

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORSHIP IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL
RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY: A STUDY OF IGALA RELIGION AND
FOUR-SQUARE GOSPEL CHURCH IN IGALALAND**

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Abstract

This paper examines worship within the context of two religious traditions in Nigeria: African traditional religion and Christianity, with particular reference to Igala religion and Four-Square Gospel Church in Igala-land. The aim was to find out the similarities and dissimilarities in acts of worship between the Igala religion and Four-Square Gospel Church. The study adopted qualitative research design. Materials were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involved the use of oral interview from twenty resource persons who were chosen through systematic sampling in three Local Government Areas of Idah, Ofu and Onyedega. Secondary materials were obtained from books, articles, journals, research documents, the internet and print media. The paper adopted descriptive and comparative method of analysis. The descriptive method describes the phenomenon of worship as it is applied in Four Square Gospel Church and Igala religion. The comparative method of analysis examines the similarities and dissimilarities in acts of worship between Four Square Gospel Church and Igala Religion. Findings revealed that worship in both Igala religion and Four-Square Gospel Church are carried out through acts such as: prayers, singing, dancing, use of musical instruments as well as animal and non-animal materials for sacrifice and thanksgiving. Findings also revealed that in both religious traditions, the role of priest in leading worship is sacrosanct. The study also found that there exist some remarkable differences in materials used for worship in both religions; while the Igala religion make use of charms and magic during worship, the Four-Square Gospel Church make use of the bible and hymn books during worship. In addition, Igala religion make use of local musical instrument, the Four-Square Gospel Church make use of foreign musical instrument. The study concludes that there is so much in common between worship in Christianity and African traditional religion such that both can be seen as essentially one in different cultural expressions.

Key Words: Worship, Igala religion, Four-Square gospel church, African religion

Introduction

The human person is not only a social or a political being but also a religious being. This is a fact of life. Religion has to do with a relationship between the human person and the divine. It is a kind of belief in a divine reality that is worshipped by the believer. One thing that is clear is that every religion, irrespective of its origin, points to the fact of a divine reality; a being that is transcendent. The fact that religion is a relationship, an interaction, the question now is: how does the human person interact with the divine person? Most religions of the world provide opportunities for the human person to easily interact with the Supreme Being. This is what brought about the idea of worship. Worship is an act of reverence to a Supreme Deity.

However, African traditional religion has been criticized by foreign scholars as being incapable of true knowledge of the Supreme Being prior to the advent of the missionaries on African soil; thus, incapable of worshipping the Supreme Being. They refer to acts of worship in African traditional religion as worship to idols. Though, this claim has been refuted by African scholars like Idowu and Mbiti among others, as they contend, there can be no people around the world who are totally devoid of cultures and religion. This study is set out to refute the assertion by foreign scholars and show that Africans know and worshipped God before the advent of missionaries on the African soil. Also to argue that worship in African traditional religion and Christianity should be considered on equal basis since they are symmetrical acts of worship to the same deity- the Supreme Being. This is done through a comparison of acts of worship in both African traditional religion and Christianity.

The Concept of Worship

Worship is an act of reverence to a Supreme Deity. It is an interaction or communication between human beings and the spirits, ancestors, deities or the Supreme Being. According to Walter Harrelson, worship is a means of sustaining fellowship between humans and the super-sensible world. It is an inner attitude which finds expression in formatted outward expressions. These formatted gestures reflect the inner reverence in the heart of the worshipper and were formatted by the human agency. Both regular and occasional worship revolve around human beings. Other aspects of worship sessions also depend on the human agency, for example, songs, recitation of praise names and cognomen of deities in any particular divinity cult rest upon humans (2). Adega defines worship as an act of paying divine honor, to reverence, to pay veneration to a divine being. It is man's great sense of awe in the presence of the magnificent divine being (153). The researcher conceives worship to be the response, often associated with religious behavior and a general feature

of almost all religions, to the appearance of that which is accepted as holy that is to a sacred power or being. Characteristic modes of response to the holy include cultic acts of all kinds: ritual drama, prayers of many sorts, dancing, ecstatic speech, veneration of various persons and objects, sermons, silent meditation, and sacred music and songs. “Also included in worship are acts of private response: spoken or unspoken prayers, silence, the assumption of particular postures, ritual acts and gestures, and individual acts of veneration of persons or objects” (Walter 3).

To Gadsby, worship is a strong feeling of respect and love for a god (1655). In the process of worship, it is neither the words nor the pattern of the worship constructed nor the sequence of prayers that is not clear emphasized, but what is done and said (NTI/DLS CY4 123). Worship is normally done in designated places; this is according to different religious adherents who gather in order to reverence and honor the god they believe in. This shows that the adherent acknowledges his or her complete submission to the will of the Supreme Being. In essence, worship is an act of expressing the belief of the people. However, it must be noted that Africans have no word for ‘worship’ as is the case in English. As a result, there are words like “to pray, to sacrifice, to perform rituals, to make an offering” (Adega 154). These words describe other spiritual beings and imply that worship involves or incorporates the above features or activities.

Giving a classical analysis and insight into the act of worship, Idowu noted that worship is an essential part of man in his urge to commune with the Supreme Being whom he believes controls and determines his destiny:

Worship is an imperative urge in man. Its beginning may be traced back to the basic ‘instinct’ which was evoked in man by the very fact of his confrontation with the ‘numinous’. Man perceived that there was a power other and greater than him, a power which dominated and controlled the unseen world in which he felt himself enveloped; a power which he therefore made out by intuition to be the ‘ultimate Determiner of destiny (108).

Worship has been defined by many authors but for the purpose of this work, it is to show the lot of love and adoration for something, is an extreme form of love, it is a type of unquestioning devotion. In Christianity, activities that depict worship are carried out in church and other venues designated for such purposes especially during crusades which are organized in places like stadiums and public squares.

Forms/Types of Worship

Basically, there are three forms of worship as identified by Walter Harrelson, they include; corporate exclusive worship, corporate inclusive worship and personal worship (5).

Corporate Exclusive Worship describes a form of worship that exclusively belongs to the group alone. Such exclusive groups may understand their distinct status over/ against other groups on the basis of a divine mission in the world (e.g. Judaism, Christianity and Islam) of clan, social, or initiatory distinctions (e.g. Seventh-day Adventists, Gnostic groups), or by reference to certain ritual or ethical commitments and practices. Under this form of worship, an elaborate system brought the new member in to the community. The community maintained its exclusiveness through the passing on of the secret lore to the devotee from the hold of the material world and thus prepares the way for his ascent to the realm of the divine form which he had been separated (Walter Harrelson 6).

The second type of worship, the corporate inclusive worship is a type of worship whereby any member of a society is, by virtue of birth, included as members of the worshipping community (e.g. the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia) (156) or at least potential members. In American Christianity, many churches engage in such corporate inclusive worship, even though they may have their fixed doctrines and requirements for membership. The Eucharist (also called Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper) often is open to all who wish to communicate (partake). Some congregations have been organized as community churches; i.e. not belonging to any of the recognized denominations; in this, worship is, of course, inclusive. Participation in worship is generally open to those who wish to take active part in the life of the new congregation, including its sacramental life at will. Many of the distinctions marking off the large number of denominations or churches from one another have lost most of their significance (157).

The third type of worship is that, which is at the individual level. The individual worship, centers in public events and ceremonies, but there is ample place in most religious communities for the devotions, prayers and religious acts of the individual, either lay or religious. In corporate acts of worship, fixed prayers, confessions and ritual acts, processions and participation by empathy in the acts of the leader of worship, all enrich the individual's own worship:

Some persons are best able to worship in the company of fellow worshippers, finding little meaning in acts of devotion done in solitude or even in the family circle. Some individuals may well find that special times and places, special rubrics and ceremonies and a properly enclosed and framed setting for the appearance of the holy are necessary for their worship (Adega 158).

Worship could come in various forms such as praying, singing, dancing, clapping and drumming, depending on the religious tradition.

Acts of Worship in African (Igala) Traditional Religion

Worship of the Supreme Being (Ojo) in Igala religion is done through several acts of worship such as prayer (aduwa), pouring of libation (ote edu dajane), offering of sacrifices (uchebo egujo), divination (egowo; abokumagane) and festivals (Ucholo) (Onoja Akpa oral interview). Giving a classical analysis and insight into the act of worship, Idowu noted it as an essential part of man in his urge to commune with the Supreme Being whom he believes controls and determines his destiny:

Worship is an imperative urge in man. Its beginning may be traced back to the basic 'instinct' which was evoked in man by the very fact of his confrontation with the 'numinous'. Man perceived that there was a power other and greater than him, a power which dominated and controlled the unseen world in which he felt himself enveloped; a power which he therefore made out by intuition to be the 'ultimate Determiner of destiny' (108).

There are several acts of worship in African religion generally, and Igala religion in particular. It is pertinent to note here that worship and divination as regards worship in Igala religion does refer to two different things:

Divination falls within an act of worship, and thus implies only a particular aspect of worship. Whereas every person can worship the Supreme Being, deities or spirits, it is not every person who is capable of divinizing (Akoh 247).

Hence, this is a special role exercised by diviners and agents of cults of worship. To bring this into the discussion on worship in Igala traditional religion, it means a religious act is that which the Supreme Being who is the highest of all beings is honoured, revered, offered sacrifices, and subsequently invoked and petitioned to direct the activities and destiny of man towards a good end (Egbunu 9). In this way, worship embodies certain characteristics of which three of them are vital for our consideration here. These are namely: Prayers, sacrifices and offerings, and very important still, divination.

Prayer as a religious act in worship means a request or entreaty made by a religious person to the object of his worship; in this sense, to the Supreme Being (Attah 241). In Igala religious ideas, generally anybody can pray by determining the time and place of his prayer, but communal or family prayer is primarily lead and said by the elders; clan or family heads on behalf of the members. According to Okwoli, traditionally, Igala elders, family-heads or clan-heads invoke God daily in their morning prayer. These elders pray for themselves and the members of their families. Contents of prayers may include entreaties for good health, protection from dangers and enemies, rain fall, fertility for women, animal and land, peace and prosperity (23). Sacrifices and offerings are almost interwoven acts in worship. Many religions, whether western or oriental are characterized by the act of sacrifice and offering.

According to Idowu, “it is inconceivable to have a religion without some form of sacrifice, however modified or refined it may be” (29). Sacrifices and offerings are means by which the worshipper keeps and sustains contact and relationship with the deity of his worship. The nature of the cult of the deity determines the type and time of offering of sacrifices to that deity. Generally, items of sacrifice include food, drinks, and living things. The most common items of sacrifice and offering in Igala traditional religion are Kola-nuts, yam and fowls. In the actual sense, the worshipper(s) partake in the consumption of what is offered, and some parts of them are placed before the shrine. This is seen as a special form of communion between the worshipper(s) and the divinities.

Divination is an important aspect of worship in Igala traditional religion. Divination according to Ojoajogwu is the ability to have insight into or discovery of unknown or future by supernatural means, or skillful forecast and good guess (6). This happens through inspiration, magic, intuition, guessing or by conjecture (Zahan 21). But in all these, the strong union with the supernatural through adoration, reverence and worship is the key to skillful display of divination. Okwoli also describes divination as an important aspect of worship and goes further to argue that it is an essential act in Igala Traditional Religion. In his words:

Divination is a very important aspect of traditional worship. This is because worshippers use divination to find out the wish of the spiritual being. Worshippers consult the diviners from time to time. Based on the advice of the diviners, individuals, groups or persons or communities carry out offerings and sacrifice or other modes of worship as required by the spirits or the ancestors (34).

From the above, it is clear that divination is a very essential aspect of worship in Igala traditional religious life.

Moreover, festivals are also considered part of worship in Igala traditional religion as festivals such as; *Oteka* festival, *Ogani* festival, *Ibegu* festival, *Icholo Okulla*, *Eju Bejuailo*, *Icholo Uchu Eto* are done beginning with worship to particular deities. Also, in these festivals, there are certain musical instruments that are used during some worship sessions. For instance, a big round drum mostly used in pair's, (*Okelegwu*), a cylindrical drum that produces a unique sound, which backs up the *odechi*, (flute), a set of whistles and metal gongs which are arranged according to their sizes. These instruments are used in worship in order to invoke the spirit of the deities worshiped; and also produce a melodious tone which in turn triggers the people or worshippers to get engulfed in dance. *Iye* and *Onuche* also assert that the use of flutes during worship have the potential to stimulate aching hearts and troubled minds (131).

Worship in Igala traditional religion takes place at designated sacred places. “These include forests, a particular tree, rocks, hills, rivers, streams and sometimes graveyards. At such venues, shrines, temples and altars are erected as symbols marking those places as essential abodes of deities and spirits” (Miachi 50). According to Achoba, in the plains of Idah, people worship some features of the environment. These they see as tutelary spirits or protective agents. The most conspicuous are mountains and rocks. The belief here is that spirits possess environmental features and, if worshipped, could give refuge (43). Furthermore, the Uwo hill range of Igalaland was worshipped for this reason. Human sacrifice was the highest and last resort to avoid massive disaster. In this case, the victim became a sacrificial lamb to redeem his/her people and, as such, is later worshipped as a god or goddess. This type of sacrifice was done as a condition for the gods to come to the aid of the people in critical situations like war, epidemic and so on. The victims of such sacrifice, for example; the case of *inikpioma ufedo atta* were usually undefiled persons such as a virgin or chaste person. Thus, in the light of the above, it is obvious that the Igala people of old believed in quite a number of totems and deities through which they venerated the Supreme Being (44).

Furthermore, in Igala religion, lands are often set aside at the outskirts of the village settlements. Examples are *Ayabi* in Affa-Ibaji, both sides are rivers and streams, *ega idah* where *Inikpi* is being worshipped. Also, *Okwula* forest, *Egbe* forest in *Egume*, *Ojaina* (Royal Cemetery at Idah), farming and other human activities such as hunting, felling of trees, fetching of fire wood among other things are forbidden since these places are considered sacred as shrines of some deities are located therein. For instance, the *okwula* forest is a small forest, it is where *Ochollo ukwulla* is carried out in Dekinna Local Government Area of Kogi State. Herein, the only priests who are custodians of such sacred forests could enter at specified times of the year. Moreover, the *Ofu* River remains a sacred place of worship for the people within its environs. Gago Ajetachi explains that rivers and streams in Igala religious setting are treated as sacred by people who live in its domain (oral interview). Often it is individual and personal, particularly when it involves prayers for fertility of women” (Zahan 83).

Priests in Igala traditional religion are responsible for the shrines of their various deities, lead members of their religious cult in worship such as offering of sacrifices, pouring of libation, performing of some initiation rites, performing of some rituals especially to appease the deity when there is calamity in the land (Okwoli 36) and inquiring from the diviners to know the cause of certain unfortunate occurrences in the land when there is calamity or disaster. There are many materials used for worship in Igala traditional religion. Since worship involves pouring of libation and animal sacrifice, material for worship cut across both animal and non-animal materials such as; cocks (*oko ajuwe*), hens (*ole ajuwe*),

goats (ewo), kola (obi), palm wine (ote ekpe), gin, local beer, charcoal (olubi), red clothes(ukpopikpa), white clothes (ukpofufu), black clothes (ukpodudu), cowries (oko igbeke), calabash (ocha) and skin of animals (Ago ela) (Egbunu 22). These materials are used variously across the various clans in Igalaland. For example, “in the immediate Idah south, the pouring of libation involves mainly the use of native gin and sometimes refined local gin known as *Ogogoro* or *kaikain*, as well as palm wine. This could be done by the individual or the community as a whole” (24). It was also done in the event of an outbreak of epidemics to bring an end to such calamities.

Acts of Worship in Christianity: Four Square Gospel Church

Four Square Gospel Churches are known for their distinctive style of praise and worship that is often spontaneous and exuberant; characterized by clapping, singing, shouting, dancing, speaking in tongues and prophesying are all typical of four-square gospel worship services (Mark Portr 285). While four square gospel congregations do sing and worship corporately, individual worshipers are also encouraged to express their love and devotion to God as their heart and the spirit of God move them. Worship is therefore an important practice in Four Square Gospel Church and is carried out every Sunday in all the Four-Square Gospel Churches which are presently spread to different areas throughout in Igalaland. According to Karin Neutel, worship session in Four Square Gospel Churches are characterized by full band, complete with drums, guitars, horns and any other instrument that are musically inclined (33). The researcher observe that four square gospel church services include solo and choir music, and most of the singing is congregational, with a worship leader directing musicians and congregation in singing. The researcher observed that the songs used during service sessions are composed in English language and local languages of the congregation where the church is located.

1. Clapping, Shouting and Raising of Hands

Four Square Gospel Church worshipers often clap, shout and raise their hands in praise. A worship leader or pastor may ask the congregation to do any of these corporately at times, but they are more often spontaneous expressions of the worshipers as they are led by the Holy Spirit. This form of four-square gospel church’s praise and worship is often criticized by scholars such as Birgit Meyer, as being disorderly and confusing (127), he is quick to point to Scripture verses that encourage each of these expressions of praise and worship. Hands lifted in churches are unlike what one sees in secular concerts. Those who lift their hands at secular concert are in a way praising the band. They are showing approval and expressing excitement for the music they are hearing. While those in Four Square Gospel Church worship service are also doing the same, in a way, they are actually not showing approval for the band and singers but instead towards heaven lifting their hands in

submission to God and giving Him all the glory and honour and praise. The researcher observed that congregation is seeing during worship sessions in four square gospel Church raising their hands in praise and prayer. This is done at times individually or by the entire congregation especially at the request of the preacher. Shouting of words such as: Amen! I receive; I claim it and clapping of hands are common during worship session.

2. Playing of Musical Instruments, Singing and Dancing

Playing of musical instrument and dancing has been part of worship since the early days of the four-square gospel Church (Mark Porter 168). Members of Four-Square Gospel Church believe that both the Old and New Testaments have reports of dance as worship. During worship the researcher observe that members of Four-Square Gospel Church generally encouraged worshipers to dance ‘in the Spirit’ meaning to dance as a spontaneous, unchoreographed act of worship when led to do so by the Holy Spirit. The Four-Square Gospel Church has developed more formalized dance ministries. These dance ministries typically feature trained dancers who choreograph their dances with the church's worship music.

3. Prayer and Speaking in Tongues

Prayer as a religious act in worship means a request or entreaty made by a religious person to the object of his worship; in this sense, to the Supreme Being (Attah 241). In Four Square Gospel Church, anybody can pray during worship sessions but there are some prayers that are being led by the priest for the congregations; and during prayers people are led by the spirit to speak in tongues. “Speaking in tongues are an outward sign that someone has been filled with the Holy Ghost. It allows the congregation to communicate with God on a plane that he or she would not even be able to understand” (Attah 245). Paul speaks of this in Romans 8, when he explains that at times the Holy Ghost will pray for our needs through groaning that can only be understood by God. The researcher observed that contents of prayers include entreaties for good health, protection from dangers and enemies, failures, fertility for women, animal and land, peace and prosperity.

4. Sermon, Marching and Running

Sermon is a very significant aspect of worship in Four Square Gospel Church. It is during this time of worship that the pastor preaches the word of God to the congregation with the intention of revealing God’s will to the congregation. During this session, the researcher observed that the priest [usually a Rev. Pastor] will read a passage from the Holy Bible and gives the interpretation of the passage to enhance the understanding of the entire congregants on what the Biblical passage is all about. The priest also tries to give analogies to practical events and moral orientation to the people so that they will come back to God and do God’s will. Sermon is characterized by marching and/or running the isles was a common practice in Four Square Gospel Church worship. This is because during preaching

the pastor will not be standing in one place but will be moving from place to place and sometimes be acting dramatic as they will be running around within the church premises just to demonstrate or show what they want the congregation to understand.

5. Thanksgiving (Sacrifices) and offerings

Thanksgiving/sacrifices and offerings are almost interwoven acts in worship. Many religions, whether western or oriental are characterized by the act of sacrifice and offering. According to Idowu, “it is inconceivable to have a religion without some form of sacrifice, however modified or refined it may be” (29). Sacrifices and offerings are means by which the worshipper keeps and sustains contact and relationship with the deity of his worship. The nature of the cult of the deity determines the type and time of offering of sacrifices to that deity. Attai Emmanuel reveals that in Four Square Gospel Church, “items for thanksgiving/sacrifice and offerings include food items such as rice, yams, water, goats and chickens. Besides, the most common items for thanksgiving/sacrifice and offering in Four Square Gospel Church are money” (Oral Interview).

A Comparative Study of Worship in Igala Religion and Four-Square Gospel Church in Igalaland

1. Similarities

A close examination of worship in Igala traditional religion and Four-Square Gospel Church reveals areas of convergence and divergence. For instance, worship of the Supreme Being (Ojo) in Igala religion is done through several acts of worship such as prayer (aduwa), pouring of libation (ote edu dajane), offering of sacrifices (uchebo egujo), divination (egowo; abokumagane) and festivals (Ucholo). Similarly in Four Square Gospel Church, worship of God is characterized by activities such as; praying, singing, dancing, preaching and offering/thanksgivings. This implies that both Igala traditional religion and Four-Square Gospel Church have acts of worship that are peculiar to their faith, but also share features that are similar to each other. Furthermore, worship in Igala traditional religion is characterized by incantations, pouring of libation and offering of sacrifices to deities and divination. In a similar vein, worship in Four Square Gospel Church is often characterized by clapping, singing, shouting, dancing; speaking in tongues and prophesying are all typical of four square gospel worship services (Mark Porter 285). Reading of the Bible and preaching of the sermon all constitutes acts of worship in Four Square Gospel Church. This means that both religions recognize the importance of various activities performed in reverence towards a Supreme deity. This section examines these areas under the following subthemes: places of worship, materials used in worship and the role of priest/clergy in worship in the two religions.

During the study, it was discovered that Igala traditional religion has places of worship such as; Ayabi in Affa-Ibaji, ega idah where Inikpi is being worshipped, Okwula forest, Egbe forest in Egume and Ojaina(Royal Cemetery at Idah). Also, the *Ofu* river remains a sacred place of worship for the people within its environs. In the same vein, worship is carried out in the church in Four Square Gospel Church worship. This church has several branches spread all over Igala-land like; Four Square Gospel Church Idah, Ankpa, Dekinna, Igala-Mela, Ofu and Ola Maboro, among other areas (Ikani Alami 80). Moreso, Four Square Gospel Church and Igala traditional religion recognize the Supreme Being in worship. While the Four-Square Gospel Church acknowledges the Supreme God, the Igala traditional religion also recognized and worships the Supreme Being of whom they call *Ojochamachala*. Moreover, both Four Square Gospel Church and Igala traditional religion have designated places where worship is done. In these areas, acts of worship are performed and the Supreme Being is approached using different means depending on the method deemed fit by such a religious tradition. Perhaps, this is what motivates Omoregbe to write that the existence of the Supreme Being is always central to religions. The Supreme Being is the channels through which prayers, sacrifices and offerings are presented (65).

2. Differences

However, as similar as these places of worship are, there exist some striking dissimilarities among them. For instance, places of worship in Igala tradition may be sites such as mountain or hills, rivers, forests and cemetery. The Four-Square Gospel Church worship in buildings that is specially constructed and consecrated for the purpose of paying reverence to God. Furthermore, materials used for worship in Igala traditional religion cut across animal and non-animal materials such as; “cocks (oko ajuwe), hens (ole ajuwe), goats (ewo), kola (obi), palm wine (ote ekpe), gin, local beer, charcoal (olubi), red clothes(ukpopikpa), white clothes (ukpofufu), black clothes (ukpodudu), cowries (oko igbeke), calabash (ocha) and skin of animals (Ago ela)” (Egbunu 22). Also, clay pot, wooden drum, calabash, cowries, skin of animals, water, charms and magic are also used for worship in Igala traditional religion. The researcher also observed that money is also used for worship in Igala religion since some of the sacrifices performed involves money which was given to some deities.

In Four Square Gospel Church, materials such as the Holy Bible, Hymns song book, band, cymbals, Bass drum, Snare drum, piano, guitar, violin, keyboard and trumpet. The researcher observed that clothes of various colors are worn during worship by various church groups such as the choir, ushers and the media units, among others. The church also uses animal and non-animal materials such as; money, goats, chickens, yams, rice, oil and other food items during thanksgiving prayers in church. The role of priests is often recognized in every religious tradition. They serve as intermediaries between the people

and the Supreme Deity. According to Ejikemeuwa and Ejikeme, intermediaries in the religious sense have to do with people or sacred objects that help to bridge the gap between the material world and the spiritual world (32). Practically, every religion makes use of intermediaries. Both those that practice rigid monotheism (such as Islam and Judaism) and those that practice liberal monotheism (such as Christianity and African Traditional Religion) employ one form of intermediary or another. One important thing to note is that intermediaries are commonly seen as having qualities of both worlds (the material and the spiritual worlds) which allow them to work as a bridge (33). Thus, the priest stands between his people and the divine.

Arinze observes that the priest is responsible for the “act of worship offered in the name of a community or part of it (119). It is the priest that carries the offering of the people to God. In this way, the priest serves as an intermediary between the people and the supernatural world; God, gods, divinities, ancestors, etc. The priest is a connector and a mediator – an intermediary. This is why Basden holds that the priest “is the accredited agent of the spirits and acts in conformance with their commands (59). The implication of Basden’s view is that a priest is an agent of two worlds: the material and the immaterial worlds. Mbiti has this to say about the African notion of a priest:

Priests are religious servants associated with temples; but in the African situation the word is used to cover everyone who performs religious duties whether in temples, shrines, sacred groves or elsewhere. There are priests reported among many societies including Ankore, Yoruba, Igbo, Akan, Shona, Bagand, Basoga, Ewe, Sonjo, and others...The priest is the chief intermediary: he stands between God, or divinity, and men (187–188).

Without mincing words, it is right to say that the African believes in the reality of a priest as an intermediary. Thus, there are priests in charge of the various shrines accorded to divinities in Igala traditional religion. A similar thought of a priest exists in the western Christian tradition. According to Ejikemeuwa and Ejikeme, the term ‘priest’ is a derivative of the Greek word *presbyteros* which simply means ‘elder’ (37). A priest is seen as an elder in the Christian community. A priest is not only an elder but he is also a person designated to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. This is why the general understanding of a priest is the one that acts as an intermediary between God and His people. In the view of Ezekona, priesthood is seen as a sacred institution in a religious setup who’s sacred officiates are ordained and dedicated for the service of a particular cult especially in sacrificial and other allied matters. Ezekona’s position ties priesthood with sacrifice (1). A priest is meant to offer sacrifice to God on behalf of the people. Ezeogu observed that “every religion has its priest who functions essentially as intermediaries between men and the

Divinity,” (16). A priest is believed to be a mediator and maintainer of the equilibrium between the sacred and the profane in human society. Again, as agents vested with sacred power, they are believed to have the ability to control and manipulate through rituals, the natural processes and events. Priests are not only to offer sacrifices but also to offer prayers for and on behalf of the people. They also receive information from the divine being and pass same to the people. Priests are the custodians of the divine worship and as such, they are the go-between between heaven and earth. In the Four-Square Gospel Church in Igala-land, the notion of priest is very prominent as each church has a priest. The same thing is applicable to the Igala traditional religion; as each shrine is attached with a priest. There might be different nomenclature used by these religious traditions, the point is that no matter the nomenclature, they perform similar function in the community of God’s people. Therefore, both Igala traditional religion and Four-Square Gospel church have the institution of priesthood who leads in worship and also serve as a go- between the people and the Supreme Being.

However, it must be recognized that priest in Igala traditional religion uses means that are radically different in performing the above-mentioned functions, than those from the Four-Square Gospel Church. This is due to their training, belief and tradition. Therefore, in leading the people in Igala traditional religion, a priest offers burnt sacrifice to a deity, perform rituals involving the use of magic, pour libations and make some incantations to invoke the spirit of the divinity. While in the Four-Square Gospel Church, a priest leads the congregation of the Lord through prayers, reading from the Bible and preaching the sermon, blessing the congregation and a times healing on those perceived to have ill health.

Recommendations

Having examined worship in African (Igala) traditional religion and Christianity (Four Square Gospel Church), this study made the following recommendations:

1. Acts of worship in both African traditional Religion and Christianity should be upholding and considered of equal status by adherents.
2. The acts of worship in both Igala traditional religion and four-Square Gospel Church be sustained for posterity.
3. African scholars of religion should be encouraged to carry out more studies on acts of worship in Igala religion and other forms of Christianity to reveal the similarities in worship.
4. Western scholars should avoid prejudice and cultural chauvinism and accept worship in African traditional religion as being same with Christianity with few varieties of cultural expression.

5. Priests in African traditional religion should to be seen and considered as being of equal status with those in Christianity.

Conclusion

This study is a systematic attempt to make a comparison of the notion of worship in both African and Western systems of thought, using the Igala traditional religion and Four-Square Gospel Church. In the past, some people erroneously misconstrue the reality of worship in African ontology and condemn African acts of worship. The idea of the Western condemning African system of belief is highly prejudiced. It lacks rational justification as this study have discovered from analysis. The only 'basis' or 'justification' for the condemnation of African acts of worship is simply prejudice and superiority complex. This study therefore makes bold to say that there is no essential difference between worship in African thought and the western thought. In actual fact, this study concludes that there is so much in common between worship in Western thought (Christianity) and African thought that both can be seen as essentially one in different cultural expressions. Hence, this study calls for proper application of human reason in our religio-socio-cultural relationship. This is to enhance good and cordial relation among all men and women irrespective of religious, cultural, political or geographical affiliations.

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