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TRENDS IN THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE IGBOMINA SINCE THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract

Religion has always been an integral part of every human society. However, one of two things has happened to man's religion in any given situation: modification with adaptation or extinction. The first may be said to have been the fate of religion throughout the world, of any religion. There is no living religion that has not taken into itself elements from other religious cultures. This study examines trends in the religious beliefs among the Igbomina people over the years. Acknowledging the indispensability of religion like in any other human society as well as the God-factor phenomenon in all their multifarious activities, their traditional religious beliefs include: the existence of Supreme Deity associated with incomparable attributes; intermediaries; spirit world comprising of innumerable forces of both goodness and evil; moral order and the transient nature of the mundane world. Much later came Islam and Christianity, respectively, with 'new' beliefs and teachings. However, findings reveal that the identified traditional religious beliefs (though with noticeable differences especially in the mode of worship) can still be centrally established in the tenets of the alien religions. Furthermore, even though religious tenets are dogmatic and social institutions such as family, religious associations, etc. are divine institutions in accordance with the natural order; change is forcing itself on societies and religious bodies as congregation after congregation today struggles with the problems caused by new world with trending patterns of life. Hence, human institutions –social, religious and cultural have changed over time and their future forms are not known with any certainty. The paper adopts a historical and phenomenological approach with a combination of primary and secondary sources of data collection. The study concludes that critical examination of trends in the religious beliefs among the Igbomina generally reveal liberalism, syncretism, and consequently, the degree of change in each Igbomina community tends to depend on the kind of external pressure(s) to which it has been subjected as well as on the extent to which it is prepared to accommodate or embrace new ways.

Keywords: Religious Belief, Igbomina, Shrine, Supreme Deity, God-factor

Introduction

Africa was for generations presented to the outside world by her invaders as the 'dark continent', inhabited by savages, intellectually lacking, un-Christianly and morally uncivilised. Lamentably, many Africans inevitably grow up today to despise their self-image, past beliefs and culture; implying that the past has been at best miss-understood and at worst, taken out of context.

As there are established names to describe different religions elsewhere in the world (i.e. Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism etc), so also is African Traditional Religion coined by G. Parrinder in 1954 as the appropriate name to that which could be given to the practices, customs, norms and beliefs of Africans about cosmological concepts of God.¹Hence, there is no society; however 'savage' or 'backward', which does not find itself confronted with the Divine. Awolalu attests thus: "It is rare if not impossible to find a typical Nigerian who claims to be an atheist... If there is any one like that, further investigation will reveal that he has been exposed to non-African cultural influences."²Therefore, African Traditional Religion (ATR) is as old as man himself.

Much later was the advent and the interactions between the two most contentious and competing religions-Islam and Christianity. The polarization paved way for the battle for recognition, which often leads to bloody conflicts between the adherents of both religions. In all, religions are not static institutions since in every religion, there are always the elements of changelessness and change.³All religions are in continuous change both in matters of attitude towards the supernatural, liturgy and in the content and forms of worship. Albeit, Africans are inseparable from their history and culture as people of yesteryears had glorious beliefs, and will always have legacies to convey to the present and future generations. The thrust of this paper is the trends in the religious beliefs among the Igbomina, a sub-group of the Yoruba race.

The Igbomina: a Periscope

The Igbomina are heterogeneous sub-group of the Yoruba race who evidently migrated to their present sites from different locations and at different times as from the 14th -17th centuries.⁴The immigrant groups include- Igbomina of Ile-Ifẹ stock, Oyo stock, Nupe stock, Ketu and Fulani/Hausa settlers who have been assimilated into the Igbomina traditions. They occupy the southeast of Ilorin within Longitude 8° and 9° North and latitude 4° and 6° West.⁵It shares boundaries with Kabba to the North-East, Ekiti to the South-East, Ilorin and Afon to the North-West, Ijagbo and Oyan to the West and Otan Ayegbaju to the

South-West.⁶ Igbomina's northern boundary is shared with the Nupe. The word Igbomina refers to the people, their language and the land they occupy.

Historical Development of Religions in Igbominaland

Prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity in Igbominaland, religion dominated the roots of the culture areas as all activities and instruments of governance and survival were clothed in religious rituals, language and symbolism. Their religion was primordial, the beliefs and worships associated with it constituted traditional ideologies and tap roots of culture. A cursory survey of the trio-religions (African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity) among the Igbomina is a necessary prelude to understanding their tenets and assessing the reciprocal influence of one religion on the other.

Once upon a time, the only known religion in Igbominaland and Africa as a whole was ATR which was upheld and passed on from them to succeeding generations. It was a religion as old as man whose founder cannot be traced. This religion colonial investigators and officials gave unfair impressions since ATR was for many years oral and miss-conceived. Idowu notes that they used misleading terms, 'primitive', 'savage', 'fetishism', 'juju', 'paganism' and 'heathenism', 'animism', 'idolatry', 'polytheism', outside their etymological context to describe African culture and religious beliefs which showed inadequate grasp of the fundamentals of African worship'.⁷ Although, the belief systems and traditions of worship slightly differed from society to society, ATR generally in Yorubaland had several things in common. The structure of the religious beliefs is by no means different from what scholars such as Idowu,⁸ Awolalu and Dopamu⁹ have identified as follows: belief in God, divinities, spirits and ancestors. Under this guide, this study examines the viewpoints of the Igbomina on religion; its functions as well as the trends in their religious belief system: the Supreme Being, intermediaries, spirits, moral order and the mundane world/hereafter. This undeniable evidence helps to debunk the extreme impressions on Africa claiming that Africans were generally too low in intelligence to have any religion or to comprehend God.¹⁰

The first external influence on Africa at large before the 19th century was that of the Arab Muslims who started to re-introduce Islam which is one of the great religions of the world. As from C.1800, Ilá-Òràngún, the major Igbomina town started to record the arrival of migrant settlers, among whom were northern traders and Muslim clerics. In the 1820s, both Àjàsé Ìpo and Òmù-Àrán also had considerable number of Hausa mallams, especially Bunu Umoru and his followers. These Hausa

clerics who were equally involved in trade and commerce practised Islam in these areas and introduced to the natives the Islamic faith. Hence, Islam came to Igbominaland at different periods and circumstances: penetrated to Òróland around 1860 during the reign of Qba Ayegusi at Òkè-Òlà-Òró; to Òmù-Àrán around 1869 with the help of one *Alfa* Pupa Abdul-Rahim from Ilorin; to Òmùpo town through the efforts of a woman called Nana Ayisatu Ariludokun; to Òkè-Onígín via the efforts of Mallam Sanni in 1900; to Òkè Òdẹ through the efforts of *Alfa* Disu Showo in 1904; to Èsié through the effort of Mallam Yusuf Abolarinwa in 1909; to Ìlúdùn Òró through the efforts of Lawal Aribikofa in 1913. The thirst for Islamic learning became utmost and reached the upward gear by 1960.

Following the abortive attempts in the 15th century, the Methodist Mission arrived in Badagry in 1842. From this cradle of Christianity in Nigeria, the Church Missionary Society under the leadership of Henry Townsend, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Gollmer embarked upon pioneering Christian missionary activities in Abeokuta. Schools and churches were built by the CMS, the Methodist Missions and others that joined later. From Abeokuta, Christianity spread to other Yoruba towns, thus making it the gate way of the missionary activities in Qyo and Ogbomosho areas and later down to Igbominaland evidently as from the 1900. Christianity started and spread at different dates in Igbomina communities (i.e. 1895 in Qra-Igbomina, 1912 in ÒròÀgò, 1913 in Èsié, 1917 in Òwù-Ìsin, 1922 in Òkèllá, 1924 in Iwó, 1926 in Òmùpo, and so on.

Thus, Christianity spread in Igbominaland either via the missionaries or native agents. The primary objective of the various Christian Missions was the propagation of their respective doctrines through the mass evangelization to the people with whom they would come into contact. Revd Thomas Dove of The Methodist Mission Church said, "...so that gospel of God our saviour may be preached...that schools may be built, that the Bible may be sent."¹¹ Another suitable strategy adopted by the Christian Missions to spread Christianity among the Igbomina was the factor testified to by Fafunwa that "the Bible in the vernacular was the most potent factor in the spread of the religion".¹²

Interactions and Trends in Religious Beliefs in Igbominaland

No doubt, history and culture are dynamic. A juxtaposition of the trio religions among the Igbomina reveal common grounds and variations in their religious beliefs that will help to ascertain the tripartite dimension of the influence of the religions on one another. First to emphatically note

is the standpoint, universality of religion. In the face of trending modernity, not on the wane is the belief of the Igbomina in the prime place of religion. God is inescapable involvement of every member of the human race as man's need to reach out to something higher and mightier than him when he is under stress appears to be both basic and universal. Human feeling when mystified by the forces of nature, threatened by ferocious wild beasts and perplexed by death and hereafter, brought about the birth of religion and so hardly did any human civilization grow in early times without giving due recognition to religion. The truism is conveyed by Onigu thus:

Since all known societies in general recognize supernatural beings and have religious institutions, it is a political, rather than an academic statement to say either that a particular society has no religion or that one religion is inferior to another. Societies have their religions as vital institutions with rituals and symbols by which to create areas of loyalty, reverence and oneness. Those who belong to one religion such as ATR, Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism, or Christianity, carry appropriate feelings of loyalty and identity in a unified system of beliefs and practices in relation to the postulated supernatural element.¹³

Till today, every Igbomina is expected to be a member of a religion and pattern his or her life towards the teachings and civilization of such faith. Religion is recognized by government and institutions for official, political, social and other considerations. For instance, one's religion is expected to be indicated in CVs, forms for documentations, as religion is one of the fundamental rights supported by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.¹⁴ Today, when we speak of the Igbomina, we refer to three divisive people living within three different religious traditions: the Traditionalists, Muslims and Christians. Believers and non-believers (*khafirs-zanadiqah*-in Islamic parlance) can only be adopted in the context of comparing one religion with another. Today, an average Igbomina, like an average Nigerian, thinks first in terms of his religious affiliation before thinking of Igbomina as a cultural entity.

Vis-à-vis the use and functions of religion, all forms of religion find footing in the sociological and psychological functions of religion as identified by scholars such as Emile Durkheim, George Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Marx Weber, Jean Paul Satre, *et al.* Religion among the Igbomina as elsewhere has not ceased from being a mechanism of adjustment and of solving problems, not only of overcoming anxiety but

also of ordering one's relationship with the supernatural and in the process supporting social norms and integrating society and personalities.

The three forms of religion in Igbominaland have solidarity and integrative functions as they stress sharing, fellowship, brotherhood, love, etc. Communal living and collectivism stressed by Islam and Christianity gave birth to associations, groups and units (Hebrews 10:25, Acts 2:42a, John 15:12, Hebrew 13:1-2, I Peter 2:17, Hadith 14-15, etc)¹⁵ which are carryover of the age long practice of brother's keeper. Examples of fellowships usually exclusive and sectarian in nature include faith groups and professional associations such as Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) /Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), Sunni Muslims, *Qadiriyya*, *Tijaniyyah*, *Ahmadiyya*, Fellowship of Scientists, Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Association of Muslim Lawyers, Christian Women in Media Association, etc. Members are not only are committed to God and their faith (doctrine) but also committed to one another's welfare. It is only when this is committedly and practically pursued that Durkheim's solidarity theory can be justified, "Religion contributes to order in society by creating conditions for social well-being, self-discipline, social cohesion and continuity of cultures and traditions".¹⁶

Although every religion teaches love of God and neighbour, religion can be divisive in an atmosphere of competition between religious groups or segments of a group.¹⁷ In many cases, religion is often the concealed factor responsible for rivalries and crises in Nigerian societies while other factors are ostensible. Ever since the introduction of the two most contentious religions (Islam and Christianity) and the Nigerian independence, politicization of religion has been pronounced as it has become a means to an end in protesting against political exclusion, maintaining status quo or defending sectional interests. This has consequently made religious radicalization, secularization, discrimination or favoritism inevitable. Since humans are socio-political animals, there is every tendency for ethnic groups and religious bodies to decry imbalances in the manner of admissions into institutions, recruitments, appointments, etc. The two positions established attest to Lewis Coser's view of the function of religion that "although it may draw men together; it may also separate them and set them against each other."

Nevertheless, religious co-existence is more pronounced among the Igbomina due to the extended family system; inter-marriages among the traditional worshippers, Muslims and Christians alike; trade, cultural

links and central virtues which evidently reflect in their local government names i.e. *Ìfèlódùn* (love is sweet), *Ìrèpòdùn* (togetherness is sweet), *Ìsìn* also known as *Ìsìnmètò* (*Ìsìn* is good at organization), *Ìfèdayò* (love turns to joy) and *Ìlá* [-*Òràngún*] traditionally coined from *ìlajìnimopín* (half portion of *Òdùduwà*'s property I received) and *Òrànmígún* (my cause is straight forward). These five local governments in Kwara and Osun States still have their cultural bond, common pursuit and overlapping religious backgrounds. Under this condition, religion still serves to maintain structural stability among the Igbomina by discouraging mischief, rebellion and opposition to the existing socio-economic order.

Aside the prime place of religion and its functions are the religious belief systems. The theocentric nature of the Igbomina as evident in their religious experience overtime reveals some beliefs that are constant but not without differences in some cases. Foremost is the belief in the Supreme Being. Belief in God is paramount in the belief system of the three religions. The Igbomina associate their God with the sky (*Olú Òrun*- Lord of the heaven) who is all powerful, all-knowing, eternal, and creator (*Elẹda*). They (Traditional worshippers, Muslims and Christians) believe in God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and whatever exists owes its existence to the Supreme Being. God is known as Allah in Islam. Allah is one person, a strict unity. There is no other God in existence (*Hanif*). Exodus 20:2-3 commands Christians to worship only God and not images and the Christians' Bible holds that God is One (Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:28-29).

Also, God's incomparable attributes as held in the Indigenous Religion are still perfect descriptions of the qualities ascribed to Him in Islam and Christianity. Till present, like in any other Yoruba or African society, the Igbomina, irrespective of their religions hold to the traditionally invented words qualifying God as the *Elẹda* (the Creator), *Ọba àwọn ọba* (the King of kings), *Ọba Àìrì* (Invisible God), *Ọyígíyígí*, *Ọba Àìkú* (the Immortal King), *Adákédájó* (He who executes judgment in silence), *Àwámáridì* (unfathomable God), *Ọba Aláànú* (God the Merciful), *Ọba Atérẹkẹríayé* (the unlimited omnipresent), etc. In Islam, the first *Sura* (*Fatiha*) confirms the similar attributes of God i.e. the Arabic words '*Rahman* and *Rahim*' translated 'Most Gracious' and 'Most Merciful' are both intensive forms referring to different aspects of God's attribute of Mercy.¹⁸ All the adherents of the three religions revere God in songs, speeches, testimonies and encounters. Igbomina people spontaneously use the term *Ọlọrun* or *Elẹdumarẹ* in their daily lives and as name prefixes and suffixes. Even though some Muslims and Christians have criticized

and modified some of their totem names to reflect alignment with their new faiths (i.e. *Òrìsàbùnmi*- *Òrìsà* gave me to *Olúwabùnmi*, God gave me; *Abógùnrin*- One who walks with *Ògún*- One who walks with *Ògún* to *Abólúrin*, One who walks with God, etc) and in many cases adopted Qur'anic and Biblical names (Mohammed, Abdullahi, Islamiat, Peter, John and James); in the real sense, the circumstances in giving such names still remain the same. .

Another belief that cuts across the religions of the Igbomina is the use of intermediary. The divinities range from primordial divinities believed to have been with the Supreme Being long before the creation of the earth and human beings (i.e. *Ọbátálá*- the arch-divinity of the Yoruba also known as *Òrìsànlá*; and *Òrúnmílá*, *Èsù*, *Ògún*, *Sànpònnó*, *Ọsun*, *Ayélála*, etc) to deified historical figures (kings, heroes, founders of cities i.e. *Òdùduwà*, *Sàngó*, *Ajagúnlá*, *Àiná*, *Ogbàìgbai*, *Tfi-Oyè*, etc) to personification of natural forces and phenomena. Divinities were brought into being to serve the will of the Supreme Being. Mbiti states that "it is in African Traditional Religion where the Supreme Being is conceived as Supreme King with the divinities appointed to minister each department in the theocratic government of the world and the ancestors (the living-dead) clearly set forth as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and the living."¹⁹ Prayers were offered to God through them. They were responsible for bringing fortunes and prosperity to all worshippers and devotees at the same time misfortune and disaster in the case of any violation of societal norms and taboos. The whole of the divinities can best be described as means to an end and not end in themselves. The word *àsẹ* (may it be sanctioned by God), the Muslim and Christians' response to prayers (amen) attests to the fact that only God has the ultimate answer. The equivalence of the intermediaries needed for atonement in Islam and Christianity are Prophet Mohammed (SAW) and the divinity of Jesus Christ (John 14:14). Prophet Mohammed is a great prophet, second only to Allah. The Qur'an teaches that Allah has no children. The Qur'an declares thus:

Say to the people of the book: let us agree upon one matter which is the same for you and for us namely, that we worship none but Allah and that we associate no partner with him, and that some of us take not orders not as in dictating orders but as in take order. (Sura 3:63).²⁰

Belief in the spirit world is another common phenomenon, universally prevalent among peoples of various cultures and religions of the world. Generally, all invisible entities are spirits but are of different types. Traditionally, the Igbomina from experience have strong conviction that mysterious spirits and powers popularly called *ẹmíkẹmì*, *Ayé* or *àwọn àgbà* in Yoruba, abound and manifest themselves in the form of sorcery, witchcraft (*àjẹ/ẹyẹ/òsòròngà*) etc. They are regarded with dread, although

it is believed that one can bargain with them or that they can be controlled by magic.²¹ Of spirits in Igbominaland, there is no end but they can be basically classified into good or bad.

a) Good Spirits (i.e. *orí*-man's double, the guardian spirit-angel). All religions are concerned with the relationship human beings have or may have with the supernatural realm. *Orírere* guards one's steps to his destiny in life. In most cases, it is this spirit that helps to ward off evil spirits that may want to derail the individual from achieving his ultimate in life. This is why most Africans will make sure they sacrifice and appease their guardian-spirits whenever they want to take any important decision or embark on a journey. Similarly, an angel can function also as a protective guardian, as a heavenly warrior, and even as a cosmic power. Hence, angels can be broadly described as personified powers mediating between the divine and the human.²²

Traditionally, the Igbomina believe in angels who could be known or unknown as they are always God-sent messengers especially in times of distress. Help rendered usually came in the nick of time.²³ Similarly, Islam recognizes the existence of four archangels and a large host of lesser angels. Aside Angel Michael, Angel Gabriel (Jubril) was believed to have revealed the Qur'an to Prophet Mohammed (SAW) in His cave-wandering meditations (Sura II.97). The *Qur'an* tells the roles of angels in Sura II.98, Sura LXVI. 4, etc. Christians also hold that angels are created beings, non-human, some of which fell into sins. Angels have power and non-fallen angels carry out the will of God. In Jewish and Christian literature, the four best known are Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel.²⁴ The Bible for instance, informs that angels warned Lot to flee Sodom before the total destruction (Genesis 19); Michael, the arch angel helped Daniel to combat the spirit prince of Persia (Daniel 10; 13, 21); etc. Like the traditional belief in spirits, Christianity teaches that the third person of the Godhead who is fully God in nature dwells within every Christian. The belief in, efficacy and emphasis on Holy Spirit among Christians is vital.

b) Evil Spirits: While the Bible refers to the devil (Satan) as fallen angel (Isaiah 14:12-15) who opposes God in all ways and seeks to destroy humanity as well as seize all powers (Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28: 13-15); the Qur'an does not refer to the devil as a fallen angel, but a fallen Jinn (Sura 2:334; 7:12; 15:27; 55:15). Islam teaches that *jinn*s are neither angels nor men, but created beings with free wills. *Jinn*s were created from fire (Sura 2:268; 114: 1-6). *Esù* in the authentic Yoruba concept, is the enforcer of the Will of Olódumarè and not the equivalent of the Euro-Christian Devil/Satan who is out to undermine the work of the Almighty

God.²⁵ In contrast, the *Qur'an* reveals thus: "Satan is, indeed, an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy. He only invites his party to be among the companions of the Blaze." (*Qur'an* 35:6). Consequently, following the advent of Islam and Christianity, adherents were made to believe and regard nature spirits, ghost spirits, *Abiku/Emere* spirits, and even ancestral spirit and of the divinities as evil.

It needs to be clarified on the one hand that the Igbomina Muslims and Christians believe in mysterious occurrences and demoniac spirits, very hostile and dangerous, as they can enter into birds, animals and human beings to cause different degrees of mayhem and death. This is evident in the prayers of prevention and deliverance that are offered by them on daily basis in their individual and congregational prayers (See Ephesians 6:9-10-12 in the Holy Bible and Sura XV:17, Sura XVI:98, Sura IV:117-120 in the Holy Qur'an). On the other hand, scholars have proven beyond reasonable doubt that as the adherents of the traditional religion in Igbominaland, like most peoples elsewhere, acknowledge and appreciate their indebtedness to their ancestors, so also can ancestral veneration be established in both Islam and Christianity. In his book, *African Ancestral Heritage in Christian Interpretations*, Abioje helps to identify what previous scholars have written on the subject of ancestral veneration under three sub-headings: ancestral veneration as a human phenomenon; the Christian cult of saints as related to ancestral veneration and the Lord Jesus Christ as an Ancestor and a Proto-Ancestor.²⁶

As much as modernity and teachings in Islam and Christianity try to demystify certain primordial beliefs (i.e. that the spirit of the dead lives), their equivalence can be found in both the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Bible. For instance, it is obvious till today that many Muslims and Christians alike pray in honour of some dead respected patriarchs (Musa/Moses, Ibrahim/Abraham, Dauda/David) and especially in the spirits of Prophet Mohammed (SAW) and Jesus Christ. This implies that the place of saints is similar to that of African ancestors/ancestress. He (Abioje), writing on the Afro-Christian Theology of Ancestral Veneration attests thus: "...Africa, like the Christian cult of saints, has to do with belief in life after death and communion with good dead persons".²⁷ The resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be disconnected from the dead coming back to life or felt to be close to the living in this world. Even though any thought of the "living dead" could sometimes be due to a person's deep love, flashbacks, expected wishes or emotions; albeit, the belief that some dead people are invisible spiritual beings is still held by the adherents of the three religions. While this author is not disputing the belief in

reincarnation, clarification needs be made that the assumption of the Yoruba names Babátúndé (father comes again), Yétúndé or Ìyábò (mother comes again) held by scholars such as Awolalu²⁸ might not be an acceptable explanation for reincarnation. If Abégúndé is someone born during masquerade festival, Abéjídé is someone born during rainy season and Babátúndé or Ìyábò as the case may be is so named to describe someone born when a father/grandmother died; it suffices to deduce from the same naming pattern that the Igbomina like the other Yoruba ...do not believe in reincarnation because of the names Babátúndé or Ìyábò. It is in this context Abioje cautions thus:

In Yorubaland, if not in Africa, the situation in which parents find themselves dictates what name they give a new baby...Naming reflects the mood or *sitz in leben* (life situation) of the parents, and should not be interpreted out of context. ...It is inappropriate to isolate the apparently re-incarnational names from the general Yoruba approach to child naming, which is to reflect the situation of the parents or the prevailing situation at the time of the baby's birth.²⁹

Also, study of genetics in modern science reveals that a very strong gene of a distant parent could be dominant to resurface long after his demise, while the real parents' genes are recessive. This aspect of change in orientation reveals that genotype, can trace back to the immediate parents and consequently, a chain of carryover from a distant generation. Perhaps, it was when such children were born or thereafter, some aged in olden days quickly identified the facial look, markings, stature, complexion or the character of the return of an ancestor/ancestress. At best, the dead are, of blessed memory celebrated periodically and a minute's silence is often observed to remember or commemorate their departure till date.

Scientific and empirical explanations have convincingly proven that the assumed *Àbíkú* mystery (spirits-born-to-die) was caused by sickle cell anaemia or other factors other than mystical. Mosques and churches today join to sensitize any would-be couple on the need to conduct blood group and genotype tests. However, demystified or not, *àbíkú* or any case of possessed child is an unraveled mystery not underestimated by the Igbomina who pray against having these wicked and dangerous spirits (*Olórún gbàwá lówó omọk'ómọ, omọ gbà jén sinmi àti àgbàná omọ*, meaning may God deliver us from evil possessed child, an all cost and wealth ruining child). Muslims and Christians do not disregard the Yoruba traditional saying that children, wealth, power, etc can also be acquired through evil means but not without stringent conditions and

eventual negative consequences. The belief is that no free gift comes from the evil powers-hence the saying, *Èsù a fúni ní fílà fí gba odidi orí lówó ẹni* (the devil gives a cap to eventually demand for a head). In the face of mysterious attacks or cases that defy medical solutions, adherents of Islam and Christianity believe in supernatural deliverance (miracles) or divine solution through faith in God. Hypocritically, many Igbomina professed Muslims and Christians till today desperately seek powers, good luck, healings from magicians, herbalists, rivers, or other mystical means justifying the syncretic nature of the society in part.

Another religious belief of the Igbomina from age long till date is adherence to the moral order, Islamic and Biblical injunctions. The activities of the Igbomina were never left unregulated. To ensure societal best practices, good conduct and harmonious living, there were different forms of taboos and values which served as checks and balances. Taboos (*èèwò*) in Igbominaland, most of which are socio-cultural in outlook with their religious implications are countless and of various weights handed down from generation to generation. For instance, the *Mokin Òró* which comprises the *Baale*, the *Asanlu* and the *Aro* of Òró must not eat the vegetable called *ẹfó òrìrì* or else become deaf; no member of Onikoyi family across Igbominaland must eat bush rat (*òkétè*); no one from *Ilé Alápá* family in Igbominaland and the people of Agbòndà community must neither kill nor eat cobra snake (*ẹjòlá*) lest they eat or kill their forefathers; during 'Ikegbe rites' in *Ilá Òràngún*, the Òràngún must travel out of the town, only to return after the ceremony because he must neither hear their voice nor see them; the *Alapa* of *EkuApa* must neither see *Obalufon* Shrine at Agbamu nor *ẹwẹ*; incumbent *Elesie* of *Esiẹ* (*Ọba Ìlú*) must not see the *Ọba Ère* and the other stone images located in *Esiẹ* National Museum as from the day of ascension; etc.³⁰ Breaking any of these taboos had spiritual implications and sacrifices binding on the entirety of the society.

With little or no difference in the motive and the eventual consequences, the numerous teachings and commandments of Islam (in the Holy Qur'an and Hadith) and Christianity (in the Holy Bible) vis-à-vis, moral order, discipline and other numerous subjects cover all aspects of human life. Some of these societal/family customs, taboos, authorities believed to be 'binding' on all can be challenged in accordance to the provision of the law of the land and the Holy Books. As breaking a taboo or acting contrary to the will of a divinity amounted to sinning against him and the society at large; violating the Biblical and Qur'anic injunctions (*haram*) means sinning against God with consequent punishments. With

time, some taboos became mere superstitions i.e. pregnant women now walk under the scorching sun without any glaring consequence other than tiredness/heat, certain naming ceremony items jettisoned and practices now held ungodly (i.e. polygamy [Christianity], consulting herbalists, invoking the spirit of the dead, some edible foods now held forbidden and defiling (i.e. pork and bush rat [*òkétè*] for Muslims, palm wine, alcohol, blood [*dònbòrò*]); etc. However, not all traditional taboos have been tagged superstitious as many that promote discipline or regulate self behaviour are not threatened by religious and scientific civilizations. For instance, kings do not prostrate to any one once he's coronated; like the priests, clergies and religious scholars are revered and versed in religious knowledge; prohibition of some foods; forbid of a female and male children of the same parent from sexual intercourse or marrying each other (Dhu-Mahram); etc.

Also worthy of note is the belief in the mundane world. The Igbomina like any other Yoruba society believe in the inevitability of death, futility of life as well as future judgment. Hence, the three religions believe in the concept of heaven which is a perfect blissful abode in the hereafter even though they differ in matters of details and procedure of who gets there and how. The three religions establish common perception that material possessions are relevant and only useful in this world. At death, no person can take any of such wealth to the hereafter. Common expressions include *ayéasán* (world of vanities), *ayèdòsì àti áre* (wretched world), *ayé àkámọrà* (mysterious world), *ayé laasigbo* (troublesome world), *ayétótó* (world of complexities), *ogunlayé* (world of battles) and so on. Ancient practice of *abóbakú* (royal loyalists) buried alongside with a demised king as his answerables in transcendental reign has ceased. They believe that it is futile to depend on riches or rule tyrannically when one does not know the time of one's death. This consequently serves as a consolation to the poor whose conditions are only temporary- 'opium of the masses'. (See Matthew 8:30, Luke 9:25, Luke 16:19-31; Sura VI.60, Sura X: 45-46, Sura LXIV. 14-15, etc).

As regards the inevitability of death, irrespective of status, age or religion; obituaries are made; dirges and tributes are sung; condolences are made from wide and near; corpses are washed, dressed, in beautiful and clean clothes (usually white) and buried in graves within the deceased's residence in few cases and Christian and Muslim burial grounds in most cases. While Muslims, irrespective of the class or distance (except for any uncontrollable circumstance-*laluri* or *al-doruri*) do not delay in burying their corpses as soon as one or two siblings and

witnesses are available; many Christians who are well endowed often arrange for mortuary preservation in order to await the convenient arrival of all the siblings or done in the bid to combine both the burial and outing ceremonies at the agreed time. Except for corpses of children or lunatics which may not customarily be carried to their home towns, burying the deceased in his home town if male or husband's town if female is retained by Islam and Christianity.

Like the traditional belief that the dead goes either to 'good heaven' (*Òrun rere*) or bad heaven (*Òrun àpààdì*) depending on how they are judged by the Supreme Deity; both Islam and Christianity also believe in the final judgment.³¹ In summary, life is a journey (*àjòl'ayé*), the earth is a temporary abode (heaven is home), all men are sojourners (1 Peter 1:17, Sura XXXV 32-35), the earth is full of wickedness (Ecclesiastes 4:1-4), death is inevitable (*Inna Lilahi Waina Ilahi Rajuin*), judgment will occur for all on the resurrection day (Ecclesiastes 12:14, John 12:48); faithful go to paradise (*Aljanatul firdaus*) Qur'an 3:142, 183-185, 198 & Matthew 25:46); while all others go to hell fire (*Jahannam*)-Qur'an 3:196-197 & Revelation 20:15); judgment is based on an individual's deeds (Qur'an 5:9; 42:26; 8:29 & 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 20:12-13). Paradise to the Muslims is a place of unimaginable bliss (Qur'an 32:17), a garden with trees and food (Sura 13:35, 15:45-48) where the desires of faithful Muslims are met (Sura 3:133, 9:38, 13:35, 39:34, 43:71, 53:13-15). Similarly, Christians view heaven as God's dwelling place and the eventual home of those who are saved by God's grace in Christ. God and His people will enjoy eternal fellowship there (John 14:2-3). The traditional concept of *Òrun ló mọ enití o là* (only heaven knows who will be safe; meaning only God knows who is faithful to Him) reminds all to be cautious of stewardship and head (or God's grace) as it has been established that the world is for all kinds (good or bad) but heaven for the chosen (godly). Hence, the saying, *àjoké ayé, àsàké òrun*.

However, while some Christians believe in rapture (Acts 1:11, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) and the imminent return of Jesus Christ (John 14:2-3, Revelation 22:7, 12); Muslims also believe Jesus is coming back but as a Muslim who will face the *Kaaba* to do Islamic ritual prayer (*Qur'an* 43:61). Nothing of that is found in ATR; there is no messianic expectation of any sort, other than always praying to God to take control of every situation.

Conclusion

Every religion has its sets of beliefs which are expected to be strictly observed. The evidence of this is obvious in the principal religions among the Igbomina: ATR, Islam and Christianity. Observably, members of a faith are fast in condemning conversion from one religion to another. Each of these religions relates to the Igbomina people differently and they fulfill different roles which are deep rooted in the nature of each of the religions. Their varying backgrounds play no vague role in the experiences of the religions. Influences from other cultures and contacts with immigrant religions have brought, not only changes in the complexion of the religion but also modification in its tenets. The trend of religion in every society stems from the fact that every religion has been forced by the nature of things to give and take elements to and from even those religions which they regard as their enemies or rival.

Undoubtedly, those who hold the traditional faith and practice ATR are in the minority as compared with those that are Muslims and Christians. In public records or forms where religion is indicated, hardly is there indication of ATR. This is not to assume however that it is only a matter of time before the declining ATR will become extinct. Even though many traditional festivals have waned in almost all Igbomina communities, some of them are still very much celebrated festivals (though with modifications) till today (i.e. Agbàásin in Ísánlú-Ísin, New Yam Festival (Ọdún Ijesu) in Ísánlú-Ísin/Èsié, Isinro in Ilá Òràngún, Egúngún Èléwẹ in Òmu-Àrán, etc). In reality, the general trend in Igbominaland like in most African societies reveals that some of the adherents wish to be regarded as connected with one or the other of the two 'fashionable' religions (Islam and Christianity), while they are at heart still attached to their own indigenous beliefs. Some individuals overtime have had experiences that cut across the three religions.

In spite of the contentious membership drive in Islam and Christianity, the prospect of ATR cannot be doubted considering the clear evidence of divided loyalty owing to the pull and push factors: indigenous and primordial position, syncretism, utilitarianism, and inter-marriages, etc. On the whole, even in the face of the dogmatic religious beliefs in Islam and Christianity, the mode of worship has not remained the same. Change keeps forcing itself on churches (most especially) as congregation after congregation today struggles with the problems caused by new ways in today's trending world.

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