not let him go away empty.

*Ritual and communion:* The ogu-Ekpeye festival is yearly rituals aim at pleasing God for an anticipated favour and blessing believed to be granted by God. This is where the Ekpeye people renew their covenant with their gods and ancestors. This is the same with the Christian Holy communion instituted by Christ in 1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brakes it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he comes.

We can look up and say Christian theology should seek to answer the real questions raised by the Ekpeye religion and African Christians therefore must be guided by the conviction that theology must be truly Christian but also truly African in expression. The purpose of Christianity is to fulfil and not to destroy, to free not to slave. Ekpeye traditional festival should look up to Jesus our brother and also our great Ancestor who is more powerful to help us than any ancestor could be. He is not from the earth like them but from heaven (John 8:23). He is not just human, he is also Almighty God. He has been able to conquer death and come back to life. Therefore He can give us much more help. All there are missiological when viewed in the entire spirit of Matzoth fest.

### **Reality of Ekpeye and Universality of Matzoth Festival**

The underlying condition of joy in a man is the meaning. Meaning is experienced and communicated in the festival. Ekpeye people knew what it means to be in a state of Joy. Ekpeye people rejoice when they knew Jesus himself the image of the Father by becoming like us, has shared our human heritage. It is within this human heritage that he finds us and speaks to us in the terms of its question and puzzles. He challenges us to turn to him and participate in the new humanity for which he has come, died, been raised and glorified (Kwame Bediako 1990, 14); it is by these Ekpeye began to praise, rejoice and dance in the time of the festival.

The joy that overcomes fears occurs in Old Testament always in the cultic fest but in the New Testament, it does occur in the everyday world. So it occurs when Ekpeye people are celebrating their festival. The reality of the Matzoth festival is the joy experienced is rooted in the cultic that eventually became a universal phenomenon. It was universal because it has reach the Ekpeye people's group from Jerusalem. The Joy and praise in the Jerusalem fall festival were more than just an expression of emotion for cult participation. As it is in Jerusalem it was more than emotion to Ekpeye people, they were rather a ritualistic reaction to the salvation realized in the festival for mankind and nature beginning from Jerusalem.

Eckart Otto & Tim Schramm saw it from the Canaanite point of view this ritualistic joy was related to a divine ascension to the throne. From the Israelite's perspective of salvation history, it was related to the enactment of bringing in the Ark (Pslam47:2). The basis of the jubilation was not in mythical-primitive events, but rather in the immediate gift of Yahweh who had reached into the historical experience of reality and from Mt Zion bestowed his Salvic power. The realization of this salvation-history event of the throne ascension was viewed as Yahweh's taking of Zion as his divine seat made real the rule of Yahweh over the whole world. Before God's salvation and blessing flowed from the festival into the world, which received this blessing in the festival community through festive praising of an enhanced life and by jubilant worship (Eckart Otto & Tim Schramm1980, 71).

The universality is in the historical event of the transporting of the ark by king David as a sign of Yahweh's taking possession of the divine mountain and this can be traced back to Pslam47 and the throne ascension. From the perspective of Jerusalem, this event actualized the mythical-universal dimension of EL's or Elyon's creation. Salvation's history and mythical dimension flow into another. In the act of ascending the throne, a fact of salvation history is actualized. However, in taking over the universal mythology of the Canaanite religion, rooted in the divine mountain this event of salvation history has a dimension that encompassed all the creation and thus negates the old monarchical view that salvation history was effective only for Israel.

### **Perspective of Ekpeye Traditional Festival in Hebrew Matzoth**

Just as all this drama keeps unfolding is God's (Yahweh) silence of Africa by extension Ekpeye people? But we are Ekpeye people, we respect and reverence the country of Wilberforce and Buxton and most of our Missionaries, but we are not Englishmen. We are Africans, an Ekpeye-man by indigene and have no wish to be other than Africans (Lagos Times, 12th July 1882). Does God turn his eyes away from us or forget because we are African? Are we totally in anything about us so remote? Ekpeye people has He forgotten that he created them? The choice of Abraham was it by merit and not by the gracious love of God? Was it in Israel alone God is dealing with? Was Abraham alone God is revealing Himself to, of course, No.

The particularistic attitude conceives of God as the God of Israel, and the universalistic attitude would express itself in such words as "look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth" (Isaiahxiv:22). The formal will regards Israel as alone worthy of divine consideration, the latter would include the Gentiles within God's scheme of salvation. Come to talk of it are there no people in Abraham's time that have a revelation of God? Who can search out the mind of God? Was it not what He wishes to reveal He does? Who

controls Him? So has God lost control of the Ekpeye people and wished that they perish? Not at all; for He takes good care of them in his universal plan of salvation meanwhile He keeps his gradual revelation to them and every people living on earth.

The great prophet of Israel Moses insisted again and again on the truth that Yahweh was the God of Nature; they also constantly emphasized the truth that God was everlasting. The prophet made it possible that they were fully in accord with the popular belief of Israel. From the first Yahweh had appeared to men as a deity who had some connection with the weather and was especially a mountain God. But by the middle of the eighth century, probably much earlier, the belief in Yahweh as the Master of the physical universe had greatly developed and found expression in the myths of Creation to which allusion has always been made. Every people who adopted such a myth made their national deity the hero. Thus in its Sumerian form, it is Enlil who destroys the Chaos monster (Gen.1.2a), in Babylon it is Marduk and in Assyria it is Ashur. We need not doubt that in Israel it was Yahweh who was held to be the conqueror of darkness (Gen.1:3-5).

On the very threshold of Israel entering into the wilderness and they're taking up the nomad life once more the Hebrews had such a signal illustration of the truth that Yahweh was the God of Nature that it never lost its hold on them, however, much another current of religious belief may have swept them from the mainstream of truth. They also received such striking illustration of further truth that in every age Yahweh was revealing Himself to Men following their capacity of apprehension (W.O.E.Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson 1930, 140).

These revelations cut across race and boundaries, even Europe and Africa as well as Ekpeye people, whoever God chooses to reveal himself. Even the Hebrew Semites shared with the rest of the race, in the earlier stages of its history all the beliefs which the evidence shows to have been common property (W.O.E.Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson 1930, 110). Nevertheless, we cannot but admire the Hebrew (Israel) a race which hitherto no hostility or persecution had robbed of its sense of nationality or its faith-the most durable people in human history, in their religious belief and practices the Jews have come a long way from Mount Sinai.

There is cross-cultural sharing of revelation among people and the Matzoth festival is very distinguished. The invention of Ogwu- Ekepeye traditional festival originate from Matzoth fest and it can be seen in the reality of God's presence in the life of the Ekpeye people. What Ekpeye people interpreted as Ogwu-Ekpeye is the Matzoth festival. It has become a tradition because it has been passed from one generation to another. The

Ekpeye forbears have replicated this festival to their own spiritual and religious needs and there are lots of Matzoth perspectives on the Ogu-Ekpeye traditional festival.

## Conclusion

The importance of the Ekpeye traditional festival cannot be overemphasised; in a general situation where most people have tacitly assumed that African religion is practically dead (Ulli Beier, 1975, 9). The attempt of missionaries to uproot Ekpeye customs and institutions, they the missionaries are believed to have an imperialist motive for doing so (K.O.Dike, 1966, 242). Ekpeye people should rise with their traditional festival and discover for themselves that the gap between the so-called pagans and Christianity was not as wide as they had hitherto imagined. They and the missionaries had been living in delusion by assuming that Christianity was a higher exponent of the Deity than Ekpeye's "pagan". It was quite clear that had they studied Ekpeye traditional religion they the missionaries, would have condemned paganism in Ekpeye traditional festival much less than they had been doing. The educated Ekpeye people are now givING a matching order to study Ekpeye indigenous religion to help the Church to bear a more biblically faithful, spiritually authentic and culturally relevant witness to Jesus Christ (Vinay Samuel & Chris Sugden, 1982, i) and that is because the white missionaries had lived all these years in the valley of delusion.

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