

Life after Death in Christian and Yoruba Belief Systems: Implications for Public Morality in Nigerian Society

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Abstract

Concerns about the fate of humans after death have generated a lot of reactions among different peoples and traditions from time immemorial. While some believe that there is no life after death, some others (as found in most popular religions) hold that the human soul is immortal and that there is life after death. Religions generally provide answers to the question of the fate of humans after death. However, beliefs in life after death does not seem to influence the public morality of many Nigerians. It is in this regard that this paper examines the Christian belief and teachings on life after death in relation to the Yoruba belief with its implications for the public morality of Nigerians. As a descriptive study, the aim of this paper is to describe major concepts in life after death among Christians and Yoruba, bring out their similarities and differences and show the implications of the belief for public morality in Nigerian society. Findings revealed that the two belief systems conceptualize death as a reality, and as an event marking the end of an existence as well as the beginning of another existence for humans. On the other hand, while the Yoruba do not believe in a specific day of judgment for all the dead, Christians believe in a final judgment day. It is also discovered that this belief has not positively impacted the public moral life of many Nigerians. The paper concludes that every religion is *sui generis* and should be treated accordingly. Also, Christians and African traditional practitioners are expected to allow their beliefs in life after death to positively influence their relationships and interactions in public life, in order to make the Nigerian society a peaceful, progressive and better place to inhabit.

**Key- words: Life after Death, Eschatology, Christianity,
Yoruba, Ancestor**

Introduction

The notion of life after death holds that death is not the end of humans, and that there is life after death somewhere in the spirit world. Expectedly, every religion deals with the issue of the past in relation to the present and the hereafter (or what happens after the end of earthly life). Death is seen as a transition from the physical world to the spirit one. The Yoruba call the spirit world *Èyìn-ìwà* (aftermath of existence), while the Igbo call it *Ala Mmuo*, meaning the spirit world (Edet 84). When a person dies, it is believed that they have transited to another existence which is seen as an eternal place of rest for the just and torment for the wicked; depending on the type of life lived on earth.

The belief in life after death is well-grounded in both Yoruba and Christian religions. This paper therefore, examines the Christian belief and thoughts on life after death in relation to Yoruba belief as well as the implications of the belief for public life. As a descriptive study, the paper aims to present how these two belief systems conceive the concept, bring out their areas of similarities and differences as well as its implication for public life in Nigeria. The position of this paper is that each of the beliefs is unique in its own right and each has answers to the question of what happens to humans after death. The similarity is significant in the common belief that death is not the end of human life.

The Concept of Life After Death

Post death life is the belief that there is another existence after the expiration of human existence on earth. Christian eschatology conceptualizes the events that will follow the end of the world. Though eschatology is cosmic in scope, it distinguishes between personal and cosmic eschatology. Personal eschatology concerns the final state of

individuals and future events that will happen to them. These include death, intermediate state among others. On the other hand, cosmic or general eschatology concerns future events that will happen to the entire universe. Events in this category include “the second coming of Christ, the millennium, the final judgment, eternal punishment for unbelievers and eternal reward for believers, and life with God in the new heaven and new earth” (Walls 2, Olusakin, “Global Warming and Eschatology” 166). The focus of this paper is to examine concepts like death, intermediate state, millennium, resurrection, judgment and the final state of man in Christian religion while in Yoruba belief, concepts like death, immortality of the soul, judgment, heaven, hell, among others, are examined. Thereafter, the views of the two belief systems on life after death are compared and contrasted, while the implications of the belief on public morality in African societies are discussed.

Christian Thoughts and Beliefs on Life after Death

The various views and thoughts in Christian eschatology are treated here under the following sections: death and intermediate state; resurrection, the millennium and final judgment; and the final state of believers

Death and the Intermediate State

In Christianity, death is seen as a consequence of sin and evil, an enemy that God would destroy at the end of the world. Death is also seen as place of final destiny for humans. To receive immortality which is a gift of God, humans have to die and afterwards be resurrected unto eternal life (Omona 2). The terms ‘die’ or ‘death’ is used in four senses in Scripture according to Harris (47). These are physical death (1Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 4:10-12 Cor. 4:12,), spiritual death (Mt. 8:22; Jn. 5:24-25; Rom. 6:23; Jas. 5:20; Jude 12), second death, and death to sin. However, the most common use of the term ‘death’ in the Bible is the one in connection with the end of physical life. At death while the spirit goes back to God, the body goes back to the ground through burial (Gen 2:7; 3: 19).

The intermediate state is the state of the dead between death and resurrection. Dei notes that attempt to describe events during this state have produced different theories. These are soul sleep, purgatory, instantaneous resurrection, and immediate ascension to heaven or descending to hell. Soul sleep argues that while awaiting resurrection, the dead are in a state of temporary unconsciousness (Dei 21). Purgatory teaches the existence of a designated place between heaven and earth where the dead are purified to enable them stand before their creator. Instantaneous resurrection opines that at death, the dead receive resurrection body. Immediate ascension to heaven or descending to hell argues that the spirit of the righteous ascend straight to heaven after death, awaiting resurrection, while the unrepentant go to hell to await the second resurrection (Dei 22)

However, traditionally, it is believed that between death and resurrection, the dead are in the intermediate state. The Christians who die “fall asleep” in that they are no longer conscious of what goes on in the world, but they are fully alert to their new environment. Paul’s use of the verb “sleep” (*koimasthai*) gives the idea of *punctiliar* (fall asleep) rather than linear (being -asleep; cf. 2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:23) (Harris 48). Passages like Luke 23:43, 2 Cor 5:8, 2Cor 5:6, Phil 1:23 and others imply that the post mortem state of the believer is qualitatively superior to his or her spiritual life on earth. Hence, dead believers will be in active communication with Christ while they fall asleep to the world. (Harris 48, Holsteen and Svigel 165).

The Christian view states that the departed believers await the second advent of Christ and the resurrection of the body as incorporeal spirits. While some believe that after death, the believer will be with Christ in a disembodied state (Phil1:23), after the return of Christ, they will ultimately “be with the Lord” in an embodied state (1Thes 4:17), some hold that at death believers acquire their heavenly embodiment, so the interim state is a period of fellowship between

resurrected disciples and the risen Lord in anticipation of the corporate consummation of the church (O'Callaghan 201).

Resurrection, the Millennium and Final Judgment

The New Testament teaches that all who share in Christ's death (by repentance and faith) will share in his resurrection and new life (Middleton 132). Dei (27) notes that there are two types of resurrection: the resurrection unto life which will happen at the beginning of the millennium and the resurrection unto death which will occur at the end of the millennium. He further states that at the resurrection unto life, both the "righteous dead" and the "righteous living" shall meet the Lord in the sky after the former group had resurrected and the latter translated (John 5:39,1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor 15:50-55). It is the faith of a person in Jesus Christ that will qualify him or her for this resurrection (Ottuh 26).

Some Christians refer to the first resurrection as rapture. Though the term rapture is not found in the Bible, the concept it represents is embedded in it. The word rapture comes from the Latin *rapere*, meaning "to snatch". Holsteen and Svigel note that the Latin translation of the New Testament renders the Greek *harpazo* in 1 Thess. 4:17 as *rapere'* (166). It means a situation in future when the redeemed will be snatched away to meet the saviour in the air (Matt 24:40, 41; Luke 17:34, John 14:2-3; 1 Cor 15:51-52). According to Dei (25), while Evangelicals generally agree there will not be any secret or spiritual rapture and that the rapture will occur during the Second Advent, they differ on the timing of the rapture. The varying views have been categorized under the terms: pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation. Pre-tribulation theory argues that the rapture will occur before the seven-year period of intense tribulation. Within this school of thought, it is believed that it is only true believers that will be raptured before the onset of tribulation, while others who repent later will be raptured after the seven- year tribulation when

Jesus and the participants in the first rapture will return to the earth. This according to Dei, is called 'partial rapture theory' (25).

Post tribulation holds that believers will be raptured after the tribulation during the *Parousia*, while mid-tribulation argue that rapture will take place in the midst of the seven-year period of tribulation. This theory argues that after three and a half years of the tribulation, believers shall be taken away before God releases tribulation upon the earth. Another strand of this belief is that toward the end of the tribulation, Christ will rapture his saints (Dei 25, Holsteen and Svigal 168-169).

Chukwuedo presents the view that the resurrection body will be like that of Jesus when he was raised from death who could operate in both natural/physical realm and in the supernatural/spiritual realm (Luke 24:41-43, John 20:26-27) (74). The resurrection body (*soma pneumatikon*) involves not just a restoration to life but to a new life, meaning a better kind of life that is imperishable, powerful and glorious, no longer subject to weakness (sickness, aging or death), and a new creation-life over which no power in the universe or cosmic had any influence (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-23) - (Ottuh, 2013). It needs to be pointed out that while Evangelical scholars agree on the meeting between Jesus and the regenerated in the air, there are two positions on the event that will immediately follows it. Some scholars believe Jesus and the regenerated will come to the earth immediately, while others believe that Jesus and the regenerated will immediately go to heaven. Dei (29) however posits that the second view is theologically sound since scripture implies that the meeting between Jesus and the regenerated will lead to heavenly entrance (1Thess 4:16-17).

The millennium (meaning one thousand) reign of Christ lies between the first and second resurrection. This period is conceived to be the time of the reign of the Messiah and the believers on earth. Four positions have been offered in an attempt to understand the meaning of the period. These are postmillennialism, premillennialism, amillennialism and *praeterist*. Postmillennialists believe that the one

thousand years of Jesus' reign in heaven is running concurrently with the present global unsurpassed peace. The premillennialists believe that the *Parousia* will begin a physical and earthly reign of Jesus on earth. Amillennialists argue that one-thousand years is a symbol of the spiritual reign of Jesus in the lives of believers. The *praeterists*-hold that either all or some of the prophecies have been fulfilled during Jesus' first advent. Most of the arguments of these positions as Dei points out, are incompatible with explicit scriptural passages on Jesus' heavenly union with the redeemed immediately after the resurrection and the subsequent air-borne meeting (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:16-17) - (Dei 23, Olusakin, "Global Warming and Eschatology" 174-175). The concern of this study is not to delve into arguments on which position is right or wrong, but to note that millennial reign of Christ is one of the aspects of Christian belief in life after death

Between the millennium and the final state is the resurrection of all people to face final judgment called the second resurrection. During this period, John records that death will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-14). Harris (49) notes that throughout the NT, resurrection to immortality is depicted as a privilege reserved for those who are in the right relationship with God through faith in Christ. The wicked will resurrect for condemnation (Matt 5: 29- 30, 10:28, Rev 20:5, 11-15. The unrighteous will rise up and appear before God in the integrity of personal life, either as disembodied spirits or in some undisclosed body form and receive judgment.

The Bible is explicit on the notion that God will judge humanity. O' Callaghan (200) is of the opinion that from the anthropological point of view, judgment is definitive in the sense that it speaks of the immortal destiny of humans; in association with resurrection, judgment involves human corporality; as interpersonal, it links directly with the personal and social character of humans. God will be the judge and in respect to this, judgment is *posteriori* to salvation and contingent on the human response to the grace of conversion presented by God. Also, according to the NT, Christ will be the

supreme judge (John 5:22,-24-28). Some Christians believe that the believers will face their judgment while they are with Christ during the tribulation period called the judgment seat of Christ and that it is only the unrighteous that will face the white throne judgment which is the final judgment. Others feel the judgment of the righteous will coincide with the white throne judgment. As Holsteen and Svilg (166) have argued, regardless of the timing, Scripture is clear on the fact that Christ will judge the righteous (cf. Olusakin, "The Idea of Judgment in John 3:17-19" 214).

For Harris (49), both the righteous and the unrighteous will face judgment. The believers' judgment by Christ is not meant for condemnation, but for the giving of rewards (cf .Holsteen and Svilg 166). So, a verdict of bad (*phaulon*) as well as good (*agathon*) as indicated in 2 Cor 5:10 are to be passed on specific deed or action in its totality. Harris argues further that the principal element in the believers 'reward is God's personal commendation (1Cor 4:5, cf Rom2:10, 2Cor5:9) that will be expressed in words like 'well done, good and faithful servant' (1986: 49). This may be given or may be withheld and will also be in varying measure (Matt 25, 21, 23,1Cor 3:15, 1Cor3:8, 4:5 cf Luke 19:12-19). The judgment of the unrighteous according to him, is going to be that of condemnation, though their relationship with Christ and their work will be assessed (John 5:29, Matt7:23, 25:42, Lk13:25-28, Matt 25:46, Rom.2:8, Heb. 6:2, 10:29) (49).

The Evangelical Universalists and non-Evangelical Universalists however disagree on the fate of the unrepentant at judgement. The Evangelical Universalists, according to Dei, holds one of these two views: One, the Omni benevolence of God will not allow him to subject the unrepentant to suffering and pains. Two, since the purpose of God's Omni benevolence is to redeem humanity, all wayward creatures, humans and angels will be reconciled to God in judgement. This position implies that divine judgment is a therapeutic process to

achieve the salvation of all creation (Dei 24). The non-Evangelical Universalists affirm the destruction of the unrepentant in judgment. They are however divided into two on the debate. The Conditionalists/Annihilationists believe that the judgment of the unrepentant will lead to their total extinction, while the traditionalists believe that the punishment of the wicked is incessant. That is, they will suffer endlessly in hell (Dei 24).

For Dei, the Universalists idea of restorative judgment falls short of biblical evidence. He cites biblical references that support the position of the non-Universalists. They are (Pro 16:4; Psa1:5; 9:5; 37:28; 92:7; Isa 34:10; Ezek 3:18; Nahum 1:15; Mal 4:3; Job 36:6; Matt 10:28; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:7; Rev 11:18; 21:8). He however agrees with the conditionalists/annihilationists that the destruction of the wicked will lead to their extinction (Gen 19; 1 Kings 18; 2 Kgs 23:10; Josh 15:8; 18:16; 2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; Psa 37:20; Isa 5:24, 9:18; Isa 47:14; Jer 17:27; Neh 11:30; Mal 4:1; 3:2; Matt 5:22; 10:28; 18: 8-9; Mark 9:43, 48; Jude 7; Rev 20:9). He argues that the expression "forever and ever" should be appropriately applied to the consequence of destruction, rather than to the means of destruction (Isa 34:10; Rev 14:11; 20:10) (25)

Also, evangelical scholars disagree on the nature of hell and its population. Sanders (134-144) records that there are four acknowledged views and one possible position in the debate. First, "eternal conscious punishment" argues that punishment will last forever and those being punished will be fully aware of the suffering (Matt 25:46, Luke 16:19-31, Mk9:48, Matt 13:49-50). Second, "annihilationism or conditional immortality" claims that in judgment, those who persistently refuse God's love and his way of life in the present world will simply cease to exist because they will not be granted immortality (2Thes 1:9, John3:16 and 3:38, Matt 10:28 (Wright 181). The annihilationists argue that the texts about unquenchable fire and "eternal punishment" mean the finality of the divine judgment, not its length. The third, called "Eternal Conscious Limbo" by Sanders was proposed by the N.T. scholar, Wright.

According to Wright, those who turn away from God will become “beings that once were human but now are not” (ex-humans) (182). They will be conscious but not experience joy nor suffering. Fourth, “Remedial-Some Leave Hell” claims that hell entails suffering but the purpose is to redeem the occupants (Eph. 4:8-10, I Pet.3:18-4-6, John 3). So, according to this view, after death, there will be opportunity to receive the gospel. Also, there is a position called “Universal Salvation- All Leave Hell” which states that people go to hell because they reject God’s grace, but they cannot hold out eternally against divine grace because God has no permanent problem children (Rev 21:25, Rom 5:18, 2 Cor.5:19, 1 Cor 5:1-5). According to this position, everybody will leave hell. This implies that eventually heaven will be populated by all humans while hell will be empty.

The majority of evangelicals affirm eternal conscious punishment. This is the position of this researcher. A minority hold to conditional immortality, while few affirm that hell is remedial. Sanders further identifies other views on the fate of the un-evangelized. They are: ‘agnosticism’, ‘middle knowledge’, ‘postmodern evangelization’ and ‘universal salvation’. Others are: ‘restrictivism’, ‘inclusivism’ and ‘a large salvation I know not how’. These views range from those who believe the vast majority of the human race will occupy hell to those who believe hell will be sparsely populated or even empty but the most common among them are restrictivism and inclusivism (146-151).

The Final State of Believers

Harris (50-51), uses six adjectives to describe the essential ingredients of the final state of believers as taught in the NT as follows:

Embodied: Here, the body of the believer will be a spiritual one (Rom 8:23, 1Cor 15:44). It is of divine origin (1Cor 15:38), God is its architect and builder (2 Cor 5:1-2); it is imperishable free from any form of decay; it is glorious; radiant and unsurpassed beauty powerful-limitless energy and perfect health (1 Cor 15: 42- 43, 50, 52-54). It is

angel-like- deathless (Luke 20:36) and without sexual passion or procreative powers (Mt 22:30, Mk12:30, Mk 12:25): It is heavenly. These according to Paul are the features of Jesus resurrected body. So, Christ is now in the state believers will be at the resurrection.

Localized: In this sense, Heaven is the natural home of the resurrected body. Heaven is not just a condition, that of knowing and serving God, it is always a place. The destinies of man and the non-rational material order are inter-locked. The new heaven and new earth in which righteousness will have its permanent home (2 Pet 3:13) correspond to human 'new resurrection body'. Whether this "newness" of creation comes about by annihilation or by transformation (both concepts find expression in Rev 21:1, 5), the result will be that God is 'all in all' (1 or 15:28) and the whole material order will unswervingly serve the purposes of spirit

Personal: This is when the physical body is transformed into or replaced by the spiritual body, personal identity is persevered.

Active: Here, the final state of believers will be that of joyful activity as they follow the Lord wherever he goes forever and ever and share Christ's universal reign (Rev14:4, Cf7:17, Rev 3:21;5:10;20:6;22:5). They will actively worship and serve God and the Lamb enthusiastically and acceptably (Rev7:9-11; 19:9; 22:3-4).

Corporate: Here life in the city of God is going to be corporate. The unmediated inter-personal communion between the individual believer and his Lord will take place in a corporate context. God will dwell among the inhabitants of the city of God in a perfect society (Rev 21:1-22:5, cf Heb11:10).

Permanent: In this sense, the resurrection body will be permanently durable, so also believers' corporate and individual life with God will be unending.

It needs to be pointed out that among some Christians, mainly the Roman Catholic Christians but also the Eastern Orthodox

Christians, the cult of the saints in heaven is recognized. The saints attained to this level based on living a life rooted in faithful witnessing to the virtues that produce harmony, peace and love with the aim of bringing about the reign of God on earth while belonging to and adhering to the creedal belief of a particular Christian tradition²⁵. Like the African ancestors, it is believed that the saints in heaven intercede for the faithful. Also, Bujo in Abioje refers to Jesus Christ as the *Proto Ancestor* (7).

The foregoing has shown that among other things, Christian thoughts and beliefs on life after death focus more on the destiny of the believer and on the final destiny of resurrected saints which will be in form of “permanent residence in God’s immediate presence, worshiping and serving him and the Lord forever in a spiritual body perfectly adapted to the ecology of heaven and totally responsive to the dictates’ of the spirit (Harris 52).

Yoruba Thoughts and Beliefs on Life after Death

In the cycle of life, Africans believe that humans pass through the stages of birth to puberty, marriage, death and regeneration. Death is not seen as the end: it is seen as a transition from the physical world to the spiritual one. Africans believe that death is a debt to be paid by everyone who comes to this world. Onyewuenyi in Edet asserts that life after death means the existence of the individual in an incorporeal yet, real form in the life beyond” (84). Among the Yoruba, like other Africans, belief in life after death revolves around the conviction that human beings came from heaven and that after - his sojourn on earth, individuals will go back to the same heaven and give account to *Olódùmarè*. It is believed that human destiny includes what s/he will become on earth including when s/he will die. Also, it is believed that this destiny cannot be changed/ altered, but can be delayed. Hence, it is said that *Ayé kò le pa kádàrá dà, wón kàn le sún ọjó o re síwájú ni* (the world cannot change destiny, they can only defer it. The “world” (ayé) in this context is the concentration of the

powers of evil in the world (Olusakin "Attitude towards Witchcraft in Africa" 118). It is only *Olódùmarè*. that can change human destiny through *Ifá* by offering *ẹbó*- sacrifice and *ètùtù*-rituals. The day of death is one of human's destiny: it can be shortened but cannot be extended (Bascom 116, Osanyinbi and Adedeji 18, Olaleye 89, Omona, 4).

The Yoruba believe that at death, while the body (*ara*) which is mortal is buried in the grave, the soul (*èmí*) which is immortal is believed to go to heaven. At death, it is believed that the deceased is embarking on a journey to the great beyond. The "fare-fowl"- *adìè ìrànà*, is meant for the journey of the deceased to heaven, while the burial ceremony regarded as entering into a covenant with the deceased. (*Bíbá òkú ya ohùn*) include the family's desire for continued interest and protection by the deceased (Ray 148). As s/he is being buried, the people present will send their messages through him/her to their departed relatives. They will sing:

Bí o bá délé kí o kílé (If you reach home, greet the people at the - eternal- home)

Bí o bá dónà ko ṣòyàyà (If you get to the road, be cheerful)

Bá mi kí bàbá mi (Greet my father)

Bá mi kí yèyé mi (Greet my mother)

Májòkùn má jẹ ekòló (Do not feed on centipedes and worms)

Ohun tí wọn bá njẹ lágùlé ọrun ni kí o bá wọn jẹ
(Whatever they eat in heaven is what you should eat with them) (Daramola and Jeje 192).

The Yoruba see heaven as their real home. Hence, they say *Aíyé lojà, ọrun nilé* (the world is market - where people go to buy and sell - heaven is the eternal home, a place of no return). When asked about the location of heaven, the Yoruba point to the sky where it is believed that the Supreme Deity dwells. *Ọrun* is a place of no return, where no one has gone to and returned even the ancestors. Hence, it is called *ọrun alákeji* (Hereafter of no return) (Ogungbemi 168). Since it is a

place of no return, its exact geographical location and indeed everything concerning life after death, cannot be subjected to science, logic and philosophy without antagonism from the believers in it (Ogungbemi 169). *Òrun*, the “abode of the Creator of everything, that is, the Supreme Being ... is the super sensible world where everyone who has his imprint or the spiritual essence, the soul, resides with him after his/her journey is over in the planet earth (Ogungbemi 168)

It is believed that *òrun* has two compartments: *òrun rere* (good heaven, where the occupants enjoy eternally) and *òrun àpáàdì* (potsherds heaven, where people go for eternal anguish). Those who were of good character (*ìwà rere*) while on earth are rewarded with *òrun rere*, while those who were wicked on earth are punished with *òrun àpáàdì*. Those who make their ways to *òrun rere* are regarded as ancestors/ancestresses. Ancestors/ancestresses remain in *òrun rere* from where they can interfere in the affairs of their family members still living (Osantinbi and Falana 63). It is held among the Yoruba that old age (adulthood), good behaviour, conduct or character (*ìwà rere*), good death and second burial are major prerequisites for anyone to be accepted into the heaven of ancestors/ancestresses (Abioje 14-15, Akomolafe 12)

The belief that ancestors/ancestresses can be born as babies into their earthly families is an aspect of Yoruba belief in life after death. This is called “partial” reincarnation, that is returning of ancestors/ancestresses “in one or several individuals that come from the same familial unit” (Aderibigbe 176). Partial reincarnation is popular in most African societies. Among the Yoruba, the concept of rebirth or reincarnation is referred to in various ways such as *yíyà ọmọ* (emerging forth of a branch or becoming a child) and *à-tún-wá* (coming back) or *à-tún-wáyé* (coming back to the world). *Àtúnwáyé* is believed to happen in three ways: *ipadà wáyé* (ancestor's rebirth); *àkúdàáyà* (die and reappear) and *àbíkú* (born to die) (Aderibigbe 176, Olawuyi 1).

Though there are no patterns to its occurrence, the reality of returning of ancestors/ancestresses to their earthly families after death, in new born babies, is undeniable: it is at the instance of God's authority and it does not exclude the individual from the normal cycle of birth, death, judgment and everlasting life either as a reward or punishment" (Akin Otiko 15). The belief that an ancestor/ancestress who is believed to remain in the abode of the ancestors eternally, still comes to be born into the earthly family sounds illogical. However, the belief that after death, they possess supernatural powers. As an analogy, according to Aderibigbe (176), "this kind of relationship is compared to the one that exists between the sun and the energy it produces. Thus, though, the sun emits energy, it continues to remain hot'. It must also be noted that the baby that is identified as the incarnation of the ancestor/ancestress can only depict certain traceable features of that person and not the soul.

Abioje's (18) finding that names like Babatunde and Yetunde, Iyabo among others, are mere consolatory/situational names like Bejide, Abegunde, Abioje and are not a proof of Yoruba belief in *reincarnation* is debatable. This researcher's interaction with Chief Ifayemi Elebuibon, the Araba of Oshogbo in Osun State (personal interview with the author. 18 June, 2020) confirms that the names are a proof of Yoruba belief in *reincarnation or rebirth*. Elebuibon admits that it is not all ancestors/ancestresses that come back into their families: it is only *Olódùmarè* who knows and decides who comes back, but he can reveal it through the oracle. The oracle can reveal it among others, during the *àkòsèjayé* which is enquiry in totality through *Ifa* into the future of a child born or about to be born into the world (cf. Olaleye 84). Another proof of the belief in *ìpadà wáyé* is that at death, the Yoruba make expressions that show that they believe the dead will come back to life. For example, they say *óti lo tunyàn* (S/he has gone (to heaven) to choose his/her destiny afresh) at the death of a beloved after a life of misfortune (Fatokun & Hofmyer 5).

Moreover, stories abound among the Yoruba of encounters and experiences of both individuals and communities about those who died pre-maturely and were found in another community. Stories are also often told of individuals who died and were buried and after many years, children and woman/women would come to their earthly families claiming to be their wives and children whom he had raised in another community after their death. This is called *àkúdàáyà* which is the Yoruba nomenclature for a dead person that is claimed to have reappeared in a different location from where he or she lived before death (Aderibigbe 179). The concept of *àkúdàáyà* among the Yoruba revolves around the belief that some persons who die without completing their destiny on earth will not go to heaven directly until this destiny is completed. Those who fall to this category may have had their lives on earth cut short by evil powers like witches, sorcerers, among others. It is believed that after death, *àkúdàáyà* can move to another far community or country to complete his destiny. Stories about *àkúdàáyà* claim that they occupy the same body they had in their first life. They live as visitors in the new community, get married, secure job and have children, interact with humans normally and only disappear after someone who knew them in their first life recognize them. Though certain questions remain unanswered about this phenomenon like what happens to the buried body of the people or whether they live up to old age in their second existence, among others, the phenomenon is undeniable (Akin-Otiko 9).

The phenomenon of *àbíkú* is another aspect of Yoruba belief in life after death. *Àbíkú* are believed to be wicked spirits who derive pleasure in being born to this world as many times as possible until the services of a traditional diviner, native doctor or traditional priest is sought to stop them. The Yoruba believe that the spirits of *àbíkú* roam about especially in the noon looking for pregnant women to enter their wombs. *Àbíkú* are called by different names to discourage them from dying. Such names include *Ajá* (dog), *Kòsókó* (there is no hoe, i.e. to dig the ground for burial), *Málómó* (do not go back again -

to the spirit world), among others (Osanyinbi and Adedeji 19). However, the best way *àbíkú* is prevented from dying is through the activities of traditional diviners, native doctors or traditional priests. The advent of orthodox medicine which has led to reduction in child mortality has however proven that most cases attributed to *àbíkú* were rather sickle cell anemia cases or lack of proper medication during pregnancy.

The Yoruba believe that there is a connection between *àbíkú* and *emèrè*. The latter refers to children having familiar spirits, who derive pleasure in being born to this world and live for a short time, achieve nothing spectacular and die prematurely in order to punish their parents or some persons. It is believed that *emèrè* can cause *àbíkú*, but it is not all *emèrè* that are *àbíkú* because sometimes *emèrè* live longer than the *àbíkú*. It is also believed that *emèrè* die when expectations about them are high and thereby dash the hope of their parents. They can die some days before or on their wedding day (Osanyinbi and Adedeji 19). Though it is not clear if Yoruba believe in the resurrection, there are stories of people who died and appeared to those who did not know they have died and sometimes sent messages to their family members through the people they appeared to.

Judgment is another aspect of African concept of life after death. In Yoruba belief, judgment is received in two ways: the one received on earth and the one received in heaven (Olusakin, "The Idea of Judgment in John 3:17-19" 215). Awolalu and Dopamu 157) record that after the necessary burial rites have been rendered for the deceased, his or her soul goes to Olodumare to give account of all of his or her deeds on earth. In Yoruba belief, what Olódùmarè judges is the character of the person. God is impartial in His judgment. After the dead might have accounted for his or her life on earth, of which God Himself is not ignorant, God would then pronounce His judgment. It is on the basis of God's verdict that the deceased will be immediately rewarded with a place in the ancestral world or a place of suffering (Ogunade 7, Odeyemi 534).

Christian Versus Yoruba Belief in Life after Death

In Christian and Yoruba beliefs, death is believed to be the end of earthly existence and the beginning of extraterrestrial existence. In Yoruba belief, there is the cult of ancestors/ancestresses, while among the Catholics there is the cult of saints involving faithful departed Christians and living Christians who venerate them. While it is believed that the ancestors watch over their families on earth, the intercessory roles of the cult of the saints in heaven is also practiced among the Catholics. It is however important to note other Christian organizations do not hold on to the belief in the veneration of saints.

Moreover, the idea of judgment, and reward or punishment is expressed in Christianity and Yoruba belief. In both beliefs, those who are found worthy in judgment will join a community of peace, while the wicked will be banished to eternal hell. In the two beliefs, it is believed that the life lived on earth will determine reward or punishment. Though the idea of resurrection, as applied to Jesus Christ in Christianity is not found in Yoruba belief, belief in continuation of life after death is common to both. The Bible teaches about meeting other saints and other dead people in the presence of God (Rev 21:3). The Yoruba also believe that saintly dead persons will join the ancestral community in the hereafter (Omona 7). Hence the dead are asked to greet those who have gone before, believing that they do hear and that they would meet together in heaven.

According to the Bible, the community that the saints will form in the presence of God would be that of activity where new depth of relationship will develop among God's people, a relationship of love, peace, righteousness and joy (Omona 7). Among the Yoruba, as among Africans generally, it is imaginable that there will be activity in the community of the ancestors/ancestresses, since life on earth is believed to be replicated in heaven. Over there, everyone will retain his or her earthly status.

However, there are differences between Yoruba and Christian belief in life-after-death. While Christianity explains life after death from the perspective of intermediate state, resurrection/rapture, millennium, judgment and final state in heaven and Christ and the cult of the saints as ancestors, Yoruba teaches the concepts of judgment, good heaven of the ancestral community, and bad heaven for dead evil doers. The belief among the Yoruba that ancestors do come back to their earthly families in what is called *ipadàwáyé* is not present in Christian belief. Further, Christians are expecting the second coming of Jesus, among others while the adherents of Yoruba Traditional Religion do not have such expectations.

The Yoruba do not believe in any specific day when God will judge all the dead. At death, a person goes to *Olódùmarè* to give account of his or her life on earth and receives judgment immediately, while the Bible talks about a specific day when the dead shall be gathered and be judged one by one (Acts 17:31, Rev. 20:11-15). Conversely, stories about *àkúdàáyà* and *àbíkú* phenomena are not present in Christianity, though in Christianity, there are stories about the resurrection of Jesus and the saints who appeared to people on the day Jesus died (Matt 27:52-53). In most cases, those who appear to people after death in Yoruba experience appear to those who did not have the knowledge of their death.

While the Yoruba advocate goodness and kindness as major prerequisites for entering the ancestral heaven, in Christianity, the acceptance of the atoning work of Jesus resulting in holy living is the major prerequisite for entering the Father's house (John 3:35-36, Acts 10:1-48, Rom. 4:1-8). Finally, God is seen as the Judge in Yoruba belief, but in Christianity, though God is the Judge, He has given authority to Jesus Christ to judge (John 3:35, 5:27).

Also, among the Yoruba, it is believed that the dead retain their statuses in heaven. That means a king on earth will still be king in heaven, while a slave will retain his/her status as a slave still serving

his master there. However, in Christianity the aspect of retaining one's socio-economic and political status is not present.

The Implications of Life after Death for Public Morality in Nigerian Society

The belief in life after death has some implications for humans. Majorly, the consciousness that life does not end in this world and that the life lived on earth is a determinant of what awaits the individual after life is expected to encourage humans to live a good moral life. In Christianity, the acceptance of Jesus' redemptive work leading to salvation and righteous living qualify the believers for good life after this existence. Also in Yoruba belief, good deed/good character (*ìwà rere*) is one of the main pre-requisites for an individual to be accepted into the abode of the ancestors and ancestresses. A moral being who is conscious of life after this existence is not expected to oppress others, does not encourage corruption and does not take what does not belong to him/her. Also, he is expected to be humble, does not hold on to power and sees leadership position as an opportunity to serve humanity (cf. Olusakin, "Pauline Christology in Philippians 2:5-11" 31). It is believed that if the occupants of positions of responsibility are conscious of the fact that life does not end here on earth, they will see their responsibilities as service to God and humanity and this will make the world a better place and avoid greed and selfishness.

Nigeria is one of the most religious nations in the world but also, one of the most corrupt nations. Nigeria was plunged into a perpetual state of underdevelopment because of the selfishness and greed of her people. Most of the political killings, bombings, kidnapping and post-election violence and court cases witnessed in Nigeria in recent times were borne out of ethnicity and religious intolerance most of which are direct outcome of greed and selfish sacrifice. For instance, some believe that a particular political office belongs to them and should not go out of their ethnic group, religion or gender. To achieve

this, they do everything possible to make sure that office hereditary or impose their political “son” or “disciple” on the people and if they do not succeed, they make sure whoever occupies the position does not succeed. This is because they occupy elective offices for selfish reasons and not for the common good. It is unfortunate to note that these people occupy important positions in their religious affiliations.

Social justice demands that the rights of all people in the community are considered in a fair and equitable manner. Unfortunately, many people believe that every good thing in the society should be enjoyed by them and their family members and any other person they extend their largesse to should remain their slave perpetually. Any attempt to displace them normally results in bloody violence. Refusal to accept defeat at the poll among Nigerian politicians is a sign of greed and selfishness. Also, rigging in election is a proof that the person concerned is seeking elective office for selfish reasons. This however does not imply that it is every politician in Nigeria that is involved in these vices. Olusakin (“Pauline Christology in Philippians 2:5-11” 32) refers to the manner in which Dr. John Kayode Fayemi, the former Governor of Ekiti State accepted his defeat by Ayo Fayose in the 2014 gubernatorial election as a good example that politicians need to emulate if there will be development.

The greed of the political class in Nigeria who do not seem to remember that they will leave this world one day and leave all their possessions behind, is a major factor that has led to agitation for resource control. Olusakin (“An Eco-theological Reading of Luke 12:13-21” 234) posits that it is saddening that the call for resource control is coming from the region whose natural resources contribute over 80% to the national annual revenue and where there is no serious development going on. The land and means of livelihood of this people have been so degraded and depleted by the activities of multinational companies that the local community has been subjected to abject poverty thereby making the gift of nature in their region look like a curse.

It is equally pathetic to note that some of the sons of Niger Delta who have been and are still in the corridor of power and who are supposed to have pity on their people and show concern for the development of their region and their people behave as if they do not care. Some of them have been in charge of the Ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs and the Niger Delta Development Commission as Ministers and Managing Directors. Some have served their states and Nigeria in various capacities and yet it seems personal interest has been placed above the development of the region as some of them (including some of the militants) are only fighting to cut their own share of the national cake. Hence, all the intervention programmes of the government including monthly revenue allocation, 13 percent revenue from the derivation principle, constituency allowances for senators and house of representatives' members of Niger Delta extraction, NDDC and MDA have not brought any tangible change and the crises in the Niger Delta still persist. Though it cannot be denied that the Federal government has not treated the region well in the allocation of resources and positions, it seems the little it has allocated so far has not been adequately used for the purpose for which it was released. (Olusakin, "An Eco-theological Reading of Luke 12:13-21" 233)

Different ethnic groups would not have agitated for their share of the 'national cake' if the people in the position of authority had upheld the principle of equity, common good and social justice in the sharing of the people's common wealth. The activities of most religious leaders in Nigeria in many churches is that of the rich (that is the priests) getting richer, while the poor are getting poorer. The priest who controls many cars, lives in well furnished apartment still collects 'prophet seed' and other offerings from the poor who are not sure of how and where the next meal will come from. If Africans are always conscious of life after death, the rate at which they amass well will be checked

It should also be noted that human morality should not be limited to fellow humans: it should be extended to nature which is also a member of the household of God. It is not ethical to continue to deplete the environment for selfish gains. The subjugation and exploitation of nature are reflections of the greed and selfishness of humans. It is on record that human activities have negatively impacted nature so much so that it has resulted in the onset of global warming (Olusakin and Udoh, "African Christian Theology of Environment" 71), thereby making life unbearable. If humans can remember that wealth acquired on earth will not be buried with them, greed will reduce and the exploitation of nature to acquire unnecessary wealth will reduce and this will make the world more habitable as humans await the day to transit to the great beyond.

The eschatological belief that this world is not the permanent home of humans should not encourage continuous depletion of the environment. Christianity envisions new heaven and new earth after this present heaven and earth may have passed away (Rev. 21:1). This implies that this world will still be inhabited after judgment, though in a modified form. As Christians prepare for the *parousia* or the end time, they should plan for future generation because it may not happen at the time expected. Preparation for future generation should make humans control global warming for future generation to meet a renewed nature. This is what the concept of sustainable development entails. Christians should live on earth as responsible and caring tenants.

The Yoruba idea of hereafter does not envisage a time in future when the world will cease to exist. The cycle of life shows that life is cyclical. The implication is that the continuous depletion of the environment and the ozone layer by human activities portends great danger for human continuous existence in Africa. Hence, African and Christian environmental ethics should be respected by Africans.

Conclusion

The foregoing has shown that life after death as a belief, cuts across all belief systems especially Christian and Yoruba beliefs, the focus of this paper. It has also confirmed that though each belief system is *sui generis* in its own right and has some peculiarities regarding its concept of life after death, the two belief systems are united in what matters most, such as the belief that good ethical behaviour is a prerequisite to the life of bliss in the life beyond. It is therefore the position of this paper that belief in life after death should influence human conduct positively in public life. The belief and consciousness that there is life after death and that the life lived on earth determines a person's lot in the great beyond as it is evidenced in the two belief systems discussed in this paper, is supposed to elicit good moral behaviour toward fellow humans and non-humans. For example, if humans will not live in this world forever, then it is fruitless amassing 'unnecessary' wealth at the expense of the less privilege. Also, humans should imbibe the culture of sharing what they have in excess with those who do not have at all or those who do not have enough. The result of these consciousness and the corresponding actions will therefore be a serene, progressive and peaceful society that is devoid of corruption, greed, embezzlement of public funds, holding on to power by all means, nepotism and other vices that are characteristic of many African societies. Though Africans are believed to be 'notoriously' religious, it seems the ethical dimension of religion has not been allowed to influence lives and various institutions in the society, the religious institution being the worst. The paper therefore recommends that the peculiarities of different religions should be respected. Also, belief in life after should be allowed to elicit positive ethical conducts in humans' interaction with fellow humans and non-humans. This will make African society a better place to live both for the present and the next generations

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