

An Assessment of the Immortality of the Soul in Igala Traditional Religious Worldview

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Abstract

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Everything in earthly existence, including human life in all of its facets, is involved in a process of change. Hence, permanence seems unattainable, and thereby desirable. The wish for immortality thus, becomes one of the most important reasons for the appearance of religions. Since ancient times, humans have wondered if after their deaths in this world they might continue to exist forever in some next and unchanging condition. Some of the questions that bothered the minds of Igala people are: is the human soul immortal? What will be the nature of life after death? Where is the abode of the living-dead? These and many other questions shall be attended to in the cause of this research. Different areas of Igala Traditional Religion have been researched into by various writers, this work is an addition to the various works carried out on the immortality of the soul in Igala traditional religion. Thus, this paper investigates the idea of immortality of the soul in Igala Religious Worldview and adopts a multi-dimensional approach. In this case, phenomenological method is used in the course of the research to describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experience of human life as well as descriptive and historical approaches. This research made use of secondary sources of data collection for analysis. The findings of this study would supply researchers in future with adequate data for further discussion on the immortality of the soul in Igala belief system and practices in other religious traditions of the world. The study provides a useful background to the immortality of the soul and religious values of the traditional life of Igala people.

Keywords: Igala, Traditional Religion, Immortality, Soul, Worldview

INTRODUCTION

According to African belief system, life does not end with death, but continues in another realm. Death is a process which removes a person gradually from the living to the living dead. After death, the individual is believed to continue existing in the world and is remembered by relatives and friends who know him in this life and who have survived him. This is referred to as living dead and this is also a state of personal immortality. With time however, such a person sinks beyond personal immortality to collective immortality which is the state of the spirit (Mbiti 27). Many religions have provided belief structures that support the religions and social need of practitioners'. However, even with the differences in religious beliefs there are similarities between many different religious groups regarding afterlife belief. One similarity among religious groups is the belief in afterlife following physical death. Another similarity is the presence of "the two polar images of life after death, i.e., the abode of the righteous, heaven or paradise, and the place for the wicked, or hell.

Rituals and sacred writings support the various religious interpretations of what death is and what it will be like in the afterlife. The belief in the continuation of life in the spirit world leads to burial rites to ensure a place in the invisible world. Achoba opines that:

The traditional beliefs of the Igala people are governed by superstitions, myths or legends and ancestral spirit. Religion is central to the people's wellbeing, so much so that they relate everything about life to their religious activities (60).

In Igala Traditional Religion, the people believe that death is characterized by agony hence few people or if any at all, is ready to die, yet they equally believe that life is not completely terminable. On this note, Aba writes:

Death for the Africans diminished the force of life, but at the same time seen as one that also opens the way to another force of life, that is the existence or survival in after-life. Death does not alter or end the life or the personality of an individual but only cause a change in the conditions. This means that, Africans believe that death is

only a transition. It is only a means of passing from the world of human beings to the world of spirits (3-4).

Similarly, Okpe maintains that:

There is a belief among Igala that man is a sojourner on earth. No matter how long a man lives on earth, he must die one day. The Igala hold tenaciously that death is a transition from the physical world to *Efojegwu* (spirit world)” (37).

For traditional Igala, death is regarded as one of the cycle of life which begins with birth of an individual; despite all precaution to prevent death it will inevitably come at the end of it all. It is in this regard that Aba echoed Ekeopara that ‘death is seen as a necessary event in the life of man in a higher (spiritual) plane...just as birth signals the joy of life or living, death intervenes to terminate it’ (4-5). It should be noted that death does not ends life but continues to exist after death; which bring about the whole idea of immortality of the soul in Igala Traditional Religion.

The paper highlights the fact that immortality is a religious experience that is of great importance to the entirety of the beliefs and practices of Igala Traditional Religion. An examination of beliefs and practices of the Igala tradition would disabuse the wrong impressions generated by ignorant and arm chair scholars on Igala Traditional religion. Hence, the need for re-evaluation and deepening of the appraisal of immortality of the soul in Igala worldview call for research. On this note, Metuh in Aba affirmed that “to get an objective view of a people’s religious beliefs, one would have to study their whole life” (10).

THE CONCEPT OF SOUL

A careful analysis of what the concept of soul is in western philosophy shows that different philosophers throughout the ages have used the concept of soul interchangeably with the concept of mind and spirit. This is evident in the definition given by Ogbenika that “spirit is understood as ordained only to “being” considered as an immaterial presence, whether of mind or soul, independent of space, time and movement (17). Etymologically, the concept of soul is derived from Greek word “*Psyche*” which means (life, spirit or consciousness). The main point that helps to understand the concept of immortality is the nature of soul. In his affirmation, Olorunnisola considers soul as a non-material component of the human person. he continue by citing Socrates who described soul as the very essence of a person, the very being of man that makes a human who he is. It is an incorporeal and eternal being that dwells in the human body (33). Similarly, Egbunu confirms that, in Igala ontology of being, the human person is said to be made up of *Anola* (body) and *Inmi* (soul). The latter, which is easily equiperated with life (*Olai*) is often translated breath and most often translated as breath and

most often rendered as *Afu* (air, spirit or breath), which is life in itself (4).

On his own part, Ibanga cites ancient philosophers, Pythagoras and Plato. For Pythagoras, soul is defined as the immaterial element in man which transmigrates into another human body, even an animal, after the death of individual. And that since the soul is imprisoned in the body; it seeks release from it which can only come as a result of soul purification through asceticism and philosophy. Plato also described soul as an immortal element which prior to its inhabitation in the human body, pre-existed in the world of the gods to which it shall return after the demise of the man (50). The human soul is naturally and essentially immortal. It is uncreated and eternal. It passed from one body to another through a series of many reincarnations. After paying off its sin (Karmic debt), the soul is liberated from semantic existence and lives in a totally blissful state. The human soul is incorruptible and indestructible. A thing can be destroyed only by separating its parts. Therefore, the soul cannot be destroyed, since it does not have parts (www.webpage.uidah.edu).

Ted is of the view that soul is the deepest interior dimension of who each of us is as a person; soul connotes who each of us is as an individual, our deepest essence (1). Soul according to Aristotle is not a distinctive occupant of the body; rather, it is a principle which implies the actuating cause of the living body. An ensouled living body is an indication of a particular kind of informed matter (Dalhat 432). Kwaja and Vernekar described soul as the complete principle of feeling, life, thoughts and humans action, that is regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, and commonly held to be separable in existence from the body; the spiritual part of humans as distinct from the physical part (14). They quoted one of the earliest Greek poets, Homer that the soul in human beings menaces in the battle. Even through the soul departed from the body, it remains in the underworld as a shadow of the lifeless... the soul is an entity which partakes of divinity, present before and after the physical body (15-16).

IMMORTALITY

The notion of immortality springs from the idea of afterlife. The concept of death understood as a cessation of life does not completely swallow-up the reality and mystery of human life. Immortal simply means exemption from liability to death, or that which is immortal is not liable to death. Chukwuedo defined “immortality as immunity from any kind of decay and death (the negative aspect) that comes from having or sharing the eternal divine life (the positive aspect)” (52). Immortality is the indefinite continuation of a person’s existence, even after

death. In common parlance, immortality is virtually indistinguishable from afterlife, but philosophically speaking, they are not identical. Afterlife is the continuation of existence after death, regardless of whether or not that continuation is indefinite. Immortality implies a never-ending existence, regardless of whether or not the body dies. (en.m.wikipedia.org) Immortality means “immunity from death. It means an infinitely prolonged (enduring) existence and personality of one and the same rational being; an unending duration of personal life” (Ogbujah 418).

Any discussion on immortality of the soul or what is regarded as “after life” or hereafter begins with the phenomenon of death. Among the Igala people, death is the gateway for anybody to join the world beyond (*Efojegwu*). When death occur, a typical Igalaman will not consider it as the end of human person, but rather a transition from the visible world (*Ilei*) to the invisible world (*Efojegwu*). This “invisible world” in Igala belief system, is a continuation of the life lived in the physical world. In his article, “Death in Igala Worldview: The Question of Continuity and Discontinuity of Life”, Egbunu comments that the idea of death among Igala people is described as a man who go to market, after several transactions, he returned home. He consider this world as a market place where all kinds of businesses are done. When death come knocking, man must answer the call which will usher him to the real home. It is a journey that every man must embark in order to reach the life beyond and continue to live as an ancestor.

Egbunu continues by highlighting the causes of death, rituals of death and the stages of funeral rites. The major area of his article that centered on this research is the 'After Life' or 'Hereafter'. According to him when death occurs, the level of respect and treatment accorded the body of the dead person is an indication that there is a part of human person that survives death. That part which survives death is the *Afu* or *Inmi* (spirits or soul). The spirit of the dead is believed to hover around the home stead until after the second burial when he/she joins the ancestors (*Ibegwu*). According to this belief system, the ancestors visit their living relatives from time to time. This visit, according to Egbunu is in form of reincarnation where the ancestors have the opportunity to reunites with the families in a new born baby. Each birth represents a new soul in the reincarnated. But the ancestors continue his/her life in the afterlife. The sex of the deceased ancestor in reincarnation notwithstanding can be male or female. Death is not a discontinuity of life rather a change of man’s level of existence.

Another area of relevance to this research is an article, “An Examination of the Contemporary Relevance of Igala Conception of Life, Death and Reincarnation” by Okpe. He gave a details explanations of where life begin, how life

is lived in Igala society and what keep an individual going in the society and in his/her lineage. The article maintained that once there is conception, a new life is anticipated in the family. From individual life, the best way to live an acceptable life is to live or be part of community. He considered marriage and procreation as a way in which a name or names are carried on in the family and this is in line with this research as a way of immortalizing soul in Igala society.

Okpe stress further that despite the joy and celebration during conception and birth, death will surely come to intervene. To the Igala people, death is considered as a transition into the next world and not an annihilation or end of life. In another perspectives, he refers to death as a wicked and dreadful spirit, which is confirmed by the names some Igala parents give their children. Some example of such names are *Ukwu monun*, meaning “death knows no king” *Ukwubile* which means death has spoilt the world.

Okpe went further to discuss the concept of reincarnation as a reunion of the ancestors with their living families in a new born babies. These babies are identified with various marks or traits in the life of the ancestors who previously lived in this visible world. Hence, names of this ancestors were given to the children to remind them of their deceased father, mother, brother, sister, uncle and so forth.

There are some areas of recantation that was not mentioned by this author which was confirmed in an interview with some elders, Adukanya Boniface, Akagwu Augustine and Ademou Patrick opines that reincarnation is not only restricted to the ancestors. According to them, the aged people in the society also reincarnate in a child while alive. When this occurs, there cannot be a smooth relationship between the child and the man or woman who reincarnated in him/her. This belief system is not peculiar to the entire Igala people but, to some parts. While some area like Ankpa and Olamaboro Local Government Areas of Kogi State testified to this belief, some part of Dekina Local Government Areas did not subscribe to this belief. They believed that only the ancestors reincarnate in children.

In examining the immortality of the soul in Igala world view, one point that is vital is marriage and procreation. It is believed among the Igala people that even though a married person who give birth to children dies, his/her name will be remembered because of the children he/she left behind. And it is believed that his/her name was immortalized in the family. But a man or woman who do not marry or give birth to children may be forgotten easily when he/she dies. This belief system is similarly to that of the Yoruba people of Nigeria as expressed by Ige and Owoyemi in an article entitled; “Paul’s Concept of Sexual Activity in Marriage: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 7:1-5” in the African Perspective. “In this article, a comparative analysis of sexual activities was drawn from

the Bible and African religion (Yoruba). According to them, sexual activity is only allowed in marriage. Abstinence is also allowed in times of cleansing or prayer but not for a very long period of time. The argument of Apostle Paul against a forced and false ascetism, though, not that he hates sexual activities but to remain pure in a period when the couple seek the face of God.

On the other hand, their explanation was very clear, as marriage and child bearing was an important part of Yoruba religion. This is because a man who gave birth to children will be personally remembered by them when he dies while reverse is the case for those who do not. Ige and Owoyemi are of the view that Celibacy have no place in Yoruba religion, even persons born as eunuchs still get married by reaching an agreement within the family members. In this case, all the children given birth to shall bear the names of these eunuchs as fathers and mothers respectively. This is done in Yoruba religion to ensure that one's name was immortalized in the family.

In an attempt to argue for immortality of the soul in her article, "A Comparative Study of Immortality of the Soul in Christianity and African Traditional Religion", Chukwuendo asserts that the Bible made it clear that at death, the human soul does not perish with the body. She succinctly pointed out from the story of creation in Genesis chapter two that God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils, the breath of life and man became a living being or soul. It is believed that God cannot die and his breath in man cannot go into extinction. Chukwuendo also quoted matt. 10:28 where Jesus was instructing his disciples not to be afraid of those who can kill the body, but they should be afraid the one who can kill both the body and soul in hell.

Similarly, Chukwuendo argues that in African Traditional Religion, the soul or spirit is quite active and exercises a great influence in the affair of the living. She stressed further that the deceased may become an ancestral spirit in the world beyond provided he lived a good earthly existence and proper funeral rites have been performed by his children and next of kin. Chukwuendo continues that, when a man dies, his body is immediately left by his spirit which hover around the house in anticipation of the funeral rites, which will enable it to proceed to the spirit world. The teaching of the Bible in Genesis chapter 2 points to the fact that the breath of God which was breathed into the nostrils of man cannot die, as God himself is believed to be everlasting. African Traditional Religion does not dispute this fact. She concluded that the belief in reincarnation and ancestral spirits support the immortality of the soul. The dead does not stop to exist in the ancestral world and it is not unconscious and oblivious of what goes on in his earthly family. That is why he is called "the living dead".

The aforementioned comparative analysis as pointed out in

this article shows that the human soul is immortal in both Christianity and African traditional religion. In Igala religious worldview, both male and female can be ancestor, provided the required funeral rites are performed. When referring to ancestor, Chukwuendo kept on mentioning "he" maybe she was influenced by the Igbo traditional belief system where only male is qualify to be ancestor. One thing that is not common in both religions is that, while the Christians belief in resurrection of the souls on judgment day, the concept of resurrection is not common in African traditional religion.

After Life

There is a lively debate on the subject of life after death. There seem to be at least three schools of thought in this regard. First, there are those who consider the possibility of another life simply because of their religious inclination. Such people would accept it because of their piety and religious dogma, second are those who would respond by simply denying it, as it defies human rationality and empirical verification. This group would argue that it is of no need, it is not possible. The third group may simply stand on the fence expecting to see whatever happens at the eschaton (Olorunnisola 31).

The African belief in afterlife has its root in the belief that man is both a material being and a spiritual being. It is believed that in addition to the tangible material component of man there is an intangible spiritual, indestructible component which outlives the disintegration of the physical frame. This is the soul or spirit. The Yoruba of Nigeria for instance, refer to the soul as the 'internal head' which guides and controls the life and activities of a person. At death, the body decomposes, while the soul goes back to the Supreme Being who is the source of life (Uduigwomen 16).

Aba referred to after-life as "life after death", the "hereafter", the "under world" or the "next world". She defined after life as the idea that the consciousness or mind of a being continues after physical death occurs. In many popular views, this continued existence often takes place in an immaterial or spiritual realm. She continues her explanation with esoteric and metaphysical views that deceased persons are usually believed to go to a specific planet of existence after death, typically believed to be determined by a god, based on the actions of the deceased during physical life. In contrast, the term after-life refers to another life in which only the "essence" of the being is preserved; and reincarnation is another life on earth or possibly within the same universe. Many religions, whether they believe in the soul's existence in another like Christianity. Islam and many other religious belief systems, or in reincarnation like many forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, believe that one's status in the afterlife is a reward or punishment for one's conduct during life (18-

19).

Traditionally, it is believed among Africans that the dead go on a journey and that death does not end life. The present life is seen as a preparation for the after-life where the dead continue to live after they have completed this life. On this note, Ogbujah opines that among the Igbo, death is generally conceived as a departure, and not a complete annihilation of the person. The major change at death is the decay of the mortal flesh and spiritualization of the body which then moves on to another plane of existence to join the company of the departed. Thus, death only disrupts but does not destroy the rhythm of life. He considers death as the beginning of the journey to the great beyond, a going home to the land of the spirit, which means that life here on earth is like a pilgrimage. The real home is in the hereafter. This is depicted in songs like:

We are visitors on earth
the earth we are in does belong to us,
we have come like people
who come to market
the earth is a place
where you buy and go home (415)

Egbunu notes that in observing how the Igala people treat a dead person's body and the respect accorded it, one would not be far from the truth to affirm that they believe there is a part of human person that survives death and one that is interred. The part which survives death is the *Afu* (spirit). Igala believe that the hereafter is an invisible world but much less the same with the present life (121).

Igala Worldview of the Immortality of the Soul

A worldview is a collection of attitudes, values, stories and expectations about the world around us, which inform our every thought and action. Worldview is expressed in ethics, religion, philosophy, scientific beliefs and so on. A worldview is how a culture works out in individual practice (www.google.com). A worldview is the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the whole point of view. A worldview can include natural philosophy, fundamental, existential, and normative postulates; or themes, value, emotion and ethics (en.m.wikipedia.org). Igala worldview is an attempt by Igala people to interpret and give meaning to their experiences and reflections about the universe. In other words, when we talk about Igala worldviews, we talk about the beliefs, assumptions, myths, legends, proverbs, rituals, symbols and sentiments with which Igala people organize their life (Ajogi 32).

All through the ages, mankind has constantly been searching for answers to justify and resolve the secrets and mysteries of life. In doing so, various questions have been raised; what is the origin of life? How does human life come about? Why did it come? What is the end-point of

human life? Ogbujah proffer some solutions to the above questions in his article "The Idea of Human Destiny in Africa: The Igbo Experience" that death is an immediate destiny for all. According to him, several attempts were made by people to fathom the mystery called death. Some have tried to explain it by creating myths of its origin, but all their effort proved unsuccessful. He referred to death among the Igbo as a departure, and not a complete annihilation of the person. The major change at death is the decay of the mortal flesh and the spiritualization of the body which then moves onto another plane of existence to join the company of the departed. Thus, death only disrupts but does not destroy the rhythm of life. He highlighted the major causes of death to be natural and unnatural.

Ogbujah continues that immortality is a mediate destiny for all. It is an unending duration of personal life which includes personal immortality and collective immortality. The personal immortality of the living dead is dependent on his progenies. Personal remembrance is enhanced by the physical continuation of the traits of the progenitors on their progeny. He stressed further that when the last person who knew the living dead dies, the departed is then entirely removed from the state of personal remembrance and immortality and enters into the stage of "collective immortality" of the ancestral spirit.

Ogbujah concludes with reincarnation as a revolving stage of human destiny. Reincarnation in this sense is described, as the belief in the autonomy of the human soul, which passes out from the dead person into another body different from the original body. In reincarnation, the soul is reborn in a new body or in successive and different bodies. This life in a new body, or successive and different bodies is occasioned and conditioned by the previous life either for better or for worse. According to him, in a typical Igbo society, the question that is normally asked is who return? Or who have the capacity to return? In response to the above question, Ogbujah maintains that the Igbos are unanimous with the position that only qualified persons, that is members who attained personhood, married and begot at least a male child, lived a good life to a ripe old age, and were properly buried by performing all the ritual ceremonies could return to earth through reincarnation. The above principle for reincarnation among the Igbos is not in consonance with belief in reincarnation among the Igala people. In addition to the above requirements for reincarnation among the Igbo, in Igala society, once an individual attains adulthood and he/she dies without getting married or bearing children, he/she has the ability to reincarnate in a child in his/her immediate family, so that his/her name is not cut off from the family.

Another area of review that is relevant to this research is the article, "The Corpus of Life and the Phenomenon of Death in a Traditional Igala (African) Society". In this article, Okpe maintains that life cannot be lived

individually. This implies that for an individual life to be meaningful, it must be realized in a community; in the community, the individual becomes meaningful towards himself and other people. Okpe stress further that the root of one's self-awareness and the desire to give meaning to the fundamental problems of human life and existence is one's self understanding as an individual who realizes oneself in a given community. This aspect of Igala understanding of life as explained in this article is not peculiar to Igala people alone but wider African. On this note, Okpe quoted Mbiti that when an individual suffers, he does not do it alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether death or living. When he gets married he is not alone, neither does his wife belong to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of his kinsmen, even if they bear only the father's or mother's name. This further suggests that whatever happens to the individual happens to the society he belongs, and whatever happens to the society happens to the individual as well. It is only in this way that the individual is capable of saying: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am!

Okpe asserts further that marriage and procreation is an aspect of life that Igala holds very firm. This is because, when a man reaches age of marriage, Igala people do not waste any time to do so, because they need their names to be "carried on". They often use the phrase 'carrying on name', which in order words means to 'live on' or simply to be alive. According to Okpe, there are two reasons attached to marriage and procreation in Igala society: firstly, an adult who do not get married without reason is not accorded due respect; and secondly, the person is not accorded status in the realm of the spirit. In his statement, Okpe maintains that the importance of marriage in Igala society cannot be overemphasized and it is for this reason that many boys on reaching adulthood, do not delay in taking wives. It is because of the importance attached to marriage, that an unmarried adult is not respected in Igala traditional communities. It expresses a concern that if a man was to leave this world without leaving behind any progeny, he will have no status in the spirit world. Therefore, it is a tremendous responsibility for a son to get married in order to make sure that his father has status when he goes into the other world, for without children one is not able to "carry on one's name". This essentially means to have life.

Marriage and procreation as expressed in this article is one of the major concern of this research. Getting married and begetting children is one of the ways in which human souls are immortalized in Igala society. This enables the names of the deceased ancestors to be carried on in the physical world. When the presence of the children is felt in the communities, is a sign that the deceased ancestor is still

alive and active.

Okpe went further to categorize death in Igala society into premature death; accidental death and death of old age. According to him, the causes of death are: witchcraft; magic, spirits and deities. He described the living dead as the *Ibegwu* of the ancestral spirits that are highly regarded in Igala Traditional society. The Igala people believe in the existence of their ancestors in the other world. They also have the belief that if a man is not due for death and is about to be sent to his early grave, the ancestors will fight back to preserve his life. This is one of the reasons why Igala people bury their dead in their homes. This will enable the family to have a closer link to their dead ones. He concluded by highlighting the rites and rituals of the living dead.

In another place, Ebhomienlen tries to use African Traditional Religion to shape human in order to ensure development in Africa. In this article, "African Traditional Religious and Human Values: A Panacea for Development in Africa", he asserts that such virtues like tolerance, brotherhood tie, high regard for spirituality and constituted authorities which are essential values required for developmental feat are well explained. But the area of interest for this research is where he distinguished between Deities, divinities and Ancestors. Ebhomienlen asserts that 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 part of the families and communities to which they belonged while they were living human beings; for what happened in consequences of the phenomenon called death was only that the family life of this earth has been extended into the after-life or supersensible world. The ancestors remain therefore, spiritual superintendents of family affair and continue to bear their titles of relationship like "father" or "mother". They have become spirits, spirits whose sphere is the spirit world reserved for good ancestor and in consequence of which communion and communication with them is possible only at the spiritual level. Ebhomienlen quoted a Yoruba dirge that says:

My father (or mother) is become a spirit of *Olufe* who wears palm fronds;

My father (or mother) is become a spirit of *Olufe* who wears palm fronds as clothes.

That is, the deceased are truly members of the families on earth; but they are no longer of the same fleshly order as those who are still actually living in the flesh on earth. They are closely related to this world; but are no longer ordinary mortals. Because they have crossed the border land between this world and the supersensible world, entering and living in the latter, they have become freed from the restrictions imposed by the physical world. They can now come to abide with their folk on earth invisibly,

to aid or hinder them, to promote prosperity or cause adversity. To some extent, they are intermediaries between Deity or the divinities and their own children: this is a continuation of their earthly function whereby they combined the headships of the families or communities with the office of family or community priests or priestesses. During their earthly days, it was their duty to help, to ensure domestic peace and the well-being of the community, to distribute favours, to exercise discipline or enforce penalties, to be guardians of community ethics and prevent anything that might cause disruption. In Africa, it is the general belief that a living father or mother, by virtue of his fatherhood or her motherhood, is endowed with the power to bless or curse an offspring effectively. That is why every passage of life and every undertaking require parental blessing. It is believed that parental dissatisfaction or displeasure may upset an undertaking or cause it to fail. It is no wonder, then, that it is believed that such power in a father or a mother who has passed into the ancestral world has become infinitely enhanced and continues to be actively effective accordingly.

Ebhomienlen stress further that because the ancestors are no longer in the world of ordinariness, the way they are approached must be different from the ordinary approach to them during the time of their earthly life. They are spirits and are approached as spirits, even though they are spirits with difference in consequence of their family ties with their earthly fold. What this implies is that the ancestors are still living and active as members of their various families and community at large. This is why the Igala people believe that death is not the end of life, but a transition to after-life. In this way, the souls of the deceased are immortalized. Ebhomienlen put towards this question. Who are qualified to be ancestors? In response to the above question, he explained that African belief generally that only good people become ancestors after they have received the 'well done!' judgment, of the Deity or of 'the court of the ancestors'. Bad or wicked people will be cast into 'a place of rubbish heap', the 'hell' of midden, or into the 'hell' of potsherds. In some cases, they become random wonderers in a place of 'no abode'. From the above explanation as given by Ebhomienlen, there is no difference between what the Christians have as recorded in the holy Bible that no sinner shall go unpunished. On the Judgment Day, souls will be lead to heaven or hell fire, depending on how they live their lives on earth. One striking difference between African Traditional Religion as given by this author and Igala traditional society is that there is no judgment in Igala traditional religion that bad people will have their place in 'hell'.

In Igala traditional society, the only condition that can make a deceased to be limited or isolated from the abode of the ancestors is when the full burial rites are not

performed. When this is done, he/she will be fully welcomed into the abode of the ancestors. In some cases, the spirit of the dead can become wonderer in a situation where an untimely death or suicide occurs. Okpe noted that "the spirit of the dead comes back to this world and serves as a benevolent or malevolent one" (29). Ebhomienlen asserts further that it is only those who have offspring and become old before their departure who becomes ancestors. 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 deceased. According to him, there are some persons who are not qualified based on the above criterion, but 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. He concluded that many millions of Africans believe that their social relations extend not just to their friends and neighbours, but also include the spirits of their ancestors and other spiritual beings. They invest time and energy in maintaining these relationships, just as they do in keeping up their connections with other people.

It is believed in Igala Traditional Religion that man has two specific and distinct entities in him, namely: body and soul. While the body is physical and ephemeral entity, the soul is believed to be a spiritual and immortal. This belief in immortality of the soul goes on to further entail that at the separation of the body from the soul at death, the human soul moves into a new world or return to this world where it continues its existence again. By this, it means that life that each person has is first lived in this physical world, followed by eternal life in the hereafter or a return to life in the old or new body. By implications, life is one. But it is lived in different phases. Thus this life is one phase, life after this is another. In this case, death should be importantly celebrated as life because death is not final, but a transition to a life yonder.

Baloyi and Makobe opines that an African worldview understands death as an integrated and continuous developmental life process which is inseparable from the interwoven connections between the visible and invisible ontologies. People do not cease to exist once they are physically dead, instead, they transcend to the spiritual world to live in the community of the living dead (236). *Ukwu* is the Igala name for death according to Egbunu. It is the inevitable end of the human person, the final end of growth, the ultimate end of man so, all life is seen as a preparation for death which is regarded as a mere departure and not a total annihilation of a person. The time of death is when the human person leaves this world, which is considered a market place, packs his/her load, prepared to go to the world of the ancestors or the great beyond in the hereafter which is believed to be the real home. In citing Opoku, he described death as a transition from this present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits. It is a

journey which man must make in order to reach the life beyond and continues to live as an ancestor (116).

In his contribution, Okpe added that the belief system among Igala described man as a sojourner on earth. No matter how long a man lives on earth, he must die one day. Death is a transition from the physical world to *Efojegwu* (the spirit world) ... Despite the negative emotions generated by death, it is believed that life goes on beyond the grave. In other worlds, death is not a complete destruction of individual. Death in fact opens the way to change one's condition; by it, the human being becomes an ancestor and is fulfilling the destiny by living again in another form. He continues in the words of Erny that, "being born must therefore be thought of in category of passage. To come here is to leave the beyond; it is to be in transit, to change one's state. Being born here means dying up there and at the end of life the opposite is true; to die here is to be born up there (37).

In consonance with the belief in immortality of soul in Igala Traditional Religion, Ngedu maintains that the ancestors are the departed relatives of the living, who led good lives on earth and at present, have found an abode with the rest of the ancestors in the other world. There is therefore the belief in the existence of *Ilei* (this world) and the *Oj'ona* (the after-world). The *Oj'ona* is the world of the ancestors. For the Igala people, the *Oj'ona* is a continuation of *Ilei*. He stress further that the ancestors, *Ibegwu* are ever-living and active, once they have died, they become "everlasting". The Africans regard these beings as being alive and keeping surveillance over the affairs of the living (119).

On this note, Magesa affirms that the ancestors and their descendants on earth are in continuity. They are perceived in the same way as the living elders of the society as far as the experience of kinship and communion is concerned. They remain in talking, and almost tangible, terms with their descendants. The ancestors and their descendants are in constant state of exchanging gifts and favours. This is what communion requires; it is what remembrance means. This dialectic strengthens the life force of the world for the sake of living humanity. While the living are obliged to seek ancestral communion for the sake of their own well-being, the ancestors are not passive in this exchange. They also desire to be in communion with living kin, to be remembered and honoured (78). The ancestors were remembered and honoured either weekly, monthly or yearly, through ancestral veneration festival, *Ote Ibegwu*. On this score, Adama confirms that the *Ote Ibegwu* was a religious festival, which marked the Igala people's belief that the dead continue to live after passing way from this life. The dead were for this reason entertained from time to time at the fest. From Hades the dead continue to visit the earth, guiding and protecting the living especially their relations (120). Jahn considers the ancestors as the spiritual

force, the dead man, the ancestors, are in communication with their descendants. They (ancestors) can let their "life force" work on their descendants. It is only when they has no further living descendants that they become "entirely dead". He continues that African philosophy knows the problem of immortality and deathlessness and has recognised and solved it long ago (109).

The idea of immortality is so strong in Igala Traditional Religion that, even though a member of the family dies, he/she will still come back in children yet unborn. That is why it is a common belief in Igala Traditional Religion that reincarnation, *Ad'awa* is a form in which human souls are immortalized. Okpe stress this when he writes:

The belief in recantation is very strong among the Igala. The native word that fairly expresses the term is *Ad'awa*, which means, "coming back again". In expression of this belief, diviners are routinely consulted when a new child arrives in a family to determine which ancestor or person has comeback in the new born. If a newborn is identified with any past relative he/she is given a personal name of such a dead relative or called by reference to the position of such a dead relative. Examples of such nominal references could be *Baba* or *Attah* (father), if the dead relative was a father to the parents of the new born, or *Iye* (mother) if the dead relative was a mother to them, or *Omaye*, if this was a brother or sister to the parents (31).

In his contribution, Achoba opines that the concept of reincarnation is a common phenomenon in most African beliefs. It is manifested in such names as *Makedono*, *Abimaje*, *Acheneje*, *Babatunde*, *Iyabo*, *Nnnanna*, and so forth. The belief in life after death is thus a part of culture of African societies especially primitive and pre-colonial communities. The Igala share this belief with other African peoples, that the spirit of an ancestor is reborn in a child. Immortality of the soul is so sacrosanct in Igala Traditional Religion because, there is a bilateral communion that exists between the living and the living-dead. The ancestors and their descendants are in a constant state of exchanging gifts and favours. This is what communion requires; it is what remembrance means. This dialectic strengthens the life force of the world for the sake of the living humanity (Magesa 78).

CONCLUSION

Immortality of the soul is an avenue through which the living-dead are transformed back into the visible world. The notion of immortality springs from the idea of afterlife. The concept of death understood as a cessation of life does not completely swallow-up the reality and mystery of human life. The human soul, which is regarded as immortal continues to live even after death. In the African's mind, the soul or spirit is quite active and exercises a great influence in the affairs of the living. There

is an afterlife and each deceased spirit is judged on the basis of his earthly character. There is also a strong belief that the deceased may become an ancestral spirit provided he lived a good earthly existence and proper funeral rites have been performed by his children and next of kin. When a man dies, his body is immediately left by his spirit, which hovers around the house in anticipation of the funeral rites, which will enable it to proceed to the spirit world. The belief in “spirits”, “ancestral spirits”, or “the living-dead” is a proof that there is belief, in immortality of the soul in African Traditional Religion (Chukwuedo 57). It have been discovered in the course of this research that there are

several ways in which human souls are immortalized in Igala worldview. These ways includes; ancestorship, marriage and procreation and reincarnation. Like the Africans belief generally, it is also same among the Igala people that death do not end human existence, rather a transition from the world of human to the world of the spirit. In this world of the spirit called *Efojegwu* in Igala language, the soul continue to live forever. This provides the strong inherent belief in Igala Traditional Religion that the deceased have the opportunity to reunite with the living relatives which becomes a focal point for this study.

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