

**COW (ESHU) RITUAL IN THE FUNERAL RITE: THE
SIGNIFICANCE IN THE NSUKKA CULTURAL AREA OF
IGBOLAND**

By

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Abstract

It has been observed that the use of *Eshu* - Igbo breed of cow for funeral rite has started resulting to confusion, misunderstanding and disunity in some families and communities in Nsukka cultural area of Igboland. It is for this purpose that this paper wants to show that this chaos negates the traditional Igbo belief and concept of death which circle around the belief in ancestral existence in the spirit world. The study made use of primary and secondary sources of information. Findings revealed that, the cow ritual is an expression of family bond which goes beyond the physical but extended to the dead parents, and also it is an effort to ensure harmonious relationship with the supra mundane. However, in recent time some Christians started seeing the traditional processes surrounding the cow ritual as idolatry and sin. This study therefore tries to argue that the traditional processes surrounding the use of cow for funeral rite is neither idolatry nor sin, but a concern for life after death which Christianity also preaches.

Introduction

The news of death in Nsukka as in many other parts of Igboland is never welcome news irrespective of the age of the deceased, but the news is a necessary process which goes with little ritual with presentation of cola nuts and drinks especially in the case of married women. This process of formal news of death is the same for the Christians and traditional believers except in some cases of

traditional priests and other traditional religious office holders who may require deeper ritual during message of death.

Following this is the permission for burial which goes also with rituals starting from the head of the family to the head of the larger family (Umunna) and to the head of the village. This process of permission remain the same for both the Christians and traditional believers even though other permissions may be requested from other religious leaders like Rev.Fr, Pastor, Chief Priest depending on one's religion. After the permission, then the burial which equally goes with significant rituals follows. There are some similarities and dissimilarities between the burial of Christians and traditional worshippers in Nsukka.

There are many other rituals performed by the people either the Christians or the traditional believers after the burial, but the concern of this work is the funeral rite which is the most elaborate in the area under study. It is elaborate because it is a rite not restricted to the family of the deceased only, the entire community or the village is involved. Another thing that makes it elaborate is the quantity of the items required for the rite ranging from many food items, assorted drinks and life animals starting from fowl, goat, cow and so on.

Cow in funeral rite is bound up with the belief of the people which point to their conception of the world that encompasses the spiritual and physical worlds. The circle of human life becomes complete with the people's belief that the funeral cow facilitates the dead into the spirit world.

The cow ritual like any other ritual in Igbo traditional religion unveils the innate meaning of the people's world view and their religious belief. Ejizu (1986) have demonstrated this function of ritual and said:

Through ritual man says something about his inner religious awareness, his vision, and beliefs about the cosmos. He also does something. He re-enacts the deeds of the gods ... Ritual occupies a central position in Igbo traditional religion, as in most other traditional religious system of Africa. (p.71).

Nsukka people believe that only people with ascribed status are

entitled to cow ritual of the funeral rite since every dead person are not qualified for it, those who died good death, died at ripe age, performed cow ritual to their dead parent(s) are entitled to funeral cow ritual.

For some years now, the processes of this funeral rite have been experiencing some issues, but the one that has resulted to serious controversy is the issue of cow ritual. Remarking the main causes of controversy during funeral rite in Imilike community of Nsukka cultural area of Igboland, Okwueze, (2012) said this:

Presentation of certain items whose type, quality and quantity may differ from case to case is one of the sore points between traditional rite and Christian rites ... the most conflict oriented aspects of the traditional burial/funeral rites are connected with presentation of material items especially life animal ranging from the fowl to the cow. The usual issues giving rise to controversies or conflicts include: (a) to who are these animals handed over? (b) In what manners are the animals killed? And (c) for what purpose (s) to what end (p.144).

Cow in the Traditional Funeral Rite

In Igbo traditional belief, death is the physical separation of the living from the dead. The people believe in life after death, the idea of resurrection of the dead after death is alien to Igbo traditional thought. Death, for the Igbo is just a transition into another world of existence (spirit world) which is in continuous relationship with the physical world. The people always ensure that this relationship with spiritual world is cordial. Mbiti (1970) observed this view in Africa and wrote:

For the Africans, death is a separation and not annihilation: the dead person is suddenly cut off from the human society and yet, the corporate group clings to him. This is shown through the elaborate funeral rites as well as other methods of keeping in contact with the departed (p.46).

Also Opoku (1978) corroborated Mbiti's view and said this about death and funeral in West Africa:

West Africa regards death not as the end of life, but as a transition from the present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits ... There is also a widespread belief in Africa that unless the proper rites and ceremonies are performed, the spirit of the dead person may not be able to join the ancestral spirits (pp.133-135).

The people believe that admission of the dead into the spirit world is not automatic. To achieve

this for the dead, the children of the dead perform appropriate funeral rites that can facilitate their dead parent(s) into the spirit world.

In the same way funeral rites in Igboland are not automatic. Many factors determine if one is to be accorded funeral rites. Among the factors are, when and how one dies, marital status of one before he or she dies and if one has a child or children especially male child before he or she dies. To support this idea that funeral rites in Igboland is conditional, we make reference to Emeka (1991); "The cases in which many or any major rites are circumscribed with taboo – death by suicide or dreadful diseases, death of infant and people living in *alu* (abomination)". (p.18). Madu (2003) add support to Emaka's opinion and opined:

The funeral rites given to one depend on: How he died, his age, sex, and status in the communities. The Igbo have both good and bad deaths. A good death implies death after a ripe old age and other parameters while a bad death implies death below this ripe old age or death by detestable diseases. (p.45).

For those who are qualified for funeral rite, their children perform it to ensure peaceful rest to the dead, place or uplift their dead parents in a higher position in the spirit world and finally to avert the wrath of the dead. This belief of the people is in line with the view of Parrnder (1976) when discussing about death rites and said:

The great aim of much time and expense is to ensure a proper funeral for the departed, so that his spirit may be contented in the world beyond, and will not return as a dissatisfied ghost to plague his family. Funerals are the last

transitional rites, introducing a man into the world of spirit.
(p.95).

Obilo, (1991) in his own view stressed that funeral rites not perform can result to ancestors striking the living to death. He said “Death can be attributed to have been caused by the ancestors especially if there is any funeral or burial rite yet undone or outstanding in the family” (p.6). It is in an attempt to place the dead in a higher position in the spirit world that make Nsukka people to include living animal as matters (physical requirements) in the funeral rites which includes fowl, dog, goat, ram, pig, horse, cow etc each having its significance depending on the community.

Cow which is the thrust of this work is the highest in the above matters and the people believe that it gives the dead the highest position or rank in the spirit world. There are many rituals that surround the use of cow in the funeral rites starting from the presentation of the cow, the slaying and the distribution of the parts of the carcass to the people it belongs to traditionally.

One of the very important rituals surrounding cow in the funeral rites is the slaying of goat which must precedes the cow. This goat is called *Ewu Ngwo Ogodo* and must be presented first before the ritual of the cow rite. This goat could be slain many years before the cow or it could be presented and slain the same time.

The *Ewu Ngwo Ogodo* Ritual – Goat of the Resting Bed Stand

This rite is very relevant to the belief and practice of funeral rite where the cow is a follow up. This practice is very common among the people of Ezimo, Obollo Imilike and other communities around Udeni LGA of Nsukka cultural area.

Ewu Ngwo Ogodo means *Ewu* – goat, *Ngwu* – stick fixed to the ground which local bed rests on it, *Ogodo* – bed, therefore *Ewu Ngwo Ogodo* means goat of the resting bed stand. It is one of the death rites that are performed before the cow rite. The process of killing the goat is that it is slain at the deceased house either in the compound or the threshold. After slaying, it is taken to the *onyishi umunna's* house. After the *onyishi* have taken his portion, the rest would be handed over to Ada – (the first female daughter) of the

deceased and other *umuada* (female relations of the same *umunna*), which they shall cook and eat.

There are two major importance of the goat ritual, first is the social aspect of it which is to thank the *Ada* and other *umuada* for the tedious work of taking care of the deceased when he or she was in the sick bed and also the work of looking after the corps before the burial. This is because, in the traditional Nsukka community before the advent of mortuary, it was the duty of the *Ada* and other *umuada* to look after the corps of the deceased till he or she is buried no matter the time or the days it takes before burial. Note that the word *ogodo* (bed) in the goat ritual refers to the bed the sick person stayed before death and also where the corps laid before the burial.

The second importance of the goat ritual is the religious aspect of it. In fact, in the belief of the people, the goat ritual is more vital than the cow even though the cow is more expensive and has more prestige than the goat. The people believe that it is the goat that first admits the dead into the ancestral community where the spirit of the deceased joins the spirit of other dead family members in the spirit world. It is a belief in the area that the dead whom the goat has not been slain for cannot be admitted into the ancestral community of the spirit world. This view concurs with Ejizu (1985), thus:

The Igbo belief in ancestral existence is the clearest expression of the people's faith in after-life. The same belief is also the dynamic hope of the traditional Igbo; that after a successful career here on earth, one could be happily gathered with his fore-fathers in the land of the 'living-dead', to continue the interminable cycle of life. (p.141).

And Agbegbedia (2015) agree to this also in discussing Urhobo belief in the spirit world and said:

The belief that what we referred to as extended family (*Orua*) in the mundane community of the people has been pre-existent in the spiritual world (*erivwin*). For them therefore, beings are released from there to populate this earth and at death, one returns to it ... we both have one ancestral spiritual world. (pp.59-60).

The diviners who have made convincing proclamations said that

those whom goat have not been slain for are kept standing in the ancestral community of the spirit world. They said that those whom the goat has been slain for uses the goat's skins as their chair in the sprit word, while others who have no goat's skin to sit are standing.

Just as in the physical world in the African setting, when parents come back home there must be a chair to sit dawn, but if they come back and there is no chair they will stand and if they stand for a very long time they would be annoyed and can unleash their anger on any of the children especially the eldest ones who are supposed to be mature enough to know that their parents need chair to sit down. This cosmological view formed the belief of the people that the dead parent(s) whom the children have not performed the goat ritual for have no chair in the ancestral spirit world and out of anger can easily strike the children especially the eldest ones. According to M. Ossai (personal communication, 11th Jan.2016), the people believe that the dead parents strikes the children for goat ritual because in Igbo traditional setting all the homes have a goat or goats of which the children can from it perform the ritual. He said that ones the goat ritual is done, they (dead) can patiently wait for the cow.

This ritual is still being done by the Christians and traditional believers. It is laughable to say that the Christians are doing it in another way without knowing the purpose. For instance when a cow is presented to the church for the funeral, a goat is provided for the *umuada*, the goat may not be used to perform the necessary traditional ritual, but the fundamental thing is that the goat is being provided even though some *umuada* may not even know the purpose. This simply means that both people of traditional and Christian religions are presenting the *Ewu Ngwo Ogodo*.

Going back to the cow ritual; it is important to note that in the real sense of it, the ritual of slaying cow as a funeral rite in Nsukka cultural area is a class thing. It is a rite to show the affluence of the children of the dead and simultaneously promote the dead parents in the ancestral world. It is based on this that the people draw the belief that the dead parents can stay for a very long time without the cow rite and yet they don't strike the children unless they contravene the

forbidden law of those who have not slain cow for their parents. Another way that cow may not be slain and yet no punishment occurs is when the cow rite exceeds four stages of parents. For instance, if A is the father of B, and B is father C, and C is the father of D, and D is the father of E, and E is the father of F. F can buy four cows and slain for E, D, C and B. At this stage no cow was slain for A and nothing happens to all the stages of the children. The belief is that A will stand on the honour of the four stages of children, B, C, D and E and therefore be promoted in ancestral world.

Process of Cow Ritual in Traditional Funeral Rite

Presentation: The first presentation is done in the house of the person whom the rite is performed for. Here, the children (specifically the first son) will do the ritual presentation of the cow to the *umunna*, this goes with certain forms where he explains that the purpose is to give honour to whom honour is due, celebrate the legacy the deceased has left behind, demonstrate that they are worthy successors of the deceased, and say how great or strong the parent(s) was.

Songs and Dance: The presentation is followed by ritual song and dance by the *umuada*. The song is thrilled with emotion stating the trials and achievement of the deceased, the smooth journey of the deceased to the ancestral world, the pains and how they will miss the deceased and finally for the deceased to look after them (the children and the relations) from the spirit world and ensure that they remain in peace and love.

Handing over the Cow to Onyishi *Umunna*: After the songs and dances at the deceased house, the cow would be taken to the house of onyishi *umunna*. There they hand the cow over to the onyishi who earlier must have been informed of the cow to enable him tell other onyishi *umunna* and the village onyishi. After handing over to onyishi, he will show it to the other onyishi and representative of the village onyishi. Note that the village onyishi does not come because of his position and status but sends a representative.

Slaying of the Cow: The onyishi *umunna* gives instruction for the cow to be slain. Then the person who will slay it will come and take

it away for slaying. The slaying can take place either in the compound of onyishi *umunna*, in the threshold or anywhere around the house. Before the slaying, the children and even the grand children of the deceased will move away as the tradition requires that children must not be present during the slaying of cow for ones parent(s) funeral rite. When the people have left, the person who is to slain the cow who can be anybody from the *umunna* who is not owing the parent or anybody funeral cow will take cloth and cover the eyes of the cow and then use knife and slay it. Immediately after slaying it, the children will come back shouting ritual shout, and hitting stick on the ground asking *onye gburu oke eshu nna m* or *oke eshu nne m* meaning who killed my father or my mother's cow depending if the rite is for father or mother.

Investigations revealed that there are two major reasons why the children of the deceased must not be present during the slaying of the cow. First is the belief that the spirit of one's dead parents and other relations are present during the slaying ritual and can consciously or unconsciously strike the children may be for not performing the cow ritual on time or for any other mistake or action. Second is the conviction that the cow is the symbol of the dead and therefore one cannot be present where the parent is being slain. It is also on this credence that the eyes of the cow is covered before slaying because the person performing the ritual slaying do not want the dead person whom the cow represent to see that he is the one doing the slaying.

Division of the Meet: After the slaying ritual, another ritual that follows it is the sharing of the carcass. This ritual may have minor differences from one community to another, but it has many things in common. For instance in Ezimo community of Udeno LGA, it is shared as follows; village onyishi = the chest and one leg or one hand, onyishi *umunna* = one leg or one hand, children of the deceased = the head, one leg or one hand, the skin and the intestine, wives of the *umunna* = the waist, the person that slain the cow = the cord of the neck close to the head. The remaining parts after the above sharing are cooked and eaten by everybody present irrespective of where one come from and no limitation, anybody can

eat the meat.

In further ritual of the meat is that the village onyishi will invite all the onyishi *umunna* to his house to partake in the eating of the chest. The village onyishi will bring some part of the chest and give to them to share. There he will perform the ritual prayers to the ancestors especially the one whom the cow is for his rite. Another ritual which is not compulsory is that the head which belong to the children is given to the *Ada* if she is married, but with the permission of the husband. But if the *Ada* is not married it then belongs to the entire family.

Note also that the carrying of the cow head by the *Ada* result to another ritual known as the returning of the *Ishi Eshu* (cow head). The *Ada* and her husband family will bring back the skull of the cow. In this ritual the *Ada* and her husband family will visit her consanguinal family with a life goat, enough quantity of palm wine, food and cola nuts. The eldest in the consanguinal family will pray to their ancestor and after that the two families will eat and drink together. This ritual of returning the skull is very important because if this is not done until the *Ada* dies, the consanguinal family may decide that she cannot be buried until this ritual is done or if they have mercy and permit the burial, it must be done before her own funeral.

Cow in Christian Funeral Rite

What is Christian funeral rite? Okwueze (2012) offers some answers to this question making reference to Imilike community in Nsukka area of Igboland; he said:

In Imilike, at the time, what essentially determined whether a burial/funeral was classified either as traditional or Christian was whether the funeral cow was handed over to the oldest man (onyishi) in the village or the chairman of the church committee (p.243).

What the above scholar said is applicable not only in Imilike, but in most communities in Nsukka. The people describe Christian funeral rite when the funeral cow is handed over to the church leaders and the church decides who kills the cow, and when the killing takes

place in the house of the deceased to ensure that the cow does not undergo any traditional ritual and the church dictates how the parts of the carcass are shared.

According to P. Ezema (personal communication, 11th Jan. 2016), Christian funeral is not limited to who the cow is handed over to, but also who receive the parts of the meat. He said after killing the cow, how the parts of the carcass are shared which is determined by each particular church zone, station or parish according their sharing formula is important to them. Ezema said that in most Catholic Churches in Nsukka diocese where he is a member, one leg or hand, the head, the intestine and skin goes to the family members of the deceased. However, he said that it has been discovered that some people after receiving the family share of the meat sends some parts to the onyishi. He disclosed that if the church discovers that, the family members are being bound from participating in the Holy Communion. And he further said that the case is more serious if the onyishi practices traditional religion.

In some parishes like St. Anthony's parish Ogbodu-Aba of Nsukka diocese, it is the family of the deceased that take care of the killing of the funeral cow for the church. In this parish, they don't care how the parts of the carcass are shared, their style is that some quantity of cooked pieces of meat are given to the church (particularly the zone where the deceased belonged) as their own share of the funeral cow meat. In this case, the parts do not matter because the meat is given to the church in pieces and not in parts.

Traditional and Christian Clash of Thoughts in Cow as Funeral Rite

This paper is not in any way to talk about conflicts or crises between the Christian and traditional believers as regards the use of cow in funeral rites. Rather it is an effort to illuminate how traditional thought clashes with Christian thought in the use of cow in funeral rite in Nsukka area of Igboland.

It is pertinent to flash back and remember that there was no time in history that the Igbo people or Africa as a people ever requested or

demanded for Christianity to fill any religious vacuum or need. The people of Igboland became Christians because the Christian missionaries came to Igboland. This simply means that the people became Christians by accident not because of any superior quality of Christianity over their indigenous traditional religion. This fact is fundamental to be known by all Christians especially those who judge Christianity to be superior to Igbo religion and violently attempt to terminate the indigenous religion of the people.

The Christians should also remember the remarkable and corporate generosity of the Igbo towards the Christian missionaries. This generosity and acceptance of the whole of Africa towards Christianity was noted about 83 years ago by Walter (1933) when he wrote about the friendliness of African natives to the Apostolate of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Africa, he said “The natives always maintained the friendliest relations with the missionaries, never molested them in any way, but on the contrary, showing the greatest eagerness to be the most cordial relations with them” (p.78).

The irony is that after many years of Christianity in Igboland, the Christians want Igbo to totally eradicate all traces of their traditional indigenous religion, culture and traditional values and replace it with Christianity and European culture.

One of the clashes of the traditional and Christian thoughts resulting from cow ritual in funeral rites is the fact that the Christians acclaim that taking the cow to the house of *onyishi umunna* is purposely to perform sacrifices. According to J. Eze (personal communication, Jan 9th, 2016), the cow taken by the pagans (non-Christians) to the *onyishi* is for sacrifices to the idol – (ancestral shrine) and as a result the Christians will never be in support of it. It is important to note that calling non-Christian Igbo pagan is wrong and unacceptable because the original Latin word *Paganus* means village dweller or a villager. So the question is, are the Christian Igbo who co-habit with traditional believers in the same community supposed to refer to some group as villager dwellers? It is in this light that Quarcoopome (1987) lamented the use of the word and remarked: “To say that anyone who does not acknowledge Jehova or Christ or Allah is a

pagan and to further identify paganism with non-Christian is nothing short of bias, a sided value judgment". (p.17).

However, this thought is erroneous because it was investigated and discovered that the cow taken to the onyishi umunna is not used for any sacrifice. According to M. Ossai (personal communication, 11th Jan.2016), the cow is not used for any sacrifice. The thought is because the ancestral shrines are kept in the house of the onyishi and therefore they assume that the funeral cows taken there are used for sacrifice to the ancestral shrine.

Another area where the Christians and traditional believers clash is the belief of Nsukka people in the ancestral spirit where the onyishi is seen as the representative of the ancestors. For the people, onyishi is both the political, traditional and most importantly the religious head of the family and the community. Talking about the position and functions of onyishi especially in respect to ancestors, Dine (2007) said this:

Onyishi (the head man by age) becomes the holder of *ofo* of authority in the village. He is the symbol of the unity of the whole village community with the spirit world. His *isi* (headship) is specifically concerned with ancestral world. Nobody else can fill that office as long as he is alive. A rash usurp of his office by any villager earns such a person untold punishment from the ancestors (p.53).

It is because of this high rank of the onyishi that the people accord them with a very good respect and as such they (the onyishi) are not expected to come where the funeral takes place and still the cow must be presented to them. And no body from the family or the community will arrogate the office of the onyishi to himself and accept that the cow be presented to him, or else the untold punishment will overcome the person.

In the same way too, the people who are performing funeral rite to their parent(s) will not risk presenting the cow to anybody other than the onyishi because it is against the ancestral norms. The people believe that such will incur the wrath of the ancestors which can result to conflict between them and the spirit world. This view was

equally noted by Davidson (1969) that “Legitimate power lay in the office sanctioned by ancestral norms, not in the person; and the person lost his right to exact obedience ones he abuses that office” (p.200). This was also supported by Ossai (2013); “that elders are respected not necessarily because of whom they are, but because of the office assigned to them by the ancestral norms” (p.168). So taking the funeral cow to the house of onyishi is nothing but a norm in the funeral rite as enshrined in the people's tradition which has been in practice since the time immemorial and people are very much comfortable with it.

This traditional thought of spirit world is not in agreement with the Christian thought. The traditional view of the ancestors in the spirit world which influences the physical world of man is different from the Christian thought of death and resurrection. And because of this traditional thought, all the ritual, ceremonies, processes and traditions surrounding the cow is aimed at ensuring peace between the spirit and physical worlds which if violated will negatively affect the physical world. Ilogu (1985) expressed this view of Igbo people and their ancestors, thus:

Again the belief that the secular and sacred ought not to be separated by an unbridgeable gulf fostered by belief in the ancestral spirit ... In their sense of continuity with deceased ancestors, young Igbo are taught to regard moral consciousness as perpendicular root that belong to the realities. (p.32).

Traditional Cow as a Symbol in Funeral Rites

In Igbo society, symbols are the vital factor of people's religious and social life. It is the way of expressing abstract ideas, values, and notions which would be difficult to express. The exact meaning of symbol transcends the physical objects and can be understood by interpretation of the meaning which the people have in it. And every religious symbol is highly valued by the people that carry out the religious activities. Many scholars of religion have proffered many definitions and meaning of symbol.

Ejizu (1986), defines symbol as “A thing recognized as normally

typifying, representing or recalling something of great importance; it implies an analogues association with that it stands for”. (p.1). Madu (2003) agreed with Ejizu and explained symbol thus:

We can say that symbolism implies the practice of using acts, sound, object or other means which are not of importance in themselves for directing attention to something that considers important; it is the substitution of a symbol with what it symbolized. (p.69).

Reflecting the above assertions to the traditional cow, one can rightly say that the cow is a symbol in the funeral rite in the area under study. Critical observation of the views of Ejizu and Madu, one can observe that the breed of traditional cow is not in any way more important than any other type of cow, but what is of great importance is that which it symbolizes – the dead. The people consider their dead parents sacred, important and essential to their world and that is why they use traditional cow which is expensive and big to represent them in the funeral rite.

This can explain how Nsukka people value their dead parents by using the most valued animal for their funeral rite. However this symbol is also reciprocal; because, the cow is also valued in Nsukka because it is used for funeral rite. The truth is that in Nsukka, this cow is not used for anything except for funeral rite

Cohen (1974)'s definition of symbol as “Object, acts, concept, or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for multiplicity of disparate meaning, evoke sentiment and emotion, impel men to action” (p.9) add credence to the argument that cow in funeral rite is a symbol. A critical analysis of the cow ritual shows that the cow implies more than one meaning. Having explained how it symbolizes the dead, it also signifies preparation of one's own cow ritual for funeral rite. That is, one making preparations for his or her own funeral rite.

In explaining how one prepares his own cow funeral ritual by providing cow for the dead parents; according to C. Nnamani,

(personal communication, Jan 19th 2016), when one offers cow for the parents funeral rite, if he dies, he will be qualified for cow ritual. What Nnamani is saying is that anyone who did not offer cow funeral rite for the dead parents cannot be offered for by his children unless their grandfather's own cow is done first. For instance, X is the father of Y and Y is the father of Z. If X dies and Y did not offer cow for X funeral, whenever Y dies Y cannot enjoy cow ritual unless Z can afford to provide two cows, one for X first and the second for Y. The implication is that both X and Y cannot be admitted into the ancestral world until the cow rituals for both of them are done. So the people believe that anyone who offers cow ritual for the funeral rite of the dead parents facilitates his own ritual hence expedite his admission into the ancestral world. This expression by Nnamani was the view of Basden (1982) when he wrote “The Ibo will endure everything demanded of him in his life; will put up hardships, the misbehaviour of his children, indeed anything, in order to insure that his burial will be properly performed” (p.117). And according to Basden (1982) also, Igbo have both first and second burial. He said “Second burial is the name adopted by Europeans and arises from the fact that, to all intents and purposes, there are two burials – the first real, the second by proxy ... those on the eastern side term it “ikwa-ozu” (p.120). The burial by proxy simply means funeral. So what Nnamani and Basden were saying is that in Igboland, one can prepare his or her funeral by clearing any impediments that can prevent a befitting funeral.

Another concept of the ritual is that it also springs honour and respect to the children who afford it to their dead parents and places them in a very high class in the society. It is because of this honour that people who have performed the funeral cow ritual to their dead parents can take the traditional title of *Ogbuefi* meaning killer of cow and therefore earn for themselves high respect in the community. In fact, Nsukka people believe that one has not offered a cow to the dead parent(s) should neither touch cow nor its rope or else the dead parent(s) will strike him or her.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this work was not just to glorify cow ritual practices in funeral rite of Nsukka people, but to present the truth with regard to what the people authentically believe and practice. In the study we have explored cow ritual in funeral rite as viewed by Nsukka people of Igboland, Nigeria. We discussed the process of the traditional ritual that surrounds the cow. The ritual established the fact that the people believe in the ancestral world. For them, the cow ritual is one of the rituals that facilitate the dead to the spirit world which therefore ensure cordial relationship between the physical and the spirit worlds, hence the protection of the people by the gods.

The paper has tried to emphasize that in every religion and culture of the people there are things good in it which promote the way of life of the people that own and practice it. Okwueze (2012) quoting Ezeanya pointed out this and remarked:

Every people, no matter how backward they may be, no matter at what stage of civilization and development they may be, have a culture, a way of life peculiar to themselves, and the characteristic features of such a way of life. In that particular culture can be found elements that are naturally good, just and beautiful, element that promotes the welfare of humanity as God's creature. (p.153).

We wish to suggest that Igbo people should practice Christianity in relation to Igbo culture. What this means is blending Christianity with Igbo culture, which is practicing Christianity in Igbo culture and not Christianity that wears European culture as was presented to us by the colonial masters. Ayandele (1960) noted this view and remarked:

Christianity is intended to be the religion not of one particular race of people only but of the whole world. But in

different countries it will wear different types: if it is to become indigenous to every soil. It should have in Europe a European type, in Asia an Asian type and in Africa an African type. (p.46).

This work advocates that both Christians and traditional worshippers can carry out funeral rite with cow ritual and still maintain peace and unity. It is just the people coming together with one understanding thereby giving respect to who deserves it. We refer to the view of Etuk (2002) that:

Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar': and unto God the things which are God's". The implication is clear; you can be a Christian if you want, even a minister or a bishop. But when it comes to the question of paying spiritual tribute to the powers that surrounds you, you have no choice but to resort to the way of your ancestors. (p.52).

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