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Appraising Some Eastern Nigeria Cultural Practices on the Basis of the Moral Foundation of the Christian Faith

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Abstract:

African religion cum philosophy is practically inseparable from the entire African culture. This necessitates the metaphysical foundation of African world-view. In Eastern Nigeria as this work observes, the story is the same. Most of these cultural practices in Eastern Nigeria portray the peoples' religion and also serves as the means of social mobilization and control thereby maintaining the basic social values of the people. On this note, this work suggests that since our modern society is becoming a global village, Christianity and its moral values with its global acceptability should be used to reconstruct most of these cultural beliefs that cannot meet the demands of our modern time. The dynamism of culture demands that better cultural practices should be employed to replace the non-valuable ones, and the good ones should be maintained provided they can meet universal needs.

Keywords: Culture, beliefs, traditions, Christian faith, lactation, circumcision, values.

1. Introduction

The Nigerian society, though heterogeneous in nature, is circular due to the existence of the freedom of worship, speech, association, etc., as enshrined in its constitution which is the supreme legal document that guides governance in the country. Coupled with this, we have different spheres of African religion coded with diverse cultures and practices of a given African society. Based on personal conviction, every adult is free to choose what to believe say and do, provided such belief, speech and action do not infringe on another person's freedom. In Eastern Nigeria, the social build up of a given society is determined by the world-views of the founding fathers. Those world views form part of the peoples' belief systems that influence the culture, religion and the philosophy of the people. To do justice to this work we are going to divide this work into the cultural formation of a people, the moral foundation of the Christian faith, basic cultural practices in Eastern Nigeria, modernization of cultural practices in the light of the Christian faith, and finally appraisal and conclusion.

2. The Cultural Formation Highlighted

On a general note, man according to Aristotle, is a social being. The desire to come or stay together with whosoever one wants is determined by one's freewill and interest. But sometimes it might be through coercion or other means. People, who associate with others in bodies that are properly organized, accept in one way or the other, to abide by or be loyal to policies, rules, norms, bye-laws and constitutions that guide the operations of such bodies. These organized bodies exist in the form of traditional communities, social clubs, religious organizations, educational institutions, health institutions, sports associations, etc. Membership of some of these bodies is naturally acquired as in the case of traditional communities and some social organizations. In others, membership is acquired by choice provided admittance is not a security threat. The choices people make are influenced by several desires of life both in the here and now as well as in the future and hereafter. From here cultures are built up to influence the members within a given setting. When such is peculiar to a given people, it becomes a traditional culture. Though some do change like lifestyle, mode of life, food, environmental cultures, etc, some also are static to an extent like language, climate, etc.

Decisions that mostly affect people in a given culture now, in the future and hereafter, fall within the ambits of religion and education. Both spheres of activity involve every human being. This could be understood by noting their definitions. John Parankimalil avers that "education is a systematic process through which a child or an adult acquires knowledge, experience, skill and sound attitude" (online). He goes on to state that the true aim of education is to develop a person in a manner that he or she will highly benefit the

society as well as the culture of the people. Lending insight to the indispensable value of education, Ellen G. White asserts that “true education means more than the pursuance of a certain course of study... It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come” (online). This implies that when education builds the mind it will in turn affect the culture of the people. Ellen White’s position rhymes with idealist philosophers of education, as explained by Ucheaga, who sees man as a spiritual being and as such education should “look beyond the outward, the perceptible side of the learner and make the learner’s inner being our focal point” (qtd by Asukwo, 2009).

Although various fields of human endeavor tap from education, that of religion is all encompassing. By definition, religion in this context is a system of living whereby people are guided by experiences, beliefs and knowledge that make them consider themselves in relationship to others, as well as to the social, physical and metaphysical world (Okwueze, 2003). Furthermore, religion is explicitly defined as “a relational belief in a transcendent Being who reveals Himself either through a general sense or specific sense to His creature (man) through which a personal worship relationship is established” (Asukwo, 2013). In essence, religion therefore guides our beliefs and this in turn guides how we view and relate to happenings in life. This makes religion an inseparable composite of the peoples’ culture. So, every culture has its perception of who the Supreme is. This is applicable to Africa cum Eastern Nigeria. As Asukwo et al argue, “if the concept of God is expressed in all the African cultures, it means that religion forms parts of African culture but not all African cultural practices are religious” (2013). We can therefore see how religion affects the belief of the people. Some of the major religions in the world are Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, African religion, and other unaffiliated beliefs. Winslow categorizes some of these major world religions by percentage attendance as follows: Christianity (31.5%), Islam (23.2%), Unaffiliated (incl. atheism) (16.3%), Hinduism (15%), Buddhism (7.1%), Folk [Traditionalism] (5.9%), other (0.8%), and Judaism (0.2%) (online). The figures according to him were as at 2010. Christianity leads while Islam follows in total highest number of adherents. Both of these religions exercise belief in a monotheistic supernatural being called God and Allah respectively. It will surprise you to note that in the case of Christianity, many cultures where it has been allowed to thrive have to a greater extent been changed, as well as the world view of the people.

3. The Moral Foundation of the Christian Faith

Christianity is a religious system in which a set of beliefs guide the way of life of a community of people who follow the life and teaching of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Hendrick, 2008). It was an observation of and the discovery that a certain group of people behaved like Jesus that prompted the coinage of the term Christians at Antioch, which appears first in the Bible passage of Acts 11:26, in the plural noun form (Esowe, 2015). Several Christian groups or denominations exist in the world today. Notable ones among them are grouped by Rhodes thus:

1. Adventist churches
2. Baptist churches
3. Brethren churches
4. Catholic churches
5. Christian churches
6. Congregational churches
7. Episcopal and Anglican churches
8. Friends Conservative (Quaker) churches
9. Fundamentalist, Bible and Conservative Evangelical churches
10. Holiness churches
11. Lutheran churches
12. Mennonite churches
13. Methodist churches
14. Orthodox churches
15. Pentecostal churches
16. Presbyterian churches
17. Reformed churches (Online)

The title Church is the most prominent attachment to several other names one could see among Christian groups. Scriptural descriptions of the church as: “the church of God” (Acts 20:28), “the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12), and “the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15) are generally acclaimed by Christian denominations (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2010). Furthermore, Christian churches believe and aver that:

- To belong to the church of God is a unique and soul-satisfying privilege. It is God’s purpose to gather out a people from four corners of the earth to bind them into one body, the body of Christ, of which He is the living head. All who are children of God in Christ Jesus are members of this body, and in this relationship they may enjoy fellowship with each other and fellowship also with their Lord (2010).

The biblical teachings of some churches are arranged into fundamental beliefs which are grouped into six doctrinal categories. They are the doctrines of God; man; salvation; the church; the Christian life and last day events. Grouped under the doctrines of God are the

Holy Scriptures, Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The doctrines of man embrace Creation and the Nature of Man. Inclusive in the doctrines of salvation are the Great Controversy, the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ, the Experience of Salvation and Growing in Christ. The beliefs which constitute the doctrines of the church include the Church, the Remnant and Its Mission, Unity in the Body of Christ, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Spiritual Gifts and Ministries and the Gift of Prophecy.

Doctrines of the Christian life are teachings on the Law of God, the Sabbath, Stewardship, Christian Behavior and Marriage and the Family. Events that would characterize the closing scenes of earth's history which are codified as doctrines of last day events comprise of Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, the Second Coming of Christ, Death and Resurrection, the Millennium and the End of Sin and the New Earth (Adventist, online).

Another set of arrangements present beliefs which are grouped into: (i) Bibliology – the Holy Bible; (ii) theology proper - the doctrines of God; (iii) Christology – the Virgin birth of Christ, His suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension; (iv) Anthropology – the study of man; under which the doctrine of total depravity and the sinfulness of all men is studied (v) Soteriology – the study of salvation; this handles the doctrines of repentance, restitution, justification, water baptism, entire sanctification; redemption, healing and health (vi) Pneumatology – the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; (vii) Ecclesiology – the study church; under which we have the doctrines of the Lord's Super, (viii) Eschatology – the study of the last events – under which we have the doctrines of rapture, resurrection, Great tribulation, the second coming of Christ, Christ's millennial reign, the Great White Throne Judgement, the New heaven and New earth, and hell (Berkhof , 2000 and IBTC, 2008).

The afore-mentioned body of beliefs in its entirety constitutes what is meant by the Christian Faith. What is certain about all these doctrinal teachings among many churches is that there is no uniformed chronological arrangement as they are not also chronologically arranged in the scriptures. But anyone who affirms and lives in accordance to these beliefs is a Christian faithful. The belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and all that pertain thereto is central to the Christian faith. He came to pay the price of humanity's disobedience by His death on the Cross at Calvary. He conquered death and the grave at His resurrection (Alalade, 2006). He opened the link way between earth and heaven at His ascension. Prior to His ascending to Heaven He promised to come again to take those who faithfully believe in God and Himself to heaven (John 1:1-3, 14; Col 1:15-19; Rom 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-26. John 14:1-3). Ellen G. White says:

- The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. 'The truth shall make you free,' and Christ is the truth. Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul. Subjection to God is restoration to one's self, - to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is 'the law of liberty! James 2:12(White, online).

A Christian faithful therefore believes in Christ as his Lord and personal Savior. He believes that having accepted Jesus as Master and Lord, there should be a difference between his present life-style and what it was before his embracing the faith. This difference which is the outworking of the indwelling Holy Spirit, is informed and guided by the law which Christ said He had come not to destroy but to fulfill (Mt. 5:17, Ex 20:1-17). It is in this law that he discovers that worshipping God demands in addition to all others a loving relationship as a moral obligation he owes to both God and his fellow man (Matt 22: 35-40). As a Christian, he believes that just as Jesus went into heaven, He will come again (Acts 1:11). Consequent upon these beliefs, he watches and prays ceaselessly for God's help to enable him be prepared together with those who may hear him, for that glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus which will draw the curtain on this sinful world's present activities, and mark the beginning of a new life of bliss in heaven. It is the belief in these major doctrinal teachings of Christ that are enshrined in the scriptures and implicit obedience to God's word that form the moral foundation of the Christian faith.

4. Basic Cultural Practices in Eastern Nigeria

Eastern Nigeria in the context of this work is defined as the territory covered by the administrative delineation of the British Colonial Administration then known as Eastern Region of Nigeria. It comprises five states in the present South-East as well as four states in the present South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria. These are states known and called Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River and Rivers (How Nigeria got to 36 States). Suffice it to state here that these states form parts African culture and as such share many cultural beliefs and practices with other African states and nations.

Most of these cultural practices appear to be traditional to the Africans simply because of the metaphysical foundation of African culture. In this respect, tradition is seen as "a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people" (Hornby,1997). Further insight is added by The Free Dictionary which sees tradition as "the passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation, especially by oral communication" (online).

Two key elements of the above definitions are: one, the way a particular group of people behave due to what they believe; two, these behavioral patterns are transmitted from generation to generation mainly through oral communication in the form of songs, dance, proverbs, folktales, artistic works, names, etc, these customs are hardly presented as inspired thoughts. Instead, they are seen to be ideas put up by the ancestors out of their epistemic observation of the cosmos with intuitive human wisdom aimed at dealing with situations of life that befell them. In other words, they are philosophical thoughts reflected upon by African legends that are now believed by some people to be among the living-dead, the ancestors.

This understanding differentiates cultural traditions from biblical traditions which have positive divine approval. When God, the Creator of man reveals how something should be done and it is followed and transmitted down the ages it is a tradition, but divine

tradition. It differs from human philosophical tradition. It is the human traditional practices that we are mainly concerned with in this paper.

To be fair in our analysis, some cultural practices in Eastern Nigeria are not harmful or evil, but some are harmful and detrimental socially, economically and religiously. A few are useful and beneficial which help to maintain the social identity of the given people. In their work captioned '*African Cultural Practices and Health Implications for Nigeria Rural Development*', Asu, Gever, and Joshua (2013) state that traditional cultural practices affect people's health either for good or bad and thereby affect their socio-economic as well as their scientific development. They list five positive cultural practices to include breastfeeding of children, special diets for nursing mothers, sexual abstinence for the period of lactation, wrestling combats and environmental sanitation.

Onyeabochukwu (2007) corroborates the above information and adds that these practices though centuries old, were formulated through the method of trial and error (online). He also joins the above mentioned group of writers to name five harmful traditional practices thus: use of cow-dung in Western Nigeria to clear the umbilical cord, refraining from giving children egg and meat so as to prevent them from becoming thieves, female circumcision, scarification of tribal marks and unhealthy marriage practices. On her part, Ameh (2002), adds very prevalent harmful practices to the list by naming three additional ones. These include male child preference, child labour and begging assistance (online). For the Efiks in Cross River State, washing of plates at night is forbidden because of the belief in re-incarnation so as not to cause barrenness in the family. That is, it is believed that at night the children from the other world may visit the home and if the plates are washed they not see what to eat and may not come into such home to be born. Spanking of a child at night among the Efiks is equally forbidden so as not to beat one's reincarnated parent. It is also morally wrong among the Efiks to give somebody's child hot food. When such is done, it goes with appeal that such action is not deliberate (Asukwo and Etta, 2011).

Furthermore, cultural practices that put question marks on Christian beliefs on the state of the dead abound. Some of which are suspicion of foul play in almost every human death that occurs, talking to the dead as if they are conscious, burial practices with negative effects on the religious and socio-economic activities of the bereaved, reincarnation and pouring of libation. Farming and harvest season's rituals are also practiced in which they sacrifice to the gods and ancestors before bush clearing, fertility goddess programs organized by women before farm cultivation and new yam festivals with the accompanying ancestral worship practices.

5. The Need to Modernize Some Cultural Practices in the Light of Christian Faith

Let us consider some of these practices in relation to the Christian faith. We will look first at some positive cultural practices:

- A. **Breastfeeding:** Practicing breastfeeding for a period of between six months to one year serves the health of mother and child well. It makes both to be close to each other and strengthens the child's immunity. It also affords the mother the privilege to inculcate good early habits to her child thus laying the foundation of the biblical injunction "train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). One may ask what makes breastfeeding special among the people of Eastern Nigeria. It shows that Africans are part of God's creation who by intuition know the importance of breast milk towards the child's growth and brain development.
- B. **Special Diet for Nursing Mothers:** Asu, Gever and Joshua (2013) affirm that this is done to help the women regain lost nutrients during pregnancy and birth delivery processes. To emphasize special diet for nursing mothers is to do the needful. In her words in this regard, Ellen G. White(online) states:
 - The period in which the infant receives its nourishment from the mother is critical. Many mothers, while nursing their infants, have been permitted to overlabor and to heat their blood in cooking; and the nursling has been seriously affected, not only with fevered nourishment from the mother's breast, but its blood has been poisoned by the unhealthy diet of the mother, which has fevered her whole system, thereby affecting the food of the infant.

It follows from the above insights that nursing mothers should be especially cared for in addition to providing good nutritious food for them. This would enhance their health and those of their infants, for a better and healthier church. For the Efiks this is called '*ebu-uman*' (nursing of a mother after child's birth). During this period the nursing mother will be confined to one place to be taken care of especially the first delivery. She is not expected to do any strenuous work so as to regain her health back

- C. **Sexual Abstinence during Lactation:** This practice was imbibed with the belief that a woman is not fully pure during this period. However, it helps in child spacing and family planning, even though the purity aspect is not true. A Christian prays and works for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of all including nursing mothers. To do otherwise is unbiblical. For Christians, the Bible admonishes in 3 John 2 that they should wish people climatically, prosperous health and spiritual growth. Husbands should therefore learn to also hold themselves while the mother and child are getting stronger during those few months after child birth. It cannot be an excuse for sexual promiscuity because sin cannot be excused. The economic situation in our world today though absent in times past, lends credence to child spacing and family planning, which the Eastern Nigerian culture saw the people practicing as they faithfully kept to that belief. On their part the Efiks believe that if the husband has an affair with his wife when still breastfeeding a baby, that baby will be sucking blood which may cause the child to suffer from '*ibe*' (the situation where a child can be up to a year and six months without walking). This belief may not be scientifically correct but helps in child spacing.

- D. Wrestling Combat. Though not severally in vogue these days, the practice of wrestling combats among communities is an activity that is traditionally upheld in some communities in South-East and South-South States of Nigeria (Idehen, 2007). For the Efiks, this kind of wrestling is for social mobilization and cohesion. It is also a platform of determining the prowess of a given family or community. Although Idehen researched on a circular footing, thereby upholding the health benefit of wrestling as an exercise, the Christian Faith discourages such practices due to the possible physical and emotional hazards that are inherent in them. What are encouraged are non competitive exercises that are not arduous. "The exercise that develops mind and character, that teaches the hands to be useful and trains the young to bear their share of life's burden, is that which gives physical strength and quickens every faculty" (White, online).
- E. Environmental Culture: In local village settings tradition requires people to sweep their environments early in the morning. This is where African aesthetics come in to add beauty to the surrounding. In some areas where public toilets exist, young people sweep and wash these toilets. A clean environment repels several diseases, while a dirty environment attracts manifold diseases. This attests to the personal hygiene of the people. Environmental sanitation is very important provided it is not done when God should be worshipped
- F. Architectural Culture: The practice is seen among the Efiks in their traditional setting. The traditional compounds are sometimes rectangular, square or oblong in shape which is popularly called '*nkan-okure*'. It is so built to accommodate and protect the extended family household (*ufök*) with all its members. The peculiar nature of this compound is that it has only one big entrance called '*usuñ-inua-otop*'. This big entrance directly faces the master's sitting parlour. It is so designed for security, functionality and aesthetics. Security in the sense that any person coming into the compound to woo the wives will be seen by the master whose house is at the center (Asukwo, 2009). In the Igbo setting, the entrance gate is called *onu-obi*. Though Christianity is against polygamy, the security design of such a home is appreciated.

There are other cultural practices which are harmful and appalling to our modern society:

- A. Use of Cow-dung to Clear Umbilical Cord: In South-West Nigeria it is reported that during circumcision of children, there is a practice of using cow-dung to clear the umbilical cord of the child (Asu, Gever and Joshua, 2013). Cow-dung is animal waste and contains impurities which would certainly penetrate into the bloodstream of the child to endanger his health. Such unwholesome practices should be highly discouraged. It is equally believed that the cow-dung contains a high degree of tetanus (which the Efiks call '*oron*'). This disease has been killing new born babies sometimes with their mother. The Efiks superstitiously believe that if burnt fire-wood and some leaves are placed cross the entrance to the room where the nursing mother stays tetanus will penetrate that room to afflict the child. By now they may have understood that such is false belief.
- B. Denying Children Egg and Meat: "In a typical Nigerian rural society, there are cultural beliefs that children are usually not given foods like egg, meat, etc, for fear that they will become thieves, witches/wizards, this leads to a condition of kwashiorkor which is as a result of lack of protein in the system" (Asu, Gever and Joshua, 2013). For the Efiks, it is not only stealing, but the fear that such may push the child to desire things exclusive to adults. We have come to the realization that children need these proteinous foods more than adults and that it is home training coupled with prayer that helps mould a good character not denial of food in whatever guise. Ellen G. White (online) intones that:
- The directions given concerning the Hebrew children teach us that nothing which affects the child's physical well-being is to be neglected. Nothing is unimportant. Every influence that affects the health of the body has its bearing upon mind and character.

While we must control the appetite of our children to make it wholesome, we should guard against traditional taboos that have unhealthy implications on them. With proper balanced meals, our children will be healthy, possess sound minds and perform intelligently at home, school, church and society.

- C. Female Circumcision: Onyeabochukwu cites (2007) Myers as saying that both female and male circumcision is practiced not only in Nigeria but also in a minimum of 26 other nations of Africa. The Bible injunction given to Abraham was for male circumcision, not for females (Gen. 17:9-14). Health experts have come up with discoveries of hazards faced by women especially during child birth due to circumcision. There are occasions where deaths of women result after child birth due to bleeding which emanate because of female genital circumcision. The Efiks and the Igbo practice female circumcision with the excuse that it deadens the sexual urge in females until they marry. When a girl is circumcised she will be put in a fattening home (*ufok nkuho* in Efik, *mgbede* in Igbo) for some varied period before marriage. They now understand that a flirt remains a flirt until God's grace makes a difference. The word of God condemns such practice and we rather obey God than human tradition and as such denounce female circumcision.
- D. Scarification and Tribal Marks: Bodily marks have health implications. Substances that are rubbed into the marks to heal them, penetrate the bloodstream and could cause divers sicknesses. In Christ we are all one (Gal. 3:28). Our character rather makes us who we are in Christ not tribal marks with their attendant dangers. Even the insecurity being experienced globally is putting checks to this practice. The young ones should be cautioned against tattooing their bodies for celebrity show. It is unhealthy and unchristian. God condemns it in a strong term (Leviticus 19:28).
- E. Unhealthy Marriage Practices. There are more than two issues involved here. Early marriages are arranged for the girl's right from 14 years and in some cases they are given to men older than their fathers. Marriage rite lists is another tradition that affects people negatively. In almost all of these lists, kinsmen of the parents draft a list which contains items of drink and tobacco that are unchristian. Requirements in the list these days are in some areas so financially demanding that most men

after marriage become bankrupt. Two outcomes result from this overburdening marriage list syndrome. First, the young men resort to areas where they can afford to pay for the marriage rites, leaving girls of marriageable age frustrated in some other areas. Second, the girls or young adult women so abandoned sneak out to have illicit sexual relations thereby plunging themselves aided by tradition into whoredom. Another practice is that of not allowing a woman to have a voice in her place of marriage. Women in most traditional settings are only to be seen but not to be heard as if they are slaves. Another form of unchristian marriage is the dynamic marriage or mother offspring. Here “a father may permit his daughter to remain unmarried with the intention of allowing her to live in the family house and produce children from different men for his lineage” (IBTC, 2010).

Every true Christian must realize that helpers do not become dumb in order to perform adequately. One who helps to work should also be allowed to air opinions on issues in her home and community of marriage. Wives are not slaves. They are help mates in all ramifications. Ellen G. White (online) counsels that young people should grow in practical experience of life, gain mental, emotional and physical maturity to be able to bear the burden of marriage before entering into it. She also discourages early marriage.

- F. Suspicion of Foul Play in Almost Every Death. Traditional Africans including that of the Igbos, Ijaws, Ibibios, Yorubas, Efiks, etc., regard all types of hardship – sickness, failure, death – as results of activities of Ubiquitous evil spirits (Kalu, 1991). When death occurs, many people ask questions in a bid to suggest the cause of it. What killed him or her? Where was he going to? Those who knew the deceased will begin to think through, to see if they can remember his lifestyle, relationships, utterances, and so on. This is usually done to enable the inquirer give a classification of the type of death. Emotions are at times whipped up to the point that consultation is sought with a native doctor to determine the cause and who is responsible for the death (Esowe, 2015). For the Efiks, aged people who live and die a good dead are called home by the ancestors to join ancestral spirit. When a young and middle aged man dies it is believed that such is unnatural death and the cause must be known. But when a wicked man who has been troubling the village dies, it is believed his death is a divine judgement and he should not be buried honourably.

This situation could be why Habenstein (1968) asserts that people react to the death of one of their own emotionally and ritually. The Christian Church admonishes every living person to be in tune with God and to relate well with his fellow beings. Death can occur anyhow and at any place. If the need to medically ascertain the cause of death arises, it should be done. But the consultation of mediums, witches, wizards, native doctors and so on, is unbiblical and unchristian. God knows everything about us and on the last day, we will know as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12). But the ultimate cause of death is sin (Ezek 18:4) which is remedied through Christ’s atonement for sin. People are afraid of the physical death, but Christianity admonishes us to be more afraid of the eternal one.

G. Talking to The Dead: During burial programs, it is commonly observed that funeral orations and biographies of the dead end with assertions that address the dead as if he is conscious. Examples of such assertions are: “we love you, but God loves you most,” “fair well till we meet again,” “see you on the resurrection morning,” adieu mama”, etc. These expressions are not peculiar to the Africans. It is universally expressed like in case of ‘adieu’ which etymologically means to commend one to God. We stockpiled burial programs till we got 200 different copies. In reading through the biographies and tributes, it was discovered that 98% of them were talking to the dead as if he or she is conscious. The Bible teaches and we believe that the dead know nothing, hear, see, smell and feel nothing in the grave. Whatever tends to act as if it were the dead coming back to communicate with the living is a demon or familiar spirit working for Satan with the aim of entangling the faith of people, thereby preparing such people for destruction. In Deuteronomy 18:11; Lev 20:6, 27; Isaiah 8:19; 29:4 Christians are commanded not to consult the dead for any reason because none of the dead possesses God’s essential attributes to enable them attain to man’s request.

- G. Burial Practices. Three prominent things are in vogue in our traditional burial practice these days. One, listing of drinks, food, domestic animals and even cow or number of cows as well as money, that the bereaved family must give to the kinsmen, village, maternal home, etc., before the burial of the dead, especially an aged person. Two, sewing of uniforms to be worn by the immediate family, extended family, friends, well-wishers and so on. Three, insisting or directing those lowering the coffin containing the corpse into the grave to position the side wherein the head of the deceased is placed in this or that side of the grave. Four, for the Efiks women related to the deceased are expected to open their hair, keep it uncombed till after burial. Five, members of the family are to walk barefooted until after burial. Six, they are not to take bath till the burial is done. These are all rituals that Christians are not to participate in, and it attracts serious persecution for Christian believers. The excessive demand of things to be done before burial would take place, cripples some people’s financial dealings. Some suffer collapse of their businesses. Others plunge into huge debts that take many years to pay. Many sell landed property to be able to meet up. Is this what the Christian Church should support? The answer is No!

One day’s uniform may not be expensive, but it should not be seen as a measure of sympathy level for the bereaved family. Its danger is more pronounced where one continues to wear the uniform till one year and afterward ceases to do so, a practice the Igbos call “*igba mkpe*”, and the Efiks call it ‘*ikpo*’ that is mourning memorial for a period of one year. This also is unchristian.

To insist that the head of the corpse must face the house is an avowal that one, the dead is conscious and, two that the dead do reincarnate. Field research findings show that people believe the dead sees the sunrise and sun-set and that their activities in the spirit world are guided by their noticing the sun-rise and the sun-set, connoting that the dead still live among the living. Others who believe in re-incarnation believe that the way the corpse is laid affects the type of life the deceased will live when he or she comes back to this

life through re-incarnation. The Bible does not support any such beliefs. It states: “neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun” (Eccl.9:6b).

I. Pouring of Libation: This is a common process of making incarnation among traditional people in Igbo, Efik and in other land. They pour wine or hot drink of any kind into a cup and begin to drop its content gradually on the ground as they mutter words of invitation and praise to the supposed spirits of their ancestors. This act is performed during certain traditional ceremonies such as marriage, burial, child blessing, new yam festival and community gatherings of various sorts in which wine is to be shared to people as entertainment. This is done with the belief that the spirits of their ancestors are conscious and could act in favor or disfavor of the living that are still on earth. We need to state that in venerating the ancestors “a departed ancestor should be remembered for a life well lived, none of them should be deified” (Asukwo, Adaka and Dimgba, 2013).

Jesus taught us to pray to God, giving us an example in Mathew chapter 6:9-13. Furthermore, He tells us in John 14:6 that we cannot go to the Father except through Him. He says we should ask the Father in His own (Jesus’) name (John16:23, 24). Our prayer requires no wine, no kola-nut, no meat and no fish in order to reach God. Just what is needed is a clean heart, a clear conscience and good relationship with God and fellow man. That is what God demands of us. With trust in Him that He can answer us, when we pray, He answers.

As a people of God, we should realize why we exist and fulfill the aim of our Creator. Professor Iwe (1979) captures God’s motive for establishing the church by these words: “God’s purpose in history is a community of peace and social justice, in which God reigns, and which is ushered in by the perfect obedience of his Messiah”. This means that the church as a community established by God should exist to inculcate an attitude of true obedience to God in all of its adherents as this is the only way we could get a fore-taste of real peace of mind that would ensure social justice among various peoples. If the Church allows itself to be affrighted by forces of the enemy of souls to the point where it cannot stand firm on the truth, its existence ceases to be relevant and its adherents become somewhat like a flock without a shepherd (Iwe, 1979).

6. Conclusion

The contribution of Christianity to the development of Eastern Nigeria is not exaggerated but a fact. Through Christianity some evil cultural practices have been corrected like the killing of twins among the Efiks, the banishment of the *osu* (caste system) among the Igbos. Let the Christian Church remain prayerful and studious, so that the society through her influence will submit to God. Most of the political, socio-economic and religious problems bedeviling our society today stem from the failure of the church in doing the needful by speaking and acting against disobedience to God and His will.

The cultural practices presented so far in this paper are not exhaustive. They are aimed at pricking our realization that whatever we do or applaud, needs to be properly examined to ascertain their alignment or otherwise to the word and will of God. Although we are not to engage in physical war over the correction of these errors, we need to be firm in condemning the wrong ones and in not partaking of their promotion acts in any guise. Mary Slessor, the white queen of Calabar was able to stand and stem the tide of twins killing even in a foreign land. God was with her. Our expectation of the soon return of Jesus in glory will only benefit us if we take His teachings and admonitions seriously and proclaim them without fear or favor. As Christian faithful, the onus is on us because; we are commissioned by Christ to transform our households. The larger society is an aggregate of these various households.

7. References

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