

A Comparative Study of Igbo Ancestorship in African Traditional Religious Context and Sainthood in Christian Religion

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Abstract

Sainthood among the Christians and ancestor veneration among the adherents of African Traditional religion have been seen as a thing that is very sacrosanct in both religious practices. Ancestor-ship is charged with intercessory for the living, and they are once humans before admittance after death into the comity of ancestors while sainthood is the belief system of the Christians which serves as mediators to them through God, while in the religious worldview among the adherents of the African Traditional Religion, the ancestors act as intermediaries in the extraterrestrial or spiritual landscape. It is one of the beliefs that life is not terminated after death and that the dead exist in another spiritual realm mirroring the activities of the living and determining their fate. Hence, the Igbo ancestors are always remembered in every Igbo religious rituals. This paper brings to bear the attributes/making of Igbo ancestors, their roles and their place in Igbo cosmology. It further looks into the Christian saints, their roles and their place in Christian/African worship. This paper also focuses on the features or characteristics that showcase their convergences and divergences, which support the two world religions using the deification theory of Hecataeus. This paper also explores those qualities that are used as a yardstick for Sainthood and Ancestorship.

Keywords: Igbo, Ancestorship, Sainthood

Introduction

Ancestorship is one of the Igbo belief systems, which arrogates power to the dead over the living. It is a belief, just like in reincarnation, that shows that death is not the total annihilation of life; rather, life continues but in a different cosmic. According to Obiakor (2010), in the Igbo's worldview, individuals, ancestors and spirits are major players. That is why the fear of the ancestral wrath is one of the bases for the Igbo to live a decent life. In support of this, Okeke (2015) says that it is believed that the ancestors can influence the lives and activities of their relations on earth. Hence, they can bring fortune or misfortune

to them at the same time, protect against evil machinations of wicked people, depending on how the living regard and remember them.

Christianity, on the other hand, the word saint is not an easy word to define or interpret; the communion of saints and saints (Sanctorum) may be understood in Latin as either neuter or masculine; in French, the translation becomes equally vague. The scripture, particularly as used by St. Paul, initially denotes every Christian, considered as already sanctified through his supernatural calling and his incorporation into Christ by baptism. It retains this in several Augustinian expressions referring to the society of saints. Gradually, the term was reserved for preference to the righteous dead and, at first, to the martyrs. Strictly speaking, the sway of the saints in Christianity has always been strongest on those who live close to them and so could profit promptly from their life, teaching and example. But their influence goes on after death through the accounts of them written by those who knew them or knew of them. As the number of later readers is very much bigger than the number of contemporaries and goes on growing, it is important to notice that many calls to holiness have been heard and answered through reading the lives of Saints. To Douillet (1958), a saint is a person, now dead, whom the Church allows to be publicly venerated. Arguably, there are theological positions concerning the saints of the Church and the consequent relation of the faithful to them. Three things in particular help to establish this and they are:

1. That they were perfectly holy followers of Christ, who during their lifetime had fulfilled in the most perfect manner all that God required from them members of his kingdom.
2. That they had as a consequence of this, a special place in the heavenly city, they were Christ's friend in a higher sense than the rest of the elect and enjoyed greater glory and blessedness in heaven,
3. It followed from this that they were patrons and mediators before God and Christ on behalf of the members of the mystical body of the Church and could obtain grace and help by their intercession for the faithful both living and dead. It is on this that Douillet (1958) described the saints as 'more precious than precious stone stones and finer than gold.

Ancestors in African Traditional Religion would be regarded as being on the same level as the saints in Christianity because both have certain spiritual qualities in common that made them so elevated. Therefore, they are the best group of intermediaries between men and God. Ancestorship is a lineage/lineup of departed elders of the same ancestral abode forming another community in the spiritual realm to superintend over the life of the living. Hence, Opoku (1978) concludes that the dead, the living and yet unborn form an unbroken family. Idowu (1973) notes that there is a general belief that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive on earth and those deceased and

that the latter have powers to influence, help or molest the former. The truth is that the Igbo, during rituals, libations and morning prayers, always invite their ancestors to be partakers because they strongly believe that their ancestors are ever present in their day-to-day activities, protecting and interceding on their behalf. Thus every Igbo man prays especially during the breaking of Kola Nut; *Udeogu my father bia taa oji, Ezenodo the father of Udeogu my father bia taa oji, Ezeanyinwara the father of Ezenodo, the father of Udeogu my Father, bia taa Oji*, he continues to call the ancestors on and on as he can remember involving them in the prayers and throwing the kola nut or food or palm wine as the case maybe on the ground. In agreement with this, Abanuka (2004) posits that since the ancestors and their descendants were of one skin (*ofuanuaru*), the ancestors are interested in the welfare of the community as a whole. At every meal, the Igbo believe their Ancestors, the unseen guests though in the spiritual realm mirroring their activities here on earth equally partake in the eaten as the Igbo after the oral invitation throws out a portion of the meal or kola nut or as the case may be outside believing that the ancestors being spirits have eaten them. Mbiti (1969), supporting this view, explains that many Africans believe that their loved ones who are dead do not actually leave them but hover around and protect them. The eldest of the family or whomever that is pouring the libation or saying the prayer will be calling their Ancestors (departed elders) in chronological order mentioning their names as much as he could remember to be part of the activity/event/ceremony. Admittance into the company of the Ancestors is not automatic as its membership goes beyond just being dead so it's not all Igbo dead family members that are Ancestors

Qualifications into Ancestorship

According to Amamchukwu (1989), under the concept of ancestors are found all the living-dead, the spirit of children, sisters, brothers and other members of their families. This could be likened to the typical Igbo family setting where everyone is a member and activities go in hierarchal order with the father at the helm of affairs. This is so because, in the Igbo worldview, life in the physical world is believed to be influenced by that of the spiritual realm. An ancestor is a dead member of an Igbo family by no means automatically qualifies him to be one. Every dead member of the Igbo family joins the company of ancestors, but all do not receive reverence nor take part in the affairs of the living. As Metuh (1987) portrays it to be the abode of the dead, "*ala muo*," which is a carbon copy of the abode of the living; the two differ only in that one is visible and the other invisible. This implies that, in the spirit world, every country or community/villages are marked out or defined just as they are in this world so that each town, community or household has its own allotted portion to which, as people die, they go. It is believed that the family setting on earth has its replica in the spiritual world where their dead family members come together to form

yet another union, it is a circle where one dies, joins the ancestors, comes back through reincarnation and continues another life altogether, just as reincarnation in Igbo cosmology stipulates criteria for one to reincarnate, same goes to ancestor. Metuh (1987) explains, “the abode of the good spirit of the dead, “*alammuo*” is a carbon copy of the abode of the living. The two differ only in that one is visible and the other invisible.

A geographical map of the land of the living would represent the spirit land in every particular town; village and homestead would be situated exactly where it is in the land of the living”. In the presence of all the dead members of the Igbo family who joined their ancestral fathers, certain remarkable achievements and respect for the values of the communities during one’s lifetime are measured before qualifying to receive reverence. Ofoegbu (2001) points out that “death alone is not sufficient to make a person an ancestor. Much depends on how a person lived and how he died”. The Igbo see their Ancestors as models, those who have lived remarkable lives during their lifetime impacted their people, and, most importantly, died at a ripe old age and were given a befitting burial. Obiakor (2010) lists these requirements as criteria for a dead Igbo person to become an ancestor worthy to be revered;

1. Bodily health and physical integrity
2. An exemplary moral life
3. Success, wealth and prosperity; maximum self-actualization and self-fulfilment: acquisition of titles; the position of power and responsibility in his community.
4. A happy married life, with offspring to the third and fourth generation; the privilege of seeing one's great-grandchildren
5. Dying a natural death (*onwuchi*)
6. Befitting burial rites

With the aforementioned criteria, it is apparent that certain crop of dead members of Igbo families, though in the land of the ancestors to join their ancestral fathers, are not ancestors that are qualified to receive reverence and veneration from the living. The Igbo people believe that one who is physically/bodily handicapped is paying his or her karmic debt; according to them, it’s a carryover of the person’s deed in the previous life. Any Igbo that suffered or died of certain ailments such as leprosy (*ekpenta*), swollen stomach (*afo otito*), hernia (*ibi*) and chickenpox (*kitikpa*) is not qualified to be an ancestor as he cannot be accepted into the cult of the ancestors hence the person becomes a wandering spirit, causing havoc and inhabiting in the trees, animals and any other place, among the Isuochi people of Igbo land such person is seen as *Ubekelehu* (wandering spirit), furthermore, anyone who died of these listed ailments among the Igbo was seen as a bad and shameful death (*onwu Ojo*). It’s generally said in the Igbo palace “o nwuruajoonwu” or “o nwuruonwuihere”. The Igbo believe that the gods curse such disease, as the sufferer must have sinned against the

mother earth (*Ala*), an act that is termed an abomination (*Aru*). The Igbo of old try as much as possible to shy away from all acts capable of bringing them into coalition with the gods. When such an act is committed, the perpetrator, with the help of the chief priest, will be subjected to appease the gods (*ikpuaru*) to avert the impending danger.

A morally bankrupt person in the company of ancestors is not revered, as the Igbo believe in the law of equity, which stipulates, “He who goes for equity must go with a clean hand”. An ancestor that receives reverence from the living must have lived an exemplary, sound, moral life while on earth. Igbo are of the view that there is no way someone who was a thief in his lifetime will be remembered and called to intercede on behalf of the living. Igbo believe in “*ofonaogu*” whenever they are fighting a just course. Igbo abhor lies, misapplication of justice, bribery, killing, covetousness, bearing false witnesses and oppressing the poor every corrupt tendency. People who had anything to do with all these life unwholesome attitudes, though they may be welcomed in the ancestral family, are never revered by the living. Hardworking and being committed to the affairs of one’s community while alive gives every dead Igbo person an automatic passport to be an ancestor to be revered: having left behind good attributes to the living to inherit and emulate.

A loafer among the Igbo is highly rebuked, cajoled while alive and never revered as an ancestor by the living and never reincarnates as no one would like to have such a child in his family. A hardworking Igbo man, through his affluence while alive, can acquire any title of his choice, having the capacity to meet up with its requisite. Being hardworking among the Igbo gives one pride of place and becomes a force to reckon with in his community and beyond. So, a wealthy person with titles usually becomes part and parcel of the communities’ administrative body: represents his people at crucial meetings and is appointed to the king's cabinet. At death, the Igbo usually remember such an ancestor while pouring libation to the hearing of the younger ones with the intent to tailor them towards living in like manner. Among the Igbo, An ancestor, during his lifetime, must not be one without an immediate family, be it man or woman; he must be married and with children, while in the case of men, they can have as many wives as possible.

Qualification into Sainthood in Christianity

Biblically, the word saint is used as an umbrella appellation for believers, just as the word ‘Christian’ is used also to identify the followers of Christ. It can also be used to denote holiness. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘saint as follows:

- A holy person
- A person, who has died, is among the blessed in Heaven

- A person who has been declared by the Church to have won the holy living on earth, a place in heaven and veneration on earth' Hornby (2010).

Now the question to answer is: Does everyone who goes by the title of 'saint' end up dying a saint? Obviously, not at all because Jesus said in the book of Mathew (7:21) that: 'Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven'. Also, among the saints, as used for all believers in the Bible, 2 Timothy (2:20) says: 'In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also wood and earthenware, and some for noble use some for ignoble use'. This explains the reasons why the Church takes time to judge and determine those of her Children who, by their excellent love, good and heroic life 'holy living' were consecrated and noble use in the hands of their master 2 Timothy (2:21) and hence, recommend them as models to be imitated by the faithful Philippians (3:17).

Saints as Judge

The saints (human, believers) will judge the world and even the angels during the last day. In 1 Corinthians 6 (1-3) it asserts that believers (saints) shall indeed judge the world (fallen) angels. Indeed, the Church believes this and this is guided by it. Now the question is: shall believers (saints) be permitted to judge the whole world and angels? Are they not usurping the prerogative of Almighty God? In fact, by no means in 1 Corinthians (3:9), it says that 'we are God's fellow workers'. Also, in the book of Mathew (16:19), the Bible shows whose authority the Church of Christ shares about judging among her Children in the following passages: 'I will give you the Kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'. Again, the Holy Spirit speaks through St Paul in 1 Corinthians (5:12) thus, 'Is it not those inside the Church you are to judge?' Furthermore, the apostle St Paul demonstrated the authority as he tells the Church in 1 Corinthians 5 (3-5), thus, 'I have pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord on the man who did such a thing. Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his Spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Saint Paul explains and writes further to young ebullient Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 (7-8) thus 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day...' Here, St Paul pronounces judgment even on himself in the same way he led the Church in Corinth to pronounce judgment in the name of the Lord 'on the man who has done such a thing' (1 Corinthians, 5:3), yet acknowledging the Lord as the righteous judge, just as the phrase 'in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Corinthians, 5:5), shows that St Paul was not aware of God being the ultimate judge

For a person to be qualified for Christian Sainthood below are the steps to be considered;

Proof of a Life of Heroic Virtue

The congregation for the causes of saints scrutinizes the evidence of the candidate's holiness, work, and signs that people have been drawn to prayers through their example. The congregation approves the case and passes it to the Pope, who in turn gives /calls the person 'Venerable'.

Verified Miracles

This stage is called beatification; a miracle needs to be attributed to prayers made to the individual after their death. The prayers being granted are seen as proof that the individual is already in heaven and, hence, able to intercede with God on others' behalf. Incidents need to be 'verified' by the evidence before they are accepted as miracles. After beatification, the candidate is given the title 'Blessed'. There is one exception to the miracle requirement: a martyr, someone who died for the faith, can be beatified without a verified miracle.

Canonization

This is the final stage in declaring a deceased person a Saint. To reach this stage, a second miracle normally needs to be attributed to prayers made to the candidate after they have been beatified. It involves a special mass that recounts the individual's life history. Pickert (2008), quoting James Martins, a Jesuit Priest & author of *My Life with the Saints*, describes the Saints as "elder brothers and sisters –people who help you along". The Roman Catholics honoured their dead ordained who had sacrificed their lives in the name of the Lord.

Sainthood, as considered or seen from the merit and reward perspective, has to do with the entire life span of the person in question, which is better assessed after he or she has kicked the bucket. For a clearer understanding of this, let us consider immediately the following scriptural verses. The gift of salvation is in an earthen vessel (1 Corinthians, 4:7), and hence capable of breaking halfway through life if not handled with care. To this end, the Holy Bible says, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians, 2:12). Not that I have already obtained this I am perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own (Philippians, 3:12-15). All things being equal, 2 Timothy (2:5) affirms that 'an athlete is not crowned until he finishes according to the rules'. However, a critical analysis of the apostle's attitude above, while still running the race and so on, his pronouncement after he finished the race when he said 'I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith...'. The apostle could only talk about the crown because he had come to the end of the race for he revealed 'I am ready to be sacrificed' (2 Timothy, 4:6). Consequently, further interrogation into this is the emergency of the fact that a saint is not fully made, 'has not obtained it', until, in line with biblical verses, he finishes according to the rules (2

Timothy, 2:5). This is the reason why the Church of Christ, empowered by the Holy Book, as we have argued earlier, beatifies and canonizes her deserving sons and daughters after death, to serve as an example for the faithful and to encourage others to be good Christians.

If the judgment of the sacred congregation for the causes of saints is favourable, then the Holy Father – the Pope will be requested to beatify the servant of God. In a special solemn ceremony, the Holy Father will proclaim the deceased blessed, which means a tentative recognition of the deceased extraordinary sanctity. From that moment, the blessed can begin to have some cult and be prayed to in public.

The Diocesan Information Processes

This is a process of inquisition done by the diocesan bishop through a diocesan tribunal. The competence of this tribunal is to build up historical facts on the life, work and virtues of the person unto whom there is evidence of popular fame of sanctity. The diocesan bishop is the Chief Judge of this tribunal; otherwise, he may delegate his powers to another person.

The Vatican Sacred Congregation Process

There is a Vatican office headed by a Cardinal entrusted solely with the causes of saints. When the acts and documents of the diocesan tribunal reach the Vatican, this office, the sacred congregation for the causes of saints, has to receive the acts and the documents, then study them in full and finally express its judgment. This office also must deal with those issues about the authentication and preservation of relics.

Areas of Convergences and Divergences of Ancestorship and Sainthood

The fact that the ancestors in African Traditional Religion and saints in Christianity have been described by varying scholars as the living dead, and both play the role of intermediaries and mediatorship in the two world religions, then one can firmly say that they converge there. But in the area of its divergence, it is observed that in African Traditional Religion, once an adherent that qualifies to be an ancestor dies, he or she automatically becomes an ancestor without undergoing any other process or processes. In Christianity, before a person can be acknowledged and deified as a saint, he or she must have undergone the rigorous processes laid down by the Church before becoming a saint.

Comparative Study of Ancestorship and Sainthood

Ancestors are nearer to men than spirits and divinities. This is why they are referred to as the living dead. They also have a dual nature and dual language. That is, they speak the language of the living and the dead, which is of the spiritual kingdom. Ancestors can be highly localized, that is when there is an ancestor for a whole community or many homes or a whole tribe. There is an ancestor for the family. They are ordinary human beings who

had once lived and did a lot to improve their various communities, bringing enlightenment to humanity, greatness and fame to their people. Those who had lived an extraordinary, holy, heroic, exemplary and mysterious life on earth were so much highly respected and regarded that when they died, they were elevated from the level of just ordinary human beings or ancestors to that of divinities. They are known as the living dead. The ancestors are still believed to be still living after the death of the person. For somebody to become an ancestor, there are certain qualifications, criteria or even requirements he or she has to meet, like living a good life, raising children, dying at a very old age and so on. Those who died prematurely are not referred to as ancestors, but if they die young while defending their nations, they would be regarded as ancestors after certain rituals are performed. Nabofa (1994) affirms that through the mediation and assistance of the traditional and spiritual elders, 'these kinds of rituals are rigidly and meticulously followed so that they can retain their ancient, ritualistic and spiritual values as revealed and decreed by the divine to avoid sacrilege'. Awolalu(1976),opined that 'to qualify, such men and women must have lived well, attained an enviable old age before dying, and must have left behind good children and memory. In agreement, Metuh (1987) said that: In many others, the funeral rites are necessary because they are regarded as 'rites of passage' by which the dead are installed as ancestors. To these four requirements – old age, offspring, good morals, and funeral rites, some societies add a fifth requirement - good death. Death after ripe old age is regarded as good and natural death, and in some places, it is called 'God's death'. Deaths before this time are regarded as unnatural, for which various explanations are given. There are some unnatural deaths which are known to be punishments from God for one's sin in his life or his previous life periods. Deaths by suicide, accident, leprosy, dropsy, smallpox, epilepsy, etc. are regarded as bad deaths. Victims of such deaths are not given the full funeral rites, and consequently cannot become ancestors.

Roles of Ancestors

As the living dead, they have certain roles or functions they perform in society. They are referred to as the custodians of morality. Africans generally believed that after death, the departed ones enter into the spiritual stage of existence. They are still actively part of the family which they have left physically by death. This belief is held because man is made up of both perishable and imperishable nature, and immediately man dies, the imperishable part of him lives on after this physical body vacates the body. Africans believe that their ancestors are capable of living their normal lives and maintaining their physical features. In fact, because of the significance of the functional activities of ancestors in African cosmology, a special altar or house is designated for them for possible veneration. This is why Mbiti (1970:10) comments that 'after the invocation of the ancestors, the focus of ritual

action moved to the main house of the homestead. The house was not merely a home for the living, but also a sacred place inhabited by the dead, a domestic space in which the ancestor resided or visited. Nonetheless, stand next to the spirits where they are the representatives of the living. In African society, harmony is believed to be made up of the living and the dead and to maintain this harmony and pursue a right with the departed spirits, many societies in Africa see to the performance of rites and ceremonies which constitute a link with the dead. Thus, the ancestors help to maintain coercion in the Society and protect their people from danger. They are overseers of the life and activities of their families. They come to the aid of their people during calamities such as families, draught, pestilence and so on. They are called on any disputes, for example, boundary disputes so that they can make peace between the warring parties. They help their people to ward off evils. They represent their people before those divinities who are the messengers of the supreme God and because they control the characters of their people, they are believed to be the people's morality (Metuh, 1987). They bless people when they are obeyed and punish them for any misconduct. Therefore, their offspring make sure that they give attention to the observation of the rules and regulations binding their communities as dictated by their ancestors. They took them to a nice feast, believing that the ancestors continued with the type of food they were eating while they were on Earth. As a result, the worshippers of Amadioha divinity will now give to their ancestors who were worshippers of Amadioha divinity what they eat while on earth. What the Amadioha does not like would not be given to those ancestors when he was alive and this is what we know as ancestral veneration (Mbiti, 1970).

The ancestors depend for their existence upon God. They are not of the same rank and file as God; they have no absolute existence of their own, and they must remain importantly connected or linked to him. They are intermediaries between God and man. They have become, in the course of time and space, 'the conventional channels through which God is approached' (Idowu, 1973). This led to the assertion that Africans never approached God directly and that it is only in the moment of distress when all other aids have failed that Africans call on God. The correct interpretations of the position of the ancestors, however, are that they constitute a halfway house in which man's soul cannot have what I can call a 'complete litmus test' because sufficiency is only ascribed to God. Ancestors are also only means to an end and not ends in themselves; it is only priestcraft and the weakness of man's mind that have tried to make the ends in themselves. (Idowu, 1973). Mbiti (1973) described the roles of ancestors succinctly thus: They return to their human family from time to time to share meals with them, however, symbolically. They know and have an interest in what is going on in their family... They are guardians of family affairs, tradition, ethics and activities. Offence in these matters is ultimately an offence against the forefathers who, in that capacity, act as invisible police of the families and communities. Through this kind of

‘inner transformation’ (Schipper, 1993), it is believed that ancestors have been ‘admitted into the community of elders’ (Ozah, 2006). Here, it has been observed that the ancestors act as agents of social control in any traditional community, no wonder Omoregbe (1993) argues that they ‘provide guides for human conduct indicating certain things or certain ways of behaviour, which should be avoided and other things or ways of behaviour which should be adopted’’, by ‘reminding people of their responsibility to conform to the wishes of their society’ (Adejumo, 2013). Bloch (1987:278) argues that ‘because of the cylindrical nature of the ritual, this social order became part of temporal and astrological order. This theme of social order is repeated again and again during the ritual’’. Falola (2003) asserts that such ancestral social order invariably ‘serves as cultural agents to present Africa to Westerners while becoming a powerful tool to articulate the ideas of Pan Africanism that united blacks in different countries. Also, it received a wide affirmation as a socialist ideology based on long-established African values’.

Udo (2008) argues that ‘as a character makes for good social relations, it is laid upon every member of the community to act in such a way as to always promote the good of the whole body’’, and ‘thereby partly creates the image of orderly antithesis’ (Bloch, 1987). Ekeke (2013) argues that ethics in African traditional society is what a person does following the established norms which contribute to the welfare of the whole community. Opoku (1978) affirms that at the same time, such misdeeds, however, can bring calamity to his immediate family, extended family, lineage and the entire community, and to avoid the shame that his misdeeds would bring to the entire community, every African try as much as possible to live a good life. Ogbu (2010) affirms that the injunctions and messages that it is believed to given by the ancestors through the mediation of the spiritual elders, try ‘to recover social credibility and wholesome impact on local community’ of the community and in this way, it solves ‘the social and psychological well-being of individuals’ (MacGaffey, 1994), and by this method also, the ancestors ‘tells it as it is by asserting its social relevance in the community’ (Adejumo, 2013). McAdams (1988) posits that it is through the ancestors that ‘personal and societal solutions enable individuals and societies to take ontological, epistemological, and ethical stands in the face of ambiguity’’. Young (2003) argues that ‘it can also be used more metaphorically, as a way of describing how the individual or group can be transformed by changing their sense of their place in society’’. Okafor (1998) affirms that ‘Igbo people turn instruments into metaphors for conveying their feelings and emotions and for giving oral spectrum description’. Turner (1968) posits that such a sacred musical instrument is regarded as a magnificent instrument for expressing, maintaining, and periodically used in cleansing a secular order of society without strong political centralization and all too full of social conflict. It is in this way that Popkin & Stroll (1981) define ethics as a code or set of principles by which men live’’. The veneration of ancestors

promotes ‘social justice, peace, and strivings for harmonious coexistence’ (Daniel, 2010). Askew (2006) idiomatically describes ancestor veneration as a silence that echoes loudly’, ‘which has become a primordial reservoir of moral obligations’ (Ekeh, 1975). Pinkerton (2011) asserts that ‘its unique transcendence is paradoxically grounded in an earthly embodiment, and the...is itself, somehow corporeal’. It, therefore, entails that the concept of ethics in traditional African society ‘is living to avoid shame in any family or community (Ekeke, 2013). According to Nzewi et al. (2001), the concept of encoding ethical lingual text on a musical instrument derives from instituting authority voicing in a worldview that processes openly disseminated information for the particular cognitive audience. They argue that the essence is in its imperative transcendental attributes, which empower it to coerce conformity in issues of societal engineering and human management (Nzewi et al, 2001). In African Traditional Religion, ancestor veneration provides a symbolic system that supports the authority of elders and initiates in the homestead’ (Chidester, 1992). It is on this that Nabofa (1994) connected and interpreted this ethical value to the notion that wisdom belongs to the elders and describes the ancestors as ‘the voice of the elders which invariably is the voice of wisdom’, that ‘reminds an initiate of his responsibilities and obligations to his fellow members’ (Nabofa, 1994). That is why Ejizu(1986) sees the ancestors as those ‘who assure the traditional Igbo hope of an after-life, as the most being ambassadors/intermediaries of their living members in the spirit world’. No wonder then Idowu (1973, Mbiti, 1977 & Metuh, 1983) described the ancestors as the living dead.

The making of ancestor-ship (Ndiichie) or Sainthood in Igbo or Christian worldview entails the living and the dead. Among the Igbo, an elder that represents its people in the Igbo traditional institution, Kingship, where laws are being made, is equally addressed as (Ndiichie). This is distinctive from the dead Ancestors “*Ndiichie* (Igbo forebears). They are elderly living members, drawn from various families, given special roles for the communities because the Igbo believe that (*okenyebuokaraChukwu*), meaning an old person, is equivalent to god. The Igbo Ancestors stipulate its uniqueness whereby several moral principles are required before an Ancestor can receive veneration from the living. Any Ancestor that falls short of these standards is never invited during rituals: it is assumed that the Ancestor has no legacy worthy of emulation by the living because they are regarded as imperishable. As contained in the words of Ofoegbu (2001) “death alone is not sufficient to make a person an ancestor. Much depends on how a person lived and how he died”. So relatives who are regarded as Ancestors must have led a good moral life... Drunkards, loafers, adulterers, extravagant persons, cowards, and lazy persons are considered to be evil. A thief is abhorred in Igbo society and therefore cannot be regarded as an Ancestor even a murderer”. That is why Ezenweke (2018), 7articulated roles of the Ancestors consist;

- Unifying families and people, caring for each other, empowering, blessing, rewarding and inspiring.
- Protecting families and clans from diseases, evil, enemies, and war.
- Mediating between people and the Divinity
- Enforcing discipline in case of breaking social values.
- Facilitating holistic healing could be an attribute to the Christian Saints going by their place in the life of the people, especially in times of trouble, want, sickness and remission of sins.

The Igbo Ancestor ship is geared towards encouraging and celebrating rewards for living a perfect life, just as the Christian Sainthood, through its selection mode, tries to bring to bear. The Igbo Ancestors who were ones living before joining the cult of Ancestors were well known by their people and their antecedents which forms the parameter for their acceptability by the living to mediate, intercede and receive veneration. This same verification and testimonial take place in the making of Saints by the Roman Catholics. The Brethren and the Igbo, through these systems, try to fill the vacuum created by death, a necessary end of every mortal, coupled with their intents and hopes of living that our works in life are not in vain.

Conclusion

Religious prejudice is connected with the Christian often-derogatory remark on Igbo Ancestor-ship, whereby it's being regarded and referred to as Ancestral worship. If the Ancestors were ones among the living, lived pious and worthy life of emulation, same as the Christian Sainthood what stops it from being accorded the same recognition and acceptance? Can that of the Christian Sainthood also be regarded and referred to as Sainthood worship? The truth is both the Christian Saints and the Igbo Ancestors were once living, died, and adjudged to have attained certain appreciable spirituality before being accorded their positions. All attributes towards the making of Ancestor-ship and Sainthood still boil down to the living imitating their lives, aspiring to live and be celebrated in turn. Both the Igbo Ancestors and Christian Saints receive veneration, intercede and partake in the rituals of worship. Contrary to the Christians's interjectory, as Egwuatu (2011) puts it, Ndigbo have never worshipped their Ancestors; they only venerate them, which is no different than what Catholics do to their Saints or what every country does to their national heroes. There is no moral justification for condemning Igbo Ancestors and dismissing them and their names as fetish and evil and reverencing theirs great and powerful, so much so that a man's ancestral name is discarded during baptism and given a white ancestral name as a Christian

name. If Christopher, Mathew, James, Peter, and Luke are saints in the Christian religion, Mgbafor, Okoronkwo, Okeke, Okorie, and Ekele are Igbo Ancestors too.

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