Academic
Journals

ABOUT IJSA

The **International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology (IJSA)** is published monthly (one volume per year) by Academic Journals.

International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology (IJSA) is an open access journal that provides rapid Publication (monthly) of articles in all areas of the subject such as Socialization, post colonialism, kinship and Descent, Culture, ethnography etc. The Journal welcomes the submission of manuscripts that meet the general criteria of significance and scientific excellence. Papers will be published shortly after acceptance. All articles published in IJSA are peer-reviewed.

Contact Us

ARTICLE

Review

The living-dead (ancestors) among the Igbo-African people: An interpretation of Catholic sainthood

Nwafor Matthew Ikechukwu

Godfrey Okoye University Enugu, Nigeria.

Studies have shown that most of the precepts, ordinances and rituals in Christian religion are more of resemblances than novelties of what were the cases in the original religion of the African people. The belief in the communion of the Saints, and its surrounding practices stressed especially among the Catholic group is coterminous with the veneration of the Ancestors in this latter religion. The affinity that exists between these two beliefs calls for a special attention, and reinvestigation especially this period when inculturation and proper adaptation of Christian culture are emphasized in the evangelization of people. This study will apply a hermeneutical approach in its study. At the end of its theoretical sample analysis, it will suggest that those ancestors whose names are traceable be recognized among the local worshipping communities who know them and who are strong adherents of this belief. It calls for a new approach in the study of the ancestral veneration with some reservations applied in the absolute condemnation of the practice.

Key words: Christian, catholic, Africans, communion of the saints, Christianity, inculturation.

INTRODUCTION

There is a common belief that most of what is African were disparaged and misconstrued as either barbaric or when it has to do with their religion, as idolatry. The accusations of these misinterpretations were levied on their European "friends" who came either as colonial masters or as missionaries. Most of these derogations were maliciously destructive and dehumanizing, and were smeared on almost all the facets of life of the African people.

In the first place, Africans were denied rationality, the epicenter of what it means to be human. If we go by the popular view that culture is human, it means that Africans do not have any culture since they do not possess that which is very essential in the definition of humanity. It equally means that Africans do not have any identity, no history and are therefore no people.

Senghor and Rohio (2007) expressed the pitiable nature of this uncharitable and cruel representation of the African people by the Europeans when he pointed the need for cultural independence among Africans. According to him, "cultural independence is the necessary prerequisite of (sic) other independences: political, economical and social". One sees in Senghor and Rohio (2007), the view that biological miscegenation merely brings about gene mutation while cultural miscegenation causes a psychological mutation which

Authors agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

affects one's personhood. What else does one further expect when one's foundation is destroyed? The effect of the denial of humanity to the African people resulted into a political neglect that ushered colonialism. A people without rationality will certainly not be able to form and maintain a state. This would therefore be done for them- a charity that is devoid of the heart and a case of Greeks bearing gifts. Even the communal life which was and is still the African ego was debased to a mere animal congregation with no exhibition of intellectuality. This discloses the state of mind of Cesaire in his *magna opus* "*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*" which is translated as "Return to my Native Land." There, Masolo (1994) analyzed very satisfactorily the content of this work pointing the two important concepts in the text which he described as what "would later turn out to be the key to the discourse on African identity."

The concepts are: "negritude" and "return." The first concept which was later developed by Senghor and Rohio (2007) is today the bedrock of all African liberation and dignity concepts. He gave the meaning as "the whole complex of civilized values- cultural, economic, social, and political- which characterize the black peoples, more precisely, the negro African world." Then the word "return" which is far from a mere homecoming to a geographical or a perceptual space means "a deconstructive term which symbolizes many aspects of the struggle of the peoples of African origin to control their own identity".

The study point of arrival is that this bastardization of African culture did not spare even the supernatural as African religion and its vital tenets are also maimed. The evidence of the occidental prejudice was obvious in the question of the African veneration, worship or communion with the ancestors. These three cultic concepts are found everywhere in the doctrine of the Communion of the Saints prominently taught by the biggest Christian group, the Catholic Church.

While this practice is seen as holy in Catholic religion, it is taken as an abomination and idolatry in the African Traditional Religion. What is noteworthy and serious is that the massive embrace of the African people to the Christian religion has not changed their conception of the power of the cult of the ancestors. The outcome of this becomes a kind of syncretism and hypocrisy that point to the need of Christianizing or put better, inculturating this aspect of the African worship to save the African people from the mix-up that indicates a crass confusion.

Understanding the meaning of culture: A preface to the inculturation of ancestral veneration in Christianity

The etymological derivation of the term culture from Latin *cultura*, which means cultivation of the soil, is very important in our understanding of this concept in the

present time. Amaegwu (2013) extended the meaning of this derivative to the "cultivation of the mind and spirit." The significant word in this derivation is cultivation which implies a dependency of culture on man.

Culture is a product of a rational being like man. Man is therefore the maker or creator of culture. It is those "patterns of behavior and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share" (Bodley 2009). It is that which helps us to distinguish one group of human beings from others; and distinguishes humans from animals. "A people's culture includes their beliefs, rules of behavior, language, rituals, art, technology, styles of dress, ways of producing and cooking food, religion, and political and economic systems" (Bodley, 2009).

Because culture is the product of man as a rational being who has freewill and the ability to make choices, it becomes really true to accept that culture "developed together with the evolution of the human species, *Homo sapiens,* and is closely related to human biology"(Bodley, 2009). By human biology it would mean that the biological and physiological features of man help him to develop a culture. For instance, man stands erect, can handle tools properly, has a large brain connection and so on, which assist him apart from his rationality to carry out what he thought out.

Tylor (1832-1917) is recognized to have given one of the best definitions of culture. In his *magnus opus: Primitive Culture* published in 1871. According to him, culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." But culture should be distinguished from society. Cultures are "learned behavioral patterns and perceptions while societies are groups of interacting organisms." This supports the assertion that culture is human enterprise while society is what both human persons and animals possess though each does that according to its nature.

Amaegwu (2013) defines culture as "the human capacity to express in symbols, for oneself and for others, the reactions and relations of individuals and human groups with their environment and their interaction with it." He cited Gomez who defines culture as "an integral whole or configuration, a magnifying glass through which people perceive the many facets of the world".

We shall also examine the meaning of culture in line with Okafor and Emeka (2004) who x-rayed the various ways writers described the concept of culture. The first among them was Malinowski (1931) who defined culture as:

"a vast apparatus partly material and partly spiritual, and partly human, by which human societies are organized into permanent and recognizable groupings" (Malinowski, 1931).

For Good (1959) in his *Dictionary of Education,* culture is

"the aggregate of the social, ethical, intellectual, artistic, governmental and industrial attainments characteristic of a group, state or nation, and by which it can be distinguished and compared with other groups or nations....". The view of the Italian Vincenso Cappalletti in a 1971 UNESCO Publication was that culture is "the awareness possessed by a human community of its own historical evolution by reference of which it tends to assert continuity of its own being, and to ensure its development".

Then the Federal Republic of Nigeria in *A Cultural Policy For Nigeria* (1988), held that culture is "the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbors". In a synthesis, the two authors (Okafor and Emeka, 2004) explained culture "as all knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, ideas and skills available in a society and by which the society can be *compared to or differentiated* from others".

According to Mondin (2004), "man has always produced culture, because he is essentially a cultural, and not a natural being." Mondin (2004) by this statement means that "at the moment of birth, nature gave man hardly the necessary minimum, the essentials, to be man, and assigns him the task of making himself and forming himself so as to fully realize his being through culture". He defined culture from "elitarian, pedagogical and then anthropological perspectives".

Culture in the elitarian sense occurs when we say scientific, philosophical, artistic culture. In the pedagogical sense, it means the act of reaching full maturation and realization of one's personality. Then in the anthropological sense, culture "signifies that totality of customs, techniques, and values that distinguish a social group, a tribe, a people, a nation".

Okere (2005) gives an elaborate description of culture as that which is specifically human, and which starts from the natural but culminates in man's free activity and creation. He puts it thus: "culture in contradistinction from nature is that part of his milieu which man has himself created". He gave an instance with the longing for food which is natural in every man but its fulfillment with either cassava and okro soup or with bread and tea is a matter of culture. He also notes that culture "is learned and not instinctive".

Two things can therefore be deduced from this exposition. The first is that culture is man-made: that is, culture is not natural to man but a product of man's activity and cultivation. The second is that culture defines an individual or a group which Odimegwu (2004) expressed thus:

"If an individual is identified by his or her community, the community is identified by culture, for culture gives a community both a sense of reality and dignity, integrity and continuity, security and social cohesion….and by his or her culture, he or she is identified".

DEFINITION OF MAJOR CONCEPTS

Ancestors

Ancestors in Igbo ontology often called *Ndiichie or Ndibunze* are those men and women who led good and exemplary lives when they were in the physical world, and are believed to continue their existence in the spiritual world. They are called the living-dead, a concept coined by Mbiti (1985) to describe their presence with the living, and their state of personal immortality in the spirit world. Following this connected function, Mbiti (1985) adds:

"But the living-dead are bilingual: they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically".

A similar notion is presented by Gbenda (2006) when he states that "the ancestors are believed to be the living-dead. Though they are physically dead, yet because they were good people in their earthly life and fulfilled societal obligations and duties, they are now spirits."

These living-dead are always involved in the affairs of their families on earth, assisting them in their struggles and warning them of any impending danger in their family life. Ancestors are often males; "female ancestors are not so revered as the male ones" (Nwala, 1985). For one to become an ancestor in Igbo world-view and religion one must fulfill certain conditions which according to Oguejiofor (1996) include:

The individual must live a morally upright life. He must also be successful as a person, and his success is shown in his possession of wife (or wives) and children especially male children, and enough material possession. He must have died a good death …not of mysterious illness or by accident (*onwu ekwensu).* These conditions must be accompanied by a befitting burial [with which] the dead are received in the land of the spirit (*ala mmuo*), by his ancestors.

Inculturation

The word inculturation is a neologism which could be taken as an entirely new word or an extensive meaning of the word enculturation. Webster's dictionary gives the meaning of enculturation as "the process whereby

individuals are conditioned by, adjusted to, and integrated with the cultural norms prevalent in the society of which they are members".

An examination of the word inculturation shows its close resemblance to enculturation. Before it finally assumed its name, it was called adaptation, indigenization, reformulation which did not portray the actual meaning. Soon after the Second Vatican Council where the term *incarnation* (Ad. Gentes No.22) was used in the transmission of the message of the gospel to cultures, the word inculturation gained entrance into the diction of the Church. This concept was held to have begun in Africa before its spread to the universal Church. The word means:

The honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It means the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people…. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly "feel at home' in the cultures of each people (Waliggo, 1986).

Locating inculturation in the history of the church

Even though the word inculturation is a new concept in the Church's dictionary, the action itself is as old as the church. The evidence of this is found in the activities of the apostles in the early church, and in the later accounts of the mission of the Church in foreign lands.   For instance, Mbefo (1989) refers to the events in the Acts of the Apostles and notes:

"there is a remarkable difference between the way the Gospel was presented to the Jews who had the Old Testament background and the Greeks who did not share that background" .

There is no doubt that part of what prompted the convocation of the first Council in Jerusalem in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles was the problem of inculturation -how to make the gospel message adaptable to both the Jewish and Gentile cultures. With the movement of the Church from Jerusalem to the Gentile world in the middle of the first century, "the presentation of the Christian message and the organization of the church were adapted to the existing milieu" (Waliggo, 1986).

The existence of the Church in the first three centuries that were inundated with sanguinary persecutions before the edict of liberty of religion by Constantine witnessed various adjustments of the gospel message and Church organization to suit the hard situation of the time. Waliggo, 1986) avers that "whatever genuine movement that has taken place in the Church has been as a result of an honest attempt to inculturate Christianity to the times and cultures of contemporary peoples."

Again, the advent of Monasticism in the Church is not as relevant today as the time its need was much felt. It was a response by the Church to an arisen situation when "red martyrdom" was not common. Think of the ecclesiastical disciplinary measure of celibacy of the clergy, the Church's strict hierarchical and monarchical structures which parodied the secular mentality of the time and most of the Medieval devotions that had their root in Roman culture. Another historical fact to the reality of inculturation in the history of the Church was the numerous official documents and directives of *Propaganda Fidei* since its institution in 1622 as a body that regulates mission activities in the Church.

Various documents from this organization reveal the constant efforts by the Church in adapting the message of the gospel to the cultures she seeks to evangelize in order to ensure continuity of Christianity in nations that are non-European. This body insists in all its documents that evangelizers need to respect the cultures of the peoples they evangelize. For instance, in 1659, it was recorded that this mission body instructed missionaries thus:

"Can anyone think of anything more absurd than to transport France, Italy or Spain or some other European country to China? Bring them your faith, not your country" (Waliggo, 1986).

Founders of various religious congregations even till today instruct their members on mission to study the languages and cultures of the people they are to evangelize. The aim tallies with the preceding instruction of *Propaganda Fidei* to avoid making their converts African-Europeans but African Christians. The missioners have to become Asians to the Asians or Africans to the Africans or simply put in the words of St Paul "all things for all men."

The next fact in history which expresses the truth of the Church's acceptance of inculturation and its movement is the existence of rival groups in the Church on the issue. We have described that of the Council of Jerusalem in St Luke's narration where the group for inculturation that would so to speak allow the Gentiles in the worship with the Jews without being circumcised, prevailed.

Again, in the second century, the group championed by Tertullian who opposed the involvement of Christians in secular matters thus making them citizens of the other world was defeated. From the negative side, the notable achievements of missioners like Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili in China and India respectively who approached their mission work with the tool of inculturation were annihilated because of the great opposition from the Dominicans who misconstrued their good intention. Waliggo, (1986) also notes that "all efforts for reunification of the Latin and Greek Churches proved

fruitless mainly because each church had inculturated itself so deeply in the cultures of its people".

Furthermore, it is clear that one of the reasons the Church lost foothold in North Africa and many parts of East Africa was because it never adapted its message to the culture of the people there. The survived Churches in Nubia, Egypt and Ethiopia have at their root, the cultural beliefs of the people. Again, one sees that unlike the Tridentine Church that was moribund with its stereotyped uniformity and ritualism, the Church of Vatican II Council is more vibrant because of its acceptance that unity in diversity through inculturation will enrich the Church and make it relevant and more lasting in each culture and nation.

An exposition of the catholic veneration of the saints and ancestor veneration in African traditional religion

The beginning of the Catholic veneration of the saints could be traced to the experience of the early Christians during their persecutions. The early Christians were believed to have taken refuge in catacombs in Rome when their lives were on the verge of destruction by the Roman demagogues.

In these catacombs, they prayed amidst graves and even used coffins and tombs in some cases to make altar for the celebration of the Eucharist. Records have it that in the early post-apostolic era, the Church venerated the dead and witnessed miracles like healing, sweet smell in connection to the bodies of these dead Christians. One does not need to be told that the major underlying factor to these actions was their belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Similar to this was the Christian action of obtaining the remains of the martyrs. These martyrs together with the Christian leaders were asked to pray for the people to the point that even after the death of these leaders, their prayers were still sought with a belief that even at death they are still effective. This informs the present day irresistible practice of seeking the prayers of the Christian living-dead (the saints). The saints are those whose lives were outstanding in holiness and sanctity.

In the Catholic and Orthodox churches where these saints are venerated, the practice is carefully distinguished from the worship given to God alone. Deacon Dr. Mark Miravelle of Franciscan University of Steubenville distinguished between worship as veneration and worship as adoration. Worship as adoration is given to God alone and is designated by the Latin *latria* by Catholic theologians while worship as veneration which is an honour or respect given to distinguished holy persons in the Church is represented by the Latin *dulia.* As early as 167 AD from the time of the martyrdom of St Polycarp, some historians stated that his body was preserved as a relic and a day was set

aside for the commemoration of his death as a feast. There was also the erection of small shrines over the tombs of martyrs then. Not until the Edict of Milan (313 AD) and other official recognitions of Christianity "that the public cult of the saints attained full acceptance and began its true growth." By 4th century, the tombs of martyrs had become the location and foundation of many large churches. By this time too, veneration of saints and their relics were so rated that a council of bishops meeting in Gangra (c.340) went as far as threatening excommunication for any Christian who despised relics.

Other evidences on the various ways Catholics venerated the saints in different nations abound. For instance, Park (2010) notes that in South Korea, ancestor veneration is recognized even by the Church. He points that in the said country, "the Catholic ban on ancestral ritual was lifted in 1939 when the Catholic Church formally recognized ancestral rites as a civil practice." The internet Wikipedia on the veneration of the dead also reveals that the ceremony of going to the cemetery and lighting of candles to dead relatives on the day of the dead which it amazingly identified as All Saints (1 Nov.) existed in Europe before the Roman rule. In the US for instance, pictures of ancestors with flowers are seen on the roadsides for accident dead relatives. Even among the non-Catholic denominations is found the practice of veneration or at least respect of the dead. Wikipedia reports that "members of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints perform posthumous baptism and other rituals for their dead ancestors…."

The essence of the veneration of the saints is found in this related concept: "the communion of the saints." In the veneration of the saints, the living do not only accord this great respect to them but they also ask their help in prayer. The communion of the saints is not the same as necromancy where the dead are conjured for the purpose of causing harm or of gaining knowledge of secret things. The communion is rather of prayer done to the triumphant members of the church by the pilgrim members for themselves and for the suffering church since the three make up the Mystical Body of Christ. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that the saints are asked to pray for us because they are more closely united to Christ and they help our weaknesses very greatly by their fraternal concern (CCC.956). Before n.954 of the same text, the introduction was captioned: "the communion of heaven and earth."

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, this phrase which was first used by St Nicetas, the bishop of Remesiana in modern-day Yugoslavia, "is the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body under Christ its head, and in constant interchange of supernatural offices." The participants in this communion as points by Wikipedia are called saints because they all have one

destination (which could be supposed as heaven) and they partake of the fruits of redemption of Christ.

Then in African Traditional Religion, the veneration of the ancestors is based on the belief that the dead continue to exist after the physical death. According to Mbaegbu (2012), the rank of *ndi ichie*, the living-dead or ancestors as he exchanged the appellations "is the highest or the topmost in the grading of human spirits in Igbo traditional thoughts…"

Those who lived well among the dead are venerated because they are believed to be not only living but also can influence the fortune of the living. This practice forms the basis of African Traditional Religion. The goal in some African cultures is to ensure the joy of the ancestors and to attract their favour and care on the living. The non-religious or social function of ancestor veneration "is to cultivate kinship values such as filial piety, family loyalty and continuity of the family lineage." From this analysis, one could adopt Jahn (1961) view that "the dead are not alive, but exist" as what explains the Igbo belief on life- after- death.

Ancestor veneration is not the same as worship of a deity or deities. While the ancestors were once human persons, the deities are created spirits that minister with some portfolios under the Supreme Being. Ancestors are better acquainted with human needs because they were once humans. This is why they are recoursed to, when in need. Mbaegbu *(Ibid* p.155) gave a detailed account of the role of the ancestors in Igbo world view when he said:

"They are also well disposed to play their benevolent roles in their respective families, villages and clans. As spirits and therefore nearer to the rest of the gods and to the Supreme Being, they are better placed to act as intermediaries between the gods and the Supreme Being and the members of their individual families and clans. And also because they possess better knowledge of the goings-on in the spirit world, they constantly warn their descendants and kinsmen of impending dangers and attract the most favourable fortunes. They also watch over their families as loving fathers and constantly seek means of obtaining blessings, protection and prosperity for their families".

"However, in some cultural groups, the objective for the veneration of the ancestors is not to seek any help or favour from them but to fulfill a filial duty. In both ways, food is offered to the ancestors who are believed to be in communion with their living. When these ancestors are offended either directly by depriving them of their recognition or indirectly by defiling the land, propitiatory offerings and purification rituals are celebrated to appease them and the land".

Veneration of ancestors is preferred to worship of ancestors because many scholars who objected to the use of the latter did that because of the connotation which the word worship bears. Worship in their description is the devotion accorded to a deity or a divine being. For these authors, what the venerators do is not an act of worship since that will imply that that the ancestors have become divine beings. The veneration is rather a respect and honour to the ancestors for their great and heroic deeds and good lives and then to ask their favour. It is also very important to know that some ancestors have been attributed with the havocs and misfortunes of their family members who neglected the celebration of their memory and their veneration. It will be neither naivety nor illogical to agree with views that maintain that "ancestor veneration remains among many Africans, sometimes practiced alongside the later adopted religions of Christianity and Islam."

Veneration of the saints vis a vis ancestral worship in Igbo religion

We have explained the meaning of ancestors, and from that can deduce why they are venerated in Igbo religion. The veneration of ancestors is made manifest in the way the traditional Igbo pray. Because the ancestors are believed to be living even though they are physically dead, they are invoked in the prayers of the Igbo people. We hear prayer of this pattern from many Igbo person: (Adopted from Ifesieh in Uzukwu, 1988)

Chukwu, biko taa oji: God please eat kola
Chineke, biko taa oji: Creator please eat kola
Ala taa oji: Earth Deity eat kola
Nna anyi ha taa oji: Our forefathers eat kola
Ndi mbu ndi egede tanu: Those who were at the beginning of time, eat kola

In the prayer aforementioned, one discovers that the ancestors (forefathers) are found in the hierarchy of spirits beginning from the Supreme Spirit. They are invited in the Igbo prayer session and are sent petitions. In some areas in Igbo land it is forbidden not to keep some food in the pots around the house lest these family members from the other world come and find the pot empty. Shrines are made for them where libations are poured in their honour and petitions are sent to them. Nwala (1985), recaptures this fact thus: "ancestral shrines are quite common in several Igbo communities. The shrines are severally called Ndiichie, Mgwu, (Ngwu is in the shape of a mud pyramid with clay plate or pot on top of it and a small building to shelter it." The ancestors in Igbo religion are intermediaries between the living and the deity. They intercede for them and protect them from harms.

Most of what were discussed here about the ancestors both in the elucidation of the concept and in the discourse

on their veneration has their resemblances in Catholic devotions. For instance, the fact of the intercession of the saints and their fraternal help is clearly proclaimed in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC n.956). It says:

"Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness… they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us,… So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped."

The help which the saints render include surely the help of protecting the faithful especially those who invoke the saints in their devotions. Hence we hear of patron saints of various places and conditions. These saints are sent petitions as done to the ancestors. Their relics are kept as symbols of their presence in chapels dedicated to them. This act is not far from the practice of *Ngwu* in the ancestral veneration pointed by Nwala in our earlier exposition.

In both venerations that is, of the ancestors and the saints, there is a familiarity. While that of the former is the family-tie, the latter is about the familiarity of faith relationship. The clear picture of the actions involved in the veneration of the saints especially in the early centuries of the history of the Church when the practice began could be seen in the description made by Isichei (1995) about Monica, the mother of one of the greatest Christian theologians Augustine. She said:

"Augustine writing in AD 397-8, observed, 'it had been my mother's custom in Africa to make meal-cakes and bread and wine to the shrines of saints."

Meer (1966) also asserts that the invocation and veneration of the saints were solemnly approved at the Council of Trent. There the bishops were authorized to teach that the saints reign with Christ and pray for men. They were to teach that it is "good and salutary to invoke them as advocates…"

The underlying fact here is that there is a communion between the *noumena* (the incorporeal world) and the phenomena (the material world). This is not far from the Igbo belief in the existence of two worlds: the physical and the spiritual worlds which are though distinct from each other have this essential link that one cannot really continue its existence without the other. It is important to also note that the practice of the ancestor veneration in Igbo culture and religion stems from this belief. While people like John Triebel believe that a link exists between ancestor veneration and the communion of the saints, Ela (1995) insists that it is deceptive to think that such a resemblance exists. He says: "…,

"We should not think for a minute that veneration of the saints can be an African substitute for communion with

the ancestors! That will just be one way to lead converts away from their culture."

Quoting Abbe Pannet, he *(Loc.cit)* expressed his reason thus:

"… the cult of saints-with its calendar, devotions, sanctuaries, pilgrimages, festivals both religious and secular, and its representations in art- is too marked by the historical experience of European Christianity for it to fully absorb the values of the African tradition".

Another reason given by Ela (1995), on this is based on the African identity crisis. He seems to be afraid of the assumption that the saints are the ancestors, and therefore to be venerated in the stead of the ancestors is another way of selling and battering African identity. Hence he notes:

"today, when Africans search for their identity, the question is not to imitate a particular saint from the Roman calendar, but to situate the ancestors within the mystery of the Christian faith" (*Ibid.*, *pp.28-29*).

However, after all the polemics on the issue of the veneration of the saints and that of the ancestors in Igbo religion, the simple fact is that a communion with the dead who are believed to be alive exists in the two religions. While the approaches and the rituals involved in this communion may differ, the truth of their intercessory function is acknowledged in both. Hence a link exists between the veneration of the saints and the ancestors.

Because of this link which we have proved, there is urgent need for a move for inculturation. A delay or total rejection of this simply prepares a good ground for hypocritical "syncretical" Christianity to thrive. With this, Christianity becomes that which Mbiti (1985), describes as "contact religion."

Contact religion according to him is the type of religion "in which a person feels no contradiction in holding a mixture of belief and practice from two or more religious traditions in Africa." He adds that in this situation, the person's "unconscious life is deeply traditional, but his waking life is oriented towards one of the world's religions." Even Okolo (1995) points how Hervier Carrier, a Jesuit priest that worked many years in the northern part of Nigeria said: "a substrate of paganism (has) continued to persist in the African Christian." It is to avert this ugly situation that we shall recommend the following measures.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that an enterprise of this sort is often very difficult to be re-examined because to change is an Olympian task. But a good orientation and a gradual

approach devoid of absolute condemnation of the practice of ancestral veneration in Igbo religion will make great impact. We therefore refuse to subscribe to any opinion similar to that of Mbogu (2011) which holds that ancestor veneration or more specifically in his words, "ancestor Christology" "may hinder individuals from understanding the true implication of Christ for their lives." Instead of posing such obstacles as posited by Mbogu, this practice when properly inculturated in a way that is unfettered with syncretism will give more meaning to Catholic liturgy especially among those who are ardent believers of this. It will ensure authenticity in the Christian worship in Africa which will sink deep into African Christians and will be hard to be mutilated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A date for the liturgy where the ancestors of each area is celebrated in a Christianized way could be set out. In this celebration, the common action of killing of fowls and other rituals could be done as family feasts after a prayer session possibly the Mass in which the names of the ancestors are mentioned; praying for and with them in words that indicate that if they are in a place of joy, they should pray for the gathered family members who are commemorating them that day.

This prayer could be made mentioning the names of those ancestors whose names are still known by their family members. This is not too far from the feast of Halloween celebrated in the United States every 31st October. This feast which many believe to be of pagan origin from the ancient Celtic pagan feast called *Samhain* pronounced as *sah-win* is today commemorated in the Church liturgies in a Christian way in America. The feast was not only a feast of harvest for the Celtic, but also a feast that expresses the belief of the ancient Gaels that on the 31st October, "the boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead overlapped and the deceased would come back to life to cause havoc…"

Similarly, the Mexican feast of the dead which was celebrated on 31st October is now part of the Church's feast of all souls. It now begins from 31st October and ends on the 2nd November when the universal Church celebrates the feast of All Souls. Part of what is done in this feast is the Mass for the dead where each individual and family communes with the ancestors and prays for and with them. Some of the rituals that usually accompany this feast were incorporated into the Church service while others were done outside the liturgy as a continuation of the feast in a social way.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

Amaegwu OJ (2013), *Globalization Vs African Cultural Values*, Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd. pp.27;29-30.
Bodley JH (2009). "Culture" Microsoft @ Encarta [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.
Ela J-M (1995). My Faith as an African, New York: Orbis Books. pp. 28:29-30.
Gbenda JS (2006). African Religion and Christianity in a Changing World: A Comparative Approach, Enugu: Chuka Educational Publishers. p.7
Ifesieh EI (1988). "Prayer in Igbo Religion: Some Traditional Models" in Uzukwu, Elochukwu (ed), Religion and African Culture, Nsukka: Spiritan Publications. p.71
Isichei E (1995). A History of Christianity in Africa, New Jersey: Africa World Press Inc. p.44.
Masolo DA (1994). African Philosophy in Search of Identity, London: Edinburgh University Press. pp. ix+301.
Mbaegbu CCA (2012). Hermeneutics of God in Igbo Ontology, Awka: Fab Educational Books. pp.149-155.
Mbefo LN (1989). Towards a Mature African Christianity, Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd. p.6-49.
Mbiti JS (1985). African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann. pp.83-275.
Mbogu NI (2011). "Christian Eschatology and Ancestor Christology: How Compatible?" in Nwachukwu, Mary-Sylvia (ed), *African Journal of Contextual Theology* Vol.3, Lagos: Change Publications Ltd. p.160
Mondin B (2004). Philosophical Anthropology, India: Theological Publications. pp.145-146.
Senghor CM, Rohio SW (2007). Readings in African Political Thought, Ibadan: Heinemann. p.590.
Nwala TU (1985). Igbo Philosophy, Lagos: Literamed Limited. p.119.
Odimegwu Ferd-Harris (2004). "Globalization and African Identity" in M.F. Asiegbu & J.A. Agbakoba (eds.), *Philosophy and Praxis in Africa*, Ibadan: Hope Publications. p.316.
Oguejiofor J.Obi (1996). "Eschatology, Immortality an Igbo Philosophy of Life" in *Bigard Theological Studies* 16:25.
Okafor RC, Emeka LN (2004). Nigerian Peoples and Culture, Enugu: New Generation Books. pp.12-14.
Okere T (2005). Philosophy, Culture and Society in Africa, Enugu: Victojo Productions. p.37.
Okolo CB (1995). African Traditional Religion and Christianity: The Neglected Dimension, Nsukka: Fulladu Publications Company. p.18.
Park Chang-Won (2010). Cultural Blending in Korean Death Rules. London: Continuum International Pub. Group. p.12.
Waliggo JM (1986). Inculturation, its Meaning and Urgency, Uganda: St Paul's Publications. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/veneration (2/3/14).
http://en.wikipeedia.org/wiki/veneration -of- the-dead. (2/3/14). pp.14:15-17.

International Journal of
Sociology and Anthropology

Related Journals Published by Academic Journals

- Journal of Economics and International Finance
- Journal of Hospitality Management and Tourism
- African Journal of Business Management
- Journal of Accounting and Taxation
- African Journal of Marketing Management
- International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology