1.1 Background to the study

The beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general cannot be over-emphasized. Ancestral veneration is one of the central and basic traditional forms of cult especially in Black Africa, South of the Sahara and other parts of the world such as China, Malaysia, and Polynesia. Aspect of this type of worship or religious expression or practice is traceable to the ancient Egyptians and Romans. The ancient Hebrews also had various aspects of it. However, their worship was more of a reverence for the dead.

Let me substantiate. In China the practice is very ancient back before 1000BC. Beyer, Graven, Mcfarland and Parker (1990,p.116) found that extending the spirits of family ancestors “were thought to have the powers to bring good luck or disaster to living members of the family. ... Every family paid respect to its ancestors and made small shrines in their honour.”

In Malaysia family rites were addressed to deceased kindred who were thought to be always close by and always concerned that
the traditional way of life should remain the same. In Polynesian societies the attitude to the ancestors was that of reverence and expectation of help and guidance, but it involved little worship. In ancient Egypt ancestral worship was traceable. There was a belief that at death the soul could live on if the body was preserved, joining the king of the dead, Osiris, in eternal happiness. Beyer, et al (1990, p.80) also found out that “Ideas about the “Next World” led ancient Egyptians to believe that the dead would need clothing and food”. It should be noted that the common man did not venerate his ancestors but he commemorated their names. In ancient Rome ancestor worship was a family affair, not a public one. The deceased joined the Manes, the household gods. They visited the families and gained immortality by reliving on earth.

The Israelites practised ancestor worship in those days. Browning (1996, p.16) observed that “The real or supposed ancestors of the Hebrews were venerated and were felt to be so close that their descendants even continued to suffer for their sins (Exodus 20:5)”. Parrinder in his book “The Bible And Polygamy” (1950, p.21) also believed that ancestor-worship was practised by the Israelites in the Old Testament. According to him: “Remnants of Totemism, of various
Taboos, and of Ancestor-worship, are to be discovered in the Old Testament”.

It appears there is no doubt that the Israelites venerated the spirits of their departed relatives. But there is no conclusive evidence which shows that ancestor worship or cult of the dead was practised by the Israelites. Probably the idea of life after death did not appear very early in the Old Testament periods, but it did occur later.

Ancestral veneration is a regular occurrence among the people of Nigeria. The people prior to Christian missionary intrusion believed and still believe in the universe full of spirits which include the Supreme Being, the divinities, the ancestors and other spiritual beings such as the ghosts, or evil spirits.

Ancestors also played active roles in the lives of their children and grandchildren. The people venerated their ancestors by praying and making sacrifices to the spirits of their ancestors. Adetoro (1976, p.61) observed “that the Yorubas had a yearly festival for the ancestors.

Ancestral veneration (perhaps erroneously called Ancestor worship) is not a religion in and of itself but rather a facet of belief that deceased family members have continued existence, takes an
interest in the affairs of the world, and possess the ability to influence either positively or negatively the fortune of the living. Ancestral veneration is the proper word and not ancestor worship hence this act of “worship” (reverence) does not confer any belief that the departed ancestors have become some kind of deity. Rather the act is a way to respect, honour and look after ancestors in their afterlives as well as possibly seek their guidance for their living descendants. In this regard, many cultures and religions have similar practices. Some may visit the grave of his parents or other ancestors, leave flowers and pray to them in order to honour and remember them while also asking their deceased relatives to continue to look after them.

In Ezza community in Abakaliki, “Onwa-Eke” which usually takes place either in December or January yearly is the very month the ancestors are remembered. Kola nuts, cocks, foodstuffs, palm wine, goats are objects offered to them. Izzi people in Abakaliki in similar manner remember the ancestors by feeding them on “Otutara”. Ikwo, Ngbo and other North-eastern Igbo people also remember the ancestors yearly in their own areas of habitation. The people of North-eastern Igbo do not have a uniform month for remembering the ancestors. Arinze (1970,p.20) has noted in his “Sacrifice in Ibo Religion” that a special yearly festival which normally falls around
August time is the time all the ancestors are honoured but the North-eastern Igbo people have different months according to the community by which the ancestors are honoured.

It has to be noted that there is no uniformity of beliefs, and practices of ancestral cult in African society. There are a lot of variations. In fact, one often finds differences of details even in a country or the same ethnic group.

The roles of the ancestors in African society are obvious. They act as intermediaries between Deity or the divinities and their own children. They also act as guardians of traditional morality as well as serve as factors of cohesion in African society. Parrinder (1974,p 57) quoting Young in “African Ideas of God” rightly noted that life has no meaning in traditional African society “apart from ancestral presence and ancestral power”. However, in spite of the important roles ancestors play in the lives of the traditional Africans, some people still nurse the idea that the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration are now irrelevant, outmoded and something properly fitted into the era of barbaric primitiveness. Those who buy this view claim that only a handful of the traditional Africans - a very insignificant remnants - still believe, practise, and worship their ancestors. They claim that the practice will soon die a natural death
because the practice can no longer withstand the influence of Christianity and Western education. However, the traditional Africans do not agree with them. They strongly believe that ancestral veneration is a time-honoured custom which will persist and continue to be practised as long as man exists on this planet Earth.

In view of this argument, the researcher carried out a research work on the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland with a view to determining the truth or falsity of their assertions. The researcher also examined the impact of Christianity and Western education on ancestral veneration. This enabled him as well to ascertain the extent Christianity and Western education promoted or retarded ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Young in Parrinder (1974, p.57) noted that life has no meaning in traditional African society “apart from ancestral presence and ancestral power”. Parrinder further observed that “all Ibo believe that their lives are profoundly influenced by their ancestors, and this belief has far-reaching sociological consequences... Sacrifice has to be offered to them at regular intervals or when a diviner indicates”. It is
a truism that ancestral spirits play crucial roles in the lives of traditional Africans. Their presence in the spiritual realm cannot be overemphasized.

Yet in spite of the importance of the ancestors in African society most people claim that the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland in particular and Africa as a whole is on the wane or in decline. They claim that only a negligible few still believe and practise ancestral veneration. Ancestral veneration is said to be of no importance to the traditional and contemporary people in North-eastern Igboland. A good number of people are apprehensive that ancestral veneration is gradually dying out as a result of western education and Christianity.

But another group – the traditional Africans and those who were not converted to Christianity claim that beliefs, practices and veneration of ancestors is very much alive in North-eastern Igboland in particular and all over Africa. The practice however, varies among peoples of Africa. The group says that the importance of the ancestors cannot be overemphasized in African Traditional Religion and culture. They claim that the traditional Africans strongly believe that ancestors occupy the place of Saints in Christianity and wonder why Christian
Missionaries could not see reason and allow them unmolested in paying reverence to ancestors as the Christians do to their saints.

The above-mentioned points are the problems of this research which the researcher examined so as to determine the authenticity or falsity of these two opposing groups of African peoples.

Moreover no scholar has carried out an in-depth research on the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration and how Christianity impacted it in this part of Igboland. The researcher therefore, considered it a desideratum to conduct a research work in this topic so as to lay to rest the arguments and the misconception, misinterpretation and outright condemnation of ancestral veneration in this part of the country.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose or objective of this study is to examine the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igbo society and the extent Christianity and western education impacted on it. In particular, the study examined:

(a) The extent the North-eastern Igbo people believe in ancestral veneration.
(b) The extent the ancestral veneration is still being practised in the area.

(c) The relevance of ancestral veneration among the people

(d) The impact of Christianity, Western education and medicine on ancestral veneration in the area.

(e) The prospects of ancestral veneration in contemporary Northwestern Igbo society of Nigeria.

1.4 The significance of the study

The importance of this study cannot be overemphasized.

The importance rests on the following points:

(1) The study will help to show that ancestral veneration still remains an important component of various practices in ancient and modern times.

(2) The study will also show that the dead are not permanently severed from the living; that all religions have some kind of belief in an afterlife although by no means uniform.

(3) The study will serve as a guide for people unfamiliar with how ancestral veneration is actually practised and thought of in this part of the country. This will go a long way in avoiding misunderstanding.
(4) This research work will also serve as a reference to other research fellows who may likely carry out similar research work in North-eastern Igboland of Nigeria.

(5) The research work will equally be relevant to ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, missionaries and the government as well as the communities in understanding this cultural aspect of the peoples’ traditions and way of life.

(6) Finally the study will help immensely in inter-religious dialogue between the Christians and the traditional worshippers. This will bring about religious toleration which will inevitably enhance peaceful co-existence of one another irrespective of one’s religious leaning.

1.5 The Scope (or delimitation) of the Study

The scope of the study covers the four principal clans or communities namely Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo (which includes Ezzangbo). These communities belong to the North-eastern Igbo group as anthropologists have classified them. Linguistically and culturally they belong to other people that make up the major culture group in South-eastern Nigeria. Ottenberg (2005, p.5) says “Linguistic evidence suggests that these four groups [communities] have resided
at Abakaliki for a substantial period of time, and that they probably had a common origin”.

The communities that make up the four principal clans that are to be covered are:

(1) **Ezza** which comprise the following communities: Amana, Amezekwe, Idembia, Amagu, Achara, Nsokara, Okoffia, Amudo. The above communities, eight in number make up Nsokara Ezza. The Kpakpaji group include the following communities: Nkomoro, Ameka, Ezzama, Amuzu, Ekka, Iyere, Oriuzor, Umuezeokoha, Umuoghara, Umuezeoka, Ogboji, Amawula, Okpomoro and Amuda.

(2) **Izzi** clan has the following communities: A - Amagu group - Amagu, Enyigba, Ishieke, Eda, Inyimagu, Okpuitumo, Amachi, Igbeagu. B - Ebia group, which includes Ebia, Nkaliki, Agbaja and Achara.

(3) **Ikwo** clan comprises A -Umuaka moiety - Akpelu, Ezeke, Muta, Effium, Amanguru, Achara uku and Ameka. B. -Utaku Moiety- which includes Alike, Achara, Inyimagu, Igbudu, Amagu, Okpuitumo, and Akpanwudele.
(7) Ngbo clan includes Ekwasi, Ukaba, Amoffia, Umuezeaka, Umugudu akpu, Umugudu osia, Okposi Eti and Okposi Ahak. Ezzangbo group include Umuagara, Amechi, Amike and Nsulakpa.

1.6 Methodology

The methodology adopted was the phenomenological approach whereby the researcher carried out an impartial and systematic study and description of the phenomena as they present themselves. Data were collected through two main sources. The first source - primary source was made up of artifacts such as tools and objects left behind by the ancestors and ancestral huts and tombs where they were remembered by their living relatives as well as oral evidence collected from the living practitioners of Igbo traditional religion in North-eastern Igboland particularly in Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo/Ezzamgbo Communities. Data from these people were collected through oral interviews, participant observation method whereby the researcher witnessed and participated in the events as they happened and recorded them objectively. Oral interview and direct observation were used as major instruments to obtain data for the study. The second source – secondary source – was made up of published works
on the research topic or related topics by previous scholars. This involved intensive library research on published and unpublished works of scholars. These works were critically examined. In addition, some records from the Archives in Enugu were consulted. The research methodology adopted was survey research because of the largeness of the area. Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo/Ezzamgbo communities were surveyed to ascertain the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland.

In this process of data collection from the field, the researcher used field assistants and local guides and interpreters which facilitated the field work in some areas it could not understand properly the local idioms. However, he has to state that the local dialects of Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo people are very intelligible among themselves because they descended from a common ancestor. The researcher who hailed from one of those sub-culture area did not find it difficult to understand the dialects of the other three communities in spite of minor dialectical variations.

1.7 Definition of key terms

**Ancestor** is any forebear or progenitor from whom one is descended.
**Worship** is the respect or reverence man pays to God or a god by saying prayers, singing with others, offering sacrifices, etc. In other words, it is a religious ritual which salute, revere or praise the deity.

**Ritual/ rite** is a set of acts or actions that are always carried out in the same way, usually involving religious ceremony.

**Death** is the total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of man. It is the end of life here on earth.

**Hereafter** is a life or existence after death.

**Ancestor-worship** is the religious worship of ancestors based on the belief that they possess supernatural power.

**Community/ Clan** is a group of people who are related to one another through descent from a common ancestor.

**Christianity** is the religion that is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the belief that he was the son of God.

**A missionary** is a person sent to a foreign country to teach about Christianity

**North-eastern Igbo (Sub-culture zone)** includes Nike, Enugu, Nsukka, Ezza, Izzi, Abakaliki, which is part of Izzi, Ngbo/Ezzamgbo, and Ikwo areas. Others are Agba, Isu, Onicha and Okposi areas. However, the researcher covered only the four sub-culture areas – Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo/Ezzangbo. These peoples were the early
inhabitants who dominated Abakaliki at the time of the movement of British colonial forces in the first decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. They dominated abakaliki in those days and are still found there today. Linguistically and culturally they are a part of the Igbo-speaking people, whose more than ten million members form the major culture group in south-eastern Nigeria.

The researcher deliberately chose this sub-culture area approach because it would provide a better and more functional framework for this discussion. This would go a long way in avoiding the negative effects of sweeping generalization of Igbo Religion which scholars of Igbo religion have been raising in literature since the days of G.I. Jones, C.I. Ejizu, Onwuejeowu and others.

\textbf{Veneration} is the respect or reverence man pays to the ancestors or the saint either directly or through images or relics.

\textbf{Sacrifice} is a religious act which normally involves oblation (act of offering) and immolation (the act of killing) of an animal or person to the supernatural being or beings. In some cases the animal or person could be left un-killed and be dedicated and allowed to roam or wander about.

\textbf{Prayer} is a solemn request or thanksgiving to God or any object of worship.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of related literature will be done in the following order: Ancestor and the concept and origin of ancestor worship, the argument which centres on whether ancestors are worshipped or merely venerated in traditional African society. Attempt will also be made to review the conditions that qualify a deceased member to become an ancestor, the roles or functions of the ancestors as well as how they are remembered by their living relatives.

The researcher will also review the concept of death and its relation to traditional, Jewish and Christian belief systems as well as the issue of reincarnation. Finally, he will review the impact of Christianity on ancestral veneration and other related traditional practices in Igboland with special reference to North-eastern Igbo people.

2.1 Ancestor

Webster’s Encyclopaedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1989, p.54) defines an ancestor as “one from whom a
person is descended; forefather; progenitor”. H.H. Farmer in Idowu (1973, p.179) observed that the ancestor:

“is a departed spirit who stands in peculiarly close relation to the tribe or the family: the life of the latter has been derived from him, and because he is still in existence he is still in a sense one with it; his favour or disfavour has therefore a sharply focused relation to it and is more urgently to be sought or avoided”.

Ancestors are departed spirits - heroes and heroines - who have gone to the spirit world. They are indeed our forebears or progenitors from whom we descended. They are the members of our families but they are no longer ordinary mortals hence they are incorporeal beings. They are the spirits of the dead persons whom the traditional Africans regard as relatives who continue to influence the affairs of the living. They are what Mbiti (1969, p. 83) calls the “living-dead” because even though they are dead here on earth, they still live in the world of spirits and “relate to the living for help and for harm”. According to Braswell (1994, p. 145) “They may bring prosperity to individuals, families, and tribes in times of planting, war, and childbirth. They may also cause sickness, death, and drought. Ancestors elicit attitudes of both awe and dread”.

Ancestors indeed include subtle bodies of all our known and unknown departed relations from all the previous generations and
relatives from all the previous generation from the father’s and mother’s side as well as the eldest son and his family.

A distinction has to be made between Deity, the divinities and the ancestors. Idowu (1973, p.184) summarized the distinction in this way:

Africans made a distinction between Deity, the divinities, and the ancestors: Deity and the divinities are distinctly, out-and-out, of the super-sensible world, while the ancestors are of the living persons’ kith and kin. The ancestors are related to the living community in a way that cannot be claimed for Deity or the divinities who are definitely of a different order. The ancestors are regarded still as heads and parts of the family or communities to which they belonged while they were living human beings: for what happened in consequence of the phenomenon called death was only that the family life of this earth has been extended into the afterlife or super-sensible world. The ancestors remain, therefore, spiritual superintendents of family affairs and continue to bear their titles of relationship like “father” or “mother”.

The ancestors are related to the Deity and divinities in certain respects and differ from them also in certain ways. They are related to the divinities because they are invisible beings living incorporeal existences. However, according to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, pp.274-275) they differ from the divinities in the following ways:
(a) Each divinity has his or her own priests or priestesses, but no official priest or priestess is attached to the ancestral shrines. The head of each family officiates at the house-hold shrine.
(b) Divinities usually have images symbolizing their presence, but images representing ancestors are rare.
(c) Ancestors are still regarded as members of the family, whereas the divinities are of another distinct order - they emanated from the Supreme Being.
(d) The sphere of influence of the ancestors is rather limited to the family to which they belonged while here on earth, while the areas of operation of the divinities are extended to the family, the clan, the ethnic group, and to a certain extent, to the race.

The ancestors also differ from the Deity (Supreme Being) in the following respects. The ancestors act as intermediaries between Deity or the divinities and their own children. The ancestors are not of the rank and file of the Deity. They owe their existence to the Supreme Being. The Supreme being is “Wholly Other” and above the ancestors and even the divinities. The ancestors serve the will of God and help Him in the theocratic control and maintenance of the universe.

### 2.2 The Concept and Origin of Ancestor Worship

According to Encyclopedia Britannica (1975: Vol.1 P.835). “The term ancestor worship describes, in a broad and loose sense, a variety of religious beliefs and practices concerned with the spirits of dead
persons regarded as relatives, some of whom may be mythical”. Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions (1999,p.54) probably borrowed this definition from Encyclopedia Britannica because its own definition is almost the same with that of Encyclopedia Britannica. It defined ancestor worship as “any of a variety of religious beliefs and practices concerned with the spirit of dead persons regarded as relatives, some of whom may be mythical”.

Ancestor worship is a term usually used to refer to devotion, and honour which is beyond veneration accorded to dead relative. A simple and clear definition is that of Lawman (2004, p.11) which defines ancestor worship as “the religious worship of ancestors based on the belief that they possess supernatural power”. Ancestral veneration has the same definition as ancestor worship except that it is contended that veneration supposed to be the right word to use hence ancestors are not worshipped like the Supreme Being; rather they are venerated.

It is not certain how ancestor-worship came about. However, the religious status of departed souls, especially the souls of ancestors has long been established. Paterson (1928,p.362) quoted Tylor as having said that “The worship of the Manes or ancestors”, “has been
one of the main branches of the religions of mankind”. Paterson (1928,p.362) further observed that:

Ancestor-worship is of high antiquity. It is vouched for in the prehistoric ages by the dolmen and the cromlech, which were certainly associated with the cult of the dead, and are perhaps the monuments of a spiritualistic movement which in early times swept over southern and western Europe, and gave a new direction and intensity to man’s communion with the unseen realm. The cult has struck root among all races, it has sometimes dominated the religious life, when overpowered it has usually been able to make terms with its conqueror, and to this day millions find in it their chief religious occupation and consolation.

Ancestor worship is traceable to a Greek Romantic writer and philosopher by name Euhemeros of Macedonia (320-260 B.C) who attributed the origin of religion to the deification of heroes and ancestors. His theory is popularly called Euhemerism. He asserted that men (heroes) among fellowmen were deified after their death and that some of them even raised themselves to divine status even before their death. Parrinder (1974, p.31) summarized it thus:

The Greek Philosopher Euhemeros of Macedonia (320-260 B.C) said that gods were departed chiefs and warriors, who had been venerated before their death and deified afterwards. From this he deduced that all the gods came from human ancestors, and that the myths concerning them enshrined memories of historical events.
James (1956, pp.6-7) perhaps captured the view of this philosopher more accurately when he observed that:

This ancient author had tried to prove that all the Greek gods, like Zeus and his companions who lived together on Mount Olympus in Thessaly, in the manner of the old invading Northern chieftains, were simply rulers and benefactors of mankind, who had won the gratitude of their subjects, and after their death they had been raised to divine rank in heaven as immortals, classed with the sun and the moon and the stars, the corn and the wine, all of which had been deified.

There are historical supports to Euhemerism. It is on record that some Roman emperors were deified after their death while some proclaimed themselves divine during their life-time. The Egyptians even before the Romans did the same thing. Deification of heroes and ancestors is also applicable to African Traditional Religion. Sango, for example, is a deified hero among the Yoruba. However, Euhemeros offered a partial explanation of religion but failed to tell us the origin of religion as such. That is, he failed to show in an unmistakable term how men came to the idea of the divine.

Hebert Spencer (1820-1903), an anthropologist and the nineteenth-century founder of the social sciences in England upheld the same opinion as that of Euhemeros. Spencer in his Principles of Sociology (1885) argued very convincingly that ancestor-worship
(including the hero cult) was the basis of human religion. “Using the phrase ancestor-worship”, he said, “in its broadest sense as comprehending all worship of the dead, be they of the same blood or not, we reach the conclusion that ancestor-worship is the root of every religion”. James (1956, p.7) stated the view of Spencer in this way:

So Herbert Spencer maintained that the origin and development of the concept of Deity was the result of the propitiation, worship and deification of the illustrious dead. Having been regarded with awe and reverence during their lifetime, after their death, their ghost were venerated and propitiated until around them an established worship developed.

Herbert Spencer strongly believed that ancestor worship was the root of every religion but many scholars did not agree with him. For instance, his theory has been shown to be untenable by E.O James. James (1956, p. 7) said that his theory:

was too specialized and intellectualized an approach to explain adequately the origin and history of religion. Moreover, as evidence accumulated, it became impossible to fit the facts into these theoretical schemes and sequences, be they Tylorian, Frazerian or Specerian.

Although veneration of ancestors feature in most religions the world over, it does not follow that ancestor-worship is the root of every religion. Onyeidu (2001, p.21) in this regard observed that:
While this theory [that is ancestor-worship] could be sustained for culture areas where ancestral worship is predominant, there are some part of the world where religion developed without any reference to ancestral cult.

Anderson (1955, p.10) told us that Andrew Lang “Scoffed at the idea that gods were originally departed human souls which would account for a belief in Ancestor-Worship as basic to all religion”. In spite of the criticisms leveled against this theory, it has been shown to be sound by some scholars notably Joseph McCabe.

Grant Allen, in his work titled “The Evolution of God” followed the same theory of Herbert Spencer. He quoted a lot of materials from the life of African tribes to prove his assertion but unfortunately his theory was displaced by a new theory conceived by E. B. Tylor in his “Primitive Culture” which was published in 1871. His theory is called Animism. Animism is a word derived from the Latin word anima which means “breath, breath of life and hence carried with it the idea of the soul or spirit”. Tylor stressed the importance of the soul both in defining religion and in understanding the evolutionary stages through which religious phenomena have passed. According to him the belief in spiritual beings or souls – animism – constitutes the minimum definition of religion. Tylor argued very convincingly that the belief in
spiritual beings and forces in nature brought about religious experience.

Haralambos and Holborn (2004, p.407) noted that Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), a French Sociologist argued very convincingly that the belief in gods or spirits originated from belief in the ancestral spirits of dead relatives. Durkheim claimed that the worship of gods was really the worship of ancestors’ souls.

2.3 Are the Ancestors worshipped or merely venerated?

It is perhaps Herbert Spencer who more than any other person, expounded the phrase “ancestor worship” in his Principles of Sociology (1885). Since then other writers have borrowed it and applied it to religion in Africa. Mbiti (1969, p.8) observed that other writers have borrowed the phrase and applied it almost to anything the Africans do in the way of religious ceremonies. Nowadays books abound that speak of “ancestor worship” to describe African religions. In fact, the whole religious system of the Africans was daubed “ancestor-worship” “because of the fact of the cults of the ancestors” (Onunwa 2005, p.70). Idowu (1973, p.38) rightly observed that the deification of ancestors is not alien to African belief especially in places the cult of the ancestors were predominant but warned that
nobody as certain investigators had done should “rush to the conclusion that all is “ancestor worship”. Parrinder (1974, pp.63) lamented that “Many writers still speak of the ancestral cults as religious worship”.

Many eminent writers have observed that ancestor worship should not be applied exclusively to African Traditional Religion hence it is a phenomenon that touched all religions of mankind. Paterson (1928, pp.362-363) observed that ancestor worship is of high antiquity. He believed that the cult has struck root among all races of mankind. There is no doubt that belief in the ancestors is one of the elements of African Traditional Religion. Ancestral Cults are found everywhere in African society. The ancestors are venerated and they receive regular offerings from their offspring. Mbiti (1969, p.8) said “certainly it cannot be denied that the departed occupy an important place in African religiosity; but it is wrong to interpret traditional religions simply in terms of “worshipping the ancestors”. Parrinder (1974, p.64) said “Other writers are positive that it is grossly misleading to speak of ancestor-worship”. He cited Cullen Young, J. H. Driberg as eminent scholars who said that ancestor worship should be dropped in describing African religion. Cullen young said that the phrase is “a highly misleading term”. J. H. Driberg says emphatically
“No African prays to his dead grandfather any more than he ‘prays’ to his living father”. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004, p.73) observed that “The term ancestor worship is a very unfortunate term indeed and if allowed to go unchallenged, one of the major elements on which the African theology is based is destroyed for good”.

Many writers believe that the traditional Africans do not worship the ancestors, rather they venerate them. In this regard Mbiti (1969, p.9) observed:

Libation and the giving of food to the departed are tokens of fellowship, hospitality and respect; the drink and food so given are symbols of family continuity and contact. ‘Worship’ is the wrong word to apply in this situation; and Africans themselves know very well that they are not ‘worshipping’ the departed members of their family. It is almost blasphemous, therefore, to describe these acts of family relationships as ‘worship’. Furthermore, African religions do not end at the level of family rites of libation and food offerings. They are deeper and more comprehensive than that. To see them only in terms of ‘ancestor worship’ is to isolate a single element, which in some societies is of little significance, and to be blind to many other aspects of religion.

To use ancestor worship to describe the whole religions of the Africans is not only misleading but grossly inaccurate. It is just like describing the religions as “fetiches” Franklin (1947,p.31). Franklin
said that to describe these religions as such “is to place upon them a connotation that is at once inaccurate and incomplete”.

There is no doubt however, that the traditional Africans hold the ancestors in high esteem and accord them all the reverence and honour due to them through offering them food and drink, naming them in prayers, naming children after them and by consulting them during any undertaking and rituals. Onunwa (2005, p.70) lamented that because the Africans accord them all the reverence and honour due to them, many a foreign investigators erroneously claimed that Africans worship the ancestors and that their religion was “ancestors-worship”.

The bone of contention is whether the Africans worship the ancestors or do they only venerate them. But what is worship and veneration? Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (2000, p.1496) defines worship as “the practice of showing respect for God or a god, by saying prayers, singing with others, etc”. Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, Centenary Edition (1970, p.1166) says “worship literally “worth-ship” mean “honour, dignity, reverence; in its highest and now usual sense, the respect and reverence man pays to God”. The two definitions above unmistakably show that worship simply means the respect and reverence man pays to God (Supreme
Being) or god for example, the divinities in African Traditional Religion.

Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1989, p.1584) defines veneration as “the feeling of one who venerates; a feeling of awe, respect, etc; reverence.” To venerate according to Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995, p.1616) means to “regard with deep respect”, to “revere on account of sanctity, etc”. Veneration according to the definitions from the two dictionaries above clearly show that veneration is the feeling of deep respect and reverence to somebody or something but does not refer to gods or ancestors or God. A Catholic Dictionary edited by Donald Attwater (1958, pp.512-513) brings out clearly the difference between veneration and worship. It said that veneration is the “word commonly used to express in English that worship (hyperdulia, dulia) given to the saint, either directly or through images or relics, which is different in kind from the divine worship (adoration, latria,) given to God only”.

From the foregoing exposition and elucidation, the two words worship and veneration are very clear and unambiguous. Worship is the respect, and reverence man as a religious being pays to the Supreme Deity, gods (divinities and other spiritual beings) as it is
obtainable in African Traditional Religion; and the Supreme Deity as it is obtainable in monotheistic religions while veneration is the respect and reverence man pays to saints, angels, in Christianity, ancestors in African Traditional Religion.

To be frank, Africans do not worship the ancestors because it is exclusively reserved for the Supreme Deity and the divinities. Idowu (1973, p.182) told us that the difference between worship and veneration is very thin; that worship and veneration “are psychologically closer than next door to each other”. He strongly believed that African peoples venerate their ancestors but however maintained that veneration could be so intense as to slip to worship hence they are closely related. Parrinder (1974, pp.65-66) suggested that the attitude to the different classes of the spiritual beings could be expressed nearly in terms used in Roman Catholic theology. He said:

Latria is used to denote that Supreme worship which is due and accorded to God alone. Dulia is the reverence and homage that should be paid to saints and angels. Hyperdulia is used of the special homage paid to the Virgin Mary.

It might be helpful to speak of Latria for the Supreme Being alone in Africa, with Hyperdulia for the gods and Dulia for the ancestors. But many African tribes have no true worship of gods; their place is taken by the ancestors.
African peoples do not put a borderline between worship and veneration because they are synonymous. They do not bother whether the honour, reverence or homage they accord to the ancestors, spirits, divinities or Supreme Being is worship or veneration. Parrinder’s (1974, p.66) observation is very apposite here and I quote him with approval:

Perhaps Europeans are too rigid, too insistent on fitting everything into strict categories, of worship or veneration. Africans do not bother unduly about this. They are concerned with life, and how to protect and augment it. Their philosophy of forces serves as sufficient guide. They go upwards in the hierarchy of forces, from men to ancestors, to gods, to the ultimate God, convinced that if one fails another will help. They do not debate as to whether ancestors are gods, or can be prayed to or not, they know that having passed beyond the grave the ancestors have “outsoared the shadow of our night”. They have acquired new powers, those powers may help men, and so men make any sort of appeal that may get succour in time of need.

What we are saying is that there is nothing wrong if they say we worship our ancestors or that we venerate them hence the two words can be used interchangeably. Awolalu (1979,p.64) is of the opinion that we actually worship our ancestors because the activities of the living at the grave of the ancestors or wherever the ancestors are invoked shows unmistakably “that what is done is much more than a secular rite or sheer veneration”. Awolalu (1979, p.65) tells us that
the problem of distinguishing between worship and veneration in connection with God/gods and ancestors is not peculiar to African religions but to Christianity as well. In his very words:

The Christian Church (especially Roman Catholicism) faces this same problem when she attempts to distinguish between worship and veneration in connection with the saints and the cult of Mary in particular. Holy Mary is constantly being invoked to pray for sinners. And when one attends a Roman Catholic Church, one may find that there is more genuflection before the symbol of Mary or Peter or any of the other saints than before the symbol of Jesus. Yet people claim that they worship only God but venerate the saints.

In conclusion let us quote Idowu (1973, p.186) once more:

Our conclusion is that while technically Africans do not put their ancestors, as ancestors, on the same footing with Deity or the divinities, there is no doubt that the ancestors receive veneration that may become so intense as to verge on worship or even become worship. Certainly the cults of the ancestors do not constitute African traditional religion, and that it is a gross error to equate them with the religion. The proper meaning of the ancestral cults derives from the belief of Africans that death does not write “finish” to life, that the family or community life of this earth has only become extended into the life beyond in consequence of the “dead” of the ancestors. Thus the cults are a means of communion and communication between those who are living on earth and those who have gone to live in the spirit world of the ancestors.
We can say without fear of contradiction that the traditional Africans do venerate and worship their ancestors for there exist elements of veneration and worship in the religious system of the living traditional Africans. The two words veneration and worship intermingle and commingle and it is very difficult if not impossible to know when one ends and the other continues. Quacoopome (1987, p.131) in his own observation claimed that the charge against ancestor worship is somehow justified because according to him, there are elements in the relationship and attitude of the living towards the ancestors that look like real worship. These are the offering of prayers and sacrifices.

Paterson (1928, p.363) observed that some Christian Missionaries who are well disposed to ancestor veneration or ancestor worship see ancestor worship as “a mode of showing reverence and gratitude to the departed which could easily be brought into harmony with the teaching of the Christian Church in regard to the communion of the saints” while others ill-disposed to the practice “have declared it to be sheer and abominable idolatry”.

The Traditional Africans firmly believe that the ancestors occupy the place of saints in Christianity. Omoregbe (1999, p.72) is among thousands of people who buy that idea. He stated clearly in his book
Comparative Religion: Christianity and Other World Religions in Dialogue” that:

Both Christianity and African indigenous Religion revere their dead members who led exemplary lives and are believed to be in heaven with God. They are prayed to in both religions and invoked for help since they are believed to be in a position to help those who pray to them. In Christianity they are called “Saints” while in African indigenous Religion they are called “ancestors”

Ancestral veneration is one of such areas compromise with Christianity seems very remote. Omoregbe (1999, p.27) has suggested that this is one of the areas Christianity has to enter into dialogue with African Traditional Religion hence their belief systems are similar with regard to the honour accorded to the dead. Davidson (1971, p.126) observed that the “appointed ancestors” were not unlike the canonized saints of the Christian church”.

2.4 Qualification for Ancestorhood

Africans believe that not every person that dies becomes automatically an ancestor. There are certain qualifications, which the deceased are supposed to have attained before they merit ancestorhood in the spirit world. Generally speaking, Africans believe that those who fulfill the following conditions are qualified to be ancestors:
(a) Those who attained a ripe old age before death.
(b) Those who lived good and upright lives here on earth.
(c) Those who left behind offspring particularly the male one.
(d) Those who died a good death.
(e) Those who left behind material wealth acquired justly.
(f) Those who received full burial rites after death and
(g) Those who were judged well by the deity or the “court of the ancestors”.

Now, let me substantiate on the points raised above. Those persons who attained a ripe old age are believed to be acceptable as ancestors. Age matters a lot in African belief system. The Africans believe that a person of age is more suitable for an ancestor than those who departed in the prime of life. However, in some locality or tribe, those who have offspring but died at an early age could become ancestors. Idowu (1973, p.187) lent credence to this view when he said: “But it appears that even those who departed in the prime of life or relatively young can become ancestors, provided they have offspring before their decease”.

The above quotation shows that having offspring is a necessity for attainment of ancestorhood. The issue of old age could be waved aside provided the person left behind offspring especially male one.
Even in some cases a person who lived a good and upright life even though he/she had no issue could be admitted into the spirit world of the deceased. Idowu (1973, p.187) again gave credence to the above statement when he said:

> It appears also that there are those who although they are not strictly qualified in the way described above, may be admitted into the spirit world of the deceased because they are good and their days on earth are done, even though they may be young and childless.

Those who could be admitted in this manner, that is without any offspring and without attainment of old age are those of high moral and ethical standards and who contributed immensely to the welfare and advancement of the communities while alive. They are those who lived good and upright lives. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004, pp.69-70) threw more light on this point when they observed:

> The person must have lived a decent life while on earth. So for one to live a decent life on earth one must not be associated with those behaviours that diminish life – theft, adultery, poisoning, witchcraft and the totality of what is regarded as abominations in the society. It is only when one is not shown to be “bad” in terms of doing the above evils, that one can be considered to have lived a decent moral life on earth and as a result can attain the status of ancestorhood at death.

The ancestors demand a high sense of respect for the traditional law and custom. Such offences above as well as taboo-breaking,
covenant - breaking, and dereliction of duty on the part of their offspring are some of the sins against the ancestors and other spiritual beings.

Furthermore, another qualification for ancestorhood is that the person did not die a “bad death”. Those who died bad deaths are believed to be disqualified as ancestor. Some types of death are generally considered as bad deaths. They include those who died of thunder bolt, leprosy, small pox, swollen stomach, suicide, on the way side, etc. The above types of deaths are generally considered as punishment from the cosmic forces and victims are not mourned as their fate is thought to have been clearly decided by the divinities who are agents of the Supreme Deity. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004, pp.71-72) gave more examples of what bad death entails:

Violent and accidental deaths are bad deaths. Suicide and the death of widows or widowers still wearing mourning dress/clothes are regarded as bad deaths. Also included among bad deaths are the deaths of those who make confessional statements of their heinous deeds and people who die while waiting for the expiry date of oath taking. Oath taking may last for months or one year. To die while awaiting the expiration of period is bad death. Deaths resulting from dreadful disease such as leprosy, madness, swollen abdomen and prolonged diseases are regarded as bad deaths.
It should be noted that the list of bad deaths is not exhaustive. There are many deaths considered to be bad deaths according to each locality, tribe or country.

Another qualification for ancestorhood is the possession of material wealth. Material wealth is a necessary condition for attainment of ancestorhood. However, the wealth must be acquired justly. Wealth is necessary so that the children of the deceased could perform the full burial rites which are usually elaborate. Full burial rites are necessary so that the deceased could be acceptable to the “court of the ancestors”. It is widely believed all over Africa that burial rites are desiderata after fulfilling other conditions discussed earlier. Above all, the deceased must be judged well by the Deity or “Court of the ancestors” to be acceptable for ancestorhood. If the deceased do not receive the blessings of “the Court of the ancestors” or the Supreme Deity, definitely they would be thrown out in “ancestral world.

2.5 The roles (functions) of the Ancestors

The reasons why the worshippers of ancestral spirits address themselves to the dead has been the subject of much controversy among the anthropologists. Paterson (1928,p.363) tells us that one
group of anthropologists contend that the ancestors (ancestral spirits) “were regarded as friendly beings with whom it was a privilege and a loving duty to hold communion” while other group contend that the ancestral spirits “were unfriendly beings against whom they had to protect themselves by defensive and offensive measures”. Paterson (1928, p.363) argues that:

It would seem that, while some could be reckoned on as well disposed- as the child, the father, and the old friend who had passed from sight - the ghosts were regarded as on the whole wayward and malicious, and even disposed to be jealous and vindictive out of resentment at the cruel fate which had overtaken themselves.

In Africa, the traditional Africans do not express any iota of doubt why they venerate or worship the ancestors. They strongly believe that the ancestors perform crucial roles in the lives of the people. They believe that the ancestors perform the following roles in the lives of the family and the community.

Firstly, they act as intermediaries between deity or the divinities and their own children. In this regard Quarcoopome (1987,p.130) rightly observes:

The ancestors seem to be the best group of intermediaries between the divinities and God on the one hand and men on the other since they have full access to the channels of communicating directly with the divine beings. As intermediaries from above
they have delegated authority from God. They have the mandate to reward right conduct and to punish the whole tribe or clan or lineage or family or the individual for crime against the society.

The ancestors are regarded generally as friendly beings in the land of the dead who intercede for the living and reward those of high moral tone while at the same time punish offenders.

Secondly, the ancestors are the guardians of traditional morality. They are superintendents of family affairs and are believed to aid or hinder, promote prosperity or cause adversity to the living human beings on earth. They are said to complain when they are neglected and to punish for dereliction of filial duties on the part of their offspring. Arinze (1970, p.19) with respect to Igbo religion observed that “The ancestors, together with and under the spirit, Ani, are the guardians of public morality, and also safeguard against any perpetual alienation of the traditional family land”. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, p.276) in their own observation noted that:

Belief in ancestors supplies strong sanctions for public morality. They are guardians of traditional morality. They, therefore, demand a high sense of respect for the traditional law and custom. The living must live as they have lived. It is believed that just as the living parents have power to punish disobedience in the youth or dereliction of filial duties, so also the neglected or offended ancestors can punish their offspring for moral offenses, and they can bring disaster upon the whole family. Thus,
murder, sorcery, witchcraft, stealing, adultery, bearing false witness, taking false oath, hatred, incest and other evils are all condemned and punished by the ancestors.

The ancestors also serve as factors of cohesion in African society. This is clearly illustrated among the Ashanti people of Ghana where the sacred Golden Stool which is the ancestral symbol is regarded as the shrine and symbol of the national soul. Idowu (1073, p.185) buttressed this point when he rightly observed:

The ancestors are factors of cohesion in African society. This is a fact well illustrated in the sacred stools which are the ancestral symbols of the Ashanti, especially the Golden Stool. R.S Rattray describes the Golden Stool as the “shrine and symbol of the national soul; the great umbrella covering the stool when brought out in a procession, or during an open-air ceremonial, is known as Katamanso – the covering of the nation. It is the supreme symbol of the ancestral genius of the nation and is thus that which gives the nation a sense of cohesion.

The Golden Stool is a work of art even though some claim it fell down from heaven. Buah (1970, pp.111-112) observed that Akomfo Anokye, a most intelligent and powerful priest during the time of king Osei Tutu told the people that:

God had sent down Golden Stool from heaven. The stool, he said contained the spirit of the Ashante people, and just as a man could not live when his soul departed so the Ashante as a people would disappear from history if ever the Golden Stool were
taken away from them. The Ashante had to guard and protect the stool at all costs, as they would protect their individual souls.

What we could gather from Anokye’s statement is that Golden Stool is an important ancestral symbol that cannot be toyed with among the Ashante people of Ghana. Brain (1980, p.181) was deeply convinced that the Golden Stool was a work of art and the heart and soul of the people. In his very words, “The carved stool is the soul of the lineage and the soul of the nation, the sacred emblem of permanence and continuity”. The Golden Stool unites their ancestors under a single symbol.

In summary, the ancestors in the words of Kirwen (2005, p.39):

intercede for the living, influence the decision of the living, apportion blessings and property, acts as a link between the living, the dead and the spiritual world. They are the guardians and protectors of the living, and the cultural guardians. They give solutions to crises in life, control personal, social and communal life.

2.6 How the Ancestors are remembered

African people strongly believe that death is not the end of human life; that life continues beyond the grave; that a person continues to exist in the hereafter. In African Cultural knowledge, Kirwen (2005, p.16) noted that:
For Africans, Physical death is the beginning of the process of dying as one enters into the ancestral community. In fact, Africans do not die in a western sense; they merely transit into another community and then return in the persons of the newly born babies that carry their names. Furthermore, the ancestors being close to God the creator are seen as the owners of life and the protectors of the living and can order, control and affect the lives of the living for better or worse. The fact that they appear in dreams, is proof positive that they are still and interested in their friends and families that are still on the earth.

This is the reason why the Africans pay much attention in remembering the ancestors by offering food and drink to them, naming them in prayers, naming children after them, by consulting them during important undertakings and during family ceremonies and rituals such as those that mark the birth and initiation of children. It should be noted that remembrance of the dead concerns mainly the ancestors as those who are not qualified to be ancestors are quickly forgotten and are therefore hardly remembered when they die.

The adult members of the family, especially the heads of families pour out palm wine, palm oil, water, beer, bits of food and lobes/pieces of kola nuts on the ground or emblem or grave of the spirits of the family. In many countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, etc. there are often family shrines set apart for remembering
the ancestors. In some localities special days or months are set apart for remembering the ancestors. For example, in Ezza in Abakaliki, “Onwa-Eke” which normally takes place in December or January (depending on Ezza calendar) is the month the ancestors are fed yearly. In Ezza History, Culture and Civilization, Afoke and Nworie (2010, p.81) observed that the Onwe-Eke “feast was specifically celebrated to offer sacrifices to the dead ancestors of the clan”. Kola nut, cocks, goats, foodstuffs, palm wine are offered to them. The Izzi people of Abakaliki also feed the ancestors yearly in August/September. Steensel (1996, pp.147-148) tell us more about the yearly remembering of the ancestors by the Izzi people:

Otutara or Jioha is the festival in Izzi to feed the forefathers and all the dead people, who left children in the world. It is the time when people honour their dead parents. It is celebrated annually in memory of the ancestors. Sacrifices are made to the ancestors for the protection they give them, if one fails to celebrate this day, his forefathers will starve shamefully among the dead that day. Socially it is a shame not to be able to feed your parents on that day. The forefathers can avenge themselves with severe punishments, either by making his crops yield poorly or even by killing the person. It is a very strong tradition in Izzi. The elders resent the person who seems to have forgotten his deceased fathers. It is celebrated in August/September and lasts two days, always on Azua and Iboko. This festival marks the end of the year in Izzi. After Otutara the new farming year begins with sharing land for the farming activities.
Apart from Ezza and Izzi people, Ikwo and Ngbo people as well as other peoples in North-eastern Igboland feed the ancestors yearly.

In fact, the Igbo people generally have a special day for feeding the ancestors. Arinze (1970, p.20) in this regard rightly observed:

Although the ancestors are daily invoked and worshipped, there is a special yearly feast about August time in honour of all the ancestors. This feast is variously called “Alom Mmuo”, or “Otute” or by other names. As preparation, children clean up the village paths. The married daughters abroad (umuada) return. On the morning of the feast the father of the family remove the past year’s sticks and plants new short kola or “ogilishi” (new boldia laevis) sticks into the ground in the special open-air family shrine. These sticks represent the forebears. He kills about four fowls over these symbols and asks for protection for himself, his family and his relations.

Apart from feeding the ancestors on certain months of the year, they are also remembered through daily prayers. In Nigeria in particular and in Africa in general the ancestors are mentioned daily during daily prayers. Mbiti (1975,p.125) noted that:

It is the custom in some parts of Africa to mention the names of departed relatives when one is praying to God. These departed members of the family are believed to relay the prayers to God, since it is considered rude to those societies to approach God directly unless it is absolutely necessary.
In Igboland the ancestors are remembered during the traditional early morning breaking of kola-nut. Orji (1999, pp.31-32) summarized the Igbo traditional morning prayer thus:

Before the advent of the white man, it was the bounding duty of any family to pray to God early in the morning before embarking on any business of the day. The prayer was said through the process of the early morning breaking of the kola nuts.

Everyday, the father of the family woke up from sleep and washed his hands. He set his chair in front of his house known as “Obi” with a kola-nut in his right hand. He sat down and started his prayers thus”...God the creator of human beings, the king on high, come and eat kola-nut. Our mother earth come and eat kola-nut. All the spirits and all the juju-gods in our land, please come and eat kola nut. We are asking for long life and good health. Another thing we are begging for is continuous human reproduction... We are also asking for wealth. Live and let live; let the kite perch and let the eagle perch. Anyone that refuses the other to perch, let its wings get dislocated.

The Igbo morning ritual (Igo oji ututu) is still in vogue in spite of Christian influences and western education. A good number of the Igbo people are of the opinion that the morning prayer which culminates in breaking of kola-nut is the same morning prayer by the Christian and Muslim adherents, although there may be differences in methods, their essence and objectives are the same.

The ancestors are remembered during individual prayer. In an individual prayer, the person prays to the ancestors for himself and
his family. He prays for guidance and protection for himself and his family. The ancestors are also remembered during public prayer. Public prayer is usually accompanied with sacrifice of some kind. Vows are usually made at the end of public prayer which are in the form of promises to offer sacrifices to God through the ancestors or spirits if their prayers are answered. Ancestors are also remembered in ejaculatory prayer. Ejaculatory prayer is a sudden and brief prayer which is said extemporaneously by the individual making the prayer.

In daily prayers the ancestors are remembered. The names of the ancestors are mentioned and those that their names have been forgotten are all prayed to for good health, prosperity and general well being of the whole family. Kola nuts and libations are offered to them daily.

The ancestors are also remembered by consulting them through the diviner, priest, medicine man or medium when a major family undertaking or decision is about to be made or when there is a calamity. The ancestors are consulted by the family priest during any major undertaking to seek their approval. For example, when one wants to travel abroad, one seeks their approval, safe journey back. The ancestors are also consulted when major changes have to be made at home, for example, when the ancestral huts housing them
are to be demolished and a new one erected in another area. Ceremonies are done to get the ancestors cooperation. The ancestors are also consulted by diviners when there is a major calamity or illness. Through a system of divination, the diviners interpret the mysteries of life, convey the messages of the divinities, ancestors and God, diagnose diseases and give solutions to various human problems. They also give guidance in daily affairs and settle public disputes. Mbiti (1975, p.124) rightly observed that the ancestors are also remembered “During family ceremonies and rituals such as those that mark the birth and initiation of children”.

Finally, the ancestors are honoured and remembered by naming children after them especially when the features of the ancestors have been inherited by those children. Mbiti (1975, p.125) said it all when he rightly noted that:

The departed are also remembered by naming children after them, especially if their features have been inherited by those children. In some places, animals, such as bulls or goats may be dedicated to the departed, and slaughtered for them in their honour when it is thought they may need them.

Thus, in African life, the departed are not readily forgotten, though there may be taboos against mentioning their names in certain places. Through rituals, dreams, visions, possessions and names they are recalled and respected. This does not and cannot mean that they are worshipped. The departed are considered to be still alive, and people show by these
practices that they recognize their presence. In this way, African Religion is being realistic, since nobody wants to be forgotten by his family immediately after dying.

The names of the ancestors are indelible on earth for their names are hardly forgotten because people name children after them. My family name is Ukpabi which is a name my grandfather was called when he was on earth. My father named him after me. So my father calls me his father. When my father died, I named my first son after him and when I die my own children will also name children after me and so on. In this way the names of the ancestors are perpetuated.

2.7 Death and the Hereafter

Rev. Fr. Goddy Ikeobi, a chaplain to Shanahan Society, in Onitsha in a pamphlet “The Christian and Today’s Burial Ceremonies” (Shanahan Society 1981, preface) wrote:

Death strikes at the very root of human existence and nobody has been able to remain indifferent to it. Our ancestors lived and died and their funeral rites were celebrated. From the much we now know of them, they all realized and believed in the substantial unity between the soul and the body, and they disposed of their dead in such a manner that nobody ever stood in doubt as to their convictions concerning life beyond the grave. They accomplished all this without the formally revealed religion.
Death is an enigma beyond human comprehension but the belief in life after death raises the hope of man. The notion that life continues beyond the grave is perhaps one of the oldest concepts held by human beings. Archaeologists have uncovered skeletons that were bound by hands and feet into a fetal position which probably indicates beliefs about “rebirth” into other forms of existence following death. The traditional Africans believe that death represents a change of status for the deceased, a transition from the land of the living to the land of the dead.

The traditional Africans believe that the “soul” or “self” lives on after death. What really happens when we die and the survival of the soul or self after our physical death has occupied the minds or attention of human beings here on earth since the dawn of consciousness. Our responses to such questions such as: After death, what next?, What actually happens when we die?, How should one live here on earth? etc. reflect our values and beliefs about human experience and the nature of reality. Andrew Greeley once remarked that “We are born with two incurable diseases: life, from which we die, and hope, which says maybe death isn’t the end” (Despelders and Strickland 2002, p.499). Our philosophy of life influences our philosophy of death and in the same way our understanding of death
and its meaning affect the way we live here on earth. According to Popkin and Stroll (1969, p. xiv) it was Socrates of old who said that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Such self-investigation really include discovery of what one believes about the consequences of death. Ambivalence about belief in survival after death exists among some people. Such ambivalence according to Despender and Strickland (2002, p. 500) was described in anecdotal form by Bertrand Russell:

> A woman whose daughter gave up the ghost recently was asked what she thought had become of her daughter’s soul. She answered that she supposed “she is enjoying eternal bliss, but I wish you wouldn’t talk about such unpleasant subjects”.

To most people the prospect of immortality is not always looked upon favourably. Many people wished people do not die at all.

### 2.8 Jewish beliefs about death and resurrection

A thorough reading of the Bible will unmistakably reveal that it does not present a systematic theology of death or the afterlife. However, death is not ignored, but biblical literature about death reflects a progression of ideas over a long period of time. In the book of Job, the end of man is described very bleakly. It is better quoted than paraphrased. In Jerusalem Bible, (Job 14:7-12) records:

> There is always hope for a tree: when felled, it can start its life again; its shoots continue to sprout. Its
roots may be decayed in the earth, its stump withering in the soil, but let it scent the water, and it buds, and puts out branches like a plant new set. But man? He dies, and lifeless he remains; man breathes his last, and then where is he? The waters of the sea may disappear, all the rivers may run dry or drain away; but man; once in his resting place, will never rise again. The heavens will wear away before he wakes, before he rises from his sleep.

Future rewards for the individual is not guaranteed in the book of Job and other wisdom books such as proverbs,, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms. The Hebrews were advised to be of good character not because of future rewards in afterlife but simply because righteous conduct leads to harmony in the present life. Despelder and Strickland, (2002, P.503) observed that “Resignation towards death was the order of the day at that time but between the time of Job and the later prophets, a gradual change from resignation to hopefulness in the face of death occurred”. In the apocalyptic writings of prophets such as Daniel and Ezekiel, we find a strand of thought that are eventually woven together in ideas about the resurrection of the body. Daniel envisions a future in which the “sleeping” dead will awaken “some to everlasting life, some to everlasting disgrace”. This development in Hebrew thought in no small measure influenced Christian theology. This development stated briefly “consists in the
belief that, at the end of time, the bodies of the dead will be resurrected from the grave and reconstituted”.

It should be noted that the references to resurrection of the body found in the Jewish prophets did not alter the essential understanding of the human person as an undivided psychophysical entity. “The Hebrew idea of personality” says Wheeler Robinson “is an animated body, and not an incarnated soul”. In other words, “it is not as if the soul takes a body, but rather that the body has life”. According to Despelder and Strickland (2002, p.504) the consensus expressed by the biblical writers seems to be:

Our present existence is of God; if there is life hereafter, it will also be God’s gift. Why be anxious about death? What matters is to live righteously”. The enduring concern is that one should not lose sight of the tasks at hand. God appears to be mainly concerned with the living, not the dead. The communal faith of Israel is sustained through customs like the Minyan, which requires a minimum number of individuals to carryout a complete prayer service, and the reciting of Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, as well as in the practice of Shivah, the period of formal mourning after a person has been buried.

2.9 Christian beliefs about the afterlife

Jesus told his disciples that those who did good on earth would come forth to the resurrection of life and those who had done evil would rise again for judgement (John 5:29). However, according to
The resurrection is not expected to take place until the end of time. The soul is believed to be immortal by itself. The soul which is believed to be immortal is said to survive “in a state of sleep or partial bliss until it is reunited to its body”. Jesus own parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16:19) and his words from the Cross to the penitent thief (Lk 23:43) reveal that the soul is judged immediately after death and admitted either to the happiness of heaven or condemned to the torments of hell. A Roman Catholic doctrine known as Purgatory offers an opportunity for purification to eliminate any personal obstacles through the purging of the soul from its sins and the enjoyment of eternal union with God in heaven.

The whole Christian teaching on man’s life after death presents considerable difficulties. Perhaps the greatest problem presented is how the dead bodies and all those that died could rise up again “on the last day” and be reunited to their bodies. Graef (1965, p.112) stated the difficulties in this way:

… This is perhaps the most difficult doctrine of all - the resurrection of the dead. For how can a body that has completely disintegrated thousands of years ago be resurrected? And what age would it have? Would the undeveloped body of two years old child be still that of a child, and the body of a decrepit old man of ninety be aged? These are questions that are often asked, though they are answered in the New Testament itself.
The answer given in the New Testament concerning the doctrine of
the resurrection of the death does not satisfy a good number of the
Christian believers and non-believers. It is really a difficult doctrine. A
good number of people express doubts of its realization.

2.10 Ancestors and Reincarnation

African Religion “affirms life, and celebrates life”. The traditional
Africans believe that there is no end of the world for human life goes
in cyclical form. They also believe in after-life or life after dead. They
believe that death cannot be avoided on earth but will come when it
will come. However, they strongly maintain that death is only a
transition, a means of passing from the world of men to the world of
spirits. They believe that the soul upon the death of the body comes
back to earth in another body, or form. In other words, the soul
reincarnates. What is reincarnation?

According to Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the
English Language (1989, p.1210) “reincarnation is the belief that the
soul upon the death of the body comes back to earth in another body
or form”. Reincarnation is derived from two words “re” which means
again and “incarnate” which means to enter (into) the body. When
the two words are combined, it means to enter into the body again.
According to Onyewuenyi (1996, p.16) reincarnation is “the theory that when the soul, separates from the body at death, it informs another body for another span of earthly life”. In reincarnation, it is believed “our souls have lived before in the bodies of other men and after death, they will be born again in other human bodies”. Eneh (1987, pp.28-29) rightly observed:

As a concept, reincarnation is the belief in the rebirth of the soul. Believers hold that death is not the end of this mortal life of man. They believe that after death a soul can be reborn in another flesh to begin his life again. This life in another body is occasioned and conditioned by the previous existence either for better or for worse. At times this concept is put forward as a solution to the problem of evil - moral and physical. At other times it is used to prove and or support the immortality of the soul. This theory has been, and is still in our days, accepted by many people. For many people rebirth is a “second chance”, a chance of correcting one's previous faults. It is a chance open to all without exception. For some people it is limited to grown-ups. This is the case in Igboland in particular since they do not accept Ogbanje as reincarnation or Ino-uwa. For most advocates of reincarnation, especially the Greeks and the Orientals the term implies the eternity of the soul. It does not for others like the Buddhists who believe, as we saw earlier that the soul is a psycho-physical compounded element which dissolves at death. Rebirth is an “endless cycle” for most Oriental religions.

The traditional Africans believe that those who are dead could reincarnate in two or more contemporaries. To be precise, they
believe that those who fulfilled certain conditions here on earth such as being a good man, dying at a ripe old age, dying a good death, having children on earth, etc. do re-incarnate. Wicked and social misfits do not re-incarnate. Reincarnation is limited by age as children are not supposed to re-incarnate as is the case in Igboland.

It is not easy to trace how, when and where this concept originated. It appears to be present in almost all the cultures of the world. Traces of reincarnation appear in Greek, Egyptian, and in fact in pre-literary societies. In terms of its religious origin, Eneh (1987,p.33) rightly noted that:

The origin of reincarnation as a religious tenet is not less obscure. It is a cardinal tenet of many, if not all the Oriental religions: Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism among others. Opinion is that belief in rebirth might have existed among the pre-Aryan people of India as part of their fertility rite and ancestral worship.

Its origin may be difficult to trace but what is certain is that life after death has been the belief of many religious faiths as Graef (1965, pp.102-103) rightly observed:

That there is a life after death has been the belief of many religious faiths, and it has taken various forms. In such Eastern religions as Hinduism and Buddhism this life is conceived in a rather impersonal way as Union with the All, the perfect peace of Nirvana where all individuality disappears. The Greeks believed in the shadowy world of Hades
which meant survival, but in a very attenuated form. The old Germans believed in the Walhalla, the realm where the heroes would continue to fight and feast in more or less the same, if a somewhat glorified, way as they had done on earth. The Mohammedans believe in a heaven specially designed for men who will find there all the pleasures which seemed most desirable on earth. Among the ancient philosophers Plato was convinced not only of the survival of the soul after death but also of its pre-existence. He reasoned that, since the soul is rational, it must be akin to the eternal principles of reason, hence be itself eternal. In modern times Emmanuel Kant sought to prove the immortality of the soul on moral grounds. He argued that, because the moral law is eternal and the present life on earth is evidently full of injustice, there must be a future existence in which all justice will be restored.

Apart from Plato and Emmanuel Kant, a good number of eminent scholars strongly believe in life after death (reincarnation). For instance, Kamath (2008, p.60) observed:

That the concept of reincarnation cannot be lightly dismissed was conceded by George Foot Moore (1851 - 1931), professor of History in Religion, Harvard University, in his Ingersoll Lecture on Immortality. “A theory (metempsychosis) which has been embraced by so large a part of mankind” he said, “of many races and religions; and has commended itself to some of the most profound thinkers of all time, cannot be lightly dismissed.... If man’s earthly existence be conceived as a probation, it must be admitted that in any one life men are put upon this probation under very unequal conditions of every kind, and that the theory of a series of embodiments in which the soul is tested under various conditions accords better with our opinions of
justice in the order of things. Finally if an end of perfection is set for the soul, metempsychosis affords the opportunity for a progressive approach to that infinite attainment...”

Man's conscience affirms that there must be some life after death. The traditional Africans strongly believe in reincarnation. Many people believe that the concept of reincarnation is a reality.

Reincarnation exists in most African societies. However, there is a remarkable difference between how the traditional African pictures reincarnation and how it is pictured by the Greeks and the Orientals. African belief in reincarnation is unique according to Eneh (1987, pp.98-99) because the traditional Africans believe

(a) That those who are dead could reincarnate in two or more contemporaries.

(b) That a person who is still alive could reincarnate.

(c) That a man can reincarnate as a woman and vice versa.

(d) That reincarnation is limited by age as children are not supposed to reincarnate as is the case in Igboland where the reincarnation of children are seen as evil since they are Ogbanje (changeling).

(e) The wicked and social misfits do not reincarnate.
In an attempt to explain what the traditional Africans meant by reincarnation, many African authors claim it is “partial reincarnation” or “partial rebirth”. Eneh’s (1987,p.99) observation is apposite here and I quote him with approval.

Great and renowned authors have represented the African notion of reincarnation as “Partial reincarnation”. In other words, they maintain that the Africans do not believe in the reincarnation of souls. Rather they assert that what the Africans believe in is the inheritance of ancestral characters, hence “partial reincarnation”. With this, people reincarnate and yet remain in the spirit world. Among such prominent authors are Professor John Mbiti and Kofi Asare Opoku, a senior Research Fellow of University of Ghana.

Professors E. B. Idowu, John S. Mbiti, Kofi Asare Opoku and others firmly maintain that there is no reincarnation in the classical sense as far as African belief system is concerned. They claim that one can however, speak of partial reincarnation or partial rebirth. According to them, it is partial because only some aspects of the deceased are born. Some features, characteristics and personality traits of the ancestors do appear on the newborn child. When this happens, the people claim that so and so ancestor has come back, has returned or has been reborn. It is widely believed that the ancestors return in one or several children in the family. In this regard Idowu (1973, pp.187-188) with special reference to Yoruba noted that:
The specific belief of the Yoruba about those who depart from this world is that once they have entered After-life, there they remain, and there the survivors and their children after them can keep unbroken intercourse with them, especially if they have been good persons while on earth and ripe for death when they died. Nevertheless, we find ourselves confronted with the paradox involved in the belief of the Yoruba that the deceased persons do “reincarnate” in their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In the first place, it is believed that in spite of this reincarnation, the deceased continue to live in After-life: those who are still in the world can have communion with them, and they are there with all their ancestral qualities unimpaired. Secondly, it is believed that they do “reincarnate”, not only in one grandchild or great-grandchild, but also in several contemporary grandchildren and great grandchildren who are brothers and sisters and cousins, aunts and nephew, uncles and nieces, ad infinitum. Yet, in spite of these repeated “rebirths” (which should be rather exhausting), the deceased continue to remain in full life and vigour in the After-life.

Mbiti (1975, p.119) was of the opinion that it was the “idea of partial rebirth” that was spoken as reincarnation. He was of the view that not everybody that is reborn in that manner, nor is the entire dead person reborn as such but only some aspects of the ancestor that is reborn. Arinze (1970, pp.17-18) argued that “The belief in the reincarnation of good ancestors seems at first sight to cancel all ancestor worship. But it does not for the Igbo, or for Africans for that matter.” He believed that it was only a part of the ancestors spirit that is reborn. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, p.273) in their own observation remarked:
The main point about reincarnation is that the genius (i.e. guardian spirit) of the family never dies. This means that something of the genius and character of the family continues to appear from one generation to another to the effect that the family is perpetuated.

Eneh (1987, p.102) criticized Idowu, Mbiti and Opoku for presenting their interpretations on reincarnation as the traditional Africans belief. Eneh said that some Africans believe in reincarnation of the soul. He said that Africans believe that it is the inheritance of ancestral characters. He maintained that African concept of reincarnation as the resurgence of a particular biological trait implies the people’s understanding of genetics. He however, believed that professors Mbiti, Idowu, and Opoku made a mistake by replacing the belief of Africans on reincarnation with its interpretation. He believes that we cannot be fair in presenting those interpretations as the belief itself because that would be very wrong.

Eneh claimed that those notable scholars in their attempts to solve the problems inherent in reincarnation, only succeeded in burring alive the problem of African reincarnation. Eneh (1987,p.103) made bold to say
that assertions by Africans actually show that they have faith in the
reincarnation of souls. He tersely but convincingly observed:

Assertions by Africans do show they have some faith in the
reincarnation of souls. For instance, an Igbo Philosophical magazine said that after the funeral
oration of a certain chief, his first son return soon
“because the chief had promised to reincarnate after a
year of his death, and that he would become a
renowned lawyer in his next life”. This assertion and
other similar assertions that abound in African
traditional society when I come again I will not be a
woman; I dare not be poor again in my next life” etc. –
implicate and involve a personality and not just a mere
trait as Mbiti and others would want us to believe. If it
were mere hereditary traits that our people believe are
reborn, then such assertions like the above can hardly
be reconciled or understood since a dying man cannot
determine how soon his hereditary traits are going to be
since these are guided by biological laws.

Eneh (1987,pp.103-104) strongly maintained that the concept of
reincarnation has come as a result of misinterpretation of genetics and
that he did not accept the view that reincarnation was the rebirth of
genetic traits.

My conviction is that some African concepts of
reincarnation have come as a misinterpretation of the
laws of genetics. They felt that somebody is reborn when
these characters – biological, physiological, psychological,
etc – are reborn. This I believe. But what I do not accept
is the view that our people believe that reincarnation is
nothing but the rebirth of these traits. I maintain that
such a position is an unseating of their belief by an
explanation of what they believe. Such a position can
hardly be justified.
Eneh (1987, pp.143-145) further observed in the concluding part of his book “Reincarnation: Fact or Fancy?” that our examination of the various concepts of reincarnation so far has revealed that neither the Greek nor the Oriental concept of it plead the case of reincarnation beyond reproach. He said that their theories “are either self-defeating or have internal contradictions”. He said that the proponents of reincarnation supposed to explain the concept in such a way that it does not “invalidate known principles and axioms”. He maintained that even in Africa and to be specific Nigeria, the concept of Ogbanje cannot be explained convincingly as a reincarnative phenomenon. He concluded that “the concept of reincarnation will ever remain a fancy, a postulate and a hypothesis to him until it is proved otherwise”.

There is no doubt that there is a paradox that is involved in the belief in reincarnation. However, we should heed the advice of Onunwa (1990, pp.107-108) that the rationale behind the belief in reincarnation may not sound plausible in the light of scientific, logical and empirical thought. He said that the attempt so far is not to defend or to condemn the belief hence it is not an apologetic or polemical stance but an honest attempt to re-evaluate the meaning and function of one important themes in Igbo religious system. He said that reincarnation has been “portrayed as an interpretative scheme for the
individual identity and societal cosmology”. He said that any “purely theological issue that fits into the strait-line jacket of intellectualism and rationalism runs the risk of losing its moral and spiritual flavour”.

He further observed that:

The African and particularly the Igbo of Nigeria had through this concept struggled to build a traditionally clean, just and moral society. Man’s excesses and rebellious tendencies had been held in check to a considerable extent in diverse subtle ways through the belief in reincarnation. The concept has been shown as another means by which the Igbo and indeed other Africans express some fundamental truths about life after death, eternity, human destiny, heaven and hell, cult of the ancestors and the essence of moral life. They have tried to fight “DEATH”, their greatest enemy through this concept. It is a concept carefully designed to console one who is bereaved of a dear one. It is not a mere gimmick or adjustment mechanism invented to compensate man for his inability to live forever on earth. Through this concept, man is encouraged to face the stark reality of death and prepares himself to leave a clean record for those coming behind.

2.11 Impact of Christianity on Ancestral veneration and other related Traditional practices in (North-eastern) Igboland

Christianity has an indelible impact on the ancestral veneration and other related traditional practices in North-eastern Igboland in particular and Igboland in general. The religious and social changes introduced by Christianity in the area affected the people positively as well as negatively. Positively, Christian missionaries initiated a process
of social change which led to the abolition of the killing of twins and abnormal babies, abolition of slavery and slave trade, abolition of “Osu” system, abolition of human sacrifice, opening up of hospitals and health clinics, the development of good road network, and the education of the youth. Let me substantiate. Killing of twins in North-eastern Igboland and other parts of Nigeria was an old custom. The people wrongly believed that it was an abomination for human beings to give birth to twins, triplets or quadruplets. It was considered unnatural for human beings to give birth to more than one child at a time like the lower animals such as sheep, goats, dogs, pigs, etc. The people firmly believed that to allow such abomination in the words of 1logu (1974, p.64) was to “incure the wrath of the ancestral spirits, which would plague the community, because the “natural” harmony between man, the spirit world and the cosmos in general, had been destroyed”.

When Christian missionaries arrived in Nigeria, they made frantic efforts to abolish the obnoxious practice. Again, in the words of 1logu (1974, p.64) “It took the added efforts of other missionaries like Mary Slessor, in the extreme south east of Iboland at Aro-chukwu, and the influence of British colonial masters to end this practice of twin killing”. The abolition of the killing of twins is a welcome development
and the people - both natives and Christian converts - are grateful to all those who fought tooth and nail to abolish the practice.

Abolition of slavery and slave trade was another major social change introduced by Christianity not only in North-eastern Igboland but in Nigerian society as a whole. William Wilberforce together with some Christian missionaries fought for the abolition of slavery and slave trade. It was in 1807 that a law was passed in British parliament which forbade all British people from buying or selling of slaves. The Christian missions went to the hinterlands and preached against slavery and slave-trade and did all they could to get the ugly practice abolished in Nigerian society.

Similarly, the Christian missionaries abolished the practice of “Osu” system in my area of research (and all over Igboland. Okoye (1965, p. 23) explained what “Osu” system means and the privileges the “Osu” enjoyed and their plight.

In the early days human beings were consecrated to certain spirits as slaves. Some people even of their own accord dedicated themselves to various spirits in this manner. Usually they did so to avoid being kidnapped or to preserve their personal immunity from some unscrupulous individuals. These spirits “slaves or ‘Osu”, as they are called in Igboland, had certain privileges. They alone could fulfill certain offices in the worship of these spirits. They formed a class of their own; and from sheer fear of the spirits nobody dared do them any harm.
In some places nobody would so much as strike them for fear of spilling their blood. In social life, however, their plight was not an enviable one especially in matters of marriage. They could only intermarry among themselves, and were kept out of many gatherings and functions. They were simply ostracized.

“When the practice of the Osu caste system began and how it originated” wrote Okeke (1986, p.13) “will remain for a very long time a hard knot for historians and anthropologists to crack because the search for its origins is as complex and intricate as the system itself”. No matter whatever may be its origin, it is gladdening to note that the practice is gradually dying out because of the dawn of Christianity and civilization in modern Nigeria.

Furthermore, abolition of human sacrifice (or ritual murder) is another positive change introduced by Christianity in North-eastern Iboland in particular and Nigerian society as a whole. Ilogu (1974, pp. 65-66) rightly explained the three types of human sacrifice that was existing in Iboland before the arrival of Christianity. According to him:

Three types of human sacrifice had existed in Iboland before the arrival of Christianity - the sacrifice of atonement when extreme abomination to the land had led to breach of harmony between the spirit world and the community. This was of course rare. The second was when chiefs and some noblemen holding the “Ozo” title were buried with
their slaves partly to ensure a smooth passage to the land of the spirits where they join the restful bliss of the ancestors. It was believed that such slaves would also serve their masters in the life after death. The third occasion was the use priests and manipulators of secret cults, oracles and shrines made of human sacrifice to appease the gods of such oracles, for example the water spirits at Onitsha.

Human sacrifice was practised in the past in primal societies and in the Old Testament times. Even the practice still exists secretly in some traditional societies. It was used to appease the deity during annual festivals or during the foundation of a town, or during an epidemic or war and so on. The motive behind it was to restore right relationship between man and the deity. In Igboland the missionaries did their utmost to abolish the custom of human sacrifice. According to Ilogu (1974, p. 66) “The political officers of the British colonial administration joined in the effort, by destroying shrines like the Kamalu and Nkuku in the Bende District of Iboland”.

The missionaries also opened up hospitals and health clinics in different parts of North-eastern Igboland. In the field of medical work, the missionaries performed creditably well. Leprosy clinics were opened for the natives as well as general hospitals. St. Vincent hospital, Ndubia was opened in 1956 while Mile four Hospital, Abakaliki was opened in 1958.
The missionaries equally helped in the development of roads which helped in the movement of the North-eastern Igbo people and their goods from one place to another.

Finally, the Christian missionaries established churches in the North-eastern Igboland. As they were opening up churches, they were also building mission schools side by side in order to educate the people in the three Rs: namely, reading, writing, and Arithmetic. Let me turn to the negative impact of Christianity in the area.

Although the above issues discussed so far “represent a tremendous positive social change”, the Christian missionaries as Aja (2005, p. 213) rightly observed:

Could not escape the often repeated accusations of ‘builder’ and ‘destroyer’ for their enterprise had as its concomitant, negative social evolution in its trail. Out of sheer ignorance of the content and significance of the philosophy behind the religious beliefs, and practices of the people, upon which the missionaries could have a solid foundation of their new faith, were condemned.

Although Raph O. Aja was commenting on the activities of the Christian missionaries at Afikpo, their negative influence are the same in Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo communities of North-eastern Igboland. In a nutshell, Christianity brought about the discouragement in the reverence paid to ancestors, condemnation of traditional marriage and
polygamy, destruction of tribal solidarity. Others are condemnation of
title-taking, ritual circumcision, traditional festivals, traditional naming
ceremonies, traditional oath-taking and traditional burial and funeral
rites and ceremonies. Moreover, the activities of the missionaries
greatly contributed to the extinction, or decline of indigenous religion,
customs and culture. Let me elaborate. Firstly, Christianity
discouraged the reverence paid to ancestors. The Christian
missionaries called such reverence accorded to ancestors ‘ancestor
worship’ and preached against the belief in the ancestors and told the
early Christian converts not to direct prayers or sacrifices to them.
However, the Christian converts did not find it easy to completely do
away with the veneration of the ancestors. This is because it is part
and parcel of their culture and religion.

The traditional Africans revere their ancestors and it is a core
element of their indigenous religion. When Christianity arrived in
Nigeria, the traditional Africans saw the veneration of saints as a close
72) has no doubt that the ancestors and saints are one and the same
spirits who perform the same function to both Christians and
traditional Africans when he observed that:
Both Christianity and African indigenous religion revere their dead members who led exemplary lives and are believed to be in heaven with God. They are prayed to in both religions and invoked for help since they are believed to be in a position to help those who pray to them. In Christianity they are called “Saints” while in African Traditional Religion they are called “Ancestors”.

Ancestral veneration is one of such areas compromise with Christianity seems very remote. However, the researcher is of the opinion that ancestral veneration is one of the areas Christianity has to enter into dialogue with African Traditional Religion hence the belief systems of both faiths are similar to the honour accorded to the dead. Omoregbe (1999, p. 171) in this regard argued very convincingly that “In actual fact there are so much in common between Christianity and African Indigenous Religion that the two religions can be seen as essentially one in different cultural expressions”.

Secondly Christianity brought about the condemnation of the traditional system of marriage and polygamy in traditional African society. Since the dawn of Christianity in Nigeria and indeed in Africa, the emphasis has been on Christian marriage system and monogamy. The Christian missionaries preached against traditional marriage system and polygamy. Ayandele (1966, p.334) contended that “polygamy remains one of the African institutions on which Christian
missions have up to date refused to compromise”. Parrinder (1950, pp. 61-62) in his own observation maintained that:

The general tradition of orthodox Christianity, eastern, western, and reformed, has been against polygamy, and in favour of full and unhesitating maintenance of monogamy, not only in Europe, but throughout the whole world. Modern biblical study has made it increasingly clear how deep-rooted this doctrine is in the New Testament.

But in spite of the missionaries negative attitude against traditional marriage and polygamy, the traditional Africans are resisting with might and main the pressures of taking to Christian marriage and monogamy. Parrinder (1950, p.1) observed that “The question whether polygamy is permissible, in modern and Christian society, is one that has been raised in certain parts of the world today. On the mission field, it is a constant source of trouble, especially in Africa”. Ayandele (1966,p.335) once more contended that when one weighs the arguments for and against the practice of polygamy by the exponents and opponents of polygamy in Nigerian situation, the attitude of the missions was not defensible. In his words:

A close study of the argument of both the exponents and opponents of polygamy in Nigeria leaves one with the impression that neither of scriptural, nor on rational, nor on hypothetical basis was the attitude of the missions defensible.
Consequently practically all Christian missions saw their churches filled with a majority of polygamists, whose money they could not reject, while the African churches increased their number considerably by accepting polygamists into full membership. In most churches of Christian missions not a few of the professed monogamists kept secret wives, such a practice was not absent among the African clergy.

Christian marriage and monogamy have not succeeded in supplanting traditional marriage system and polygamy in Nigerian society in particular and African in general. It is gratifying to note that theologians and modern scholars are now finding a way of blending the traditional and Christian marriages to the satisfaction of the traditionalists and the Christian converts. Gbenda (2001, pp. 44-45) in this regard observed:

Modern scholars and theologians are working out the modalities of having the traditional marriage and Christian marriage celebrated together or combined, having realized that one cannot let go the traditional marriage as it is an aspect of African cultural heritage and religiosity from time immemorial before Christianity touched the African soil. Admittedly, it is plausible to celebrate the two at the same time, not only as a cost-saving device but as part of the Africanization of Christianity. Marriage therefore is one of the elements of African Christianity.

The efforts of modern scholars and theologians are commendable.

Traditional marriage is deep-rooted in our culture, tradition and
religion. So blending the two systems together is an effort in the right direction.

The insistence of one man, one wife has created serious problem in our society. Ilogu (1974, p.96) highlighted the problem when he noted that “The emphasis of the church on one man one wife, had also added to the number of women who remain unmarried. Some of these in despair would also go into the towns as prostitutes”. Ilogu (1974, pp.74-75) also observed that the problem which Christianity brought on the dislocation of Igbo “institution of family life built on polygamy is, can be seen from the fact that the problem is still with the church after a century of the church’s existence in Iboland”. Steensel (1996, p.206) also observed that:

The polygamy factor also pulled the church away from the people. Baptism was refused to any man, who had more than one wife. In many cases men were forced to send away their wives except the first one. This was very difficult for the older Christians, who did not belong to their old friends again and were also not fully accepted in the church. The social reasons of polygamy were the short life, or the high mortality, the need of manual labour on the farms, next to the reasons of status, even more than material possessions. Polygamous marriages also established relationships throughout the community, which gives stability and peace. Many parents try to persuade their children not to attend church, so that they will marry more than one wife and so attain to more status and wealth and get more children than otherwise.
Thirdly, Christianity brought about the destruction of tribal solidarity. The missionaries brought about the disintegration of Nigerian society. They preached against polygamy, preferred Christian marriage to customary or traditional marriage and so on. Ayandele (1966, p. 330-331) revealed how they brought about the disintegration of Nigerian society when he noted that:

No one can argue against the fact that the Christian missions broke into tribal solidarity with their denominational varieties and rivalries. Moreover each mission had regulations and worked on principles which threatened the traditional society. Take for instance the preposterous regulation that polygamists who wanted full membership and privileges of the church must first disown all wives but one. In a polygamous community this regulation could upset the society if there were many polygamist converts disposed to listen to the missionaries....

When a missionary converted individuals in a community he removed units from an organic whole and thereby undermined the monolithic structure of the community. The converts not only imbibed a new set of religious beliefs but began to nurse alien ideas, economic ambitions and political aspirations of their own, detrimental to the welfare and solidarity of the community. In a country where religion was the cement of the society, the guarantor of moral principles and the basis of secular authority, renunciation of the traditional religion implied renunciation of the moral, civil and political obligations to the community as well.

In fact, the communal life and brotherhood of the Africans are destroyed for ever. It is a truism that the traditional Africans cherish
communal life and brotherhood and there are morals concerning social, economic and political life of the people. Everybody in the community is expected to help one another in time of need, to defend his country in time of war, to protect the weak, the aged, the young and to punish offenders. In Africa, everybody is his brothers’ keeper. People are expected to show hospitality to relatives, friends and even strangers. Mbiti (1975, p.177) rightly observed that “It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality, even to a stranger”. At the family level, individuals are closely bound to each other. Parents are duty-bound to look after their children, protect them from harm, educate them, discipline them and cloth them as well. Children in turn have to obey their parents, to be humble and kind. They are also expected to care for their aged parents, to show respect to those who are older than them, etc. The issue of brotherhood also extends to the extended family system whereby older relatives such as aunt, uncle, cousin, etc. are expected to be catered for by their relatives and they in turn to bless them and advise them as well as pray for them for God’s blessings.

Indeed things have fallen apart since the arrival of Christianity in Nigerian society. Even though it brought good innovations, the evils that came along with it are very great. Nduka (1965, p.10) has noted
that “Of all the agents of imperialism it was the missionary who made the most revolutionary demands of the Nigerians”. Nduka (1965, pp.11-12) further observed:

To make matters worse, virtually everything else in the native culture was regarded as bad. More often than not a policy of complete Europeanization with a view to replacing the native culture was adopted. Not only native names and costumes but also native songs and dances, folk-lore, art, systems of marriage, were to be consigned to the scrap heap. It was altogether a revolutionary demand.

Fourthly, Christianity rejected title-taking. Title-taking is a time-honoured custom, that is, custom highly valued and respected because of long tradition in Igboland. Adibe (1992, pp.23-24) highlighted the importance of titled men in Igboland when he noted that:

To be a titled man is the greatest ambition of an Igbo man, because they alone are ranked as elders of the society and they, by their initiation it is believed will be accepted by the ancestors in their paradisal abode, when they die. Non-titled men do not join the ancestors. The titled men enforce moral discipline in the society and through their words and actions are expected to mould the character of the youths. They maintain and enforce the traditional norms of the society. Thus, as a sign of purity, they wear the white feather of the eagle fixed to their caps.
Title-taking e.g. ‘Nze’, ‘jioke’, and ‘Ozo’ are of such relevance in Igboland today and indeed in other parts of Nigerian society that the Christian missionaries condemned them and other customs as either superstitious or idolatrous. Ilogu (1974, p.71) reported that one Mr. Nzekwu, the Rev. G. Anyaegbunam, and some other members of a conference held at Onitsha on Tuesday 12th of May, 1914 remarked: “Scarcely is there any custom in this country that has nothing idolatrous or superstitious in it. But what and where shall we be if we reject and throw all these customs out as quite unfit.” In fact, it is not an understatement to say that virtually all the customs in Nigerian society were condemned by the early missionaries and the new converts. Ilogu (Ibid) also noted that:

Whatever was its political, social and economic significance, because most of the Ozo rites of initiation were associated with many religious rites, the missionaries understandably educated their converts to have nothing to do with it. Ozo title holders at conversion must renounce their title and burn the insignia of the title as well as the cult objects associated with it.

Arinze (1983, p.53) suggested what the parish priest and the local catholic community should do in order to ensure that no pagan religious ceremonies are involved before allowing any Christian convert to take any title:
When therefore, Christians wish to take title in a town, the parish priest and the local catholic community must first make an exhaustive inquiry into the title in question. If it is found that the title of itself, contradicts faith or morals, then no catholic can take it, no matter under what conditions. But if it is found that the title is a purely social affair at the taking of which some pagan religious ceremonies were performed, then the title society must agree to abolish these religious ceremonies for all candidates who take title. An agreement is then signed between the title society and the catholic community of the town. Only after such agreement may a catholic proceed to take title. The aim of the agreement is not to Christianize any title. The aim is to remove the pagan religious ceremonies from them so that the titles may remain purely social or economic propositions.

In North-eastern Igboland some churches are highly against the traditional customs such as title-taking and the rest of them while other churches like the Roman Catholic Church often try to discard some customs totally like the ritual circumcision while others are done without the rituals that are considered to be against the catholic faith.

In Izzi land, Steensel (1996,p.208) noted that:

The churches in Izzi do not look favourably towards Jioke title takings. Many people nowadays feel that it is a waste to invest money in titles rather than in education of the children or in building good houses, etc. But the main reason for the church to oppose title taking by their members is the requirement to sacrifice to the mgbaja pot and the disgust against the use of alcoholics and the record playing throughout the night...
The difficulty to take jioke title for a Christian is especially the sacrifice that has to be made to the mgbaja pot. If you refuse to do that the title group will refuse you. Therefore some Christians want to make the inya title, because there is no mgbaja involved in it. However to make inya is worse, because then a horse is addressed like a human being and sacrifices are made to it; and later it is eaten.

Fifthly, ritual circumcision and traditional festivals are other traditional customs condemned by Christianity in north-eastern Igboland. Circumcision rituals which Odey (1986, p.2) called ritual circumcision is a puberty rite in Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo including Ezzangbo. This puberty rite which is open to man and woman who have reached nubile age prepares the girl or boy for married life. It is called ritual circumcision or circumcision ritual because no actual circumcision takes place but a mere ritualism. In Ezza, Izzi and other areas ritual circumcision is very elaborate to explain here. Suffice it to say it is one of those areas the Christians and the natives could not agree. Odey (1986, p.Xiii) maintained that ritual circumcision and Christianity are incompatible and therefore irreconcilable particularly in Ezza.

Ritual circumcision in Ezza is a custom which is as old as Ezza itself. It is a ceremony of initiation into the traditional way of life. Consequently, traditional worshippers regard it as the soul of Ezza culture. On the other hand, the Christian Baptism is a
custom which is equally as old as the Christian church. It is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian way of life. Both in practice and principle, the two of them are incompatible. In view of this, the practice of ritual circumcision has, since the advent of Christianity in Ezza, constituted a great problem for Ezza people who honestly want to remain faithful to the Christian faith and loyal to Ezza custom.

Faced with this problem, many baptized Christians in Ezza have abandoned their faith in favour of ritual circumcision. On the other hand, many more have abandoned ritual circumcision in favour of the Christian faith. There are however, those who are still finding it difficult to decide for either of them. Right from the time the Catholic Church came to Onueke Ezza, this has been the situation of things in the Church.

As things stand at present, a good number of the Christian converts have abandoned the ritual circumcision but problems abound because majority of the girls betrothed are children of the African traditional adherents who do not toil with the time-honoured custom. They often insist on performing the rituals by their daughters. To say the truth, the Christian converts have not completely abandoned the practice in some villages. A good number of them perform it secretly. The ritual is done within a day or two instead of lasting for a month or more. Some perform it after wedding in the church. That is, at a much later date particularly when all is not well after Christian marriage. For example, when no issue is forthcoming or when the wife or the
husband or both of them are always sick or when things become hard in life or when they suspect their problem could be as a result of not performing the ritual circumcision.

Ritual circumcision did not receive the blessings of the Christian missionaries and their agents. The coming of Christianity has drastically affected the practice as Steensel (1996, p.209) rightly observed.

The coming of Christianity has also changed the circumcision rituals. Christians will not perform all the Rituals belonging to circumcision though most Christians still circumcise their daughters. Several churches discipline Christian parents who have their daughters circumcised.

Worse still the Christian missionaries and their agents condemned the long-standing traditional festivals in North-eastern Igboland and other parts of Igboland. When the early missionaries introduced Christianity and its festivals such as Christmas, Easter, etc. the traditional Africans did not raise eyebrows because festivals were not new to them. What they rather did was to make the traditional festivals and ceremonies to be in conformity with the newfangled faith so as to accommodate the interest of the young men and women of the community who are converted or attracted to the new faith.
Onunwa (1990,p.142) presented this view better when he rightly observed:

We have also noted that in recent times, some traditional festivals and ceremonies are being “renamed” and reinterpreted” by some communities in order to accommodate the interest of the young men and women in the community. In addition, some have shifted the dates of the annual festival of their deities to coincide or fall in within the period of Christmas or Easter when they would be sure to get guests. Often at such festivals, Christian priests may be invited to say some prayers for the welfare of the community.

The church was seen as an agent that breaks up old structures, handed over to the present generation by the ancestors thereby undermining the unity in the family and the village which resulted in the inability of the people to act as one in many situations. Steensel (1996, p.205) cited “Otutara” festival of Izzi people as a typical example of the traditional festival condemned by the Christians when he noted that:

The breaking up of the family relationships became most clearly visible during the Otutara festival, when the ancestors of the family are being fed. Traditionally all the family members gather and eat together that day. But the Christians do not participate any more on this day. Every year again we see that persecution becomes more severe around the time of the Otutara festival. If there would be any festival that could unite the whole of Izzi and be a symbol of the traditional religion, it would be this festival.
All the traditional festivals associated with the veneration of the ancestors are condemned by the Christian church. In short, all traditional festivals such as “Onwa-Eke” or “Nefioha” festival, “Ekengwu” Ekka festival, “Udenyi” Nkomoro festival, “Aji” Ogboji or “Aji” I nyere festival, “Otulali” Umuezeokoha festival, “Erishi” Nsokara festival, “Inyimakfu” Idembia festival, “Obodo” Amana and “Omefu” festivals, etc. are all condemned as Idolatrous. There is no known traditional festival in the North-eastern Igboland that has received the blessing of the church except the New Yam festival which the Igbo people fought hard to maintain.

Sixthly, the missionaries urged the Igbo Christian converts to bring their children in the churches for baptism and naming ceremonies instead of resorting to traditional naming ceremonies. The traditional naming ceremony is very important in Igbo society. It is never dispensed with. The naming ceremony is usually attended by the family, relatives, neighbours and friends. Mbiti (1975, p.87) highlighted the importance of naming ceremony in traditional African society when he noted that:

The name is considered in African societies to be very much part of the personality of the person. Therefore it is taken seriously, and chosen with care and consideration. Often names of people have a
meaning, and it is this naming which must be given due consideration.

Traditional Africans attach much importance to names. So Christianity will do well by encouraging new converts to take native (Igbo) names at baptism and confirmation. Arinze (1983,p.51) says “a good name is acceptable, provided that does not refer to anything in pagan religion”. A good Igbo name which has meaning is preferable to foreign names which make no sense to Igbo Christian. Arinze again (1983,p.51) warns that it is high time we stopped using meaningless names in the name of Christianity.

Some Igbo names are beautiful names such as Ikechukwu, Ngozi, Chukwuuka, Chukwuemeka, Chinwe, Uchenna. We should stop taking meaningless names such as Violet, Fineface, Kingston, Drinkwater, Seagrave.

Seventhly, traditional oath-taking, burial and funeral rites/ceremonies are other customs condemned by the church. Oath-taking is one of the rituals in African Traditional Religion. The Africans strongly believe that the gods give impartial judgment because they are the custodians of public morality, and upholders of truth. The traditional Africans believe that the gods are ever ready to defend the innocent who is falsely accused of any offence and the protector of the oppressed. Liars, dishonest persons and all those who swear
falsely are punished. Onunwa (1990, p.128) said it all when he rightly noted that:

The belief in the ability of the gods to give impartial judgment has been the bedrock of Oath-taking in traditional society. Since they are the custodians of morality, upholders of truth and honesty, the gods are believed to defend the innocent who is falsely accused of any offence. They will always justify the innocent and protect the oppressed. On the contrary, they do not tolerate the ways of the liars and the dishonest. Those who swear false Oaths in the names of the gods are not spared. Such liars are punished in such a way that the society begins to fear the spirits and the gods. Because the gods have the ability to detect crime, men and women have been held in check to some considerable extent. As a means of social control, its background is rooted in religion. In spite of man's attempt to cover up truth after an Oath by trying to kill an innocent person by all means, God often protects the innocent.

The Christian missionaries had tough time with the traditionalists over oath-taking or “swearing on juju”. The Christians prefer swearing on the Bible or not at all. However, most Christians do not object to oath-taking when situation warrants it. In the words of Onunwa (1990, pp.128-129)

...It is still amazing that some Christians who live far away from their villages still revert to the local deity and refuse to swear on the Bible when they want instant justice on a matter. No doubt the shrines of local deities are patronized by a large number of educated people when it comes to settling any serious dispute through oath-taking.
Onunwa (ibid) further observed that the practice of oath-taking may persist.

The practice of oath-taking would continue as long as human beings continue to interact with one another. The society is still full of cheats, dupes, and liars. Suspicion and accusation are still rife in interpersonal relationships and one of the ways to banish fears from people about the genuineness of their relationships, is oath-taking. The traditional method is yet to die because the people still fear the power of the gods.

Another tradition which the church condemned is the way people are buried and remembered in the society. The custom in Abakaliki and probably in other parts of Igboland before the arrival of Christianity in Nigeria was to bury infants and those who died without any issue or criminals in a burial ground specially earmarked for them and to bury those who married and have offspring at their respective homes. That is, to bury them in their compounds or in their houses and to accord them all the burial and funeral rites due to them. But when Christianity arrived it introduced the burial of infants, boys, girls, men and women without issue at their places of habitation. The traditionalists frowned at such ugly development. This is an area the traditionalists in the su-culture area of research could not compromise at all with the Christians, even now.
The Missionaries consider the traditional burial system as obnoxious while the traditionalists consider their own system of burial abominable and polluting and a veritable way of desecrating the ancestral homes. The Christian converts to the chagrin of the missionaries find it hard not to participate in the traditional burial and funeral rites and ceremonies. Okoye (1965, p.33) lamented that “of all pagan religious practices, pagan funerals seem to be the most attractive to our Christians”.

Perhaps, the greatest condemnation of the traditional practices that affected the traditional worshippers most is the rejection of the second burial rites and ceremonies by the Christians. This rejection posed a big problem to the Christian converts who “were ready to obey the teachings of the missionaries and at the same time felt the compunction as filial duty to dead parents as well as respect to community opinion, as such converts were also members of the local non-Christian community” (Ilogu 1974, p.67). The funeral rites and ceremonies are very important in African society. Among the Igbo people of Nigeria the rites and ceremonies are as important as the birth of a new baby. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, pp.256-258) noted the two kinds of funerals observed by the Igbo people.
The Igbo had two important kinds of funeral ceremonies for every adult who dies a good death. The first ceremony is the physical burial of the body. … The second ceremony which is intended to make the dead man secure his place in the company of the ancestor comes up at a much later date. Although there is no rigid rule about its performance, it is believed that the sooner it is performed the better for both the living and the dead. People also believe that it cannot be evaded without disastrous consequences. It is believed that until it is performed, the dead do not enjoy the full privileges of the dead, and are not able to intercede for the living. The dead man himself will be unhappy; he is a homeless wanderer since he has not been offered a permanent place in the spirit world. In the alternative, he will persistently haunt his former dwelling place, and assuredly bring calamity on his family for such unfeeling and unwarrantable negligence.

Lastly, the activities of the missionaries and their agents greatly contributed to the extinction, or decline of indigenous religion, customs and culture. The missionaries repudiated and damaged the cultures and led natives to acculturation. However, Water (2006,p.30) has argued that:

Most modern missionaries and missionary societies have repudiated cultural imperialism, and focus on spreading the gospel and translating the Bible. Sometimes, missionaries have been vital in preserving and documenting the culture of the peoples among whom they live.
His argument tries to show that the missionary’s activities in Nigerian society and indeed in Africa are not only harmful to the people but also advantageous in many ways.

2.12 Summary of Literature Review

The researcher first and foremost explained and reviewed the ancestor, ancestor worship; its origin and the argument whether they are worshipped or merely venerated in traditional African society. He also reviewed the conditions that qualify a deceased member to become an ancestor, the roles or functions of the ancestors as well as how they are remembered by their living relatives.

The researcher further reviewed the concept of death and its relation to traditional, Jewish, and Christian belief systems as well as the issue of reincarnation. Finally, the researcher reviewed the impact of Christianity on ancestral veneration and other related traditional practices in Igboland with special reference to North-eastern Igbo people.

In the course of the review, the researcher discovered that in spite of the enormous works available to him, none seems to have adequately revealed the beliefs, practices, and relevance of ancestral veneration and the impact of Christianity in North-eastern Igboland.
This research work therefore fills the above gap in knowledge as it aims at fully x-raying the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in the area and how Christianity impacted on it.
CHAPTER THREE

ANNUAL FEEDING OF ANCESTORS IN NORTH-EASTERN IGBOLAND.

3.1 “Onwa-Eke” Festival in Ezza

The annual feeding of ancestors in Ezza land is known as "Onwa-Eke" because it usually falls on “Onwa-Eke” month according to Ezza calendar. “Onwa-Eke” month normally falls on January every year. However, the festival sometimes falls at the tail end of December.

Here is the traditional Ezza Calendar and Feast

The Ezza as well as the Roman run a twelve calendar year and observe the leap year at some times. The twelve month that make a year are as follows:

1. Onwa Esato - nesweoha (new year) - usually July in Roman Calendar.
2. Onwa tete - (Nineth month) - August in Roman Calendar.
3. Onwa iri - I loke Nwagu Nne Ochie suru te e kulaturiya Nwanwiya. Ie whebe Nne ochie la atsuakwa ime nshi - The tenth month (Onwa iri) is the time when all yams and crops planted are due for harvesting. This period is the time when Ezza people have surplus food ranging
from yams, cassava, and cocoyam. They have all been harvested or being harvested thereby making food available for both adult and young ones. This was why Iloke Nwagu, an old woman ordered that her grandchild be brought back to her home during that period because of plenty of food at her disposal.

(Tenth month) – September.

4. Onwa aji ihoto (The Aji feast month celebrated by some communities in Ezza) - (Eleventh month) - October.

5. Onwa Obodo – Amana (Amana Playground month) - November.

6. Onwa Inyimukfu – Idembia (Idembia Iroko Month) - December

7. Onwa Eke – Onwa erishi/Igbo I’eri iwhe (Feasting month) - January.


9. Onwa Ikpa (Tilling month) – March (Onwa wherewhere) if leap year.

10. Onwa okoro (planting month) – April

11. Onwa Ishii (Sixth Month) – May (planting continues)

12. Onwa Esaa (Seventh month) – June

**Ezza Native Weekday**

Ezza has four native weekdays namely, Eke day, Orie day, Afor day and Nkwo day. So, Ezza native weekday tallies with that of the Igbo people.

The festival is a period the ancestors (Ndi-iche) are honoured by offering them food, animals and drinks. It is mainly celebrated to offer sacrifices to the ancestors. It is also a period the living
symbolically commune with the ancestors. It is also called the Harvest festival because it is celebrated during the period when all crops have been harvested.

**Preparation**

Preparation usually starts as soon as “Onwa-Eke” new moon appears in the sky. Roads and paths are kept clean in the villages. Village squares are also kept clean. The entrance to compounds as well as the compounds and their surroundings are tidied up in readiness for the occasion. The huts (nguji) enclosing the symbolic graves (ilu) of the ancestors are repaired if in bad shape while the rooms of the huts are swept properly. The symbolic graves or tombs that are broken or that are in bad shape are put in order. The tombs of new ancestors are moulded into a good shape. The huts, mouths of the tombs (the necks of the broken clay-pots mounted on the tombs) as well as the tombs are all decorated.

The women in each compound usually use native chalk (nzu), yellow camwood (odo) and red camwood (ufie or uhie) to beautify the tombs of the ancestors. On the eve of the occasion which is usually on Nkwo day every family provides a small basket (“ishinkata”) full of uncountable pebbles and place it on a forked stick (“ichikara”) and mounted it at the boundary of each compound (ishiali or ishinefi) for
the evil spirits. In addition, a lobe of stale kola nut (oji chi) is placed on top of the pointed end of a palm frond, then an ofo stick, a small tobacco stick (oshi enwuru), an “obelebe” leave, “utsenyi” and a chick are tied together on the palm frond and mounted also at “ishiali” for the evil spirits or ghosts so that they will feast on those items and leave the living alone during the feeding of the ancestors. It is widely believed among the people that failure to provide those items to them would bring about torment or harassment of the living by the evil spirits.

After the offerings to the evil spirits on “Nkwo” day, the people get ready to usher in the “Eke” day. “Eke day” is the "Eke Azuta", that is, the Eke day people go to Eke Imoha to buy fowls, goats, yams, kolanuts, etc. for the sacrifice on the following day - Orie day - which is the actual day for the festival.

The actual celebration

“Orie” day is the actual celebration. The first community to open up the celebration is the Amuzu community followed by Amegu, Ameka, Ezzama and other remaining communities follow suit. Each community is expected to celebrate the festival within four days, that is within one Igbo week. The festival lasts for one full month and ends on harvest month - February which is “Onwa Akpaji” or “onwua Ikpa”
for short. This is the month every unharvested yam can be harvested by anybody who sees the yam or yams in any farm.

On the very day of the festival all the daughters of each ancestral home converge at their ancestral homes with their husbands and children. While coming the women are expected to bring along with them a calabash or bowel of pounded yam, with delicious soup full of meat as well as red palm oil mixed with roasted-ground pepper in a dish while husbands buy pots or calabashes of good up-wine, kola-nuts, and heads of tobacco. They also bring with them cocks, hens, goats, dried meat, kola-nuts, etc. which they offer as sacrifice to the ancestors.

Apart from the food and animals for sacrifice at the ancestral homes, every woman is expected to prepare delicious food for her husband. She can also give him kola-nuts and tobacco if she can afford those things. She can also add groundnuts and banana for nothing is too much to the husband during the occasion. The husband in turn has to buy her wrappers and dresses and provide meat and tubers of yams.
The sacrifice

In the ancestral shrine (nguji oha) every member of each family will present cock, hen, pounded yam (never cassava fufu), because yam is the staple crop which is supposed to be given to them. It is the king of the crops. kola-nuts, usually four kola-nuts, "ukpara" full of "uza-ukpara" and "anegu" (dried meat). When everybody has presented his or her own items for the sacrifice, the officiating elder in the family presents those items to the ancestors by laying them before the tombs of the ancestors. The cocks or hens or goats as the case may be are tied to the pillars on top of the tombs and he takes the kola-nuts and cuts its “eyes” (enya oji) that is, the tiny shoot within the lobes with his right finger nails and invokes the ancestors that can be remembered asking them to come and receive the kola-nuts and those sacrificial victims presented. He prays on behalf of the worshippers who have presented the items to the ancestors for good health, long life and prosperity. The prayer goes in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Igbo Language</th>
<th>English Version</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ndiichie (o kpo aha ha n’otu n’ otu) bia taa oji. Anyi bu umu unu agbakoola ebe a inye unu onyinye ndi a wusara n’ili unu ka unu racha</td>
<td>Ancestors (he mentions their names individually) come and eat Kolanuts. We your children have gathered here to offer you all these items layed before you on your tombs for your consumption.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As you take these gifts, we ask for good health, long life, and prosperity. May you increase our wealth, children and ensure that we live longer than you did before we join you over there. Ensure that no one dies prematurely. All these we pray. The people answer in unison Onogodu –o-o-o-o. Anybody who says it will not be so will not live to see it happen.

After the prayer, he casts the pieces of kola-nuts on the mouth of each tomb, pour some tumblers of wine on the mouths of the tombs. He then takes the cocks or hens or goats as the case may be and repeats the prayers and then kills them. He sprinkles the blood on the
mouthing the tombs and all over the tombs and stick the feathers of the fowls on the tombs. The (wing) feathers are tied together on the pillars of the tombs. He then throws the animals outside for preparation for cooking.

First, the feathers of the cocks or hens are burnt. The goat is partially roasted in order to remove the hair. Having removed the feathers or hair of the animal victims, their bodies are laid on “okwa” (wooden plate). The entrails are emptied. During the dissection, the worshippers keep an open eye to see whether the testicles of the cocks are white or have dark spots. If they are white without any dark spot, they rejoice that the ancestral spirits have received what is offered to them and they have the hope that the ancestors have heard their prayers. But if the testicles have dark spots, then it means the ancestral spirits rejected the sacrifice. A fortune-teller is consulted in due course to unravel the cause of the abomination.

Meanwhile, the women get the yam fufu and cock/hen/goat soup ready for the occasion. When the food and soup as well as the meat are ready, they are carried to ancestors’ hut. Here the officiating priest offers some parts of the livers to the ancestors by placing some on the mouths of the tombs. He then moulds some of the food into lumps and dip them into the soup and throws them on the tombs and
sticks some on the tombs while some are thrown out for other spirits who are probably other ancestors who are not from the particular family. As the officiating priest gives the ancestors food he prays in this way or similar manner:

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nara nri nke a ma mee ka ekpere any rue gi nti dika anyi na -enye gi nri. Nara nri nke esiri esí ma nye anyi nke di ndu. Ndi ogo mmuo azza si “Onogodu” nke putara “Amin”.</td>
<td>Take this food and let our prayers be accepted as we give you food. Receive the cooked food and give us the raw ones in return. The worshippers respond by saying &quot;Onoogodu, meaning Amen.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sharing**

For fowl, the person who presents it as sacrifice takes the head, its leg and a wing. The officiating priest (who is usually the eldest) takes the neck, the chest, the anal part and the gizzard. The thigh goes to the next elderly person while the third and fourth elderly persons divide the back part of the fowl. Other remaining parts are divided among other members of the family.

If a goat, sheep or cow is offered as sacrifice, the officiating priest takes the neck, and in addition takes the liver and kidney and other petty parts. The next elderly person takes the heart in addition
to other petty parts. The third and fourth elders take their own special selected parts called "mbo". The fifth and sixth elders are the sharers. They take a special share called "eka-oke", a part they take in view of the fact that they shared the animal(s). Then the remaining parts of the animal are shared among other members of the compound. They take their shares according to their age of birth or traditional marriage or "Ibu uwhu" ceremony.

Other events

The people eat, drink, sing a song and beat drums in gratitude to God and the ancestors including the divinities that the occasion or event had been very successful. It is a period of general conviviality. Singing, dancing and merrymaking continue till daybreak. Merrymaking continues the next day. Men and women carry their musical instruments and go from village to village or from home to home singing, dancing and receiving gifts from admirers. All these take place on Nkwo day.

At dusk, preparation and giving of food to evil spirits (ejo-maa) begins. The evil spirits are those who died without issue during their lifetime and those who could not marry in their lifetime as well as those who died prematurely. In the past, this category of dead men
usually did not receive proper burial ceremonies. Their corpses were usually carried on bamboo stems and thrown into bad bush usually called "ikirikpoo". Their dead bodies were not buried but allowed to be devoured by vultures and other animals. Their names are never mentioned while cooking in the night. They are evil spirits who go about causing havoc to people especially during “Onwa-Eke” festival because it is believed that they feel famished and are tantalized by the food, animals and drinks offered to ancestors.

Appeasement of evil spirits of Departed people (Non-ancestors)

Their food is prepared by smashing pieces of cooked yams in a bowel without addition of palm oil, salt or pepper. This type of food is called "onu". When dusk is over and darkness immediately falls, the family priest takes the "onu" out of the compound. He passes the playground and makes for “ishineswe” (a shallow pit where yam peelings are deposited for the evil spirits). There he drops the “onu” for the evil spirits. There the evil spirits feed themselves and depart to where they come from. It is believed by the people that failure to give them their own food would result in undue harassment of the worshippers of the ancestral festival.
Conclusion and dispersal

On Eke day, that is, the last Eke day of the month of the celebration, the masquerades of various sizes and descriptions travel to Eke-Imohia market and display their prowess and dexterity. Men, women, children, girls, and boys all go to see masquerades display at Eke-Imohia market. That day, the officiating priest offers only food to the Eke shrine (Enya Eke). When the offering is over, the elders move en mass to Ezekuna's tomb (Ezekuna is the founder of Ezza people) to offer sacrifice that will end the ancestral festival in Ezza for that year. A goat, cock, four kola-nuts, dried meat and palm wine are offered on Ezekuna's tomb with prayers and petitions. The prayers and petitions are said in this or similar way:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>English Version</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ezekuna, anyi bu umu gi agbakola na nguru be gi taa ibunye gi oji, okuku n’ewu na izu gi nke oma na mmemme “Onwa-Eke”. Were oji a, okuko na ewu na utara ji a ria nyeghachi anyi ozo n’uju. Anyi ji ohere a na-arial ndu ogologo,</td>
<td>Ezekuna, we your children have gathered in your compound today to give you kolanuts, fowls and goat and to feed you properly on this “Onwa - Eke” festival. Take these kolanuts, fowls and goat and pounded yam that has been cooked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

O kwa aririo anyi? Ohaneze azaa: I see!

and give us in return the raw ones in abundance. We seize this opportunity to ask for long life, wealth and prosperity. May we increase in strength and size. Whoever wishes us bad luck should reap bad luck in abundance. We are “kerekete nwenu” (birds called kerekete in Ezza), the eyes that see us sing this year will also see us the next year. Whoever says we shall not live, may the one die a bad death. The grandmother, who said that we are like what happened to her grandchild, may what happened to her grandchild happen to her again. A tree that sees us and shakes, may fire burnt it to ashes. Is it not how we have prayed? Others respond: so it is.
When the sacrifice is over in the later part of the day, the ceremony comes to an end.

It should be noted that the whole week of the festival is a holy one. And as such nobody is expected to quarrel, beat or fight anybody. A person who did not undergo ritual circumcision is not fit to offer sacrifice to the ancestral shrines of his family. It should also be noted that if one is unable to feed his ancestors on “Onwa-Eke” festival, he has to ask the ancestors to be patient with him; that he would do it the next month. However, he is not supposed to go and partake in the feasts of the ancestors in other households. If he does that he risks being struck dead by his own ancestors he left to go hungry while others are being fed.

Needless to say that the ancestors receive offerings and sacrifices regularly from their offspring. For example, offerings and sacrifices are offered to them at “Okeaku” (New yam) festival. However, the period of the “Onwa-Eke” festival is the designated period the ancestors are collectively remembered, and fed by the people.
3.2 “Otutara” or “Jioha” Festival in Izzi

“Otutara” or “Jioha” is the festival in Izzi which is celebrated annually to honour and feed the ancestors. Sacrifices are offered to them for the protection given to the people. It is also a period they solicit for more protection against various diseases, evil spirits, and untimely death. It is equally a period the people ask for long life, many children to live after them and prosperity. The festival is a sure means of telling the ancestors that they have not been forgotten by their living relatives.

The festival is celebrated in August /September yearly and it lasts for two full days. The festival marks the end of each year in Izzi land according to her traditional calendar. The feast usually begins in “Amegu” one week before “Otutara”, on “Azua” day from every community or sub-tribe. People come to the graves of Nnodo and Ekumaenyi (also spelt Ekumenyi), the forefathers of Izzi, to feed them. The sacrifice is normally done by the Ishi-uke of Amegu. When the sacrifice to Nnodo and Ekumaenyi is over, the next Azua becomes the very day everyone is expected to feed his own ancestors and the ancestors of the sub-clans.
Preparation

Preparation usually starts immediately the New yam festival is over. The entire community is perfectly kept clean. The hut (mkpu) housing the graves of the deceased are repaired if in bad condition. Broken graves are remoulded into a good shape. Women use yellow camwood, red camwood and native chalk to decorate the mouth of the grave. The people especially the females shave their hair and paint it black while others plait it. Yams (usually white yams only), seeds of “achi”, “akpurata” and “ekpiri” trees are bought if not available. Fowls, goats, cows, and dry bush meat are made available and are used for the feast. It should be noted that generally fowls are offered to the ancestors. Goats and cows are also offered too by those that can afford them.

The celebration

As I have stated in the introduction, the feast usually begins in “Amegu”, one week before “Otutara”, on “Azua” day from every community or sub-tribe. People come to the graves of Nnodo and Ekumaenyi, the forefathers of Izzi people, to feed them. The sacrifice is normally done by the Ishi-uke of Amegu. When the sacrifice is
concluded, the next Azua becomes the very day everyone is to feed his own ancestor and the ancestors of the sub-clans.

The ceremony normally starts early in the morning by the shooting of cannons (okpolali). The shooting, in fact, begins so early that it awakes those still sleeping. It is believed that the shooting of cannons also awakens the spirits of the dead and announces to the world that dawn has broken.

The shooting and booming of cannons continue throughout the two days of the occasion. It has to be stressed that it is only those people who killed cows to their dead fathers that are fit to use cannons (okpolali) while those who could not offer them and therefore buried their fathers without killing cows for them are not entitled to use cannons. They are however, entitled to use den guns instead.

On the day of the festival, everyone - sons, daughters, namesakes, etc. bring their gifts to the family elders. Married women send their own gifts for the feast to their brothers or relatives to sacrifice for them while they remain with their husbands. Everyone participates in the ceremony. The only exception is the widow whose husband has died and the second burial rites of the husband have not been performed. The reason is that the people fear that on Otutara day the dead husband who is not among those being fed will be sad for being
starved and is likely to come to fetch her wife to cook for him. So, the widow is advised by the elders to go to her own relatives and stay there till the festival is over.

**Sacrifice**

When all have gathered for the occasion, the oldest man in each ancestral home officiates on behalf of all the sons (umunna). He enters the hut housing the graves of the ancestors of that family. He sits on “ekwechi” (traditional dwarf stool) or on the grave and prepares the kola nut with oil and pepper and dry bush meat (anegu) and puts it in the mouth of the clay pot (onu obi) on the grave. He pours some glasses of dry gin or palm wine into the mouth of the grave. He then prays for good health, protection against calamities, abundance of food, children and above all long life and prosperity. Steensel (1996,p.149) records a man’s prayers to the ancestors in one of the Otutara festivals in this way:

You, my father, this is the kola oji we come to give you this day to celebrate Otutara this year. This is the little I could get this year. Give me good health; me and my children, my wives, my brothers and my half-brothers, our daughters in marriage and all our children and grandchildren, wherever they are. Protect all of us. Give us abundant food and let us live longer than you did. Help us to be
After prayer for his own gift(s) he kills the animal(s) which could be cock, goat or cow. He pours the blood into the mouth of the grave and on the neck of the pot. He then throws away the carcass for children to get ready for cooking. The man then takes the sacrifice of his brothers and sisters and prays on behalf of them one by one and kills the victims and sprinkles the blood on the emblems. He then takes the gifts or sacrifice of others, offers prayers on their behalf, slaughter the victims and pour the blood as usual on the mouth of the grave and sprinkles the rest on the whole tomb (or grave). When everyone has presented his or her gifts to the officiating priest and prayers have been said and the victims offered as sacrifice to the ancestors, the people wait anxiously for the dissection of the animals in readiness for cooking.

The animals if cocks are dissected and examined to ascertain whether the testicles are reddish white which portends or shows good omen or have dark or black spots which portends bad omen. It is also observed to know whether the fowls devour the sacrifices on the graves. If they do, it also shows good omen; if not, it portends bad omen. If bad omen is noticed, a fortune-teller is consulted in due
course to unravel the cause of the bad omen and necessary sacrifices are done to avert imminent disaster on the people.

When the cooking is over and the yam-fufu has been pounded, it is brought to the graves by the eldest man. The officiating priest prays once more. He prays in this or similar way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Igbo Language</th>
<th>English Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee nri ndichie anyi! Were ha ma rie maka ndu onye obula n’ezinaulo. Gbaa mbo ka umaka juputa ezinaulo nke ga-eme ka anyi lota n’igwe izu unu nri afo ozo. Nye anyi ezigbo ahuike, ji gboro kai na n’ikwu eziokwu, akunauba nke ga-eme ka anyi na- enyeju unu afo mgbe dum.</td>
<td>Here is the food our ancestors! Take them and eat for the entire life of the whole family. Ensure that children fill the family so that we will come en masse to feed you next year. Give us good health, enough yams, and in fact, wealth generally so that we will continue to feed you always.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the prayer, the priest then moulds the fufu into lumps and then dips them in the soup and places them in many lines next to one another before the mouth of the grave. He adds special parts of the meat such as liver (meji) and pours some cups of palm wine or other types of wine into the mouth of the grave (onu obi). He also
adds some snuff. It should be noted that if the ancestor is a title holder, the food is placed on the native plate (okwa) and never on the ground before the mouth of the grave. Some fufu and dry meat are also placed outside the tomb for other forefathers who may have come to participate in the sacrifice. The officiating priest also prays to them. The people once more observe whether the fowls really eat from the sacrifices.

**Sharing and eating**

When the feeding of the ancestors is over, the whole family gets ready for their own meal. The sharers move into action. The elderly, young men and women and children - all sit separately. Food and meat are shared according to seniority. So the oldest man receives the biggest portion followed by the next person and so on. When the elderly have received theirs, the remaining is divided and put on okwa for others to choose in order of seniority. It should be noted that some portions of the meat is set aside for neighbours, friends, in-laws and extended family members. Wine is also shared. Women are given theirs. The elderly get the best quality and the lion share. Young people get theirs. Children only drink soft drinks. Everybody present eats, drinks to his or her satisfaction.
Other ceremonies

The next ceremony, which follows is the making of small mats from palm leaves. These small mats are called “ugbeja”. Many “ugbejas” are made and food is placed on them for the jujus (minor gods). Economic trees such as coconut, mango, bush mango, oil palm, etc. also receive gifts of food on “ugbeja”. Houses and all things inside the houses especially the iron tools receive food on ugbeja as well.

In the noon, two shallow sacrificial pits, usually called “njoku” are made at the right side by a boy along the entrance to the compound. The boy receives dry meat from the elder as he digs the pit. The soil removed from the pits is put in four small heaps which are used to fix four mats (ugbeja) in front of the njoku. When the boy finishes the making of the pits, an elderly men holds him by the hand and lift him out of the pit. Then the oldest man puts some porridge of yam with palm oil (onu) on the four mats. The man also puts a sharp piece of wood or bamboo on the mat on which a piece of yam and a piece of kola is impaled. When this is done the man asks the father who is now an ancestor to accept their gifts and give the family peace. Note that some mats are also hung on the two fig-trees at the entrance to the compound if the owner of the compound is
already dead and had the cow title during his life time. It should also be noted that “njoku” is dug for the first time on the day that the “ishi-akpa” is installed and is usually repeated on every “Otutara” day. The man only makes two pits but if his father is still alive, four pits are made. The yam peels are thrown into the pits on Otutara.

The next day of the festival is “Iboko nwa maa” or “Iboko oboku” called such because it is the Iboko market day the spirits of the dead are believed to attend market, buy and sell like other living human beings. People say that those who are able to see spirits, normally see them on that day in the market. Around nkwegu and iziogo “nkwegu nwa maa” and “iziogo nwa maa” are also found. This market is the first market day after “Otutara” day. Some people entertain fear that if they come to market they are likely going to buy from the ghosts unknowingly. People believe that they dress like human beings and sell goods like human beings but they are dead men and women.

It should be noted that title holders do kill fowls on Otutara day, roast them and preserve them with salt and pepper before drying them. They send them the next day to the market where the title holders gather to receive these fowls, which are called “oku ishi-akpaa”, so called because the blood of the chickens killed are smeared
and poured on the “ishi-akpaa”. The title holders eat in the market and share the meat of the fowls and depart for home.

The day is also called “Iboko oboku” because more of the fowls that remain from the previous day will be shared. It has been noted too that under normal condition, people feed their dead father, mother and namesake on “Otutara” day. However, women who of necessity have to be home on “Azua Otutara” day to cook for their husband, do seize the opportunity to go on “Iboko oboku” to sacrifice to their own dead parents.

Iboko day is the day for real celebration. All cases and disputes are settled that day. That day delicious food is prepared in abundance. Wine is made available in abundance too. People go out to visit friends. Gifts of food and drink are sent to relatives, friends and well-wishers. People are seen flocking along the village roads and market squares and play grounds. Music and dance feature very prominently. Around 2 o’clock (or thereabouts), dances start in the village square. The girls and young women dance the “igbiri” dance, while the boys dance the “edege” dance. The “ayita” dance is also danced by older boys and young men. The people also dance the “okweregede” dance which the people say is the oldest dance in Izzi
land. The people sing, beat drums and dance till darkness fall. When it is dark they disperse to their respective homes.

**Conclusion and dispersal**

On “Okpo” day every body goes to the farm to ritually and symbolically weed on the farm. The people say in Izzi dialect “kanyi je azo okpa otutara l’egu”. (That is, let us go and march otutara legs on the farm. The final ceremony of “Otutara” is the chasing of evil spirits. The evil spirits (ejo-maa) are the spirits of the dead who during their life time did not marry or did not have children and were not buried according to custom but were thrown in the bad bush (ochieja) for the birds of the air and dogs to devour. People believe that these spirits go about causing havoc and harming people especially during “Otutara”. The women therefore ensure that they chase them away through a method called “aku awha” (apha) or “aku dehoho”.

This is how it is done. The event starts within two weeks after “Otutara”. It starts from Amegu around 10 o’clock in the night. The people shout that evil spirits, the bad year and sickness and all evils should go away empty-handed. They shout, make noise through beating empty tins or drums using pestles to make noise in the
mortars, hitting any object they can lay their hands on against another. They combine the noise of shouting with that of empty drums, tins, mortars, etc. As they knock objects against another they shout with their full might:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Izzi dialect</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ejo -maa gbara eka la -o , la-o-o-o</td>
<td>Evil spirit should go empty-handed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee-hoho dee-hoho (two times)</td>
<td>Dee-hoho, dee-hoho (two times).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ejo Awha (apha) gbaru eka la-o, la, o-o-o</td>
<td>The bad year should go empty handed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee-hoho, dee hoho (two times)</td>
<td>Dee-hoho, dee-hoho (two times)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the event starts at Amegu, it quickly spreads from village to village throughout Izzi. The people firmly believe that after a few hours the evil spirits and bad year including all sorts of evils and sickness must have been driven away.

In conclusion, “Otutara” is the annual festival for feeding the ancestors. However, the ancestors are fed as many times as possible. The people observe “Otutara onanwu” during the dry season immediately after the harmattan, when the yam is tied in the barn. Rich people in most cases observe this. The ancestors are also
remembered during daily prayers and when food or drink is being taken by the people. Some lumps of food are often thrown outside for them during eating. A glass of wine is also poured outside or on the ground for them when wine is being drunk by the people.

3.3 “Igba - Aji” Festival in Ikwo Community

Ikwo community or clan feed the ancestors yearly during “Igba-Aji” festival. Five principal communities namely, Alike, Unweka, Echara, Mgbabo and Okpuitumo, feed the ancestors yearly. The ceremony normally begins on Orie day and ends on Eke day. “Noyo Alike” begins it, followed by Echara Nkpoke. Ezeke Unweka is the last group that celebrate the festival and end it for the year. Each community feeds the ancestors on one Igbo week, then give way for another community the next Igbo-week; followed by another community until the whole Ikwo clan completes the ceremony. The day of the sacrifice is called “Inu ndi maa nri” (giving of food to the spirits). Cannons are fired during the festival and masquerades display their dance very prominently during the period.

Preparation

Three days to “aji” festival, the women and youths get the compounds tidy. Village squares and roads/pathways are kept clean
by the village age-grades. Each woman sees to it that her house is kept clean and beautiful by rubbing cow dung, and white chalk on the walls of her house. The site of the huts housing the tombs of the ancestors are kept clean. Tombs and huts that are damaged or in a bad state are repaired. The tombs are decorated with local chalk (nzu), red camwood (ufie) and yellow camwood (odo). The tombs of new ancestors are moulded into a good shape with the “mouths” of the tombs properly positioned. The skull or heads of animals offered on the tombs are hung on the tombs.

The men buy cocks for male tombs and hens for female tombs. In addition, dry fish and wine are also bought in readiness for the occasion. They also buy white yams and kola-nuts for the sacrifice. They buy new dresses for their wives and daughters. They buy new clothes for themselves and their sons. The women and their daughters plait their hair while the men and their sons have haircut. Gunpowder and cannons are also made available. The people in charge of masquerades display also get prepared.

The “Umuada” coming to “Aji” festival have to provide the following to their parents:

(a) Four fat yams for the father.

(b) Four fat yams for the mother.
(c) Grass cutter or a big dry fish for the mother.

(d) A head of tobacco and a snuff box for the father.

(e) Four gallons of wine for both parents.

The “Umuada” have to come with their husbands to the ancestral homes for the festival. In addition to what they have to give to their parents, they also make provision for what they have to offer as sacrifice to the ancestors.

**The sacrifice**

The most elderly man serves as the priest in each compound. However, the priest can delegate another elderly man to perform the sacrifice for him if it is not possible for him to do it. It should be noted that a priest is debarred from offering to the ancestors if he has sexual intercourse with the wife or wives of his father. The priest of each home offers the sacrifice on behalf of others. The items for sacrifice are brought into the huts. The people gather together in the hut or outside, if it could not accommodate them. He prays with kola-nuts for each offerer and kills the victims. Here is the sample of the prayers:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Igbo Language</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ndi ichie (okpoputa aha onya ahu) bia rie ihe ndia ewetara gi n’eba. Ka ina ewere onyinye ndia a (onye na achu-aja akpo aha onye nyere onyinye ahu) anyi na ario maka ahuike, ndu ogologo, na umuaka na akunauba.</td>
<td>The ancestor (he mentions the particular ancestor) come and eat what is presented to you here. As you take this gift the offerer (the priest mentions the name of the person making the offering) asks you for good health long life, many children and prosperity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the prayers, he casts the pieces of kola-nuts on the mouths of the tombs, kills the victims and sprinkles the blood on the mouth and all over the tomb. When the animals have all being killed, they are prepared and used for cooking. The cocks are roasted to remove the feathers. Then they are dissected. During the dissection, the worshippers keep an eagle eye to observe whether the testicles of the cocks are white or have dark spots. If they are white they claim that the ancestors have accepted the sacrifice but if they have dark spots, it means the ancestral spirits have rejected the sacrifice. The person who gives out the fowl for sacrifice goes to the fortune-teller for advice because it is an abomination. The livers and gizzards are
roasted and oiled and some parts offered to the graves of the ancestors while the rest are eaten by the elders. Yams and the fowls are cooked. When they are done, they are brought to the tombs for offering. The “ntukoleliya” (small lump of food placed on top of the main fufu on each native dish (oba) is used to offer to the ancestors. Some glasses of wine are also poured on the mouth of the tombs.

**Sharing**

After feeding the ancestors, the food, meat and wine are brought out for sharing. Food is shared first before meat. The remaining “ntukoleliya” or “okpulishi utara” is given to the person who comes to offer the sacrifice.

The one left at the bottom of the native dish (oba) is for the women who cooked the food. The rest of the food is spread on native tray (okwa) and shared to all. Next, the meat is brought out for sharing. If cock or hen, the backside and the chest are reserved for the elders. The necks are shared among the namesakes of the ancestor of that particular tomb. One of the legs of the fowls is given to the person who roasted it while the remaining one is for the sharers. After giving the elders all the back parts and chests of all the animals offered as sacrifice, the remaining are divided into two - one
for males and the other for females. They divide them further when they reach their respective homes.

After eating and sharing of meat, drinking of wine follows. The ancestors are given one glass each by pouring the wine in the eye of the tombs (enya-ilu). They say each ancestral tomb has to drink first before the rest of the people. The elders take the first rate. The rest are drunk by all. The Umuada, the women and neighbours all drink to their satisfaction. The women while drinking in the midst of the men have to squat in respect. As wine drinking is going on, a good woman singer starts a song by singing a beautiful tune while others respond. Good dancers swing into action. They sing, dance and celebrate lives.

Closing

The festival comes to an end with the observation of what is called “Aji Unwanyi”. It is called Aji Unwanyi because it is the festival where women folk celebrate their own feast. It is particularly dedicated to womenfolk in each year. Women prepare very delicious food for their husbands, friends and relatives. The masquerades feature very prominently during the closure. Much wine is taken while the masquerades move from one village to another. They are seen all over the villages and along the roads. It has to be noted that one who could not feed his ancestor in a particular year has to stay indoors
during the feeding of the ancestors. He is not supposed to go and participate in the festival in another family. If he does he risks his life as he stands a very big chance of being killed by his dead father he starved during the festival.

Similarly, he is not supposed to attend burial ceremonies and rites if he has not done second burial ceremonies and rites of his parents.

3.4 “Igwa Maa” Festival in Ngbo and Ezzangbo

A man normally begins to feed his ancestors when he has fully performed the second-burial rites and ceremonies of his father. It is only when he has done that, that he has right to build a mud tomb that serves as a point of contact between the living and the “living-dead”. The festival is called “igwa maa”. The festival usually starts yearly on the month of March /April and ends within a month. That is to say that each family has to feed its own ancestors any day within that month. This implies that the festival is not done one day by the people. However, everybody is expected to perform the rites and ceremonies within that month of March. The ancestors are also fed again in July yearly.
Preparation

When the time of the festival is approaching, the leaders of each village ensure that paths, village squares and playgrounds are kept immaculately clean. Each family ensures that the family and the surroundings are kept clean. Men and women as well as boys and girls and children also get ready for the occasion. Women plait their hairs, girls do the same. Children also have a hair cut. New clothes are sewn for them. Yams, cocks, rams, goats are bought if they are not available. Those who can afford horse or cow can also buy them in readiness for the occasion.

Each clan, or community and kindred unit has to appoint a representative that has to reside at “Ndulo”, in Ngbo which is the heart and seat of the “Igwa maa” festival. The representatives popularly called council of elders or traditional priests are expected to move to “ndulo” at least a week before the festival so as to observe what is known as “traditional holiness”. Members of each family (both men and women) will also go along with the traditional priests and observe the traditional holiness. The tombs are beautifully decorated with camwood and yellow wood and white chalk.
The celebration

The usual day of the celebration is normally on “Okwo” day. The eldest man in each family who has performed the second burial ceremony of his late father is the only person that is qualified to perform the sacrifice. On the appointed day, the officiating priest of each family offers the sacrifices on behalf of the family. The women born by the ancestor(s) are expected to bring pounded yam accompanied with well-cooked soup while each husband is expected to provide two gallons of up wine, four Igbo kola nuts and a bottle of well-ground snuff. They are also expected to provide cocks, goats, rams as the case may be. Wealthy ones could offer cows or horses. All the above items are offered to the ancestors. The animals are killed at the tombs which are carved images called “enya maa” which represent the shrines or images of the ancestors. Prayers are offered by priests. The prayers are similar to the ones already given above. After the prayers, the animals are killed and their blood smeared on the emblems of the ancestors. Food and wine are also offered to the ancestors by the officiating priest.

After making sacrifices to the shrines or emblems of the ancestors, the meat, wine and food are shared among the people. They are shared among the in-laws, the chief priest, the elders,
daughters of each family, the women and their husbands in each family, the namesakes of the ancestors as well as the grandchildren of the departed. The in-laws by right are given one of the wings of fowls killed and one of the forelegs of goat, ram, cow or horses killed. The other wings or forelegs go to the youths within that family. The elders have the following shares of the animals killed: $\frac{1}{2}$ of the thigh, some parts of the livers and heart. It has to be noted that only titled men have the right to partake in the sharing and picking of meat at the place of sacrifice. Those who are not titled men are not supposed to participate because the ancestral spirits will not spare their lives.

When the sacrifice and sharing and eating and drinking are over at the ancestral shrines, the man who has gone to feed his ancestor(s) now returns to “ndiagu” with the remaining food items, meat and wine accompanied by the traditional musicians singing the traditional music. The remaining food items, meat and wine are eaten up at Ndiagu.

Here at “Ndiagu” village his friends and well-wishers will welcome him and thank him for feeding his ancestor. On reaching home, the man will have a 21-gun salute to show that he has successfully performed the duty of feeding his ancestors without problem. He will entertain the villagers who have gathered to
welcome him with the leftover of the food, meat and wine, although he has to add more food, meat and wine to argument whatever is left after the sacrifice.

The festival is rounded off about five days full of activities starting from “Okwo” day to the next “Okwo”.

### 3.5 Belief system of the people

The belief system of the North-eastern Igbo groups could be said to be diffused monotheism hence they believe in one Supreme Deity Chineke or Chileke without a definite denial of other gods - Earth goddess, Ali, the Sky god, Igwe and other minor gods such as Aliobu, Njaji, Ochiorogwu, Ohe-nwata, Ebo, and the rest of them.

In pre-colonial days the people were all polytheists, for they believed and worshipped many gods. In the words of Ottenberg (2005, p.23) the people “have held strong beliefs in the widespread Igbo spirit of the earth, and in a common Igbo high god, Chineke or Chileke, as well as in a common Igbo Cross River spirit, Obasse or Obase”. The people also believe in the existence of numerous spiritual forces. They believe strongly in ancestors and in reincarnation. Public and private shrines with their priests abound in the North-eastern Igbo groups. Sacrifices are common in the areas to ensure health,
long life and success in farming, raising animals, and above all in producing and rearing children.

Nowadays a good number of the people have been converted to Christianity. The Catholic Church was the first to be established in Ezza, Izzi, Mgbo and Ezzamgbo while the Presbyterian Church first took root in Ikwo soil. As of now the Catholic Churches, Anglican churches, and others are found all over the principal North-eastern Igbo groups making substantial converts from the traditional worshippers.

3.6 Divinities and other gods worshipped by the people.

Divinities are beings (deities) having divine attributes, ranking below God but above men. In other words, they are gods that are next to the Supreme Being. In the words of Awolulu and Dopamu (1979, p.72) they “are gods with small letter “g”. They are believed to be offspring of God. They are believed to exist with definite functions or duties to perform. The people see them as “Ministers or functionaries with portfolios in the theocratic government of the world”. In the words of Mbiti (1969, pp.75-76):

Divinities are on the whole thought to have been created by God, in the ontological category of the spirits. They are associated with Him, and often
stand for His activities or manifestations either as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of those major objects or phenomena of nature. Some of them are national heroes who have been elevated and deified, but this is rare, and when it does happen the heroes become associated with some function or form of nature.

The North-eastern Igbo groups believe that God delegated some authority or functions to the divinities in their areas of jurisdiction. The divinities are the intermediaries between God and man. God is often worshipped through them and they receive regular sacrifices. The divinities worshipped by the people are the Arch-Divinity Ali, Thunder Divinity Igwe and Oracle Divinity Ibinukpabi.

**Ali (The Mother Earth)**

Ali (also called Ala) is a chthonic fertility goddess of the Igbo people. Jordan (1993, p.10) described her correctly as:

A popular deity who is also goddess of the underworld linked with a cult of the dead (which rest in her womb). Her temple is the Mbari, which contains a cult statue depicting the goddess seated with a child in her arms and adorned with the crescent moon. She is flanked by attendant deities. She enjoys a profusion of local shrines which are well supplied with votive offerings. Serious crimes including murder are considered to be offences against her. An annual yam festival is celebrated in her honor.
Ali is indeed the arch-divinity of the people as well as the Igbo People in general. She is the Earth goddess. She is the ruler of men, source of morality and protector of the crops and also human beings. As queen of the underworld she receives the dead into her womb. Ali is the land in which people build their houses and live till they die. It is also the place they till for the production of their crops and the place for the rearing of animals. It is also the place they are buried when they die. Ali is the guardian of public morality. She gives and administers moral laws. Ilogu (1985, p.11) further observed that:

Ala, the earth deity, guards the morality of any given place in a number of ways. What she sanctions constitutes right conducts and what she condemns is tabooed. Priests and elders who have been initiated into the sacred society called Ozo are the exponents of Ala’s mind. Homicide, adultery especially incest, stealing of yams and some other criminal offences are considered Nso ala, abominations against Ala, that is against the traditions of the people as laid down by the earth deity.

In addition to the above offences or sins against Ali, killing of sacred animals, coveting another person’s animals, coveting another person’s land, giving birth to twins and poisoning are other offences or sins against her. It has to be noted however, that giving birth to twins is no longer considered as a serious abomination to Ali as it used to be. Ali, the Mother Earth is indeed a great divinity not only in
North- eastern Igboland but all over Igboland and offences against her are never toyed with.

Punishment meted out against the violators of Ali’s commandments is insanity which is very difficult to cure. A lot of sacrifices are performed to propitiate the deity before cure could be effected. Land is so important in the North-eastern groups that “its disposition is guided by societal norms since anything otherwise will attract the punishment of Ali” (Ugoh 2003, p .88).

**Igwe (The Sky god)**

The sky god is called Igwe in this part of Igboland. He is usually said to be the husband of Ali who sends rain to the earth. The sky god, Igwe sends rain to soften the earth so as to make it productive. The people admire the god as the sender of rain and giver of fertility. People offer sacrifices to its shrines and name children after him. Igwe has oracles located in various part of Igboland which most of the traditionalists patronize. Sorcery, poisoning, bewitching, stealing, murder and the breaking of his laws are sins against Igwe. The punishment meted out against offenders is destruction of the person’s life and goods through thunder and lightning.
**Oracle and other gods**

Oracles are generally the mouthpieces of divinities and spirits and tend to be connected with divination. Oracles are consulted in matters of divination and health care. The oracles are believed to unravel the mysteries of premature death of persons, the loss of personal belongings or things belonging to a group or community. Oracles also unravel the mysteries of seemingly incurable illnesses, poor harvest, epidemic, famine as well as predict what the future has in store for individuals or community. Ibinukpabi (Long juju of Arochukwu) is the oracle that the people patronize more than any other.

Other gods include male and female gods which are kept in the homes. Male gods include Uzu, Aliobu, Ogbube-Ali, Okukeuwa, Obasi, Njajii, Ogwu and Obu-ukwa (ite-onu-abor) while the female gods include Ochiorogwu, Okuke-Uwa, Ochi-Ogbaru-Nwanyi, Iteonu-Abor, Ohenwata, etc.

**Uzu** is the god of the blacksmiths. It is the god of fire and head of firework or profession of the blacksmith. Uzu normally chooses people to take up the profession of blacksmithing. Uzu gives signs to those chosen during infancy. When a child is chosen by uzu, the parents of the child know through dotted spots that resemble body rashes
spreading all over the child’s body. When noticed, the father immediately takes cola nut and appeals to the uzu god to take care of the child assuring uzu that as soon as the child grows up, he will take up the profession of blacksmithing.

**Aliobu** is the compound god. It is a man’s god. Females are usually debarred from touching it or removing it from where it is kept. Females are not even permitted to cut off any of the branches of the fig-tree that houses the Aliobu god. Aliobu is usually kept by a full-fledged traditional man who has married, performed the traditional marriage rites and ceremonies and crowned it with “ibuwhu” rite and ceremony. Aliobu is normally placed on the ground at the centre of the compound. This god serves as a watchdog in the compound. It helps to restore any stolen article or money in the compound. It does this by striking the offender with sickness ranging from madness to abnormal behaviour, etc. Aliobu god also helps in maintaining conjugal fidelity on both the man and the wife as they are never permitted to commit adultery.

**Ogbube-Ali** is also a compound god. It is also a man’s god. This god sits with Aliobu god in the centre of the compound. They complement each other. Both take the same sacrifice, work together and feed together. So nobody invokes Aliobu without mentioning Ogbube-Ali.
Ogbube-Ali performs the same function that Aliobu performs. Ugoh (2003, p.49) rightly observed that both “are a must for a man in Abakaliki traditional society”.

**Oke or Okuke-Uwa:** This is the only god that represents Chileke (Supreme Being). Man speaks to the Supreme Being through this god. This god is appealed to for the gift of a child. Such request is presented to Chileke through Okuke-Uwa. A woman who is barren seeks the assistance of Okuke-Uwa through the offering of sacrifices. Her husband makes this request through his Okuke-Uwa and the Earth goddess, Ali simultaneously for the gift of a child or children. The role of Okuke-Uwa in the process of procreation is an important one. According to Ugoh (2003, p.53) “Okuke-Uwa sees to the spirit world as well as the physical world. It also monitors the relationship between the two. Okuke-uwa god is not a vengeful god, hence it is associated with goodness of children coming to the world as well as other new creatures”.

**Obasi:** This is a warrior god and the god of hunters. Warriors and hunters prepare for war and hunting respectively by appeasing Obasi god. They lay their instruments of war and hunting before the shrine of Obasi for his blessing. Warriors pray to Obasi to protect them in the battlefield. They do this through promises of bringing human heads
home to offer sacrifice to him. Hunters too pray to him before going for hunting for protection against dangerous animals and for a huge catch of big wild animals.

Obasi is a god of blood and hungers for fresh blood. Fresh human heads cut from the battlefield are placed in front of Obasi shrine. The blood gushing from the human head is used in sprinkling the face of Obasi. Hunters when they return from hunting deposit their game they were able to catch on the emblem of Obasi. The animals will remain there while friends and well-wishers would come to dance round the Obasi, congratulating the hunters and showering praises to Obasi. The hairs of the animals are removed and stuck on the emblem of Obasi before the removal of the animals placed before him.

According to Ugoh (2003, pp. 57-58) Obasi has a direct contribution to the economic history of the North-eastern Igbo people in the following respect:

As the god of battle, it helps the entire community to pursue their course that centers on collective security and survival. It helps the community fight their enemies just for one reason always - over agricultural land and for expansion. If victory is won, a lot of tribute is given to Obasi. It means that new residential territories and more agricultural land are acquired for the community. This leads to expansion. Ndiegu as new territory was one of such
areas captured from neighbours and such land increases the land ownership of both individuals and the entire members of the society. Ndiegu lands are shared among the large families that make up a community. Each family will share their own portion among the older member of the family who were presumably war veterans. Boundary disputes are not exempted.

**Nja-Jii:** This is the god of yams. This god is seated at the centre of the yam barn. Before the harvest and eating of new yams in each year, Nja-jii is among the gods that are venerated and appeased with cola nuts, new yams and meat. The ancestors are fed before new yams are eaten. Yam is never harvested and eaten without the rituals and sacrifices to the gods concerned. The elders of each clan fix the appropriate month of the year harvest and eating of new yam take place. Yam is the only crop that enjoys a highly organized yearly festival before it is harvested and eaten by the people. The Ezza people call the new yam festival ‘Okeaku’, Izzi people call it ‘Ojiji’ Ikwo, people call it ‘Nefioha’ while Ngbo people called it ‘Insuikwe’

Nja-jii god is one of the beloved gods in North-eastern Igbo because of the high premium the people placed on yams, especially on white yam. As a god of yam, Nja-jii sees to it that yams kept in the barn are protected against thieves. It is also a god that ensures good harvest. In each year Nja-jii is thanked for bumper harvest and a
promise is made to it that if harvest is good the next year, a white hen will be offered to it in appreciation.

Yam especially white yam is a highly valued crop in North-eastern Igboland. It is the crop of the rich. A man’s wealth is determined by the number of yams staked in his barn as well as the number of cows, goats, hens and wives he has. The importance of white yam has to be stressed because throughout the North-eastern Igboland it is the only yam that is highly valued. It is the only yam that is used in sacrifice. The ancestors are fed with white yams. Nja-jii is also fed with white yam and other gods. In all sacrifices that require food, only white yam is used to offer sacrifices to the gods.

**Ogwu:** Ogwu is a personal god that male and female keep in the home. It is regarded as the bravest of all the personal gods because of the practical manifestation shown to a lot of people. Ogwu selects persons who see to the upkeep and delivery of its numerous messages. Such persons selected are endowed with spiritual powers that enable them to cure people suffering from different illnesses. This god usually selects persons to undertake profession related to medicine such as midwifery and medicine man (dibia) for attending to pregnant women and fortune-telling respectively. A person who is selected never refuses without some disastrous consequences. If the
person refuses he or she will fall sick and will never recover and many abnormal things will happen to the person and the members of his or her household until the person takes up his/her calling by Ogwu.

The role of Ogwu is to restore normalcy to a person who behaves abnormally. Ogwu ensures that one maintains proper ethical behaviour in the society. Once a person is insane, Ogwu is appeased for normalcy to be restored to the person. It is the key role of Ogwu.

The power of Ogwu is never underrated even by the Christians. Ugoh (2003, p. 41) recounts what a Christian convert called by Ogwu does for his or her safety.

Someone who is called by Ogwu and is a Christian, usually does the following: He/she would appease Ogwu with a promise that he/she would take up the profession of his calling. That since he/she has taken to the worship of the white man's god, he will also take up the cure of the sick according to the white orthodoxy. The Ogwu will agree and so such a person could take up nursing, patent medicine dealership, studying medicine at the university and qualify as a medical doctor, pharmacist or in a related field. Such people are those who excel in their medical profession or its practice and not necessarily the most brilliant medical student in the class.

Ugoh argued that the people's belief is usually a mystery and is very difficult in giving proper interpretation. He is of the opinion that “It is of no use trying to dispute the above assertion because it has been
researched into, proved and it has been happening to the people” (Ugoh 2003, pp. 41-42).

**Obu-Ukwa (Ite-Onu-Abor):** This god is an auxiliary god that does not stand on its own. Rather it assists Ogwu who sits with it. It is generally regarded as the wife of Ogwu. Ogwu is considered to be stronger than Obu-ukwa god. This god is kept by both males and females in North-eastern Igboland.

**Female Gods**

All married women in traditional North-eastern Igbo keep personal gods. Tradition forbids unmarried women to keep personal gods. Female gods in the area include Ogwu, Ohe-Nwata, Okuke-Uwa, Ochiogbu, and Ite-onu-Abor.

**Ogwu:** Ogwu is one of the gods that both males and females keep in their homes. It is the most effective god kept by women to take care of their huts or houses. Women native doctors take their professional licenses from the Ogwu.

In her daily prayers, a woman takes cola nuts and calls on all the ancestors and Ogwu including other gods to help her in her household to ward off evil. She also prays for good health for herself and her children. She also prays for the success of her daughters in
marriages and the welfare of her children abroad and the cities in the country. She also prays for increase in harvest of the year’s crops.

**Ohe-Nwata:** As the name sounds, it is the god that takes care of the children. Its primary responsibility is to take care of the children right from the spirit world through conception to delivery and maturity. Ohe-nwata is the god that is appeased and appealed to when a woman is barren. She is begged to intervene on behalf of the barren woman to save her from the agony of barrenness. A woman who stops conception without the attainment of her menopause also appeals to Ohe-nwata. The fertility of a woman’s womb is the responsibility of Ohe-nwata. When a new baby is born, Ohe-Nwata is notified to take care of the baby till maturity.

**Okuke-uwa:** Okuke-uwa for women is placed in the yam barn. It is the god of creation. It is responsible for the physical moulding of man. It is through this god that man speaks to the Supreme Being who is the creator of everything. In speaking to the Creator of the world, the most important interest to man and woman is to have a child and such requests are channelled to the Supreme Being—“Chukwu Okike” through Okuke-Uwa. A woman who is barren usually seeks the assistance of Okuke-Uwa through the offering of sacrifices. The Earth
goddess and Okuke-Uwa are appealed to simultaneously for the gift of a child.

Okuke-uwa is an important god in the sense that a woman who has no issue is ruined in life. She will not receive decent burial. Her husband who dies without issue will also not receive decent burial because both of them would be thrown into the evil forest and never buried. Although the coming of Christianity has influenced the burial practice, the childless couples are never buried at home but at the backyard or nearby bush but they are never accorded decent and full burial rites and ceremonies like those who left behind children.

**Ochi-Ogbu (Ochi-Ogbu Nwanyi):** Ochi-Ogbu Nwanyi is a god of happiness. It is also a god of appreciation, especially of gifts. The god is always happy when presented with gifts. Ugo (2003, pp.71) observed that “It is truly feminine god for females are consumers of their husband’s wealth”. This statement is not completely true because most women are preservers of their husbands’ wealth. In some cases, some women are richer than their husbands and happen to be the breadwinner of the family. This god is daily or occasionally fed with food, wine, kola nuts, dried meat and fresh blood of fowls.
3.7 The Relevance of Ancestors and Ancestral Veneration in North-eastern Igboland

The belief in ancestral spirits is widespread in (North-eastern) Igboland. The ancestors protect their earthly lineages (Ozigbo 1988, p. 30). The ancestors are part of the family and lineage and are therefore interested in the family and lineage they belong. They are part and parcel of the family and this is the reason “they are felt to be still present, watching over the household, directly concerned in all the affairs of the family and property, giving abundant harvests and fertility” (Parrinder 1969, p. 125). The ancestors are therefore “guardians of public morality, and also safeguard against any perpetual alienation of the traditional family land” (Arinze 1970, p.19). They perform this function in conjunction with the Mother Earth Ali. Okafor (1992, p.23) rightly observed that “An offence against the ancestors is an outright abomination and thus a crime against Ala, the constitutional deity”. The ancestors are also believed to have the power to protect their beloved ones in the human world against evil spirits and evil men, against misfortune and other calamities. Olupona (1991, p. 130) rightly noted that it is the “Belief in survival and in interaction between the living and the dead [that] is the basis of the veneration of the deceased in general”. 
The relevance of the ancestors to the people occasioned the honours accorded to a person who died a “good death” to quicken the deceased acquisition of ancestral powers. This normally starts from the very moment the person dies. The person is given a befitting burial. The children ensure that their deceased parents are buried according to traditional laws and customs. This is because as Okafor (1992, p. 22) rightly observed “A “good” burial is a passport to the spirit world - the happy dwelling place of the ancestors”. After the burial of the corpse, a second burial which is a mere ritualism is done at a later date. The essence or purpose of the second burial is to make the dead person qualify for annual feeding of the ancestors and admission to the “court of the ancestors” in the spirit world. The daily invocation and worship of the ancestors show unmistakably that they are important and are the bedrock of the individual families and lineages they belonged. Apart from the daily invocation and worship, a special yearly feast is held in their honour in igboland “about August time” (Arinze 1970, p. 20). The months differ in North-eastern igboland. For instance, Ezza people honour them by feeding them between December/January yearly. They also honour them during “Okeaku Ezza” festival, that is during New yam festival. Izzi people also feed them annually in August/September, Ikwo, during Igba-aji festival and Ngbo / Ezzangbo around March/April yearly. The
ancestors are honoured by giving them food and drinks during those periods.

The annual feeding of the ancestors is a yearly ancestral festival. It is very important because it is a means of communing with the ancestral spirits by their living descendants. Moreover, it serves “as a unifying factor for all the members of the family and their grandchildren” (Orji 1999, p. 80). When the people come together for the festival, sacrifices are made to thank them for the protection they give to the people. The occasion affords the people a golden opportunity to come together as one extended family. They eat, drink and celebrate life together. They recount in common their achievements, and problems as well as their aspirations. The occasion affords them the opportunity to settle family disputes and other matters that retard the progress of the extended family.

The relevance of the ancestors is also seen in their roles in traditional oath-taking where they are called upon to bear witness in the oath. The people strongly believe as Steensel (1996, p.146) has rightly observed:

They know who is telling lies or who speaks the truth. Forefathers are trusted that they can pass free and fair judgment, irrespective of the person’s status. They punish whoever is guilty and honours the forefathers. They are the last hope of the common man!
The importance of ancestral veneration is also seen in the way the North-eastern Igbo people honour the ancestors by naming children after them. In this way, the ancestors are remembered almost for ever in all over North-eastern Igboland. The elderly feel greatly honoured when children are named after them while alive apart from that due to them when they die and become ancestors.

Furthermore, the ancestors act as intermediaries between their living children and the deities. They ensure that protection is given to their living descendants by intervening on their behalf when the need arises. Apart from intercessory and protective roles of the ancestors, they “are capable, on their own, of inflicting harm and punishment on those who misbehave and of bestowing blessings such as giving children, wealth, etc” (Nwala 1985, p. 120). “The ancestors are best group of intermediaries between men and God” wrote Okafor (1992, p.23) “because they are mid-way between the spirit world and human world. It is this beliefs in the personal immortality; in the spiritual presence of the ancestors that gave rise to the “cult of the ancestors”.

Similarly, the ancestors are relevant to the people and this is the reason why they are consulted on important issues such as marriage, use of clan land, in times of trouble, etc. They communicate their wishes to the living through various means. In this regard Fuller (2001, pp. 62-63) rightly noted that:
They may appear in dreams, communicate through divination, spirits or “prophets”. They may possess mediums who give their message. In some tribes they are thought to visit their families in the form of an animal, such as a python, dove or lizard. They also show their pleasure or displeasure by omens, miracles, calamities, hauntings and the behaviour of a child in which they are reincarnated.

The relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland in particular and Igboland in general cannot be overemphasized. It is germane to conclude with the observation of Okafor (1992, p. 24):

Thus, the cult of ancestors engenders social harmony and moral rectitude and fosters communal spirit. It urges the Igbo on to great achievements and to strive for high status in the society. Above all, the “ancestral cult” mellows the natural fear arising from man’s uncertainty of his fate after his earthly sojourn. And what is more, it enhances intercommunication and interaction between the physical and metaphysical worlds.

3.8 The Prospect and future of Ancestral Veneration in North-eastern Igboland

The prospect and future of ancestral veneration in the North-eastern Igboland appear very bleak owing to the following reasons: Christianity has impacted on the beliefs and celebration of the festivals of feeding the ancestors. The Christian converts are made to consider the festival as idolatrous. Abel Udah, a senior patrol supervisor of Ebonyi State College of Education but from Ngbo community told me that the Christian converts were told to keep away
from “second burial which is known as “ikwa ozu” and which Ngbo people regard as the most important tradition in the life of the people”. He lamented that “the traditional music which we used to enjoy during the celebration of “igwa mma” is considered to be a sin by the Christians”. The traditional priest of “Igbedee”in Ngbo Mr. Igboke Ede told me too that the celebration of the ancestral festival is on the decline because a number of those who received western education and who are converted to Christianity no longer participate effectively in the festival.

In Ndufu Echara Ikwo, one Noble Nnabo Aloysius observed that the coming of Christianity has affected the celebration of ancestral veneration, burial rites and ceremonies and other related traditional practices in the area. He said that “the enthusiasm attached to the festival before the advent of Christianity is going down gradually due to the arrival of Christianity in Ikwo clan”. In Ezza, Nwankwo Cletus Iribor of umuezeoka community told the researcher that the coming of Christianity, Western education and Modernity have affected negatively the belief and celebration of ancestral festival and other related traditional practices such as traditional burial customs, title-taking, etc. He said that the old men and women who still take part in such sacrifices now do it almost lonely in cold manner. This is because; according to him “young ones who are now Christians do
not take part”. Nwankwo likened what is happening to “Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe where “the Whiteman has come with his knife and cut the ropes that bind Africans together and things fall apart”. With regards to “Onwa-Eke” festival, a festival specifically celebrated to offer sacrifices to the ancestors in Ezza clan, Afoke and Nworie (2010, pp. 81-82) lamented that:

Ezza people’s continuous conversions to Christianity have heralded a complete change of attitude to the sacrificial aspect of the feast as only a small number of people now sacrifice to the ancestors during Onwa-Eke festival. The festival has acquired a clearly different significance for Christians. It is celebrated now as a festival of harvest and thanksgiving time for all the gifts God has given Ezza through the year.

In spite of the bleakness of ancestral veneration in the area, there seems to be some rays of hope and prospect of ancestral veneration and other related traditional practices in the area because of the following cogent points:

Firstly, the North-eastern Igbo people are very traditional. So the impact of Christianity has not yet affected very deeply the ancestral veneration and other related traditional practices in the rural areas. In fact, traditional religion still rules the minds of the rural-dwellers to a great extent. The Christian missionaries and their agents
who required the people to give up almost all their basic traditional beliefs did not make sense to most of them.

Secondly, the conversion of the people to Christianity was somehow superficial because their belief in the Christian God did not preclude their belief in the divinities and ancestors. The researcher in the course of his research work found that most “Christians” especially those that were converted from traditional religion still participate in the first and second burial rites and ceremonies. They also participate in the traditional oath-taking because they fear that the Christian oath is not all that efficacious. Most of the Christian converts also have strong faith in reincarnation. Moreover, some were pragmatic in taking to Christianity. For example, the old childless men and women take to Christianity so that they can receive proper burial from the Christians when they die and not because Christianity is all that edifying.

Lastly, the conversion of most of the people to Christianity is not a genuine conversion because most of the so-called Christian converts keep in secret fetishes or charms in their residences to protect them against harm by their enemies. They also resort to fortune-telling during periods of inexplicable illnesses. Moreover, a substantial number of the Christian converts in the area have reverted to their
former traditional religion when they become aware of the shortcoming of Christianity. Some are found limping between the two faiths. Sometimes they go to church and participate in Christian activities because it is fashionable to them but they still cling to the traditional faith because it has become part and parcel of them. They do not want to sever relationship with their kith and kin and elders of their communities.
CHAPTER FOUR

BIRTH, DEATH, BURIAL RITES AND CEREMONIES AMONG

TRADITIONAL PEOPLE OF NORTH-EASTERN IGBO LAND

4.1 Childbirth in Ezza Community

When a man’s wife is pregnant the husband takes precautions against all evil things that can hamper the smooth delivery of the baby. He goes to a fortune-teller who gives him pieces of advice on all precautions he has to take to ensure that all is well with the woman and the expectant child to be born. The fortune-teller (jibia) performs some rituals which symbolically ward off evil spirits and human evil machinations that could be a stumbling block to the safety and delivery of the child.

In addition, the woman is taken to the native midwife who gives her some concoction of herbs and roots to be taken twice or three times daily. According to one madam Uhuo Elom - a native midwife from umuezeoka - the concoction is a veritable means of healthy and easy delivery of the child. The woman makes frequent visits to the home of the midwife to collect more herbs and roots which she boils and drinks according to the midwife’s prescription or direction. The
midwife entertains minor complaints from the pregnant woman and advises her on what to do.

The husband in his part does not stop sexual intercourse when he learns the wife has conceived; instead he intensifies his efforts in sexual intercourse so that his seeds will add weight and health to the expectant child.

### 4.2 During delivery

During delivery the village midwife assists the woman to deliver the child. Childbirth usually takes place in the woman’s cocoyam barn. But before attending to the woman in labour the midwife ensures that nothing serves as impediments to her safe delivery. In normal circumstances delivery is not difficult. The only exception is in the case of an adulterous woman who experiences difficulties or even death if she stubbornly refuses to name the adulterers. When they are many she names one or so and casts some pebbles away to represent others. Afoke and Nworie (2010 p.108) rightly observed that:

> According to Ezza custom and belief, an expectant mother would surely die if she had committed any of the society’s abominable acts like adultery, witchcraft, murder, malicious destruction of neighbour’s property such as crop or life stock [livestock] and failed to confess it either before or during delivery.
When the woman is delivered of her child, the new-born baby comes out with a loud cry. The cry attracts the attention of other women present and they unanimously shout in joyous mood “Nwanyi Daa wandu. Ekele diri Chileke” which in English means your life is safe o woman; may glory be to God. The afterbirth or umbilical cord (eze) is cut by the midwife and taken to the barn for proper burial. Ezza people strongly believe that improper burial of the eze will make the child to have impaired vision and memory as well as poor intellectual acumen. The remains of the umbilical cord that falls down from the child after a few days after birth is also buried by the couple. The couple buries it usually in the yam barn at midnight when no one is in sight.

4.3 After delivery

After the delivery, the child is bathed in warm water to remove blood and other mucous substances on its body. After the bath the child and its mother is ritualistically ushered into the mother’s bedroom by the women present at the scene of delivery. The midwife or any elderly woman beats a calabash dish if a female child is born or a blade of a hoe or its handle if male. As she does so she sings
“nwefuru, nwefuru ndawere nje” which according to one renowned barber Mr. Cletus Nwankwo means “the child should live as a stone that rolls to any direction without harm”. As the midwife sings others respond till they reach the house of the mother and the baby and its mother enter the bedroom. There they stay till the outing ceremony day. The mother however, occasionally comes out to bathe or to answer the call of nature. But the child never comes out to see the daylight till the outing ceremony.

The day of delivery is usually a day for general rejoicing. Feast is held in honour of the mother and the child. The midwife first of all receives her fees. Traditionally, the midwife is given four yams, a hen or cock according to the sex of the child. She is also given some unspecified sum of money, snuff, camwood and yellowwood. She receives those things and bid leaves to all. Meanwhile the husband of the woman gives out some tubers of yam to prepare for the wife. He also buys up-wine or down-wine and English-wine for the women and men who have gathered to say congratulations to the wife. He presents first of all some kolanuts on a wooden kola dish (ukpara). Two coconuts are also placed on the ukpara. Dry meat (anegu) is also added. The elderly person prays with the kolanuts for the health of the child, the mother, the husband and all present. Everybody eats,
drinks and sings a song that God has done wonderful thing before their eyes; that a new child has been born into the family and the community and the nation as a whole. After the merriment, all who are not in that family departs while the mother and the child continue to remain indoors till the outing/naming day. The mother nurses the child indoors without exposing herself and the child to daylight. The mother is well-fed with balanced diet. The reason for keeping them indoors is to protect the body of the child from harsh weather and to protect both of them from contracting infectious diseases.

4.4 Outing ceremony

The mother and her child stay indoors till the outing ceremony. The outing ceremony usually takes place after the expiration of two Igbo weeks. For example, if the baby is born on Nkwo day, the outing ceremony takes place after another Nkwo day, that is, the eight day which must fall on that Nkwo day. The outing ceremony takes place on Nkwo day unlike some Ezza people e.g Ogboji people who conduct the outing ceremony the very next Igbo week the child is born irrespective of the day the birth took place.

On that outing ceremony day, the child and the mother are exposed outside the house for the first time. Early in the morning,
women from the husband’s kindred and other well-wishers including mother-in-law and other relatives congregate or assemble in front of the mother’s house. The child is brought out. The child is bathed thoroughly in the midst of the women who have arrived for the occasion. The mother also bathes privately. When bathing is over, the husband presents to the women kolanuts, coconuts and dry meat on native wooden dish (ukpara). He also provides wine of all kinds and yams for cooking. If he is wealthy he kills a goat or number of fowls or buys other type of meat.

A native necklace - raffia (egwo) is tied around the child’s neck and around one of its thighs and an English rope (oghu) around its right hand. The mother also wears the egwo necklace which shows that she has recently given birth to a baby.

The eldest man in the compound takes one of the kolanuts, breaks it and adds some pieces of dry meat and prays for the health and wellbeing of the child and the mother. He thanks the ancestors (Ndichie) and Chileke for keeping the child and the mother healthy. The kolanuts, dry meat, and coconuts are shared among everybody present and the elderly who could not be physically present.

Special type of food called “ine-eghari” is prepared. It is made by cooking yams, native beans (ogboriga), bambranuts (akpanyiko).
The yam is smashed, properly mixed with the native beans, bambranuts, palm oil, pepper and salt.

The mashed yam (ine-eghari) is scooped into the two palms of the eldest woman in the compound and she swings them round the head of the baby and the mother saying “nwewhuru, nwewhuru, ndawerere, ndawerere nda” meaning the rolling stone that moves to any direction, let there be no harm. This according to Cletus Nwankwo is the first ritual done for the welfare of the child and the parents. The mashed yam is also put in a dish for the man and the wife who jointly hold a spoon which they simultaneously dip and scoop some of the mashed yam. This practice is called in Ezza “okolago” which symbolically signifies a re-union of the man and his wife in bringing up their child.

The rest of the mashed yam and pounded yam with delicious soup full of meat are shared among the mother and the elderly. More food mainly cassava fufu is also prepared in large quantity for others who have come to rejoice with the family for the birth of the newborn baby. Groundnuts are thrown on the ground for children to scramble to get in front of the woman’s house.

People, eat, drink, sing and praise the ancestors, the Mother earth (Ali) and God (Chileke) for having a day like this. They offer
gifts to the child and the mother and wish them well and depart to their various places of habitation.

4.5 Circumcision

Circumcision normally takes place after the outing ceremony. The circumcision doctor arrives very early in the morning. On arrival, the father of the child presents a kolanut on “ukpara” dish. The man then uses the kolanut to pray that all will be well with the child after the operation; that their forefathers did the same thing without any mishap; that theirs would not be different.

After the prayer he uses “uke” (special native powder) to mark a vertical line on the forehead of the child. He also allows the uke to touch the child’s tongue. The reason for doing this is to avoid too much loss of blood during the operation. After that he takes his special local razor blade called “akwo” and cuts the foreskin of the child. After the operation, the penis is washed with warm water. Then a special type of palm oil called “manuko” administered or rubbed all over the operated part of the penis. On subsequent days the penis is washed with warm water and after that manuko is rubbed all over the area. After some weeks, the place heals. After the operation, the doctor is given two yams and kolanut. But nowadays he is given
some money. The amount of money depends on what the father and the doctor agreed on.

In female circumcision, the procedure is the same. The only difference is that the operation is performed by a female and that the clitoris is what is trimmed.

It has to be noted that in the past, boys and girls were circumcised in their teens. The circumcision was full of many rituals. Girls were circumcised when they reach their nubile age. That is, when they were considered to be ripe, mature “with full breasts”. The clitoris was trimmed. The boys were also circumcised by removing the outer covering of the penis. The girls also undergo ritual circumcision in the past during their adolescence. The boys also observe ritual circumcision in the past during their adolescence. However, the girls no longer observe circumcision and its rituals except in few places because of Christian influences, Western education and modernity. Boys do undergo circumcision a week or two after birth but no longer observe the ritual circumcision owing to Christian influences and modernity, except in few places where it is done secretly.

It should be noted that “ritual” circumcision is very important to the people because it marks the transition into womanhood for the
girls and manhood for boys. The girl who was about to leave her parents and go to live with the husband was confined to a fattening house for weeks or months during her ritual circumcision to make her plump and beautiful and ready for bearing children. The boy who was about to marry or has married also undergo the ritual circumcision, though the period of confinement is shorter compared to that of girls.

4.6 Naming Ceremony

The child is named on the day of birth or after a day or two but the ceremony is usually postponed to a future date so that the couple will get ready for it. The parents get ready for the naming ceremony by providing at least the following:

- Four kolanuts
- Four fat white yams
- Two coconuts
- Two gallons of up wine
- Two heads of tobacco
- A cap
- Some fathoms of cloth
- A fat and healthy goat
- A hind leg of a bush meat and
- Dry meat (anegu)
When the scheduled date reaches, the person named after the child arrives at the couple’s compound. But before his or her arrival, all invited guests are already seated. The traditional music is played to make the occasion hilarious and exciting.

The occasion begins by presenting the above items to the namesake if still alive followed by presenting the child to him or her. This is immediately followed by joyous shouts and warm embrace. The guests hold the namesake, the child and the parents in a warm embrace. After exchanging the usual pleasantries, the eldest man is given the kolanut on “ukpara” dish and a dwarf stool called “ekwechi” to sit. He then cuts the “eyes” of one of the kolanuts and uses pieces of the dry meat and invokes God, the ancestors, the earth goddess of Ezza (Ali Ezza) and the earth goddess of the community to come and eat kolanuts and bless the child, the parents, the child’s namesake and all present in the occasion. He asks for the blessings, long life and protection of the child and its parents, the namesake and all invited quests. He casts the kolanuts and the dry meat on the ground.

After the prayer, food and drinks are presented. All those present enjoy themselves. Some parts of the kolanut is shared including the coconuts and dry meat while the namesake goes with the goat, yams, tobacco as well as the fathoms of cloths, a cap and
the hind leg of a bush meat. The people sing songs, clap their hands and rejoice with the namesake for being alive when a child is being named after him. After the merriments, the guests show appreciation by offering some gifts mainly in cash to the child and the namesake. After that they disperse to their various areas of abode.

It should be noted that if the child is named after a dead person, the parents of the child would go with some kolanuts and a goat to the grave or tomb of the child’s namesake, for notification and sacrifice. However, if the parents cannot afford a goat, they can go and offer kolanuts and the killing of a goat can be postponed. There in the tomb of the person the child is named, the ancestor is invoked and told to receive the kolanuts, that a child has been named after him or her and the parents and the officiating priest ask the ancestor to guide and protect the child against harm and evil men. After the ceremony the child now is called the name of the ancestor and will continue to answer that till death in addition to other names the parents may wish to add to that.

4.7 Death, burial rites and ceremonies in Ezza
Death is an enigma that puzzles man and woman in Ezza land. The death of anybody, young or old is riddled with superstitious beliefs. Even though the people believe that death is a price everybody has to pay willingly or willing-nilly, at any point in time they strongly believe that no one can die without some causes or reasons. The reasons often adduced for the occurrence of death ranges from one’s destiny, human evil machinations such as witches or wizards to punishment from the cosmic forces as a result of the evil the person committed or as a result of ogbanje (changelling) in the case of those that die at tender age.

Ezza people like other communities covered in my research normally differentiate between good death and bad death. Good death is the type of death that befalls a man or woman who has lived a long and virtuous life here on earth and has begotten children to take his or her stead when he or she dies. In other words, it is the death of an elderly person who has an offspring, who lived a just and righteous life here on earth. It is the opposite of a bad death which is a type of death that befalls a person who dies childless. Included in this category is a person who died as a sorcerer or witch or wizard and those who committed suicide or those who died on the wayside.
or of swollen stomach or those who died at tender age or those who
died of small pox, cholera, etc. I shall examine the death, burial rite
and ceremony of good death in Ezza. Bad deaths are never accorded
decent burials and they are never mourned.

When an elderly person is ill, precaution is taken to ensure that
the person recovers from the illness as soon as possible. Local herbs
and roots are administered on the person. If the condition of the
person worsens, a fortune-teller (jibia) is consulted or even invited to
come and unravel the possible cause or causes of the illness. If death
eventually occurs in spite of all the precautions against its occurrence,
there is a wild (uncontrolled) outburst of wailings from the relatives.
Wailings and other indications of mourning continue for some time.
The wailings attract neighbours who converge at the deceased
compound to sympathize with those he/she left behind. The eldest
son of the deceased sent words across to the kindred, the married
daughters of the deceased and the sons’ in-laws notifying them of the
father’s or mother’s death. The village heads and traditional ruler of
the area is also informed of the demise of the man or woman. Before
their arrival, preparations are made with regard to wrappers, caps,
wine of different brands, gun powder, cannons, camwood and
yellowwood, goat, cow and other things necessary for the proper burial of the deceased.

As the relatives await the arrival of the invitees, cannons boom in the air informing the general public that death has taken one of the people in the village.

4.8 Wake Keep

The in-laws and other relatives assemble at the man’s compound in the evening for a wake-keep. The wake-keepers go in procession round the village. In the night a funeral procession takes place. The procession team makes its way round the village. Fearful looking men move about in search of the dead man. They move with dangerous cutlasses brandishing them as they run about. They cut down branches of trees and scatter them along the roads or paths. Their mournful songs frighten villagers “They searched and searched for the man but all in vain”. After the procession, they come back for the continuation of the wake-keep. The wake-keep ends at daybreak.

4.9 Before the burial

Before burial, the sons and daughters of the deceased as well as the in-laws and other relatives had already made preparations for the
burial. Cloths (wrappers), caps, goats, etc. had been bought. When the kindred and other relatives who went back home after the wake-keep have arrived, the eldest man of the deceased presents kola nuts on “ukpara” dish. They use the kola nuts to pray that whoever caused the death of the man will follow him shortly. They also pray for a successful burial. They break the kola nuts and chew. After that, the eldest son is asked to go and show the place his father is to be buried. The place of burial is usually in front of the man’s house. The son takes a hoe and digs once or so on the spot and drops it.

4.10 Digging the grave

Those appointed to dig the grave then swing into action. They begin to dig the grave, one person at a time. When one is tired or has dug it to some extent, another takes over. They continue in this way until the grave deepens. After digging the grave for some time, they invite the sons and daughters of the deceased to come and inspect the grave. As they come, they bring some gallons of wine to soften the grave. The grave-diggers snatch the gallons of wine without delay. They drink the wine and continue digging and deepening the grave. The grave is dug shoulder-high in depth while the width is in the size of outstretched arms of an adult. Note that it is an
abomination for lizard(s) and “aghashi” (special insects) to enter the grave being dug.

The grave is constructed in such a manner that it forms a mud-bed “okpo”. For instance, the head has a projection where the man’s head is placed while the other side of the body down to the legs is of the same level. When the elders are satisfied that the grave is properly dug with all the guidelines observed, one person remains inside the grave while others watch outside. Then the sons and daughters as well as in laws and other relatives are invited by the elders to converge in the man’s barn (but cocoyam barn if a woman) and present what they are to use to bury the man. These things include fathoms of cloths, caps, goats, wine, etc.

4.11 Lying in State

Meanwhile the old women who have reached the age of menopause will attend to the corpse. The corpse is washed and rubbed with “ufie” and “odo”, that is, camwood and yellowwood. After that, selected men are asked to go and clothe the corpse. They first of all take one wrapper and one cap and ritualistically touch the body of the deceased and then withdraw them for future use during the man’s second burial rites and ceremonies. After that the body is clothed in
the finest wrappers and caps. After this, the body is lain in state for funeral oration. When the body lies in state the wife or wives and children come after the other to speak to the dead father to take revenge if the cause of the death is as a result of human evil machination. But if it is a natural death, they ask the father to stay there in the land of the spirits and intercede for them. The funeral address of the first son which is mingled with prayer goes in this way or similar manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Igbo</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O buru na I nwuru onwu chi gi, rahu nke oma ma zuru ike na ndokwa. Mana o buru na o nwere onye butere onwu gi, egbula oge imegwara. O buru m butere onwu gi; gbuo m n’eleghi anya n’azu.</td>
<td>If you died a natural death, sleep well and rest in peace. But if your death was caused by somebody, do not fail to take revenge. If I am the very person that brought about your demise, kill me without delay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After concluding the last farewell speech, other rituals follow: After the last ritual, the corpse is wrapped in a mat and carried by able-bodied men to the grave. Nowadays, coffin is used in most cases especially, if the deceased approved that while alive. As they are
doing so uncontrollable wailings fill the air and the cannons already positioned begin to boom in the air.

4.12 Interment

When they reach the grave, the corpse is lowered and laid in a sleeping position facing the entrance of his compound. He is made to place his left hand on his head while raising his right hand (“eka-lkenga”). But if the person is a woman, she is placed facing her house.

The dead man’s snuff box, some money, “nka” stick, palm leaves, “igirishi” (newboldia laevis) are all placed inside the grave for the dead man’s use. In the past, if the man was a head-cutter, or a chief, some slaves would be killed or buried alive to accompany him to the land of the dead. After placing the corpse in the proper position and other things as enumerated above are added, the grave is ready for the next stage - the stage of covering the grave with the sand scooped in the course of digging it. Traditionally, the first son takes a hoe and casts sand twice before others join in and finish the covering of the grave. While the covering is going on, the “okpolali” (cannons) continue to be fired as many times as possible. The firing of the cannons shows that the interment has already taken place. Wailings
and lugubrious expressions continue till the grave is fully covered with soil. After the burial, the people who have gathered to give the man a befitting burial depart after taking food and wine given to them by the surviving sons. The kindred share the goats or cow given to them for the burial. They also eat food and drink wine due to them. After that they depart to their homes while relatives of the deceased tarry for some days.

4.13 Mourning continues

Mourning usually lasts for seven Igbo weeks; that is, 28 days. At intervals during the seven Igbo weeks of mourning, sympathizers troop in and out to console the bereaved family. As they come, they bring delicious food full of meat while the men accompany them with calabashes of palm wine. They console the bereaved that the death is not a bad one; that it is proper and fitting that the son buries the father and not the other way round. They say “instead of the snuff box, let it be its spoon”. They say all sorts of things so that the bereaved ones do not brood over the death of their dear one. After consoling them, they partake of the wine they brought to the bereaved. The procedure is that as people bring wine, glasses of wine are poured on the dead man’s grave while the bereaved and the
sympathizers drink the rest. Food brought by the sympathizers is shared in the family for everybody to eat. The sympathizers if in group fire cannons to signal their approach and they sing songs and dance and make merry thanking God (Chileke) that the man did not die a bad death. Bad death occurs when one dies on the way side, swollen stomach, witchcraft, before the expiration of oath-taking, etc.

It has to be noted that within the seven Igbo weeks, the bereaved wife or husband normally maintains sad demeanour and the widow or widower restrict herself or himself. When the lamentations and burial ceremonies are over, both widow(s) or widower(s) shave their heads as a mark or symbol of grief and bereavement.

In some places signs are set up to indicate that death has visited a household but it is not generally observed. Signs are set up after the death of a leader, traditional ruler, a rich man or any prominent figure in the village. Strips of cloth is hung pennant-wise on long poles at the entrance of the dead man’s compound to announce the fact that the owner of the compound has died.

We have to note that burial as a general rule follows within 48 hours of death; although there are some exceptions. If the deceased is of high standing, it could be delayed so that adequate preparations be made before burial. If this is the case, the body is preserved in a
local manner. It has to be stressed that it is a must that the corpse of a person be buried in his/her home. This is the reason why the people believe that the deceased if not buried at home will remain in a restless and unhappy condition in a strange land and will not be able to join the “court” of his/her ancestors in the spirit world. It has to be observed that married women are buried in the husband’s homes and not carried to their parents homes as it is done in some parts of Igboland. A woman who has children is buried beside her house while the husband is also buried beside his own house. It has to be noted also that a woman who dies while pregnant is not buried with the child in the womb. Rather caesarean operation is done to remove the foetus. After its removal it is buried beside the dead woman. It should not be forgotten that what we have described so far is the death and burial of men and women who left behind offspring.

If it is the death of a child or a teenager or a grown up person who has no issue which is known as “okoyi”, the parents and immediate relatives mourn for the loss and the corpse is disposed of as quickly as possible. The death of such people is characterized by a very deep sense of irreparable loss. Those who learn about such death usually shrug their shoulders in bewilderment and sometimes develop goose pimples when they think of such bad deaths. When
such type of death occurs, the corpse is usually buried shallowly or thrown into the bad bush called “ikirikpo” without any ceremony. Such type of death is never mourned and the deceased is never buried at home. Those who are not directly affected normally keep away from the corpse and from the area the corpse is disposed because of the stigma associated with such type of death. The names of those who passed in this way are never mentioned during the night. In the case of “okoyi” (a grown up childless person), his or her belongings are thrown away in the spot he or she was buried so that the spirit will never come back to collect those things or harass the parents.

However, nowadays, the person who dies in that manner is now buried outside the parents’ home and no longer at “Ikirikpo” because of the influences of Christianity, modernity and western education.

4.14 Second burial rites and ceremonies in Ezza

Second-burial rites and ceremonies is called “ome-ekwa” in Ezza. It is the last rite that the living of the deceased accord to the dead father or mother which ushers the dead parents to the land of the ancestors. The rites and ceremonies usually take place after some years ranging from four to ten years depending on the time the people concerned have fully prepared for it. This is because the rites
and ceremonies are usually very elaborate and very costly in terms of materials and money. Nowadays many people who can afford the expenses involved usually perform the second burial of their parents the following Igbo week the interment took place.

4.15. How it is done

When the son of the deceased or any person entitled to the ownership of the dead person’s property wants the second burial rites and ceremonies to be done, he invites the sons and daughters as well as the father-in-laws of the deceased in consultation with the members of his kindred to schedule the year and month for the commencement of the burial rites and ceremonies. The invitees confer within themselves the appropriate year and month for the occasion. They all agree with the host the appropriate year and month. They eat and drink whatever the host provided them during the invitation. After that they disperse.

When the time approaches, a second invitation is made. This time the actual month and date are fixed. After that the sons and daughters as well as the in-laws of the deceased disperse to make final preparation. They get ready for the purchase of goats, cows, horses, fowls, salt, gun powder, wrappers, caps, yams, rice, etc. The
commencement day for the deceased male is usually Eke or Afor market day and lasts for four days, ending on the same day it was started. If the deceased is a female, the occasion begins on either Orie or Nkwo market day. In the past a fortune-teller was invited. He came with his paraphernalia and stayed in the compound to ensure safety of the people. However, nowadays the fortune-teller is consulted to ascertain whether all would be well.

4.16 The first day

On the eve of the occasion cannon shots are fired after night meals to signal the commencement of the funeral rites and ceremonies the following day and to recall the spirit of the dead person on earth for its funeral rites and ceremonies. On that very early morning, tender palm leaves ("omu") are tied round all the economic trees so that the spirits who will invisibly be in attendance will not cause spiritual plucking of them. In the early hours of the day, intermittent booming of cannons is noticed. This announces that the ceremonies have started.

A flat wooden plank representing the dead man’s bed ("ugbo-oshi") is placed outside the compound, towards the playground, which represents his Ikenga. This is done to show that the man when alive
was a warrior. Meanwhile the officiating person makes small mound at the frontage of the dead person’s house (if the man’s grave cannot be identified) signifying his grave where the rituals will be performed. Then menopausal women decorate the grave by sprinkling it with camwood and yellowwood. A goat and a cock to be offered to Ikenga are presented to the elders. The age grade responsible for slaughtering these animals will cut off their heads in one strike and their blood sprinkled on the Ikenga and on all “akpa ilu” (the wood mounted on every grave of an Ezza ancestor) in the compound. After this comes another round of cannon shots.

Next is a procession around the community. Fathoms of cloths are distributed to the daughters of the deceased. These cloths are folded and worn in the traditional manner. Other women also wear the remaining fathoms of cloths. The women file up for the procession according to their age or status. They go with the following items: a handle of a hoe, a den gun, a matchet, and a drum. The eldest woman comes last in the procession. She is dressed in the usual regalia of the deceased – his cap, clothes, staff and bag. This procession is meant to be a search of the deceased in most of the places he used to go while alive. When they return, they are welcomed with a goat at the entrance of the compound. The goat is
called “eghu oso” (a goat for the procession). They match on the goat while singing a dirge. The leader of the procession goes into the compound and dance around the grave of the deceased. Others follow her gradually and that ends the first procession. The goat they matched on while dancing is killed and shared.

Later the funeral proper begins. The following items are used for a funeral: a bag of salt, a goat, cocks/hens, a long bar of metal (called Ogologo Igwe in Ezza) and foods and drinks for entertainments. The first wife of the deceased is led into the arena of the ceremony by a man, who is one of her people. The man takes a hold of a cock and declares: if this woman is responsible for your death, take vengeance on her; otherwise, you should rest in peace and look after your family. He then waves the cock round the woman’s head and strikes the head of the cock on the grave of the deceased and it dies instantly. Other wives follow according to their seniority and fulfil this rite. After them, the eldest son and other sons and daughters in turn pray to the grave recalling what they did to restore the man’s life while alive but all in vain. Then the first son grips the two legs of his own cock, invokes or call the dead father by name to come and receive the cock he is offering for his welfare and his family. He swings it round his head and with all his might hit the head of the cock on the grave and it dies
instantly. After the first son, other sons do the same rite. After them, the daughters do theirs. It should be noted that each offerer add more fowls for namesakes and grandchildren. Such fowls as a rule are not killed in most cases but reserved for future use.

When all the fowls had been killed everybody presents his or her other offerings such as palm wine, goat, salt, and other things required for funeral rites and ceremonies. Each daughter of the deceased is expected to present a carton of beer, two gallons of palm wine, a fat and healthy goat, salt, etc. A daughter could give a fat goat to cover symbolically the dead father’s mouth against flies perching on it. A well-to-do daughter could offer a cow or horse to kill to her dead father or mother. Alternatively she could offer a reasonable amount of money in place of a cow or horse. The son can also kill a cow to his father. After presenting gifts, sharing begins.

A goat is given to a group of people who go in procession looking for the dead person. It is called “eghu oso”. Another goat is also given to a group of women who rubs camwood and yellowwood on the body of the dead person. It is called “eghu ehu ufie”. As all these things are taking place, firing of cannons and den guns continue at intervals. Wine of all brands are shared among the people – kindred by kindred, umuada, Izzo women, etc. Fathoms of cloths are
shared to umuada according to seniority. The women also share salt. The wrappers shared by the daughters are worn during procession to the market looking for the dead man. They always wear the wrappers and caps daily for the four days the funeral ceremonies last. All the aforementioned rites and ceremonies normally take place on the first day of the occasion.

4.17 The second day

On the second day, many activities are not performed. It is said to be a free day for mourning. It is called “Ndabu l’ali odzu”. The day begins with the lamentation of the first wife, if the deceased was polygamous. There is no special rite performed in relation to the funeral on this day except that friends are received and entertained.

Heads of premature palm nuts are cut and its nuts cracked and eaten by the people during the funeral ceremony. Heads of ripe palm nuts are also gathered and its oil extracted for the preparation of food for the occasion.

4.18 Procession

Procession to the market place also takes place on the second or third day. On the procession day, the funeral singers together with
female friends and relatives of the deceased will go round a nearby market singing the dirge. Normally cannon shots are fired to signal that funeral procession is around the corner. One of the closest relatives of the deceased will put funeral cap on her head and tie wrapper round her chest and carry “ukpara” on her head and then another puts on the deceased clothes and cap to make her resemble the deceased when alive. Then the rest of the relatives will dress in a funeral manner and follow the rest in the procession. The man’s achievement while on earth will be showcased in the market that day. If he once bought a horse for his people, the tail and skull will be carried by the procession team. If he did “jioke”, the pestle is carried by the procession team. If a blacksmith, a hammer is carried about. The procession team move about in the market collecting some food items from sellers. They stay together beat drums, sing songs extolling the good qualities of the man. His photograph picture is carried about showing him to people. They dance and drink wine in the market place and make merry. After that the procession team returns home. Cannon shots are fired to signal that they are living the market and returning to the home of the deceased.
4.19 The third day

This day also begins as the second day with the lamentation of the first wife. On this third day, activities are noticed. The menopausal women come early in the morning, boil the palm nuts, extract the oil and use it to prepare soup, pounded yam and “ine-eghari”. These food items are given to the dead man by the drummer of “oshita” (a drum for the dead beaten by one man, never danced by any body). He does this by moulding some fufu, dipping them in the soup, invoking the dead man. As he does that he throws the lumps to the graves of the dead man and prays for the welfare of the people. He beats the drum at intervals which no living being is expected to dance other than the dead.

4.20 The fourth day

The fourth day which is the last day of the funeral is the most busy day and it is full of conviviality. This is the day the dead man’s compound will be swept thoroughly by the funeral attendants. The sweeping of the compound is called in Ezza dialect “Iza-uwhu”. The shells of palm kernels, dead leaves, palm fronds tied round economic trees in the compound are all thoroughly removed and the compound is properly swept clean by married women in their menopause. The
refuse is dumped outside the compound beside the playground and the area where the refuse is dumped is never cultivated that year.

The fourth day is also the day the deceased is fed. It is called “otu-nri l’ilu”. The ritual which brings about a total separation of the dead man’s spirit and that of his wife or wives is done. It is called “imamkpe”. The menopausal women prepare yam fufu and “ine-eghari” and put them on a dish and keep the food in the house of the man’s wife. The wife does not stay indoors where the food is kept. She stays outdoors facing the walls of her house with a guard, matchet at hand. The man in charge of giving the food to the dead man enters the room where the food is kept, carries it and as soon as he is outside the house, he calls the woman three times. But the woman is advised not to answer. On the fourth call, the woman respond by telling the late husband to go and eat the food while she remains alive on earth to look after the children he left behind for her. The man then moves to the grave of the dead man to offer the food to the dead man.

It has to be noted that everybody within the compound is expected to remain indoors as the “imamkpe” ritual is going on so that the spirit of the dead man hovering around will not harm any person. The remains of the food given to the dead man and the dung
of the animals killed for the occasion are gathered and deposited somewhere around the playground where other spirits of the dead are expected to go and feed themselves.

The wife/wives of the deceased are clean shared. The first wife accompanied by other wives collect the hairs and proceed mournfully to the major entrance of the compound and throw the hairs at a cross-road. They then return home through a pathway and do not remarry in life. However, younger wives who intend to remarry do not return home that very day but sleep elsewhere. They also do not partake of the fowl meat used for the ceremonies. It should be remembered that those men who did not kill cows to their dead parents do not partake of the cow meat killed in this occasion. The people believe that if they do, evil spirits will kill them.

Meanwhile the host and “umuada” busy themselves welcoming invited guests for the grand finale of the second burial rites and ceremonies. Palm wine, English wine, food of assorted kinds are made ready. At midday or thereabout people begin to take their seats. They stay in groups. The “umuada” stay together, the kindred, also stay in group. Other groups include the community, the extended family, the age-grade of the dead man whose funeral is taking place and others.
All sorts of music and dance feature in the occasion. Cannons are fired incessantly. Singing and dancing and merrymaking continue till darkness falls. Merrymaking and general conviviality continue till daybreak.

4.21 Conclusion

The eldest son of the deceased thank all the invited guests. He gives a goat or cow to the daughters of their father as a way of thanking them for a successful burial ceremony. That ends the ceremonies.

The next thing that is done is to invite the elders of the kindred to perform the last ritual. This is called “imifu oshilonu” (removal of stick from the dead man’s mouth). First and foremost, a mud grave is moulded which becomes the place the children of the deceased can direct their sacrifices to their deceased father. Then a cock and a goat are killed and their blood smeared on the grave of the deceased. Plam wine and yam fufu are also offered on the grave of the deceased.

The last thing that brings the funeral rites and ceremonies to a conclusion is the invitation of a fortune-teller (jibia) to come and chase away the evil spirits. It is called “ichi igidimma”. The jibia
prescribes what is to be done and does it to drive away the innumerable spirits from the compound which may cause havoc to the living. After that the funeral rites and ceremonies come to a conclusion.

It should be noted that childbirth, death, burial rites and ceremonies in Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo/Ezzangbo are very similar with minor variations or differences. This is understandable when one notes that the clans descended from a common ancestor.

So in all the clans or communities, precautions are taken during and after conception. The woman takes great care to ensure that miscarriage does not occur. A pregnant woman receives herbs and other native medicines from the native midwife. The husband in his own part has to continue sexual intercourse after conception so that his seed will help for the birth of a healthy baby.

During delivery, childbirth usually takes place on the woman’s cocoyam barn which is normally behind her house. During labour, the parturient mother is assisted by a village midwife. Other women may be there to encourage her not to lose hope. However, men are debarred from going close to the birth place.

After birth, the child and mother are confined in the mother’s bedroom for one Igbo week or two. They remain indoors till the
outing ceremony. Circumcision normally takes place after the outing ceremony. The child is named on the day of birth or after a day or two but the ceremony is usually postponed till the baby cuts its first tooth.

Death, burial rite sand ceremonies take the same procedure throughout Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo/Ezzamgbo communities. It is the death of a person who left behind offspring that is accorded full burial rites and ceremonies and receives second burial rites and ceremonies at the appropriate time. A childless person is not accorded such a befitting burial neither is the person given a second burial rites and ceremonies.

When a person who has left behind offspring dies, the kindred, in-laws, etc. are notified. Wake-keep and funeral procession are done. The grave is dug. Care is taken in digging the grave to conform to the traditional standard of burial. A security guard guides the grave against lizards and other insects or animals entering the grave.

Visit of masquerade features during the burial of a man especially a prominent man such as a traditional ruler, or a deceased person who belonged to “Ogbaruishi” society, that is a society of those who killed and beheaded enemies and carried their heads homes during their life time. This is particularly applicable to Izzi,
Ngbo/Ezzangbo and Ikwo people but is not generally observed in all communities that make up Ezza clan. In Izzi for instance, early in the morning of the second day the man died, the village masquerade known as “Ogbodo-enyi” would visit the deceased compound creating fearful sensations among children and women alike. The masquerade represents the spirits of the dead.

Preparation for the corpse for the burial is done in the communities I carried out my research work. It is thoroughly washed and beautifully dressed. During interment, great care is taken to ensure that all the customary burial rites are meticulously observed and all the necessary items that should accompany him to the spirit world are provided. The living fear that any forgotten item would be demanded by the dead person after burial. The demand which the children may not be aware, may result in making the children to suffer one calamity or the other.

Drinking with the deceased by the living is another ritual that is observed especially in Izzi clan. Friends and relations of the deceased gather to drink with the deceased for the last time. They drink throughout the night when the corpse is still inside the house ready for burial. Wine drinking continues till the corpse is buried.
Lying in state of the corpse is the next stage. The corpse which has been beautifully dressed, is carried outside for “agwa Ikenga” followed by funeral oration. This is applicable to all the communities the researcher carried out this research work. During the funeral oration, another ritual called “eye mini l’ onu”, that is pouring water in the mouth is observed. In this ritual, the dead man is cleansed of his past sins or guilts and foul words by taking some water on pieces of broken pot called “mbeji” and clean the mouth of the dead man. This is not generally observed in all the clans or communities. Izzi people in particular observe this ritual to its fullest.

At the conclusion of the farewell address, an old man would address the deceased last. The old man would take a fowl and say almost the same thing as the oldest son had said. After that, he would take some wine and pour it before the dead body telling him that his friends and relatives are paying him the last respect and that they have stopped drinking with him from that day onwards. After this speech, he would kill the fowl and pour the blood on the dead man’s right hand and arm where the part of cow’s skin or goat’s skin is put. After concluding the last farewell speech, he throws the fowl into the
air and whoever catches the fowl can eat it. The fowl is never cooked in the dead man’s compound. People say that whoever eats the fowl must never have sexual intercourse with the deceased man’s wives. If he does he will surely die. Because of this, those who have eyes on the wives usually do not run for slain fowl. Again, this ritual is also particularly observed in Izzi clan.

The last ritual before burial is the sitting of the corpse on a chair. If the deceased was a titled man, his titled group would make a chair raised with sticks in form of a platform and place the dead man on it. This chair is called “Ebvu l’aba” in Izzi dialect. The reason for doing this is to make the dead man to arrive in the land of the dead as chief and wealthy man, sitting on his throne while departing to the spiritual realm. The dead man would sit on the chair and cannons would be lined around the chair and be shot. It should be noted that this grade of burial is only reserved for very affluent personalities. From oral evidences gathered it is only very few people in Izzi that have attained this type of burial. It is said to be the highest grade of burial. After the burial of this kind, the throne, that is chair “ebvu laba”, is never destroyed until a cow is killed. And it is only those people who enthroned their fathers at death that have to partake in
the cow. If anyone who did not bury his father in that way eats of the meat, he would die after its consumption. It is worthy to observe that this ritual is rarely observed nowadays in Izzi because of its expensive nature and the influences of Christianity, western education and modernity.

After this last ritual, the corpse would be taken down to the grave for burial. While he is being taking down to the grave, everybody especially the sons, daughters, in-laws and other relatives would be wailing uncontrollably. Then an”Ikpa” drum goes on with single beating. It is called “nkwa maa”; that is drum for the dead. Wailing and crying and the single beating of the “Ikpa” drum would continue until the burial is over.

The corpse which is already dressed in fathoms of cloths is laid on a first floor of the grave by two men and lay wood across the grave and after that palm leaves. Then the second floor of the grave would be filled with soil. As they are covering the grave, cannons would be fired. Wailings continue until the grave is completely covered. Note that a titled man is usually buried in his house and a very wealthy man can be buried in a coffin although this practice of burying in the coffin is newly introduced. Most traditionalists detest
such practice fearing that it would be hard for the deceased to be reincarnated.

After the burial, there would be beating of drums, singing and dancing and masquerading. These practices are similar in all the clans. Dancers are praised and some money are given to them by admirers. People from neighbouring villages bring food, wine and other presents to the sons, daughters and relatives of the deceased. Visitors are given food, drinks and they in turn try to console the bereaved. Merry-making continues to the following day, that is the third day and night.

The second or third day is the period the title-holders, lineage and relatives share the cows or goats killed for the burial. If the deceased was a titled man, e.g. one who did “Jioke” (Onye meru Jioke), the Jioke society will share the cow or cows. The lineage will also share their goats. As the sharing is going on, the masquerades would be entertaining people. The people go on eating, drinking, singing, dancing throughout the whole day and night. People from neighbouring communities’ troop in to the compound of the deceased to console the bereaved. They came with cooked food and wine especially palm wine. These continue for a long time.
After a week or any time after the burial, the elder son calls the relatives and presents to them a goat. They mould the deceased grave or tomb and put a forked stick on it and put the head of the slaughtered cow or goat and a piece of yam in the fork. This is called “amailu” in the clans. The tomb would become the place the dead man would be remembered after the performance of the second burial rites and ceremonies.

The second burial is the climax and completion of the burial processes that began when the person died. The people say that without the fulfilment of these second burial rites and ceremonies, the deceased cannot associate with the ancestors who are already in the spirit world. These rites and ceremonies usually usher in the deceased to the land of the dead. The second burial is the last phase of the transition ritual into the spirit world. It is only after the rites and ceremonies that the deceased can be qualified to be given a place among the fed ancestors. The second burial qualifies the dead person to be given food on the day the dead are remembered and fed in the clans or communities. The second burial ritual needless to say is the final stage of bidding farewell to the deceased member of the family.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE IMPACT OF IGBO INSTITUTIONS AND CUSTOMS IN THE
ESTABLISHMENT AND SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN
NORTH-EASTERN IGBOLAND.

5.1 Preamble

Igbo institutions and customs had great impact on the advent of Christian Missions in North-eastern Igboland. The arrival of three old and well-established Nigerian mission organizations – the Roman Catholic Mission, the Church of Scotland Mission (Presbyterian Mission) and the English Primitive Methodist Mission brought about a major change in North-eastern Igboland. According to Idede (2007, p.3) the Anglican Church (C.M.S) arrived very much later in 1959. These missions brought churches and schools to North-eastern Igboland which had positive and negative impact on the lives, culture, customs and traditions of the people.

The Roman Catholic from the beginning operated steadily and intensively throughout Abakaliki Division, and in short throughout the whole province of Ogoja while the Presbyterians’ activities were limited. The area they achieved much success was in Abakaliki town. The Presbyterians relied very heavily on the stranger Igbo for their membership. The catholic did so at first but as they spread their
tentacles into the rural areas, their indigenous Igbo members increased by leaps and bounds. The primitive Methodists on the other hand had most of their members in rural Igbo areas.

The Igbo traditional institution of marriage, social and religious institutions impacted greatly on the establishment and spread of Christianity in North-eastern Igboland in the following respects:

5.2 The Institution of Marriage

The people attach much importance to traditional marriage not merely for sexual satisfaction but mainly to produce children for the continuity of the ancestral lineage. The people also attach much importance to polygamous marriage. A man is free to marry as many wives as possible provided he has the sufficient resources to marry them and maintain them with the children. But when Christianity arrived in North-eastern Igboland, the Christian missionaries and their agents began to preach against the marriage of more than one wife. Those who are already marrying more than one wife found it difficult to divorce all but one. Those who are yet to marry are advised to marry only one wife. Ugwu (2002, p.56) lamented that “These religions condemned polygamy and upheld in its place monogamy but
the Africans from the word go had this as part of their cultural heritage”. Steensel (1996, p.206) also noted that:

“The polygamy factor also pulled the church away from the people. Baptism was refused to any man, who had more than one wife. In many cases men were forced to send away their wives except the first one”.

Initially, Christianity could not make progress because of this singular act. The missionaries were at pains on how to convince the natives to marry only one wife. Polygamy has been the custom of the people from time immemorial. The people find it difficult to give it up. The educated ones among them could not be convinced because people in the Old Testament times married more than one wife. It is on record that King David and Solomon married many wives. The issue of polygamy really acted as a stumbling block to the establishment and spread of Christianity in North-eastern Igbo land.

The influence of Christianity also affected the traditional family set-up. The family is considered as an important institution in North-eastern Igbo land but the coming of Christianity brought about Christian family. The Christian family disrupted the traditional family institution because the bond that binds them together was irretrievably broken and lost. The missionaries and the early converts advised the new converts not to associate any longer with the natives. So the new converts go to church together, bury the dead together
and do all things in common. Gradually they severed relations with their kinsmen and women.

The traditional adherents however, tightened their belts. They had tough time with their children who escaped to the white man’s religion. The children were cut off from the family. Some were disowned, some were beaten terribly while others received one form of punishment or the other in order to debar them from going to church. But as luck would have it those who were adamant or determined to follow the new-fangled faith later overcome the resistance after a period of suffering. Christianity seems to have triumphed for a revolution is being wrought where there are Christian communities over events such as births, deaths, and marriages. But the people’s conversion to Christianity is nothing but superficial. In this respect, Ubah in Steensel (1996, p.201) rightly observed:

“... the conversion of the Igbo to Christianity was not a genuine religious conversion, but rather a matter of adaptation and accommodation, while traditional religion still ruled the minds to a great extent”. The following words of Steensel (1996, p.201) also seems to buttress the argument that the conversion was superficial.

However, the victory of Christianity was somehow superficial. Surely the belief in the supreme God became part of the religious consciousness. But belief in the divinities and ancestors did not stop and most “Christians” still participated in sacrifices
offered to them. Traditional oath-taking remained needed as the Christian oath did not meet the needs of the community. Also faith in reincarnation remained strong. Most church people of the colonial period were harbouring some religious teachings of Christianity and some traditional religious beliefs.

Syncretism has been the order of the day in the area under study. This agrees totally with Webster’s assertion (1973, p. 65) that:

... the new Christians freely mixed their paganism and Christianity. They might dress in European clothes and attend church on Sunday, then put on African dress and consult the diviner on Monday. They presented their babies, decorated with protective charms, to the Christian clergyman for baptism.

The ancestral veneration affected (and still affects) the establishment and spread of Christianity in the following ways: (a) A good number of the Christian converts are unable to do away with paying reverence to their ancestors. Customs, they say die hard. Christianity is either to adapt or perish (b) Christian converts still entertain fears that non-performance of burial and funeral rites and ceremonies of their dead relatives would bring disaster sooner or later.

5.3 Social Institutions

The social institutions I wish to discuss include age-grade system, title-taking and institution of Muo (masquerade). All males in
the villages who have attained manhood are organized into age-grades. The age-grades ensure that village paths and playgrounds are kept clean. They help in building and maintenance of roads and culverts. Maintenance of markets and settlement of petty disputes are also assigned to them. They also keep the village and town very lively by dances, masquerades and other forms of entertainments especially during traditional festivals.

Title-taking is an important institution in North-eastern Igboland. Title-taking confers on the persons or holders a place of honour and respect among their fellow country men and women. Apart from respect and honour, title-taking gives the holder a sense of satisfaction and achievement in life. Title-holders also have a place in village or town assemblies and committees either for settling disputes or for important decisions that will affect the village or town.

The institution of Muo is another institution that plays great roles in my research area. It acts as an instrument of cultural expression and veneration of the people's religious beliefs and practices. It also performs the role of entertainment and helps to instill good behaviour, obedience and honesty in children. Onyeneke (1987, p.2) says “The powers of the masquerade include the authority to order humans around without challenge. They have the right to
compel people to join in some communal work, to exact fines and even to seize property by force”.

Apart from the crucial roles the above mentioned social institutions performed (and still perform), the missionaries and early Christian antagonisms to them was very great. The age-grade system is now being substituted with Young Men Christian Organization (YMCO) by the Christians. The village age-grades are no longer strong as they used to be because many of them have decamped to Christian religion and new ones are difficult to build up as majority of grown-up males prefer to join the battalions of Christian denominations that are ominously sweeping across the North-eastern Igboland.

Title-taking is no longer considered fashionable to those Christians who believe it is idolatrous. Title-taking to be sure is part and parcel of Igbo culture but it is considered as idolatrous in the eyes of the Christian converts. From the initial period, Christian converts were allowed to take title like “ozo” title, “jioke” title and the rest of them but later was banned as some elements of idolatry was alleged to be involved.

To debar people from title-taking by the church means that the elders are denied the position of high status and privileges associated
with titles in traditional community. Steensel (1996, p.207) lent credence to the above statement when he rightly observed that:

... taking of titles is forbidden by most church denominations, which means that the elder cannot reach a position of high status in the community and that he must miss the privileges connected with titles in the community. He is thereby excluded of certain functions that are preferably given to titleholders only.

The institution of masquerade initially did not receive the blessing of the early Christian missionaries and their agents. Although it has very little or nothing to do with rituals or heathenism as such, Christian missionaries forbade their converts to have anything to do with it. Even converts were forbidden to watch a masquerade perform any of its thrilling acrobatics.

5.4 Religious Institution

Igbo traditional religion which is an integral part of African Traditional Religion affected the establishment and spread of Christianity in North-eastern Igboland. The priests and worshippers of Igbo traditional religion viewed the presence of the missionaries as enemies of their own faith who came to displace and supplant them and their faith and plant theirs. This point is buttressed in Agha (1999, p.103) when he rightly observed that “The priests and
worshippers of the Native African Religion were hostile to the missionaries who brought the new religion as they felt that it was a threat to the growth of their religious practices and worship”.

The traditional priests and worshippers’ fear of the Christian religion is justified because the new faith has really supplanted the traditional religion and the priesthood associated with it. In this respect Onyeidu (2004, p.18) rightly observed:

Today, Christianity has supplanted the traditional religion and the priesthood associated with it. Christian institutions such as churches, chapels, convents, schools and seminaries have been established in places where traditional shrines once stood.

There is no doubt that traditional system of worship has since been eroded and stamped out as a result of the preaching of the Gospel. The persistent beliefs and practices of traditional festivals, oracles, circumcision rituals, superstitions, traditional marriage, consultation of fortune-tellers, birth and burial rites and ceremonies, totemic animals and trees and strong attachment to Mother Earth are considered by the missionaries and Christian converts as areas that are adversely affecting the solid establishment and spread of Christianity in North-eastern Igboland. The above areas are the heart of the people’s traditional religious beliefs, practices and culture. The people do not
budge an inch in terms of compromise with the Christians. The Christian converts are often found implicitly believing in and practising those customs and tradition. When all is well most of the Christians claim not to have anything to do with tradition, but let there be trouble or serious problem such as an inexplicable illness, the Christian does not hesitate to consult the oracle or fortune-teller to ascertain the cause of the illness and the way out of it.

All in all, the people saw the missionaries as agent of imperialism who collaborated with the British government to perpetuate alien rule in Nigeria. Some of the people also saw them as agent who came to destabilize the traditional institution and customs. However, some people cooperated with them so as to curry favour from them. For example, these who received the western education were given the Whiteman’s job. Some were employed as clerks and teachers. Some traditional rulers welcomed them in order to perpetuate their rulership.
CHAPTER SIX
THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY, WESTERN EDUCATION AND IMPROVED MEDICAL FACILITIES ON ANCESTRAL VENERATION IN NORTH-EASTERN IGBO LAND

6.1 Christianity

The influence of Christianity on the traditional practices especially on the beliefs and practices of ancestral veneration is very great in North-eastern Igboland. No sooner had the missionaries introduced the new religion than they began to despise the people's religion. Christianity began to preach against the belief in divinities and other minor deities, consultation of oracles, and fortune-tellers, traditional burial and funeral rites, polygamy, title-taking, belief in reincarnation and other traditional practices which they considered idolatrous practices. Let me elaborate. Christians object on the following features of traditional burial practices:

a) The belief that without funeral rites and ceremonies the deceased cannot enter eternal life.

b) All traditional burial practices involving rituals.

c) Invitation of masquerade and fortune-tellers during burial and funeral rites and ceremonies.
d) Yams, egusi, money, snuff box, cooking utensils, etc. put in the grave that the deceased is expected to use in the spirit world.

e) Eating, drinking and merry-making while the corpse still lies in state.

f) Excessive financial involvement in burial and funeral rites, etc.

The missionaries taught that Christian converts should not perform the second burial of their fathers. This created a very “big problem to many converts who were ready to obey the teachings of the missionaries, and at the same time felt the compunction of filial duty to dead parents as well as respect to community opinion, as such converts were also members of the local non-Christian community” (Ilogu 1974, P. 67). It should be noted that second burial is indispensable in traditional Igbo society. Ilogu (1974, P.67) summarized the reasons why this is so.

It was believed that this second burial was the one that helped the spirit of such departed elderly persons to rest comfortably with the ancestors in the land of the ancestral bliss, from where they plead effectively with the gods for the well-being of their children on earth. If this second burial was not performed, the proper inheritance of the late father's property could not be finally settled. What was worse the extended family would be harassed by the hovering spirit of the dead person who had not properly settled down with the other ancestral spirits.
The Christian community has not fully integrated second burial into the church officially. However, in most communities under my research, Christians nowadays perform their own second burial. They incorporate most of the traditional burial customs but keep away from the ones they consider idolatrous. Even in some cases, some Christian converts do relapse into the traditional religion in order to perform the second burial of their parents or older brothers. Even some Christians do perform the second burial without religious memorial service. In most cases, those who do this are punished by the church by debarring them from going to confession. They are also made to pay fine before being admitted in the church again.

Similarly, Christianity preached against consultation of oracles and fortune-tellers. Oracles are generally the mouthpiece of divinities and spirits and tend to be connected with divination. Fortune-tellers are those traditionalists who claim to be able to foretell the future and produce reasons for various happenings through preternatural power. The traditional worshippers often consult them before the commencement and ending of burial and funeral rites and ceremonies. They are invited to chase away evil spirits after the completion of a person's second burial rites and ceremonies. They are also consulted when somebody is sick or dead or when some articles
are stolen or when a couple could not get an issue after traditional marriage. They are also consulted when somebody wants to achieve success in any undertaking such as in an examination or promotion at work and so on and so forth. Christians preached and still preach against this practice. They say that fortune-tellers "are only clever psychologists who merely pretend to have the assistance of some higher power" (Okoye 1965, P.9). They say that if at all the fortune-tellers have any power, there is no doubt, it is the oracle of Satan.

Christians also preached (and still preach) against belief in reincarnation. The Christians do not believe that a person reincarnates when he or she dies. The Christians preach that once a man dies here on earth, he is fixed for heaven or hell for all eternity without any further change, except that it may be necessary for some people to pass through the fires of purgatory before entering into heaven.

Christians also preach against title-taking because according to them there are superstitious practices performed before, after or during the process of initiation.

It should be noted that Christianity in its bid to convert the people divided the community into two camps – the converts who looked down on the old traditional religion, and the devotees of the old religion. Christian converts were not favourably received by their
people who regarded them as people who had no regard for tradition and religion of their forefathers. The people initially did not welcome the missionaries because they were deeply convinced that once the missionaries and their African supporters established themselves, they would disrupt the traditional beliefs and organizations. So those who were very conservative in their traditional practices detested any interference from any quarters in matters of religion.

The new converts however, were set out with the intention of converting the so-called "heathen" to their own views in all things - religious, moral and social. The missionaries were convinced that the people's traditional religion was inferior to their own. So they labelled the people's religion fetishism, idolatry, juju and heathenism. In the missionaries' view, to accept Christianity was the same thing as accepting "civilization". They claimed that those who accepted Christianity and civilization must, of necessity withdraw from traditional rituals of kinship which were directed to the divinities and the ancestral spirits.

The devotees of the old faith were also sad because the church now settles offences which used to be dealt with by the lineage. The same is true for burial and funeral rites and ceremonies. The villagers no longer bury their Christian converts. They are now buried by the
Christian community. The Christian converts were (are) advised not to associate (themselves) with traditional burial and funeral rites and ceremonies. This has created problem because the natives and the Christians no longer join hands together to bury a person. So, when a person dies, a question is asked to know whether the deceased was a Christian or a traditional worshipper. If a Christian, then the Christians go en mass for his or her burial. But if the deceased was a traditional worshipper, the natives move in unity to bury the dead. But a problem often arises in a situation where some of the sons of the deceased happen to be Christian converts while others are traditional worshippers. The Christian converts would insists on allowing only the Christians to bury their father while others would claim that their father when alive was not a Christian and therefore ought to be buried in the traditional way. In a problem such as this, joint burial by the Christians and the natives have been advocated but evidence shows that in such a situation the Christians seem to raise an eyebrow on every ritual done by the people as abominable and polluting. Moreover, burial expenses tend to be too much for the bereaved family to bear.

The church was also seen as an agent that breaks up the old traditional structures which the people believed was handed down to
the present generation by the forefathers who are now ancestors. Opinions within a family become divided because Christian converts and traditional worshippers live in the same family. Christians form groups and try to associate with their church members and vow never to attend village meetings, traditional festivals, keeping village paths tidy or doing communal work with their age-grades. They also refuse to take the traditional oath and titles. The church was also seen as an agent that helps to break up families because Christianity preached against polygamy. Baptism was denied to those who had married more than one wife. In many cases men were forced to keep only one wife and to send the rest away without rhyme or reason.

In fact, the unity in the family and the village and the ability to act as one person was irretrievably lost in many situations. We are aware that the two systems - traditional religion that expresses unity of lineage and Christianity that expresses the unity of groups of believers in churches are not mutually exclusive hence the Christian converts still belong to the traditional families though they no longer worship in the traditional way. This means in effect, that they impair the solidarity of the communities they belong. Thus, with the advent of Christian missionaries, "a potentially violent intrusion was made into the social and political world of the Nigerian peoples" (Ayandele
1966, p.5). This "violent intrusion" also affected the religious life of the people especially the traditional practices of burial, and funeral rites, traditional marriage, traditional title-taking, and above all traditional festivals that normally unite the whole villages and even communities and serve as symbols of traditional religion.

6.2 Western Education

Perhaps the most potent factor that militates against ancestral veneration in particular and traditional practices in general is the western education which is a concomitant of Christianity and which was regarded by missionaries as the get way to the benefits of the western civilization and modernity. The motive for the introduction of western education by the missionaries was purely evangelistic - to help them to convert the so-called "heathen" whom they erroneously believed were being introduced God the first time not knowing that the people had their indigenous religion long before the advent of the missionaries and their new faith. The Christian missionaries were the pioneers of western education in Nigeria. They were responsible for the running of the majority of schools in Nigeria. Nduka (1965, P.9) rightly observed, that "It was they who made, on behalf of the west,
the first determined attempt to change the cultural moorings of the Nigerian peoples".

The missionaries taught the new converts in the mission houses and encouraged them to look down on the people's culture and to adopt the British way of life. Later, mission schools and colleges soon sprang up in many places in North-eastern Igboland. Those who were taught the scriptures and the 3Rs that is, Reading, Writing, and 'Arithmetic became transformed and gave up the old faith. Gradually some of them who had knowledge of the scriptures were made to preach against ancestral veneration and other "idolatrous" practices of their own people. Soon the converts became "friends" of the white men and they formed a small group of people. In this way, traditional life was deeply undermined and the family structure was seriously disrupted. Those who received the western education gradually became detribalized and westernized. So they become separated from their religious milieu and linked with another social group. Such educated ones hardly participate in traditional burial rites and ceremonies and traditional festivals and other traditions of their people. They now regard such traditional practices as devilish. They hardly move freely with those who observe the traditional rites.
Worse still, western education encourages mass exodus of the people from the rural areas to the urban cities. Such movement created some problems and unfortunately weakens the traditional hold on people. It could be recalled that in the villages or rural areas, the people normally conform "to the neat pattern of communal living and sharing in the large extended-family units, with its organized patterns of social control through customs, prohibitions and the use of religious systems of oath and authority, associated with the ancestors" (Ilogu 1974, P.95). In fact, the traditional pattern of life and old traditional beliefs and practices are adhered to. But those who moved to the towns and cities have terribly become sophisticated and Westernized that they ridicule traditional beliefs and practices as superstitious and very primitive.

As the primary educational aim of the missionaries was to produce devout Christians while that of the Government was to produce serviceable subordinates, the native scholars were not encouraged to value any part of their native culture. The missionaries saw nothing good in the people's traditional practice. They wanted the people's religion to be uprooted and to be replaced with Christianity. A.W. Howells, father of the late Bishop A. W. Howells of Lagos, in those days remarked (in his lecture to Egba people on 27 September
"... Darkness and the day can never come together" (Ayandele, 1974, p.79). Darkness refers to the indigenous religion while Christianity refers to the day. So the missionaries did everything within their power to replace the native culture with theirs. Native names, songs, dances, folklore, art, systems of marriage, language were utterly condemned as barbaric. The native converts were encouraged to wear European clothes, speak their language, embrace their life style. In short, they adopted complete Europeanization in order to replace the native culture they despised.

Unknowingly to the missionaries, it was only the material wealth, together with the power that was associated with it that really impressed the natives more strongly than anything else. In fact, the people accepted Christianity purely for economic reasons and not for spiritual upliftment nor for the conviction that Christianity was better than traditional religion. However, because of the benefits of western education, which include gainful employment as clerks or teachers, catechists, etc. a good number of the natives turned to the new faith. And this drastically affected the ancestral veneration and other related traditional practices in North-eastern Igboland. For instance, those who received Christian and Western education began to despise their indigenous religion and way of life. They abandoned all beliefs in
favour of Christian God or more correctly the Trinity, and submitted themselves to be baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". They began to discard their culture in favour of European culture. They cherish putting on European clothes, speaking their Language and wholly embraced their lifestyle. In this way Christianity and Western education began to undermine the peoples traditional practices and culture. The traditional burial and funeral rites were abandoned. They replaced the veneration of the ancestors with the veneration of the saints and angels. The salaries they received as teachers empowered them to solve their financial needs. Their ability to read the Bible put them on advantageous position to preach the Gospels and embellish their preaching with quotations from the Bible. The traditional worshippers were handicapped because most of them were unlettered and their religion has no written Scripture which made it impossible for them to back up whatever defence they could put up in favour of their faith.

Economic factor also affected ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland. Nduka (1965, pp.98-99) rightly buttressed the point when he rightly observed that "It was neither the science, philosophy nor even religion of the west, which most impressed the natives: it was material wealth, together with the power, which caught their
imagination”. Traditional burial and funeral rites and ceremonies that are always very expensive and elaborate are not affordable to poor people. Such poor set of people and those without issue moved en masse to embrace Christianity, which bury every dead person, whether with or without issue and with minimal cost. Moreover, free donations from Christian sympathizers to the bereaved family serve as powerful impetus in turning to Christian faith.

Furthermore, western education and Christianity have devalued the traditional customs. New yam festival celebrations and title-taking ceremonies are considered to be unacceptable to Christian converts because of the traditional religious ceremonies associated with them. The traditional belief in reincarnation, and use of charms have been watered down by the use of psychology, metaphysics, philosophy, medicine and theology “The traditional belief in the spirit of thunder is now rendered without good foundation by the knowledge of electricity and allied subjects” (Arinze 1982, p.21).

It is unfortunate that during the colonial period the school, which was the centre of Christian religious and moral education, excluded the teachings of the beliefs and customs of the people. Rather the missionaries taught the natives to abandon their religion and customs and to adopt those of the western world. Moreover, they
"acquired a disdain for everything African such as African art, music, dancing and marriage customs. They even rejected African names for Baptism" (Onwubiko 1973, P.315). The Christian missions in the North-eastern Igboland are very much against many traditional rituals and burial ceremonies, beliefs in traditional gods and ancestral spirits, ritual circumcision, polygamy, etc. (Ottenberg 2005, p.116).

The native converts join hands in condemning the people’s customs. For example, a Christian convert who happens to be the Catholic Bishop of Abakaliki Diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. M.N. Okoro writes in Odey (1986, p.x). "The Catholic Church in Ezza is now old enough. And any further compromise of the Christian faith with ritual circumcision, which contradicts the teaching of Christ, would be a direct denial of Christ". The attitude of the missionaries brought about the weakening of traditional beliefs and customs and this really gave rise to moral disintegration in the society. In this respect, Nduka (1965, p.110) rightly observed.

When the indigenous Nigerians abandoned their own beliefs and customs, they found that they could lie their way through the proceedings of the magistrates' courts. Converts to Christianity were given the assurance of forgiveness of sins. However grievously and however often they sinned each day or each week, all that was required of them was confession and repentance, and the moral state of each was wiped clean.
6.3 Improved Medical Facilities

The introduction of western education also brought about improved medical facilities. The missionaries opened mission hospitals and clinics where the people are cured of diseases. For instance, a leprosy settlement was opened in 1946 at Mile Four, Abakaliki and later some out-stations were also opened. Then in 1948 Mile Four Hospital (Maternity) was opened and in 1957 St. Vincent Hospital, Ndubia, Igbeagu was also opened. The opening up of the above hospitals and others drastically reduced the people’s superstitious belief that some diseases such as small Pox, swollen body or swollen stomach, TB and others are grave signs of abominations committed against the mother earth, Ali or other divinities.

Improved medical facilities also reduced the consultation of oracles or going to fortune-tellers to ascertain the causes of such illnesses. Nowadays when one falls sick, people go to hospitals for treatment. They now know the need to be vaccinated against small pox and other deadly diseases. People no longer fear the dead or the ancestors as they used to owing to western education and improved medical facilities. Immolation of chickens and animals and the provision of other things as a propitiatory sacrifice are greatly reduced, though not completely eradicated. In fact, western education
and improved medical facilities have watered down the importance, beliefs, and practices of ancestral veneration in North-Eastern Igboland.
CHAPTER SEVEN
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of the findings

The researcher in his findings discovered that the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration were very much alive in North-eastern Igboland. The ancestors were offered sacrifices regularly. There were special months in each community or clan in which a festival was held in their honour. The researcher discovered also that in spite of the fact that ancestral veneration was very much alive in the clans, the practice was in gradual decline due to influences of Christianity, western education, colonialism and modernity. As things stand now, it is not certain whether the practice will be abandoned completely in the near future owing to the fact that the traditional worshippers do not toy with ancestral veneration and a good number of Christian converts who happen to relapse into traditional religion often participate in the practice. Moreover, Christians and traditional worshipers were often found remembering the ancestors though using different approaches or methods.
7.2 Contributions to knowledge

The contributions of this thesis to knowledge rest on the following points:

1. This thesis contributed in enlightening the academic community and humanity on the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland.

2. The thesis also revealed the extent the ancestral veneration is still being practised in North-eastern Igboland.

3. The research also contributed significantly on the relevance of ancestral veneration among the people.

4. The thesis equally showed how Christianity and western education impacted on the people’s custom, culture and religion.

5. The research finally revealed how the emergence of Christianity, western education and medicine affected the continuance of ancestral veneration and other traditional practices in North-eastern Igboland.
7.3 Recommendations

1. The customs and traditions of the people which are not inimical to human progress and development should not be roundly condemned by the Christians; rather, they should be allowed to co-exist with the new social order introduced by Christianity and western education and other agencies.

2. The traditionalists should allow Christian converts to practise their faith unmolested. They should not be forced to do what they claim to be obnoxious to their faith. The Christians on the other hand, should not use the churches as places where the traditional religion, customs and culture are wholly criticized. There should be religious tolerance between the Christians and the traditional worshippers.

3. The Christians should not see the custom and culture of the people as the greatest obstacle against Christian faith taking roots in North-eastern Igboland. The Christians should rather strive to engage the natives on meaningful dialogue in areas of disagreement so that there will be a peaceful coexistence of the two faiths without each annihilating the other.
7.4 Suggestions for further research

The following researchable areas have been identified for future investigation by interested researchers.

1. The impact of Christianity and western education on ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland.

2. Birth, death and burial rites and ceremonies among the native people of North-eastern Igboland.


4. The prospect and future of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland.

5. The impact of Christianity on the celebration of festivals associated with the feeding of the ancestors in North-eastern Igboland.

7.5 Conclusion

Africans particularly, the North-eastern Igbo people strongly believe that physical death is not the end of a person’s conscious life. They believe that when they die, they merely transit into another community and then return in the persons of the newly born babies that carry their names.
The beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igboland in particular and Africa in general may persist because it is a worldwide phenomenon. The influence of the dead on the living is very great. The Christian churches celebrate their ancestors by rituals of sainthood. The secular society does the same by building monuments and naming streets and buildings after those who played great roles in developing and protecting their societies. Families worldwide remember their dead by elaborate funeral rituals, cemetery headstones at the place of burial and expensive mausoleums.

People believe that those who died in virtue live on in the presence of God in heaven, while those who died in vice live in the presence of the devil in hell. There is no society in the known world that does not respond ritually and have beliefs regarding the fate of the deceased.
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# APPENDIX I

## LIST OF INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED DURING MY FIELD WORK

**Ezza Community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>STATUS/OCCUPATION</th>
<th>DATE INTERVIEWED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mbada Otozi</td>
<td>C.100 yrs Died 5/01/010</td>
<td>Ndegu Ogboji</td>
<td>Oldest man in Ndegu Ogboji, a well-known farmer</td>
<td>23/6/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>James U. Anyigor</td>
<td>C.72 yrs</td>
<td>Onuogi Nkomoro</td>
<td>A Former Catechist of Saint Kizito’s Parish</td>
<td>23/6/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Cletus Nwankwo (alias Iribo)</td>
<td>C.70 yrs</td>
<td>Alubeleke Umuezeok a</td>
<td>A renowned barber and also a farmer</td>
<td>23/6/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Uhuo Elom</td>
<td>C.75 yrs</td>
<td>Alubeleke Umuezeok a</td>
<td>A midwife</td>
<td>23/6/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Geoffrey Nweke</td>
<td>C.71 yrs</td>
<td>Umundegu Nkomoro</td>
<td>A one time councillor of Nkomoro Community, now, a member of Imoha Dev. Centre</td>
<td>23/6/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Magnus N. Nwinya</td>
<td>C.70 yrs</td>
<td>Umundegu Nkomoro</td>
<td>A renowned wine-tapper and farmer</td>
<td>23/16/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Nwajibia Anyigor</td>
<td>C.80 yrs</td>
<td>Akeze Nkomoro</td>
<td>A farmer</td>
<td>23/6/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/ N</td>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>PLACE</td>
<td>STATUS/OCCUPATION</td>
<td>DATE INTERVIEWED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Awam Joseph N.</td>
<td>C.74yrs</td>
<td>Nkaliki Echara Unuhu</td>
<td>Retired H/M</td>
<td>10/1/2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Mary Obashi (Mrs)</td>
<td>C.73yrs</td>
<td>Ndioke Ndiebor Ishieke</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>10/1/2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Nwanigo Nwogbala Aba (Mrs)</td>
<td>C.71yrs</td>
<td>Ndiogodo-Abia</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>10/1/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Elias Nwovudu</td>
<td>C.72yrs</td>
<td>Ndiebor Ishieke</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>10/1/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Joseph Awam</td>
<td>C.76yrs</td>
<td>Ndiebor Ishieke</td>
<td>Retired H/M</td>
<td>10/1/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ekuma Lazarus</td>
<td>C.74yrs</td>
<td>Idembia Ishieke</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>10/1/08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### IKWO COMMUNITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/ N</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>STATUS/OCCUPATION</th>
<th>DATE INTERVIEWED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Noble Nnabo Alloysius N.</td>
<td>C.70yrs</td>
<td>Ndufu Echara</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>28/02/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Hon. James Ali Nweke</td>
<td>C.75yrs</td>
<td>Ndufu Echara</td>
<td>A one time councillor of Ndufu Echara ward, supervisory councilor of Ed Ikwo L.G.A and customary Court President. Now a renowned butcher at Ndufu Echara.</td>
<td>28/02/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Patrick Onele</td>
<td>C.80yrs</td>
<td>Ndegu Echara</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>28/02/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Oke Nwanchor</td>
<td>C.76yrs</td>
<td>Ebonyi State College of Ed. Ikwo.</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>28/02/08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NGBO COMMUNITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/ N</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>STATUS/OCCUPATION</th>
<th>DATE INTERVIEWED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Eze Idenyi</td>
<td>C.74yrs</td>
<td>Ngbo</td>
<td>Priest of Ogbo Obasi, farmer.</td>
<td>02/02/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Igboke Ede</td>
<td>C.80yrs</td>
<td>Ngbo</td>
<td>Priest of Igbedee farmer</td>
<td>02/02/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ishiali Ukpa</td>
<td>C.81yrs</td>
<td>Ngbo</td>
<td>Priest of Ogbo Isi farmer</td>
<td>02/02/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Abel Udah</td>
<td>C.60yrs</td>
<td>EBSCOE, Ikwo</td>
<td>Senior Patrol Supervision, Ebonyi State College of Ed, Ikwo.</td>
<td>28/02/08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ezza

Ezza is one of the principal clans that make up the North-eastern Igbo people of Ebonyi State. Ezza territory is approximately 528km or 300 square miles in area. It shares boundary with the Izzi People to the North, the Ikwo and the Agbo clan of Cross River State to the East, the Akpoha, the Okposhi, the Ugwulangwu and the Oshiri to the South and the Agba, the Ezzamgbo, the Orri, the Ntezi and the Okpoto to the West.

Oral traditions corroborated with anthropological evidence confirm that Ezekuna was the founder and legendary ancestor of Ezza people. His father was said to be Ekumaenyi whom Ugoh (2003, p.20) noted “was reputed to be a huge man of stiff military bearing”. “He had a quick intelligent mind, great personal charm and iron will”. It should be noted that very little is known about Ekumaenyi’s Personality. Oral tradition however, according to Afoke and Nworie (2010, pp. 10 – 11) “believes that Ekumaenyi is the grand father of Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo people. Ekumaenyi gave birth to Ezekuna, Olodo and Noyo who were the ancestral fathers of Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo respectively”. 
The following villages which have grown into communities make up Ezza clan: Umuezeokoha, Umuezeoka, umuoghara, Amewula, Amuda and Okpomoro. These six communities make up the Orokeonohoa group. Others are: Oriuzor, Ekka, Ogboji, Nkomoro and Inyere. These five communities make up the Imoha group. Others are the Kpa-kpaji group which include Ezzama, Amuzu and Ameka. The rest are the Izzikworo group which include Amana, Amaezekwe, Amegu, Nsokara, Amudo, Idembia, Echara, and Okoffia. There are altogether 22 communities in Ezza clan.

Ezza people occupy the North-eastern Igbo of Abakaliki. Ezza was under Ogoja province of Eastern Nigerian before the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. After the war the provincial system was relocated in proper enclave of East Central State. Later Ezza came under Anambra State when the East Central State was divided into Anambra and Imo States. Again Ezza came under Enugu State when Anambra state was further divided into Enugu and Anambra States. Then on 1st of October 1996, Ezza community came under Ebonyi State of South Eastern Nigeria.

Ezza had only one Local Government Area before the creation of Ebonyi State. It was known as Ezza Local Government Area. When Ebonyi State was created on 1st Oct. 1996, Ezza was divided into Ezza
North and South Local Government Areas. The former Governor of the State Dr. Sam Egwu further created development centres from the two Local Government Areas.

Izzi

Izzi belongs to the North-eastern Igbo group. Linguistically and culturally, they are part and parcel of Igbo-speaking people that form the major cultural group in South-eastern Nigeria. The exact period they inhabited where they are occupying now is not known. However, linguistic evidence suggests that the people have lived at Abakaliki for a substantial period of time and that they have a common origin with Ezza, Ikwo, Ezzangbo and Mgbo people. The ancestral father of Izzi people is said to be Nnodo Ekumaenyi who has a common link with Ezekuna, the ancestral father of Ezza people and Nnoyo, the ancestral father of Ikwo people. Ezzamgbo and Mgbo people are said to be sisters of Izzi people. Currently Izzi community has three Local government Areas namely, Abakaliki, Ebonyi and Izzi with thirteen autonomous communities. However the former Governor of Ebonyi State Dr. Sam Egwu has increased the number of autonomous communities after the creation of four development centres.
According to Izzi Civil Club (2006, p.24) Izzi community (clan) “is located on the world map between longitude 80 20’E and latitude 60 30’ N”. The land is bounded by Ukele and Osopong people of Cross River State in the East, Tiv and Idoma people of Benue State in the North. It is bounded in the West by Ezza-Effium, Mgbo and Ezzamgbo people and share a common boundary with Ikwo and Ezza people in the South. According to 1991 Nigerian population census, the community covers a land mass of about 900,000. According to Steensel (1996, p.5) Izzi land “covers about 2264 square Km”. It is situated on “a flat undulating landscape, some 120-180 metres above sea level, sloping gently to the East”.

Ikwo

Ikwo people also occupy the North-eastern part of Igboland. According to Egbe (2006, p.10) Ovuoba “stated that many oral historians hold that the founder of Ikwo was Enyi Nwegu, who migrated from Igala in Benue State of Nigeria”. But the general consensus among Ikwo people is that Noyo was the ancestral father of Ikwo people and that Ekumaenyi was the grandfather of Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo people. According to John Ovuoba in Egbe (2006, p.38)
“Ikwoland lies between longitude 8.050 east and latitude 6.04 north and has an altitude of 91.44m above sea level”.

Ikwo people share a common boundary with Izzi people in the North and Osopo people in the North-East and share South-East with the Cross River which form a natural boundary between Ebonyi State and Cross River State of Nigeria. Ikwo people also share a common boundary with Ezza people in the West and the people of Itigidi in the South-West.

According to Ogbalu (1988, p.71) Ikwo community or clan comprise umuaka moiety which includes Akpelu, Ezeke, Muta, Effium, Amanguru, Achara uku and Ameka. Then Utaku moiety includes Alike, Achara, Iinyimagu, Igbudu Amagu, Okpuitumo, and Akpanwudele.

Ikwo has a fairly large population. According to Okeworo (1981, p.15) “about 242, 500 people live in the area according to 1963 population census”. As of now the population has almost doubled as a result of increase in population and migration of other people to farm on its rich soil which is suitable for the production of rice, yams, cassava and other crops. As of now Ikwo is the main community that produces the largest quantity of rice in Ebonyi State.
Ngbo/ Ezzangbo

Ngbo (Mgbo) and Ezzangbo (Ezzamgbo or Izhiamgbo) belong to the North-eastern Igbo group. Linguistic and cultural evidences show that they are part and parcel of Igbo-speaking people that form the major cultural group in South-eastern Nigeria. The exact period they inhabited where they are staying now cannot be determined. However, linguistic evidence and oral traditions show unmistakably that they have a common origin with Izzi people. Oral tradition has it that one Obo Echara Ugo left Ishieke in Izzi and settled at Izhiamgbo. He, therefore, became the founder of Izhiamgbo clan. Izhiamgbo later formed Mgbo clan. But another tradition ascribed the origin of Mgbo to one Erege whose first son Onyeupfu Erege settled at Ekwashi and is the founder of Ekwashi community. Erege’s second son Ezeta Erege founded the Unwuogudu community and the other sons of Erege formed the other 5(five) communities of Mgbo.

However, the third tradition claimed that Mgbo originated from Ejeogu, the son of Egara of Izhiamgbo. Egara himself was a hunter from Amegu Izzi who migrated to continue his hunting expedition. From his sons, several Mgbo communities descended.

Even though there are variations in the oral traditions of the origin of Mgbo/Ezzamgbo people, one thing is clear. They descended
from Izzi people and that is the reason why “There is no land boundary between Izzi and Izhamgbo and they cannot shed one another’s blood, because they are brothers” (Steensel 1996, p.13). Mgbada and Ugoh (2004, p.44) rightly observed that “it has become popular that they [Ezzamgbo and Mgbo people] originated from the Izzi and they are treated as such in virtually all traditions of the Abakaliki people”.

Mgbo and Ezzamgbo are bounded in the East by Ebonyi Local Government Area and in the West by Ishielu Local Government Area. They also share boundary with Benue State in the North and Ezza North Local Government Area in the South.
THE BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND RELEVANCE OF ANCESTRAL VENERATION IN NORTH-EASTERN IGBO LAND, NIGERIA

By

NWANGAMA EDWIN UKPABI
PG/ Ph.D/ 06/ 41120

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION AND CULTURAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

SEPTEMBER, 2011
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A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION,
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D) IN AFRI CAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION.

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR AGHA U. AGHA

SEPTEMBER, 2011
APPROVAL PAGE

THIS THESIS HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA,

NSUKKA.

BY

_________________________________  ________________________________________
SUPERVISOR                        EXTERNAL EXAMINER

_________________________________  ________________________________________
INTERNAL EXAMINER                  HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

_________________________________
DEAN OF FACULTY
DECLARATION

Mr. Nwangama Edwin Ukpabi, a Post-graduate student in the Department of Religion and with Registration Number PG/Ph.D/06/41120 has satisfactorily completed the requirements for the research work for the Ph.D. Degree in African Traditional Religion.

The work embodied in this thesis is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree of this or any other university.

__________________________  _________________________
Head of Department           Supervisor
CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that Nwangama Edwin Ukpabi with Registration Number PG/Ph.D/06/41120 has satisfactorily carried out all the corrections on this thesis as suggested by the External Examiner.

_________________________________  ______________________
Head of Department                  Supervisor
DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to my wife, Joy C. Nwangama and my children, Valentine, Emmanuel and Samuel.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to lots of people for a successful completion of this research work on the Beliefs, Practices and Relevance of Ancestral Veneration in North-eastern Igboland. First on the list is my humble and hardworking supervisor Professor Agha U. Agha who pointed out all the grammatical errors embodied in the thesis. Next are those who helped me in my field work. They include John Nworie, a close friend from Izzi; Chukwuma Ngwoke and Cletus Nwankwo also bosom friends’ from Nkomoro and Umuezeoka communities respectively. Others are Stephen N. Okeworo and Fred Odo who are my colleagues in Ebonyi State College of Education. Mention should also be made of Abel Udah who is a senior patrol supervisor in Ebonyi State College of Education and Aloysius N. Nnabo, a civil servant and an indigene of Ikwo.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Head of Department of Religion, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Rev. Fr. (Dr.) H. C. Achunike and other eminent scholars in the Department such as Professor C.O.T. Ugwu, Professor, M. I. Okwueze, Dr. (Mrs.) B. A. Okoli, Dr. S. O. Onyeidu and a host of others too numerous to mention by name.
I would like to extend the acknowledgement to my brothers - Fabian Ucha Nwangama, Peter Nwankwo Nwangama, Daniel Nworie Nwangama and my sister, Mrs Nwankwo Nweke.

Finally, I am extremely grateful to numerous authors whose books I consulted in the course of this research work. I apologise for my inability to mention them by name. I also extend my acknowledgement to all the elders in Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo and Ngbo clans who granted me private audience in the course of my research work.
THESIS ABSTRACT

The thesis aimed at examining the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in North-eastern Igbo society and the extent Christianity and Western education and medicine impacted on it. The problem of the thesis centred on the argument that ancestral veneration was of no importance to the traditional and contemporary people of North-eastern Igboland and that it was gradually dying out as a result of western education and Christianity. The methodology adopted was the phenomenological approach whereby the researcher carried out an impartial and systematic study and description of the phenomena as they presented themselves. Data were collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included artefacts and the huts and tombs where the ancestors were remembered by their living relatives as well as oral evidence collected from the living practitioners of Igbo traditional religion in the area. The secondary sources were made up of published and unpublished works on the research topics or related topics by previous scholars. In addition, some records from the Archives in Enugu were consulted. The key findings of the research revealed that the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration were very much alive in North-eastern Igboland. Sacrifices were offered to the ancestors regularly. Each community had a special month in which a festival was held in their honour. The findings also indicated that the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration were in gradual decline owing to Christian influences, western education and modernity. Most Christian converts no longer participated in anything associated with ancestral veneration in the area. The findings of the research finally showed that it was not certain whether the beliefs, practices and relevance of ancestral veneration in the area would be abandoned completely in the near future because all the traditional worshippers appeared not to toy with ancestral veneration and a good number of Christian converts often relapsed into traditional religion and joined the practice. Moreover, Christians and traditional worshippers were often found remembering the ancestors though using different approaches.
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