

AETIOLOGY OF IGBO CULTURAL RITES (A CASE STUDY OF ABIRIBA COMMUNITY): IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING.

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Abstract

The study investigated the aetiology of Igbo cultural rites with the aim of highlighting the implications for church and community relations as a means of promoting peaceful co-existence. The investigation isolated the following rites namely: "igu afa" (naming ceremony); "igba nnnunu"(shooting of birds); "uche oba" (surveillance of barn); "izari efa" (public recognition ceremony); "igwa mang" (Fulfilment of vows); "uche"(community surveillance); "ili madu" (burial); "ikwapu aria"(sharing of property) and "ila ikwu nne" (matrilineage). The Abiriba community in Igboland of Abia State in Nigeria was used as a case study. The research was guided by three research questions designed to establish the essence, raison d'etre and similarities between the rites and Christian rites. The case study featured three sages selected with a criterion as purposive sample and applied an unstructured interview schedule derived from the purpose of study as the instrument for data generation. Frequency distribution was used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that (i) the cultural rites have symbolic essence (ii) the rites have raison d'etre (iii) there are similarities between cultural and Christian rites. The implications of the findings for the pastoral counsellor, the church, and the age grade system were highlighted. It was recommended that the church should adopt the attitude of critical contextualization which refers to the process whereby cultural beliefs or rites are neither rejected nor accepted without objective cross-cultural analysis.

Key Words: Igbo, Culture, rites, community relations

Introduction:

Rudyard Kipling in discussing cross cultural differences in Hesselgrave (1978), pointed out that east is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet. This statement is both true and false. It is false because there have been technological, political and even religious meeting points. The easterners have learnt from the West in technology, politics and religion

for a considerable period of time. Recently, a considerable number of westerners have turned to the East for answers which they feel have not been made available to them in their occidental heritage especially in the realm of metaphysics. However, the statement is also true because the gulf remains. The gulf will not be bridged by those who reject their own cultural heritage in favour of foreign ones. Hopes of bridging the chasm lie rather in individuals who will stretch their minds and hearts in an attempt to embrace and comprehend, however imperfectly, both eastern and western cultures. The eastern and western cultures have both similar and different patterns of thought. Western thinkers are fundamentally conceptual in thought. They rely on the formation of hypothesis about unobserved phenomenon and test the hypothesis by an inductive process. The eastern thinker is more concerned with the inner and personal nature of the self and with a reality beyond the empirical world (intuition). The nature of things is to be discovered not by logical inference from piece meal facts of this world but by acquaintance through one's personal experience. Smith in Hesselgrave (1978), pointed out that these two patterns of thought are operative in every culture. None of the two patterns of thought is completely foreign to some of us. Where we differ is in the degree of priority given to one pattern over the other.

Cultural Rites:

Cultural rites are rituals observed at various periods of life or season to communicate achievement of developmental tasks or changes in the environment as required by the community's philosophy of life. The rites or rituals are intended to remould the moral, mental and spiritual orientation of the initiates towards their world and their roles in it. The knowledge imparted to initiates is designed to create the awareness that henceforth the individual does not live for himself alone. The community and divinities have a stake in his life, since his actions affect the very bond that binds the human and spiritual communities. Thus the individual is taught that the structures of the community are divinely given and that the maintenance of the expected social role and relationship is a religious duty. Cultural rites feature three symbolic processes namely separation, transformation, and reincorporation. Ray (1976) pointed out the importance of the stages. According to him, the separation phase marks the symbolic death of initiates. They are neither what they used to be nor what they will become. The transformation phase features endowment with new nature and roles. Persons are symbolically remade into 'new beings' with new social roles. The

reincorporation phase features the symbolic integration of the individual into the society or community through positive reinforcement such as praise, congratulations; songs, feasting, dancing or ceremonial outing.

Statement of the Problem:

Although indigenes have taken over the leadership of the church from colonialists, the missionary stereotype of African culture as primitive, fetish, and pagan has persisted; sometimes leading to violent clash between the church and community. In view of the current need for indigenization of Christianity, there is need to investigate the cultural rites using sages that cherished the cultural heritage in the face of colonial and missionary onslaught. The rediscovery of the essence of these rites will promote harmonious coexistence of church and society.

Scope of the Study:

The investigation concentrated on the following rites of Abiriba community in Igboland namely: igu afa (naming ceremony); igba nnnunu(shooting of birds); uche oba (surveillance of barn); izari efa (Public recognition ceremony); igwa mang (fulfilment of vows); uche(community surveillance); ili madu (burial of person); ikwapu aria(sharing of property) and ila ikwu nne (matrilineage). The study was done at Abiriba community in South Eastern part of Nigeria. Although the nomenclature of rites differs from place to place, the basic features run across communities.

Purpose of the Study:

The study sought to find out the essential nature and significance of Abiriba cultural rites as grounds for promotion of harmony between culture and Christian faith. It specifically sought to:

- (1.) Discover the essence of the rites
- (2.) Explore the significance of the rites.
- (3.) Establish similarities between the cultural rites and Christian rituals.

Significance of the Study:

It is hoped that this investigation will reveal the erroneous nature of colonial missionaries' interpretation of the cultural rites. The study will project their genuine nature and significance. It will promote better adjustment among citizens by neutralizing neurotic guilt emanating from violation of the supposed Christian regulations on these rites and

promote harmony in the community. It will also promote further indigenization of Christianity in the community.

Research Questions:

The following research questions guided the investigation.

- (1.) What is the nature of the isolated cultural rites?
- (2.) What justifies the existence of the rites?
- (3.) What similarities exist between these rites and Christian rituals?

Research Design:

This is a descriptive survey research using Abiriba community as a case study.

Area of the study:

The study was restricted to Abiriba community in Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State in Nigeria. The community is located at Northern zone of Abia State which is in South Eastern Nigeria. It is an Igbo community reputed for commerce, industry, entrepreneurship and self reliance in community development. It is one of the most developed communities of Igboland with virtually all Christian denominations. Ukoha(1998) noted in his work, "Abiriba city state" that Christianity came to Abiriba through the efforts of Rev. J.K. Macgregor and Rev. R. Collins in 1911. By 1995, there were more than 40 Christian denominations and prayer houses in Abiriba all competing for converts.

Population of study:

The Abiriba kingdom is composed of several autonomous communities with a population of approximately two million people. The communities share a common cultural heritage under the leadership of the "Ikwukwuma-Eze Enachioken" (Enachioken in council) presided over by the Enachioken of Abiriba the highest traditional ruler.

Sample and Sampling Technique:

The study used a sample of three sages selected through purposive sampling technique. Only sages that satisfied the following criteria were selected

- (1). senior citizens as required by gerontocracy
- (2). Pronounced commitment to tradition and culture as evidenced by initiation into all the cultural rites.

- (3). Ability to reason as attested to by leadership role in community affairs
- (4). Assertive behaviour reflected by a nonconformist lifestyle.

The material in this paper is a synthesis of information generated from the interview of the following cultural sages. 1. Late Eze Ukiwo U. Ukiwo (the Enachioken of Abiriba). 2. Chief Ikoru Eke: the traditional head of Ndi Ngele Ozua in Amamba 3. Late Chief Agwu Udeocha Nkungwu: the traditional head of Amuba community .The above persons met the criterion of the sample selection by virtue of the fact that they were all traditional leaders which attests to their sagacity. They were also polygamists; senior citizens who have celebrated the Uche ceremony and assertive in that they maintained their status quo as traditionalists till death despite the influence of Christianity around them. They later died avowed traditionalists.

Instrumentation:

The study used the unstructured interview techniques to generate the relevant data. This was preferred to other techniques due to the fact that most of the subjects were illiterate. Moreover, there was need for flexibility in the interview process for adequate generation of information.

Data Collection:

The research questions were used to elicit appropriate responses from the subjects on all the relevant rites. The researcher conducted the interview in person at the interviewee's place in an informal atmosphere. In fact some of the subjects did not know the interview was for a research purpose. The researcher simply presented himself as an inquisitive person who wants to understand more about the culture of the people.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Summary of the responses to each of the research questions.

Rites	Frequency of Response		
	Essence	Significance	Similarity
Igu Afa	3	3	3
IgbaNnunnu	3	3	3
Uche Oba	3	3	3
Iza Efa	3	3	3
Igwa Mang	3	3	3
Ime Uche	3	3	3
Ili Madu	3	3	3
Ikwapu Aria	3	3	3
Ila ikwu Nne	3	2	3

Findings:

The investigation recorded the following findings:

- (1.) The cultural rites are essentially different from one another.
- (2.) The rites are significant in the culture
- (3.) The rites have their similarities in Christian rituals.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1:

What is the essence of the isolated cultural rites?

The subjects answered the above question by narrating the essence of the rites. Although their narratives on the rites corresponded with the popular view in most cases, there were differences that showed deeper insight of the said rites. The most outstanding of the differences was that of matrilineage where one of the subjects disagreed totally with the popular explanation. The subject postulated the polyandry myth instead of the homicide myth of matrilineage. This difference in one of the cases goes to confirm the fact that sages do not always conform to the popular view but rely on personal judgments. The following is a summary of the responses to the question on each of the rites.

1. "Igu Afa" (Naming ceremony)

The naming ceremony is the process of ascribing a personal identification label to a new born baby. It is usually performed by the eldest in the family on the eight day from birth. Holding the baby in his arms, the officiating man talks to the baby thus: "in the name of our forefathers and

of the family and those gathered here, I welcome you to the family and to our community". "In our world," he continues, "people are identified by names; hence, we have come to give you a name by which you will be identified." Then he announces the name by which the child is to be known. Prayer is offered to God, divinities and ancestral spirits, asking that the child might live up to the name as well as have long, useful life on earth. He proceeds to acquaint the child with characteristics of life on earth by feeding him with bits of the items provided for the ceremony and draws the relevant inference. For instance, he may take a piece of the bitter kola nut and touch it to the baby's tongue and say: "Life is not always pleasant; there may be times of bitterness. May you be able to accept it as a part of what it means to live. Our wish, however, is that you do not experience the bitterness of life." The ceremony incorporates the new born into the nexus of relationships including the protection by the ancestral spirits. It is usually considered a micro ceremony.

2. "Igba Nnunu" (shooting of birds)

It consists of parading a live bird hooked to a bow by a boy between 5 and 7 years of age throughout the nooks and crannies of the community where his relatives live. The live bird hooked to a bow symbolizes the enemies he will be expected to capture and bring home alive or the skull of those he will kill in the course of his head hunting or security functions later as a youth in the community. The child, who is usually naked, is escorted by an older child who keeps the tokens of appreciation, comprised of tubers of yam, maize and money which their hosts shower on the celebrant, in a basin. The gifts are given after the child has saluted his adult guest and narrated how he mounted the sentry box and captured the bird as it was coming out from the nest. Adults usually initiate the salutation and narration by addressing the boy as "eti" which means child hero. Sand is poured on the head of the boy by adults to show that by this act the boy has identified with the community and her ideology of life which borders on military invincibility. The bird is usually roasted at the end of the one day exercise for the boy and his peers to eat. The tokens of appreciation together with the feast which is held in the evening for the boy communicate messages of approval, acceptance and identification to the individual. This childhood rite symbolizes the transition from infancy to childhood. The presumed entrance into the bush to hunt for birds marks the separation stage. The daylong parade across the community marks the transformation phase when the child is endowed with new nature and roles. The feast in the

evening with his peers marks the incorporation into society as a boy. The new being that was remade to an infant person at the naming ceremony now graduates to boyhood. The rite is exclusively for males.

3. *"Uche-Oba" (surveillance of the barn)*

"Uche-Oba" is the customary rite which symbolizes the transition from childhood to youth. It is performed by male children between twenty five and thirty years of age who later emerge as an age grade. The initiates retire to the bush and use the community barn as a rallying point for a period of four days during which they are symbolically transformed. The separation from the community symbolizes the stripping of their former mode of being, making them neither children nor youths. The four days duration in which they do not taste anything cooked by a woman symbolizes endowment with new nature and roles. During this period, they are spiritually and sociologically remade into 'new beings' with new social roles. They are exposed to the ugly realities of guerrilla warfare such as harsh weather conditions, attack of ferocious animals, darkness, thirst, hunger and hunting skills. They are acquainted with the oral history of the community, norms, values and structure of the community government. Senior members of the community oversee this traditional military orientation exercise. At the end of the four days, the elders welcome them back to the community with a male goat which indicates recognition, honour and appreciation of their emergence as youth and perform some libationary rituals to mark the event. They march to the community square where they are received in the hall and the goat is killed for their entertainment. They eat together as a mark of team spirit ; unity of purpose and cooperation. The society communicates messages of approval, and acceptance by the warm reception, gun salute, and libationary prayer for them. The rite is exclusively for males.

4. *"Izari Afa" (Public recognition):*

This maturity rite symbolizes the transition from youth to adulthood. It is performed by people between thirty-five and forty years of age whose age grade is due for recognition with a name by the community. The ceremony involves a royal procession across the community led by a horse rider with intermittent libationary stoppage at the designated centres of the community. The ceremony ends with the unveiling of the developmental project which the initiates embarked on to mark the event and their reincorporation into the community through pouring of libation, elaborate display of their unique cultural dance and

masquerade. They are showered with congratulatory messages from the community's customary and civil authorities amidst feasting. The rite embraces male and female members of the age grade.

5. "Igwa Mang" (Fulfilment of vows):

This is a ceremony performed by an age grade to mark the end of four-years of formal military cum civil service to the community. It is performed by men and women between forty-five and fifty years of age. The risky nature of the military function creates fear in the subjects, hence the need for consulting God and gods for protection as a precautionary measure. This consultation of spirits features a vow or pledge of a token of appreciation which one will give to God/gods on successful completion of the four years community service. At the end of their tenure of service, the participants separated themselves from the community on a designated day of the customary four-day week and retire to the shrine of the village god that is believed to have performed the feat of protection. They spend the night there and perform rites that amount to fulfilment of their collective and personal vows which they made before the god at the commencement of the four years military service. Thereafter the initiates move from the shrine into the community with a colourful dance procession. The community and their respective families recognize their heroic feat through verbal and non verbal appreciation. Thus they are reincorporated into the society as old adults.

6. "Uche" (Community Surveillance):

"Uche" is the last cultural ceremony conducted by age grade members between sixty and seventy years of age to mark the end of their four years community surveillance function and retirement from community service. This rite marks the transition from old adulthood to living ancestorship ("Onye Ichie"). The "uche" rite consists of symbolic separation from the community marked by erecting a traditional canopy with George or wax clothes at the community centre where a night vigil is kept on the night preceding the event. The ceremony is marked by presentation of gifts in form of cash and kind by the celebrant's wife (wives), children, in-laws, friends, and general public. Customarily the celebrant does not sleep in his house on the night of the "Uche" day. It is presumed that the celebrant would be killed by visiting malignant spirits sent by enemies who are envious of the gifts they received during the day. The only way to avoid the attack is by escaping from the house so that the spirits will not find him when they visit the house that night.

7. *"Ili madu" (Burial of person):*

This rite marks the transition from living ancestor ("onye ichie") to dead ancestors ("ndi ichie") in the spirit world. Burial of a person ("Ili madu") covers all the symbolic rituals performed in respect of someone who died at the desirable age. It is noteworthy that it is not called the burial of a corpse ("Ili ozu") for the dead person is not deemed to have died but rather to have gone home. The ceremony lasts for three days. The first day marks the lowering of the body to the grave ("Iye madu ali") which is usually filled halfway. The second day is symbolically observed as the day for "Iwu uhu" (washing of the body). The symbolic bath ("Iwu uhu") consists of satisfying the demands of the cults and organizations which the person identified with during his lifetime. The third day is symbolically observed as covering of the body ("Ipaba madu"). The person who is assumed to have been lowered to the earth is now buried by being fully covered with sand. Unlike the first day, the second and third days feature festivities in honour of the dead.

8. *"Ike aku" (sharing of property) or "Ikwapu Aria" (removal of utensils):*

It is called sharing of property ("Ike aku") in reference to a man and removal of utensils ("Ikwapu aria") for the woman. This rite marks the termination of the current round of reincarnation with reference to a dead person. It involves the itemization and allocation of the deceased person's fiscal and non fiscal properties to the appropriate heirs in accordance with the custom. Henceforth they are no more considered as the properties of the deceased but of the living. The deceased person transforms into a historical figure.

9. *"Ila Ikwu Nne" (Matrilineage) :*

Matrilineage refers to the systematic tracing of 'ancestry' through females. It is seen as an organizing principle that allowed men to exercise rulership in a social group while inheritance and succession passed in the female line. Powers were transmitted from males to males as in patrilineal system, the only difference being that such males share a common female ancestry instead of common male ancestry. In this system, a man's next of kin is either his brother or his sister and her children. The brothers' children cannot inherit his property because they came from another woman (his brother's wife). So the membership of the matriclan ("Ikwu") spreads across families, kindred and communities just like a social club. It is headed by the oldest member of the group

whose home serves as a place of meeting throughout his life time. The custom of matrilineage recognizes three stake holders in a man's life or death. These are the nuclear family, the matrilineal ("Ikwu") and the kindred ("ezi"). The biological son is entitled to inherit his father's residence or house in the kindred compound, his father's gun and machete (symbols of occupation in a horticultural society). The wife is entitled to pieces of new wrapper from his box if the man had the customary cloth box. The oldest half-brother ("umujiahuo") in the kindred is entitled to a piece of wrapper. It is only after the above three provisions have been met that the matrilineal ("Ikwu") has the right to share whatever is left after paying the burial expenses which is usually conducted by the matrilineal. Thus children in matrilineage enjoy dual inheritance. They inherit from their father and their matrilineal. This is very contrary to the common but erroneous impression that matrilineage robs children of their inheritance .

Research Question 2:

Why do you consider the rites important and reasonable?

According to Table 1, all the subjects responded to this question. Unlike the popular opinion which anchors the significance of these rites on ancestral legacy or tradition, the sages were able to produce reasonable justifications for the rites. Although there were slight differences in the explanations, the researcher does not consider them significant. All the respondents proffered similar justifications. The following is a synthesis of information generated under the above research question.

1. "Igu Afa" (naming ceremony): The justification of this rite anchors on the belief in reincarnation. The new-born child is initially looked upon with awe as a stranger from the ancestral home in the spirit world. The Igu afa (naming ceremony) therefore marks the acceptance of the baby, which from the standpoint of the spirit-community completes the reincarnation process. If he is not accepted and catered for, he dies again thereby aborting that particular turn of reincarnation. The ceremony makes him a member of a family through which he will realize the purpose of that particular turn of reincarnation.
2. "Igba Nnunnu" (shooting of birds): "Igba nnunnu" reflects the communal value for bravery. A community surrounded by bloodthirsty neighbours must be brave and courageous to survive. This explains why it is considered to be foundational to all other rites in the village. It was necessary for every man to imbibe the values of bravery, courage and

aggression to fulfil both his civic and family roles. The rite also strengthens and transmits value for the extended family, as the child is required to visit all relatives who offer him gifts of yam and maize for his exploit.

3. **“Uche-Oba”** (surveillance of barn): The rite promotes the development of the abilities and skills necessary for successful community defence. It is the practical experience of the values transmitted in the previous rite i.e. shooting of birds. The collective experience fosters team spirit. The individual henceforth realizes that he does not live for himself alone. The community and divinities have a stake in his life, since his actions affect the very bond that binds the human and spiritual communities.

4. **“Izari Afa”** (Public recognition): The public recognition ceremony marks the formal integration of a particular age grade into the communal gerontocratic government with appropriate responsibility and privileges. It is a kind of public recognition of maturity which makes one eligible for community service. It also contributes to community development since the new age grade is obliged to execute one relevant developmental project to mark the event.

5. **“Igwa Mang”** (Fulfilment of vows): This rite provides a formal opportunity to thank God/gods and fulfil vows which were made at the commencement of the security function. It is actually a celebration of survival for many die within the duration of the service either naturally or in the course of their duties.

6. **“Uche”** (community surveillance): **“Uche”** ceremony is more than a celebration of retirement from successful community administration service. An **“uche”** celebrant shows that the family has been able to increase the numerical strength of their ancestors by one since the person has lived up to the maximum cultural lifespan. It is to these ancestors that people appeal to in pouring libation. The greater the number, the better for the family for there is strength in number. The ceremony also enables the celebrant to raise a kind of pension fund in cash and kind for his/her sustenance in old age in view of inevitable decline in earnings.

7. **“Ili madu”** (Burial of person): The burial rite is significant as a mark of respect to the dead. It is assumed that anyone who is not buried according to the prescribed customs suffer in the spirit world where he is considered a debtor because he enjoyed the proceeds of other people’s burial but failed to provide his own for others to enjoy. So his journey to the spirit world is truncated. He may turn to a malignant ghost as a result of the disappointment and attack the family.

8. **"Ike Aku"** (sharing of wealth) or **"Ikwapu Aria"** (removal of utensils): Sharing of the property marks the end of the concrete memory of the deceased person as a member of the family. Thereafter, he transforms into a historical figure in the family history.

9. **"Ila ikwu Nne"** (Matrilineage): The rite shows the importance attached to female offspring in the community. It is interesting to note that a woman is involved in both explanations and that both of them made sacrifices. One sacrificed her offspring to save the life of an individual; the other sacrificed her body, time and energy in polyandry to ensure the posterity of a group of men.

Research Question 3:

Do you see similarities between these rites and Christian rituals?

Table 1 reflects the diversity of opinion of the respondents to the above question. They all agreed that they were similarities but cited different examples based on their limited knowledge of the Bible. Prominent Christian rites are baptism, Holy Communion, ordination, marriage and burial. Even where the similarities are not exact, the principle of commemoration, celebration, recognition or thanksgiving stand out clearly in many Christian rites. For example, today's popular mothers' Sunday or women's day which every church celebrates on May dates back to ancient spring festival known as Hilaria dedicated to the mother goddess Cybele on 2nd Sunday of every May. It was Miss Anna Jarvis (84 years old spinster) who turned it to a public holiday in honour of maternal parents living and dead on the 10th of May 1908 (Wallechinsky and Wallace:1975). Most churches have retained the date and given it a new meaning by making it a day of honouring living mothers with gifts and recognition. Likewise, the current Christian festival of Christmas was derived from a pagan festival. According to Owen (1981) in his work on five religions in the twentieth century, 25th December was the Roman festivals of Nativitas solis invicti (birthday of the unconquered sun) while 17th December was the Roman festivals of Saturn which was held by giving presents and freeing of slaves for a short time. The Christians adapted the two festivals to mark the birth of their founder and show love to people through gifts on the Boxing Day. It is also noteworthy that some of the findings under this research question corroborate the earlier work of Okonkwo; Okoro & Oji (1992), in the unpublished report of the Constituted Committee Handling the Issue of cultural ceremonies of Abiriba.

The following specific similarities were cited by the respondents:

1. "Igu Afa": The "Igu Afa" (naming ceremony) is analogous to the Christian child dedication among the evangelicals and infant baptism of the Roman Catholic Church. The influence of supernatural beings are brought to bear on the life of the baby in both rites.
2. "Igba Nnunu" (shooting of bird): The "Igba nnu" rite is similar to the Christian rite of Lord's Supper. Whereas Igba nnu communicates invincibility to younger generation; the Lord's Supper communicates self sacrifice to new disciples. Both rites are designed to transmit qualities necessary for the survival of the entity.
3. "Uche-Oba" (surveillance of barn): The idea of training someone to ensure efficiency is not foreign to the church as attested to by the numerous seminaries and monasteries in the environment. Whereas the community used the uche-oba rite to provide paramilitary training to the youth for effective community defence function, the church uses seminaries to train the youth for effective doctrinal defence function as apologists and polemicists.
4. "Izari Afa" (Public recognition): The izari afa rite is a kind of public recognition of maturity which makes one eligible for community services. It is comparable to Christian ordination of lay leaders which is a public recognition of eligibility and commission to serve in the church. Christian ordination enables a member to join the leadership cadre of the church just as "Izari afa" enables a person to participate in the gerontocratic system of government in the community having been recognized as mature.
5. "Igwa Mang" (Fulfilment of vows): The Igwa mang rite is similar to Christian vow and thanksgiving services. Christians vow before God or pastor when embarking on some outstanding projects. When they succeed in such endeavours they fulfil their vows to God and even celebrate the break-through with a thanksgiving ceremony. The person who experienced the victory is appreciated with gifts just like the "igwa mang" candidates. The "Igwa mang" vow is comparable to the vow of Jephthah in the Bible which he certainly fulfilled with relevant ceremony.
6. Uche (community surveillance): "Uche" rite is similar to church councils or Jewish Sanhedrin . The Sanhedrin denotes the supreme judicial and administrative council of the Jews, which, it is said, was first instituted by Moses, and was composed of seventy men (Num. 11:16, 17).Easton This council of seventy-one senators with the addition of the high priest as president, determined the most important affairs of the nation. (Smith) From the few incidental notices in the New Testament,

we gather that it consisted of chief priests, or the heads of the twenty-four classes into which the priests were divided, elders, men of age and experience, and scribes, lawyers, or those learned in the Jewish law (Mt 26:57,59; Mr 15:1; Lu 22:66; Ac 5:21). The presence of the priests in the Sanhedrin implies that it also featured retirement for priests in the Bible were subject to retirement.

7. Ili madu (Burial of person): Ili madu is a conspicuous rite in Christendom. The church burial rite in Abiriba community lasts for two days as against the customary burial, which lasts for three days. A burial rite is a form of respect.

8. Ike Aku (sharing of wealth) or Ikwapu Aria (removal of utensils): The sharing of inheritance ("Ike aku") is similar to the inheritance rite found in the Bible. The Bible supports inheritance of progenitor's property or modern execution of a legal will.

9. Ila ikwu nne (Matrilineage): The lineage of Jesus was traced through the woman in the gospel of Mathew for the sake of proving to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. The same expediency that informed Mathew's deviation from the norm informed the matrilineal heritage system.

Implications for Counselling

The research findings have implications for pastoral counselling with reference to the church, the age grade system and the community.

First, the findings show the need for counsellors who are often involved in cross cultural work to be broadminded. It is very difficult to modify a deficit or excess behaviour from the surface. The counsellor must be able to penetrate beyond the surface to the essence and significance to enable him touch where it is itching and draw analogies that can easily be understood. This calls for the development of a bicultural frame of reference which he should develop through reading and exposure.

Secondly, the church has much to learn from the findings of the research concerning the way she relates to the local culture. The findings especially that of research question three show that the prevalent dichotomy between Church and culture is not the best. The early missionaries, out of ignorance, threw away the baby with the bath water on the basis that in traditional cultures it is hard to draw a sharp line between religious and non-religious practices (Kane:1982). Unlike the colonial missionaries, the indigenous pastor is in a better position to assess cultural issues. Insights from the disciplines of Anthropology,

Sociology, Psychology and Theology make it possible today to draw the previously difficult imaginary sharp line between religious and non-religious practices. Total rejection of culture reduces the usefulness of the church as channels for the conversion of the community. The community sees anti culture Christians as fanatics whose attitude is inimical to their progress and survival. They consider them as traitors and may ostracize them. This is because everyone is proud of his identity and culture. Paul was quick to point out that he was a Jew and a Hebrew. To reject one's culture is to reject one's identity.

Thirdly, the findings show that the age grade is an important fabric of the Abiriba society with reference to cultural rites. All the rites are directly or indirectly related to the age grade system. The Abiriba community government is intricately interwoven with the age grade that any deviation from that will create much problem in community administration (Obasi: 1981). Age grade serves as the community frame of reference. For example, if someone dies; those who do not know him in person would quickly like to know his age grade. The moment the age grade is cited anyone in the environment would find it easy to draw some conclusions about the incident and relate to the victims accordingly. Even customary offences can easily be attributed to immaturity once the offended finds out that the offender belongs to an unrecognized age grade. Community lands commonly known as 'Nkpako' are shared according to age grade. Community levies are shared and collected by age grade. Community appointments and leadership use the age grade as a criterion. As such there is need to preserve the age grade for continuity of traditional values and coherent relationship in the community. Although the age grade system has assumed some questionable dimensions in the recent past, what is needed is concerted effort at reformation instead of abandonment. The church can never surpass the age grade in community government. Likewise the age grade can never surpass the church in setting spiritual and moral tone of the community. The community needs both of them.

Finally, the findings show that the society must desist from cultural bigotry. Getz (1989) in an article titled "Traditions to trample or treasure" noted that some traditions are just for fun while others have deeper significance. As time goes on, he continued, the reasons behind our traditions are forgotten but in many instances, we perpetuate them even though they no longer meet the needs that explain their origin. Like people and plants, organizations have a life cycle comprised of a green and supple youth; a time of flourishing strength and old age. At old age

organization structures become more important than the people who make up the organization and people serve the organization more than the objectives that brought it into existence. Traditions become stumbling blocks on the way of progress. Means and methods become ends in themselves. Those who insist that "as it was in the beginning, so must it be; world without end" are not doing the community any service. No culture is stagnant and as such provision must be made for inevitable changes. The change of Igwa Mang role from warfare to community service is a commendable adjustment. Likewise the dressing of boys celebrating the Igba nnnunu rite in pants instead of leaving them naked is another commendable development. Similar constructive innovations should be implemented for peaceful co-existence of church and society.

Limitations of the Study

Although the investigation attempted to forestall all identifiable design problems, the following limitations characterized it.

1. The investigation was limited to one community in Sub-Saharan Africa. A research of other African tribes may produce a different result or reflect different rites.
2. The study did not cover all the rites of the community. It was limited to what could be described as rites of passage.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in the light of the findings and counselling implications of the study.

The church should adopt the attitude of critical contextualization which refers to the process whereby cultural beliefs or rites are neither rejected nor accepted without empirical examination. The aim of such investigation is to find common grounds for mutual relationship between the church and the host culture. This calls for a broad frame of mind that enables us to accept what is true and good in all cultures and to critique what is evil in them. A cultural dance or play which promotes pleasure of sight; humour, relaxation, aesthetics, socialization, acrobatics and complex dance and vocal skills are in order while masquerades or cultural displays that feed on violence; intimidation, victimization, extravagance, magic or witchcraft and humiliation of women are not welcome. Such should be rejected unanimously. God revealed himself to us through the history and culture of a specific people.

Hiebert (1985) rightly pointed out that "the scripture is the basic source from which theological knowledge comes. It is also the sole

authority by which culture should be evaluated". Therefore the scripture has to be explored afresh. Western conceptualizations of the biblical theology should be reviewed critically and if necessary set aside. In doing so we may have deeper understanding of God's message as we ponder directly upon all the original materials of the Bible. African churches can learn much from western theological concepts as part of their Christian heritage but western theology is not the final standard against which they should measure their own. The standard is biblical revelation.

In as much as the Bible is God's word, it is also a historical document written by men whose personality and environment influenced their thought. The Lutheran Reformation method of interpretation, which uses the analogy of scripture and the historical grammatical context, should be maintained. The meaning of scripture is neither personal nor hidden. Once the necessary steps are taken anyone can discover it. Some of the current teachings of most protestant churches which condemn everything African are based on questionable Bible exegesis such as Allegory; Cabbalism and Symbolism. I was stunned when a pastor from a popular church cited I Kings 12:32-33 as his scriptural authority for condemning the cultural August Meeting for women.

In doing critical contextualization we need to remember that there are fundamental similarities underlying all cultures because they are rooted in the common humanity and shared experiences of all people. All people have bodies that function in the same ways. All people experience birth, life, death, Joy, sadness, pain, drives, fears and needs. All people are confronted by mysterious circumstances. All people create myths of origin, deity, spirits, world views, languages and cultures. All people have sinned and need salvation. Since these unifying factors make it possible for people in one culture to understand those in another culture; they also facilitate the development of cross-cultural frameworks for both indigenous and trans-cultural church doctrines.

We need to understand the cultural conditioning of our theologies. Some of us think that we preach a de-culturalized gospel, but there is no such thing. Christianity was launched within the matrix of Greco-Roman culture. If the Judaic background provided the revelation, the Greek and Roman cultures were means of expressing and spreading the revelation. We must not underestimate the fact that Christianity, as we know it, has worn the cultural garb of the western world for nearly twenty centuries. We may compare the Christian faith to a beautiful song. The biblical revelation is the words while theology is the music and rhythm. Although the words remain constant, the music and rhythm keep

changing according to generation mores. That is why Christian theology is never stated once and for all. According to Tienou (1982), every generation of Christians in all cultures must tackle seriously its theological tasks. The plurality of theology namely: Catholic theology; Evangelical theology; Pentecostal theology; African theology; Black theology; Ethiopic theology etc. confirms the above fact. The plurality of theology also confronts us with the fact that there are several ways to interpret the same scriptures with honesty. This involves not only a study of the biblical texts but also the historical contexts in which they were written.

Summary

The study investigated eight cultural rites with the aim of highlighting their nature, and similarity to Christian rituals. The psychological significance of the rites and the implications of the findings were pointed out. The research ended with the relevant recommendations for peaceful coexistence of church and culture and suggestions for further studies.

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