

JUXTAPOSITION OF BURIAL RITES IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION: IGBO LAND AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Burial rite is one of the things the living owe the dead. Every culture and religion has their way or their own mode of operation as it concerns burial. Christianity, Islam, etc. have their own modes so also African Traditional Religion. Most people especially Christians have gone a long way in misunderstanding the way African Traditional Religion does its own burial. Some made allusions that it is expensive, some say that there are some rituals they perform that are not important. On this work, the researcher tried to juxtapose the Christian burial and that of the African Traditional Religion. It was discovered that the aim of burial rites both in Christianity and African Traditional Religion are the same. It was also discovered that African Traditional Religion has its own way of according respect to the dead which they believe that the ritual would accompany the dead to the land of their ancestors. For the African Traditional Religion, there is no problem with what they do. They now advice Christians to focus more on the aim of the burial rites that it would be of immense benefit to them. The paper made use of Socio-Cultural analysis in its approach.

Key Words: Burial, Rites, African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Juxtaposition.

Introduction

All the religions in the world share a belief that there is life after death. Life does not end in the grave. It is believed that when the bodily aspect of man perishes in the physical death, the soul which is the essential part of man survive death; returns to another life beyond. Different religions and cultures give different interpretations to the afterlife. This different interpretations and understanding of the life after death reflects on the different methods of burial rite of each religion and culture. The central thing about burial in every religion is that, every religion seems to see it as a necessity for gaining peaceful rest in the life after death. The Christians believe that the soul returns to God to give account of his

life on earth. The African traditional religionists believe that the dead after proper burial rites is transformed into an ancestor, to share in the ancestral community. The Hindu, Buddhism and other Asian religions and cultures believe that the soul returns to Brahman, losing its identity. In Islam and Arabic culture the dead is rewarded in paradise. In all this, it is worthy of note that any of this life after death, whether with God, with the ancestors, with Brahman in paradise or in any other place as may be interpreted by one's religion and traditions, is basically for those who have lived a good life on earth.

The inevitability and consciousness in the belief in afterlife has informed all the religions and cultures to focus on the means of preparing the dead for the journey to the life after death, known as burial rites. Every religion and culture has its own way and method of burying the dead. The mode of burial rites may differ, both pattern of funeral rites and attitude towards death. Nevertheless, that does not necessarily mean that any one is superior to another. Environment and the status of the dead person most times determine the kind of burial rite to be given to the dead person.

It is acceptable that every religion and culture has its method of burial and none is superior to the other. It is on this note that I have decided to have a juxtaposition study of the burial rite in Igbo African traditional religion and in the Christianity to bring out the difference and similarities if there is any. In doing this I will make reference to Tiv and Yoruba religious and cultural attitudes towards the dead and burial rite when the need arises.

Clarification Of Concepts

To help us to understand better bone of contention in this work, the key concepts need to be clarified.

Concept Of Death

Under normal circumstances, there cannot be burial rites without death. It is when someone dies that we talk about burial rites. It is death that demands burial and funeral rites. However, defining death or discussion of death is a difficult task, reason being that as a living being, I have not died before to enable me say for certain how death looks like or what it really is. Those who have died cannot come out to talk about death which should have been another certain and real source of discussing death as it really is. Despite these difficulties, attempt

will be made to give the meaning of death based on religious interpretations and on other scholars view. Many religions, most especially the two religions in discussion in this work; Christianity and African Traditional Religion believe that man has two aspects; the body and the soul or the spirit. The body decays at death while the soul or the spirit survives. Thus, I shall begin the definition of death as the separation of the soul or spirit from the body. The soul or the spirit is the life wire of the body while the body serves as an instrument with which the soul or the spirit carries out its physical duties. Many scholars have given different concepts of death. For scholars like Joseph Fouche quoted by Davies (2002, 225) "death is an eternal sleep." For Onwuatuegwu (2010, 45) " death is a necessary and inevitable end awaiting each and every created being both man and animals, as well as plants. " According to Metuh (1997, 171), "death is the gate way between the two states of existence. Life on earth and life eternal..." In the view of Hans Kung (1985, 18), death is " when the signs of life were absent - especially when the heart ceased to beat and breathing stopped - the person was generally regarded as dead." But Allan Anderson (2000) perceives death "as a beginning of person's deeper relationship with all creation, the complementing of life visible an invisible. Talbot quoted by Amanze (1996, 4) asserts that "Igbo people consider death as the dissolution of one's corporeal nature. It is Gods Messenger which appears to the dying in the form of skeleton with a staff with which he strikes his victim and transforms him into a spirit."

With Talbot's description of death, it can be viewed that death is the end of life and the victim that is the dead suffers extinction. "But the people believed that death is only a transition. It is only a means of passing from the world of men to the world of spirit" (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979, 253).

If death is the end of man, then, there would not be need preparing the dead in a special way before burial.

Concept Of Burial And Funeral Rites

Burial rites are the last of the rite of passages in the life of man. It is a rite with which the dead is prepared for the journey to eternal life. Thus, it is death that gives birth to burial for without death, there would be no burial. In the World Book Encyclopedia, burial is seen as funeral custom. According to Oxford English Dictionary vol.1 funeral rite is to bury and to mourn the dead. Burial is the last respect that any person received from his family, relatives, cult group, religious group, age group, and members. This can be easily noticed in the burial of the Igbo people because it is said that, "*mgbe mmadu nakwa' onye ozo ka o na-*

akwa omwe ya, at the time when one is burying another that he prepares for his own. Burial ceremonies and its preparation, is determined by the religious, economics, social and political status of the dead, whether a traditionalist or Christian. However, one thing that is central in burial, whether in traditional mode or on Christian mode, is the washing of the deceased body with water. Again, the burial of a traditional person who died a good death is accompanied by so many preparations before burial which may be too cumbersome to be narrated here. Also, the same way in the preparation of burial of a Christian who died holding strong his faith. On the day of burial, the corpse is brought out, dressed in fine clothes, and laid in state. The grave is dug, depending on where one decides he/she should be buried. If it is a traditional chief, he will be dressed in his full regalia as a chief. He will be dressed according to his chieftaincy title, just as the Christian dress the full member, if a man in Christian men organization and women in Christian women organization. Since every human society possesses death ritual (burial rites and funeral ceremonies) demonstrate the ritual means of changing the status of the dead especially in terms of saint or ancestor and into his kinship community.

Let us now look briefly at the burial rites among some West African traditions. I may not go into detailed analysis of the funeral rites but to bring out the most common things among the African traditional burial rites.

Burial Rites In Igbo Traditional Religion

Igbo traditional religion takes cognizance of two main things in the burial rites; the burying of the physical body and funeral rites which follow suit depending on the family's preparation and readiness. "For the Igbos, the burial and Funeral rites are absolutely necessary for a person's salvation....and the spirit was restless and confused in the next world if it did not get the type of burial it demanded." (Mmuo 2014, 54).

For the Igbo therefore, any dead relation's spirit who was not properly buried will not have rest, rather it will be hovering around looking for something to destroy or to torment his family members whose responsibility was to bury him and give him funeral rites. "The non-Christian Igbo in fact would never condone the omission of these rites for his relative. He would perform the rites secretly for him if the Christian relatives would not do so." (Mmuo 2014, 54).

This is where there is always controversy between Christians and African traditionalists. When a child leaves his parent or her parents to join Christianity, even when the father or mother did not accept the same faith he accepted, he would make everything possible to see that his father or mother was buried in his own Christian faith he held so strong and tenacious. But, when there is another person who holds the same faith with the dead man, he would never allow omission to take place because one Igbo adage says *okwukwe onye nedu ya*. That is one's faith guides him. As I have said earlier that two main things take place within the burial of an African traditional religionist in Igbo land, the burial of the body and the funeral rites. However, in each of them, there are some processes that must be undergone during the burial rites.

The Burial Rite In Igbo Tradional Culture And The Rites Of Invitation (Funeral Rites) Into The Community Of Ancestors

In Igbo traditional religion and culture, a dead relative is not laid to rest in to the grave just like that as log of wood; there are series of rituals that must take place before the body of the deceased would be laid to rest. According to Patrick Mary Mmuo (2014, 54), in Igbo perspective of African Traditional Religion, especially in Nri areas which is also believed to be the traditional origin of the Igbo people , "the death of a person is attended by two sets of rites and ceremonies which come one after the other. These are the burial and funeral rites, and rites for initiating the spirit of the dead into the ancestral community."

This assertion shows that burial and funeral rites in which the initiation rites are performed are very much necessary to help the spirit of the dead to descend peacefully into the community of the ancestors. In his view, Mmuo believes strongly that in Igbo traditional understanding, "Just as the naming ceremony incorporates the person into the human community... So do the burial rites terminate his juridical and earthly existence here, preparing him also for entry into the ancestral community" (2014, 70).

It can be understood clearly here that burial rites in Igbo perspective of African tradition seem to be an access or criterion for resting in peace that is being with the ancestor. As I have said earlier on that the body of deceased Igbo person is not just laid to the grave just like log of wood, let us look at those rituals that surrounds the burial of the dead Igbo person.

The Burial Rite

There are many social activities that come up before the main rituals are performed during the burial of a core Igbo African traditionalist such as "... The crying and mourning... the negotiations with the various relations of the deceased, and many other formalities that has to be performed before actual burial" (Mmuo 2014, 70). The actual burial begins after those social activities with cleansing rites followed by liberation rite that is absolution, the ritual of dance and then the burial proper.

Cleansing Rites

The cleansing rite is actually relevant in the burial of an African tradition religionist because it is a means of washing away all the wrong deeds of he may have committed unknowingly while living. According to Mmuo (2014, 71), the cleansing rites begin with; "... a ritual of washing performed by the first daughter and one other dip their hands in little earthen pots of water beside the body and run it down the body from face to feet. This is done four times."

This ritual is meant to help and cleanse him of all unknown sins which he may have committed when he was alive.

Liberation Rites

The liberation rite also known as absolution is mostly performed for titled men. For instance, after the ritual of cleansing rite, the man's first son performs a rite of liberation to liberate him from all the worldly moral obligations imposed on him by the title he had taken and to transform them into spiritual honors, because these remain with the deceased and be inherited by the son. He takes the also and the Ofor and with them performs the same actions over the body as the daughter had done (Mmuo 2004, 71-72). Thus, it is believed in Igbo perspective of African Traditional Religion that whatever position he occupies and traditional office he had held in this world is the same position he is going to occupy in the community of the ancestors. That is, if one is an *Nzeor* an *Ozoor* had received any other chieftaincy title when he was alive on earth, he would also be the same in the community of the ancestors, that is, the "spiritual community, the Igbo tradition kingdom of heaven." (Mmuo 2014, 70).

This rite has categories depending on the status of the deceased. For example, Mmuo (2014, 71) asserts that "there are differences in burial rites, determined by birth ... age (adult or child), status in life (title or not) ... in what position did he

die." So, in African Traditional Religion, the status of a person determines the kind of burial rites and liberation rites (absolution) he receives.

The Ritual Dance

Since the Igbo people of African believe that death is not actually the end of life but a transition to a new life into another world, when a man especially (a titled and or aged man), dies a good death that is, at the ripe old age, there are many ceremonies attached to the burial which establishes that the death of a good person is not actually a separation from the family members rather going to represent them in the spirit world.

Such ceremonies are drumbeating, traditional dancing by age groups of the deceased, of his first son and his first daughter, and other musical ceremonies. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004, 58) are of the view also that the status of the deceased determines their burial rites. In their words, "Depending on the status of the deceased, there may be drumming, dancing, firing, of musket and guns and the pouring of libation as part of the funeral rites messages are given to the deceased during the dancing to deliver to the past relatives -ancestors."

Patrick Mmuo is more specific in saying that "one among the members of the deceased age group performs a ritual dance for him" (2014, 72). The dancing serves in most cases as part of the announcement to the public that the burial has begun.

The Rite Of Initiation Into The Community Of The Ancestors

This is the final ritual that is accorded to the dead which is believed that will lead him gloriously into the community of the ancestors. Actually before any burial rites begins the death of the deceased must have been announced to distant relatives of the deceased and to the public, especially if it is a woman that died, her people that is where she was married from must have been informed about the death of their sister, otherwise there may be a serious problem between the families of the dead woman and that of her husband. Even Mmuo (2014, 71) stated out rightly that

After death occurs, the death is announced to the public and after a period of crying and dancing, the final burial rites begin. The body is brought outside and laid on the mat placed on palm leaves on the ground and covered up with a mat up to the neck... The priest then performs the rite to strengthen the deceased on his journey to the spirit world. He waves a cock or a ram round the

corpse with it telling the dead 'take heart and pose for your journey: he kills the cock and run the blood on the eyes of the dead and tells him 'shun all and fear and all timidity.... He drops some of the blood on the hand saying, ward off all attack, wave aside all blockade. He drops some on his feet saying; move on without staggering or wavering

This corresponds to the burial of a chief who was my friend's father which I attended at Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebony State. When the dead man was brought home in the morning, there was no thorough washing of the body as the tradition requires, may be because the body has been deposited in the mortuary and had been decorated already and dressed in his chieftaincy wear but the first daughter brought an earthen pot filled with water and cleaned the father's body especially the face, the palm and the legs. After the cleaning, the first son came and waved a cock over the father for four times and uttered some words of farewell, the same actions was also performed by the last son. After this ritual a chief like him came and did the same thing after that the coffin with the corpse was taken close to the house where his grave was dug. At that point, the coffin was opened and one big cock was killed by the chief and the blood was poured on the body of the dead man. A big goat was killed and some blood was poured on the body of the dead and the head of the goat was also put in the coffin. After a native cow was killed and the skin of the right limb of the cow was torn and then tied around the right hand of the dead chief and the coffin was closed.

Each rite performed during the burial has its significance and purpose. It was when all this things might have been done and other rituals, which I had, explain are performed that the body of the chief was buried. According to Mmuo (2014,73) after this announcement have been made and the necessary rituals performed " the coffin is then lifted by two of the age group members and with it they perform a gallant farewell dance and processed straight on to the grave for his burial." At the burial I experienced in Uburu, Ebonyi State, after the burial of the physical body of the deceased chief, there was a little ceremony. In the early morning of the next day everybody in the compound except the wife of the dead chief left for the town and Uburu market led by his first son to announce the funeral ceremony of their father. Meanwhile before going, seven gun shots have been boomed to show the beginning of the announcement. Immediately we returned from the announcement, another seven gun shots was boomed and the

rites began in earnest, (Ikwa ozu). The rite of initiation into the ancestral community is therefore the burial rite that gives the deceased the opportunity to commune with the ancestors. The Igbo people call it *ikwa ozu*, preparing the dead for a mission or journey. So, when a man dies and has been buried physically..."Funeral rites practically accord him this happy initiation and permanent communion in this spiritual community, the traditional Igbo kingdom of heaven (Mmuo 2014, 70).

This rite of initiation into the ancestral community is performed together with social ceremonies. The rites of initiation into the community of the ancestors can be fixed at a particular period after the burial of the body. But it can also be carried out within the same period depending on the agreement of the family members of the deceased or the instructions given by the deceased before his death or the season in which the death occurred because there are period in Igbo tradition religion and culture that burial and funeral rites do not hold. The rites of initiation into the ancestral world (Ikwa ozu) as it is usually called by the Igbo usually begins with "...an elaborate wake keeping with the deceased lying in state" (Ugwu and Ugwueye 2004, 58). After the wake which begins at about midnight following the festivities,

The ceremony begins with the ritual firing of canons and dancing intended to awaken the spirit of the deceased to the joys of his accession to the ancestral domain, and to announce to the whole town that the rites and ceremonies are about to begin. The *umuada* (all the daughters of the deceased extended families who are married to other families) are most prominent in the dancing and they parade the whole village with their dance. (Mmuo 2014, 73- 74)

This Mmuo's description of initiation into the ancestral community is exactly what I witnessed in the burial of my friend's father at Uburu in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebony State which I attended in January 2019.

Burial Rites In Tiv Traditional African Culture

Tiv cultural tradition as part of African Traditional Religion has its own method of performing their ritual in burial and funeral ceremonies which certainly may not be entirely different from other African cultures and traditions. However some changes that occur in the African Tradition Religion in their different religions most times are based on climate, soil, and weather. According to Orpin

(2010, 34) "The Tiv like many other African tribes have a rich funeral custom which they inherited from their ancestors. Burial rituals were performed 'in the Tiv traditional society from the time of death to the times when the corpse is taken to the cemetery for burial." He also stated that burial in Tiv begins, just like that of Igbo with wake- keeping. For the Tiv as Orpin clearly stated, "wake keeping is the art of being awake all night watching a corpse before burial with lamentations, with much singing and recently drinking and dancing to keep the bereaved company and consoled them" (2010,34).

It is a tradition in the African Tradition Religion that when someone dies especially one who died a good death there must be public announcement before the burial. Thus, in Tiv tradition "prior to the burial a wooden drum would be beaten especially when it was a prominent man, to announce to *takuruku anyam - azega*, a prominent ancestor" (Orpin 2010, 35).

Orpin made us to understand that in Tiv traditional culture, burial is effected in a descent and orderly manner even without religion service. The Tiv like many other culture of the world have their method of befitting burial for all categories of people. This embedded richly in Tiv burial rites and ceremonies which are the means by which the transition is effected to ensure that the dead receives secure place in the spirit world or in the great beyond or in the land of the dead (Orpin 2010, 37) from the above it can be understood that there is no significant different in which burial in Igbo and Tiv tradition al culture and religion. It is obvious that burial rites in African Tradition Religion are to enable the deceased to gain access to and be in peace in the spirit world, and to console bereaved relatives. Thus, Awolalu, and Dopamu (1979, 266) observed that in Tiv tradition "There is also a' second burial which consist of a series of social and ritual events. The second burial is characterized by social festivities - dancing, feasting, and drinking. This depends on the available time, as well as on the financial resources of the survivors."

Those feasting, dancing, and other merriments are believed to be happening in the spirit world just as it was happening in the physical world. Those ceremonies give the dead joy as he journey to the spirit world as it is believes that he - the dead the ancestors partake in those celebrations.

Burial Among The Yoruba Tradition Religionists

The Yoruba authors, Omosade Awolalu and Adelumo Depamu in their book "West African Traditional Religion (1979) gives an in-depth insight into the Yoruba traditional rites and funeral ceremonies. We shall make excerpt from the work.

In their description of traditional burial rites and funeral ceremonies in Yoruba, they give an instance of the death of a man who die at old ripe age. According to them once there is an announcement of a death old man, the booming of the gun indicate the announcement. People came together from different areas to the place where the corpse. From there the corpse will be taking from one place to another with a man holding a fowl going in front of the carries of the corpse.

The tradition of carrying the corpse from one place to another with the fowl whose feather were being plucked till the destination of the corpse is to clear the way for the deceased for safe journey back home. After the display back to the house of the deceased, food, and drinks are provided for the quests. Meanwhile before burial the hair of the deceased is shaved very well if it a man but it plaited if it a woman. The body of the deceased I swashed very well with warm and clean water and with new sponge, and soap believing that the washing will enable the dead to be admitted into the abode of the ancestors. After the washing the corpse it will be dressed in a very nice cloth brought by the relatives and will be brought into the sitting room where it will be laid in state on a bed. After that the ceremonies begins with music, dancing, and feasting and women dance around the corpse singing funeral songs. The next morning entertainment and burial take place. On the seventh day there is another elaborate ceremony called *ije* "seventh day of burial" this is celebrated in the belief that on that day the deceased will finally set out for his journey to the spirit world.

Burial Rites And Funeral Ceremonies In Christianity

In every religion and culture burial rite is the final rites according to a deceased member. And I have mentioned earlier that every religion has it method of burying the dead. Burial rites and funeral ceremonies in Christian tradition is followed with different processes both before and burial. Some rituals were to be performed before the actual burial takes place. In this Christian burial rites and funeral ceremonies, my focus will be mainly on the catholic traditional or liturgical burial rites not because the catholic denomination has or claims

monopoly of power but because it has a procedure and processes of preparation and burial that is universal to the whole Catholic Church. For example,

Depending on local custom, the significant time during the preparation for burial would seem to be the following; the vigil in the home of the deceased the time when the body is laid out; the assembly of the relatives and if possible, the whole community ... to offer sacrifice, and to bid farewell to the deceased in the final commendation followed by the carrying of the body to the grave or tomb (Castello and Flannery 1975, 750)

Within the preparation of the deceased for the great journey to the eternal rest in the catholic tradition some rituals are performed such as singing of "psalms, readings and prayers at various time when the family, friends and neighbors of the deceased or other members of the community assemble at the coffin (Castello and Flannery 1975, 759). In the Christian funeral ceremonies and burial rites there are rules and guidelines which must be followed. There are necessary rituals which cannot be omitted. Adrian Fortescue and J.B. O'Connell describing their guideline says.

As in the case of marriage, so in that of funeral, there are really several rites which follow One another.... The bringing of the body to the church; Martins and Lauds for the dead, Requiem mass; the absolution, the burying. In general these complete funeral rites are of obligation. While the office of the dead may be omitted for a reasonable cause the prayers which follow the absolution may never be omitted (1960, 392)

This prayer which follows the absolution seems to be a kind liberation prayer for the deceased from sins in case he had faulted unknowingly or due to human weakness. According to Chapman Geoffrey (1991, 65)

In every Christian burial rites, if the corpse was brought to the church, it is received by the minister by going to the door of the church and greets the people who are present in their own denominational tradition. Then, if it is a Catholic the priest will sprinkle the coffin in which the deceased member is laid with holy water and says; in the water of baptism (the name of the deceased is mentioned) died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May he/she now share with him eternal glory!

Adrian and O'Connell (1960,398) add that "if the coffin is taken at once to the place of burial the procession is now formed as when going from the choir to the coffin for the absolution." But before the burial of the body, there is sprinkling of water and incensing of the body. "The deacon takes the sprinkler, dips it in the lustra water, and hands it to the celebrant.... The celebrant and the deacon go round the coffin ... the celebrant sprinkles it with lustra water first towards the feet next in the middle then towards the head" .(Adrian and O'connell 1960,397-8)

Castello and Flannery (1975, 752) explained also that after the funeral Mass in the Christian burial the rites of final commendation and farewell is celebrated. This rites according to them is the last farewell with which the Christian community honors it members before the body is buried. The Christians do these because they also believe that death does not really end life rather "in the funeral rites the church celebrates the paschal mystery of Christ. Those who in baptism have become one with the dead and risen Christ will pass with him from death to life to be purified in soul and welcomed into the fellowships of the saints in heaven. (Castello and Flannery 1975, 750). They still maintain that although in death there is a certain separation, Christian who be really separated in death. (1975, 752). Death in actual sense does only separate the physical relationship but not the communion between the living and the dead especially when the dead is believed to have lived a good moral life. Therefore,

The Church through its funeral rites commend the dead to Gods merciful love and pleads for forgiveness of their sins. At the funeral rites, especially at the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifices the Christian community affirms and expresses the union of the church on earth with the church in heaven in the great one communion of the saints (Chapman 1991, 3).

The Christians therefore believed that the funeral rites given to their members help to lead him / her to God and to live with the saints. In the Christianity, there are different arrangements for the adult's funerals and that of children. They differ in a sense, although both can receive burial Mass. According to Castello and Flannery (1975, 750-751)

The rite of funeral for adults has been arranged in three plans.....The first plan provides for three stations. In the home of the deceased in the church and at the cemetery; the second plan

has two stations: in the cemetery chapel and at the grave; the third plan has one station: at the home of the deceased.

According to this three plans for the adults Christian burial processes like sprinkling of water, sacrifice of the Eucharistic (if it is a catholic), prayers, singing of psalms, and reading of text in the Bible, preaching the word of God for the encouragement of the bereaved and the attendant of the burial, giving them hope that death is not the end of life but a transition into a new life in another world and finally the funeral commendation comes before the funeral rites.

Commendation itself serves as the initiation rites into the company of saints. Thus, the song of farewell in the catholic burial rites goes thus;

Saints of God come to his /her aid!

Come to meet him/her angel of the lord!

Receive his /her soul and present him/her to God the most high...!

This song is always sung after the prayer of absolution and commendation. It is believed that with all the rituals performed the deceased will be cleansed of his venial sins so as to meet the saints and angels of God who are already waiting to take him/her peacefully to God. In the case of death of a baptized child, Castello and Flannery (1975, 786) state that "the funeral rites of baptized children who die before the age of reason are arranged according to different plans of funerals...." That means funerals ceremony of...a deceased child cannot be the same as that of the adult. These authors went further to say that if the child whom the parents wished to be baptized should die before baptism, the local ordinary, that is the bishop of such diocese, taking into consideration pastoral circumstance, may permit the funeral to be celebrated either in the home of the child. If the mother had wished to baptize the child then the child has received what the Catholic calls baptism by desire. Therefore it can receive Christian burial although not planned as that of an adult.

Juxtaposition Of Burial Rites In ATR And Christianity

As I have said in the beginning that every religion has its method of burying and preparing the body of the deceased member. It is also worthy of note that before the advent of Christianity and Islam in African, there has been a mode of worship and people have been dying and were been buried religiously. The juxtaposition of burial rites in African Tradition Religion and that of Christianity will help us to understand or point out the point of dialogue between them. What we should always have in mind is that, in matters of death in all the

religions, there is always a melting point the "life after death. Or life after life "as Hans Kung puts it. It is also believed generally by every religion that death is not really the end of life but a transformation. This we often hear in the Catholic Mass for the dead that for those who believed in Christ life has no end it is only transformed. Placing the meaning of burial rites to the African Traditional religion, especially the Igbo tradition and the meaning of burial rites to Christianity side by side Mmuo (2017 x-xi) says,

In traditional Igbo culture, the salvation of the dead is demonstrated in the funeral rites and ceremonies and rituals performed for the dead. The more popular and festive these ceremonies are, the better they are presumed to help the soul of the dead or indication their conditions in the spirit world ...in the Christian religion the salvation of the dead is demonstrated in the funeral rites which indicate that the soul returns to God and stays with him and his angels and saints.

Every religion believes therefore that every member that died who is believed to have lived a good life and have been properly buried by his members goes to live with the other members who have died earlier and are living in peace in other world. The terms of every religion may differ in reference to their dead member who are believed to be living in peace in the world of afterlife. For example, the African Traditional Religion and Oriental religions see their dead member as ancestors while Christianity uses saint to designate their dead members. According to Davies Douglas (2002-103) in the religious of the East Asia and in African traditional societies, funeral rites constitute the prime arena within which the states of an ancestors is conferred upon the dead, just as descendant have to use such medium as a time when they pay their dues to the dead who are now becoming ancestors. Christians in similar way, during the burial and funeral rites of a member, it is a period when the member pays their burial dues for the dead and it is a medium in which there is offering for the support and consolation of the bereaved family and also a period within which they commend the dead to God.

As I have said earlier on, form or method may differ in burial rites depending on the cultural background, yet its purpose is one, and the same. In the Christian parlance,

In being born into the life of Christ at baptism the Christian community, a community united in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus., at death of one of its members the Church that welcomed the new Christian in baptism gather again to bid farewell and then hand the deceased back to God (Smith 1998,7).

That is to say, when a person is baptized into Christianity he has been initiated into the community of believers in Christ and thus eligible for receiving Christian burial and funeral rites when he dies. During the Christian funeral rites, absolution prayers is said for the release of the deceased in case he had faulted unknowingly, the Christian prayer of absolution is for the Christians who received baptism and were incorporated into the community of the believers- the Church and are believed to have kept the faith till death. In the same way in African Traditional Religion in Igbo of West Africa for example

An Igbo baby has no juridical personality immediately it is born. To obtain personality it has first to undergo the series of social and religious rites and ceremonies prescribed by the custom... And the first of these ceremonies is the naming ceremony at which the baby is gives names. Once this is done the child is integrated into his kinship community. If he dies without the rituals he would not be buried with any funeral rites (Mmuo 2014, 47-48).

It is clear here that just as the naming ceremonies gives name, initiates, and incorporates a person into the kinship of his community so also the Christian baptism gives a person name, initiates, and incorporates him into the Christian community. In the same way as the burial rites terminates the earthly existence of a person in African Traditional Religion and prepared him for entry into the ancestral community, so does the funeral rites in Christianity end the earthly existence of a member and prepares him for the entry into the company of the angels and saints. Having read through some works about burial rituals in African traditional religion and haven attended many burials in the different cultures in Nigeria, even Muslim burial rituals one thing that is central in burial rituals is the washing of the corpse. This washing has a significant which has something to do with purification of the deceased. This washing reflects the Christians sprinkling of the dead with holy water, which can still be seen as a purification of the dead for safe journey to heaven. The sprinkling with holy

water according to Castello and Flannery (1975,752) recalls the person's entrance into eternal life through baptism and the incensation which honours the body as a temple of the holy spirit are considered signs of farewell.

These rituals on the body of the deceased both by African Tradition Religion and Christianity will bring to our consciousness that;

.... It is commonly believed that when a person dies his spirit remains in this world for sometimes wandering restlessly in the vicinity of his home and other places he used to frequent during his life time. After the completion of the funeral rites, the spirit enters the *ndiichie*, ancestral shrine (Metuh 1991, 119).

So sprinkling and incensing the body of the deceased member, the Christians show that the spirit of the dead still hovers around and funeral rites help him to meet the saints on the way to heaven so that they will take him to God. In another instance Parrinder (1969, 107) gives us five phase in an African traditional religious burials. According to him " there are usually five phase to a funeral: the preparation for burial the morning before interment and wake keeping , the interment itself, the morning after burial and later mourning at varying period" Smith (1998, 24) on the other hand present 6 ritual processes of Christian funeral action, time between death and the central funeral action, time of the central funeral action , vigil and related rites and prayers funeral liturgy, time after the central funeral action, and rites of committal.

A critical look at the two processes or phase of funeral rites of both Parrinder and Smith it is obvious that there is no clear different between them, it has also been a custom in the Church in the funeral rites not only to commend the dead to God but also to support the Christian in the burial and the bereaved by giving them hope of future resurrection of the baptized with Christ.

Evaluation And Conclusion

From the studies already done I have to draw a kind of conclusion that both African traditional religion and Christianity believed that when a dead member who lived a good life is given a proper burial he be in peace in eternity with the ancestors or the saint who are living with God. What is obvious in both African Tradition Religion and Christian burial rites is that "the power of funeral rituals lies in the fact that death is directly faced, addressed and in a sense, experience as a kind of transcendence" (Davies 2002, 44-45). Death is understood by both African traditional religion and Christianity not as an end of life but going

beyond the earthly life to the spiritual life without end hence the funeral rites for preparation for the journey. It is also worthy of note that Christianity, especially Catholic as a religion thrives to adapt itself to every traditional culture and religion it finds itself, adopting certain parts' of the cultures and transforming them into their tradition. So, Christianity especially the new Pentecostals is gradually eliminating some of these traditional practices in burial rites and funeral ceremonies, not actually that they are bad but because it does not suit their way of doing things. Sometimes they could not especially the Catholic which is conscious of enculturation shy away from the traditionally conceived need some of them have served. That is why Allan Anderson cried bitterly that some of the indigenous and traditional funeral rites have been transformed and are given Christian meanings so as to suit both Christians and make meanings to those with traditional orientation. One may ask the question, is there any problem with that since it is suitable both for the Christians and the traditionalists? The answer is, that a thing looks like something does not qualify the former-to be the later. Giving the traditional practice a Christian meaning must have gone a long way scraping the real traditional meaning. With this approach, it is now difficult to point out or to make a clear distinction between Christian burial and traditional burial. In any case, since every society possesses death rituals as Davies explained burial rites and funeral ceremonies demonstrate the ritual means of transforming the status of the dead from mere human being into ancestor or saint. And that is the striking similarity between the purpose of burial rite and funeral ceremony in African Traditional Religion and burial rite and funeral ceremony in Christianity.

Nevertheless, one striking difference between both is that in burial rites of a core African Traditionalist, there must be a sacrifice of an animal whose blood will be poured into the grave of the deceased which signifies a means of communion with the ancestors, while the Christians especially the Catholic believe that the Eucharistic sacrifice which also signifies the of the living and the dead and which Christ is the sacrificial victim and the chief priest has covered every other sacrifice. Actually, we can see that there is sacrifice and bloodshed in both but manner in which they are performed differ. Yet they serve the same purpose.

In conclusion, it is very much important to understand that every religion, depending on its cultural background has attitudes and language associated with death and bereavement, and the burial rite and funeral ceremonies express these attitudes. Since every society varies in its attitudes towards life after the life,

funeral approach towards the preparation of the deceased, local traditions, cultures, religious affiliations, and style of life obviously influence this attitudes and beliefs to a great extent. Therefore, African traditional religionists cannot and should not be expected to treat the dead typically as the Christians do. Although, what is done may be the same in a sense (form) but the language and approach may differ.

Recommendations

- The leaders of Christianity should be tutored on the African way of doing things.
- Government should be very careful in enacting laws that concerns tradition.
- Christianity should emphasize more on the excesses in the African tradition religion burial rites if any.
- African tradition religion adherents should try to be proud of themselves and equally create awareness on what the A.T.R burial rites is all about.

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