

**ANCESTOR HOOD IN AGENEBODE TRADITION AND
SAINTHOOD IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY.**

BY

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**FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY**

AUGUST, 2023

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION,
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **CLETUS ESHEMOGIE OLEGHE** with the Mat. Number; **ART1802059** in the Department of Religions, Faculty of Art, University of Benin, Benin City, in partial fulfilment for the award of Bachelor of Arts

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for his indescribable love and mercy towards my life. It is also dedicated to my ever-supportive parents: Mr. & Mrs. Oleghe for their unending love and goodness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“No greater task is ever achieved by an individual without the prior efforts and support of others.” It is to this end that I wish to acknowledge the many individuals that have added values and morals towards my pursuit of education.

First and foremost, all thanks to God Almighty, for His blessings throughout my academic years and for the completion of this research work.

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Extremely appreciation to my parents Mr. and Mrs. C.M. Oleghe and Family for their continuous prayers, care, and sacrifices; and for educating and

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ABSTRACT

Christianity as a religion through the help of early armchair scholars and missionaries has painted many of the African traditional religious practices with derogatory names like: fetish, heathen, pagan, and cruel without realizing that their practices are no different from that Africans, clear example is the idea of ancestors and saints. While many contemporary Christian's sees saints as holy, pure, righteous and heavenly, they see and

regard ancestors as demonic, evil and devil's tools. Hence, they pay no respect and show no regard to their ancestors.

Saints just like ancestors are morally dead people whose attitudes while alive have accorded them respect of people, however, due to religious differences and worldviews, these religious figures have been approached with diverse understanding, placing one above the other, treating one respectably while despising the other. On the backdrop, this research work was designed to lucidly examine the concept of ancestors in Agenebode and saints in Roman Catholic Church. This work employed the descriptive methodology. In order to ascertain reliable data, various methods of data collection were employed; Literatures were reviewed, journal articles and internet were also consulted. This work finally revealed that saints and ancestors have a level of similarities like serving as intermediaries in the two religions, and they also have their peculiarities.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Death as an integral part of man's life have been approached from different light and shades. Death to a layman appears to be the end of the existence of a person. It is believed to be the annihilation of man which comes with rottenness of the body. It is unavoidable stage of man's life; hence everyone is bound to undergo its experience. It is a phenomenon of life that transcends religions and cultures of the world. Each of the religions irrespective of their doctrines, teachings and dogmas see it as an important and unavoidable but necessary evil, be it Catholics, Jews, or adherents of African traditional religion. The question to what happens during and after death is one of the things that bothers man across religions and cultures of the world.

Death though a natural phenomenon, the way and manner at which it happens goes a long way to determine the status of the deceased both in the

present world and in the world beyond. Ancestors and Saints alike are seen to have passed through the icy hands of death. Both names/titles conveys a heavy religious undertone. While Africans according to Opoku (1978) sees ancestors as people whom through death are transformed into another realm of life (spiritual bliss) due to their deed while on earth, Catholic in like mind believes saint to be holy people whose lifestyle while on earth is worth emulating. Mbiti (1975) maintained that the term “Ancestors” refers to: All the dead departed who are physically dead but are still believed to be alive in the memory of those who remember them when they were in the community.

The concept of ancestor hood in African traditional religion and sainthood in Roman Catholicism both points to the idea of death as only a means to an end and not an end in itself.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Christianity as a religion through the help of early armchair scholars and missionaries has painted many of the African traditional religion practices with many derogatory names like: fetish, heathen, pagan, and cruel without realizing that their practices are no different from that Africans,

clear example is the idea of ancestors and saints. While many contemporary Christians see saints as holy, pure, righteous and heavenly, they see and regard ancestors as demonic, evil and devil's tools. Hence, they pay no respect and show no regard to their ancestors. Some who tend to be fair on the issue of ancestors and saints, place the saints high above their ancestors.

While prayers made to saints are seen as holy and as prayers made to God, prayers to ancestors are seen as idolatry and devilish.

Many people believed saints to be pure hence closer to God, they are treated as God's vessels. They perform religious activities like "holy" pilgrimage to the tombs, graveyards and shrines of these saints, and all these activities are not seen as idolatry. Ancestors in African traditional religion is a dignified office that is not accorded to anyone and everyone. Just like Mbiti (1969) clearly said, they are the living-dead whose moral lifestyle has gained them passage into the cadre. Although they have been derogatorily explained to be devilish, however an in-depth study would show that they are not too distinct

from Christian saints. This study is therefore designed to critically analyze the concept of ancestorhood in Agenebode Tradition and Sainthood in the Catholic Church, comparing their similarities and differences.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The Aim of this work is to critically explain ancestor-hood in Agenebode tradition And Sainthood in the Catholic Church, comparing its similarities and differences. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives have been set:

- i. To know and understand the concept of death among the Agenebode people
- ii. To know and understand the types of death
- iii. To know the causes and reasons of death
- iv. To know and understand the burial rites of the Agenebode people
- v. To understand and know the place of the ancestors in Agenebode Tradition

- vi. To know and understand the concept of sainthood in Roman Catholic church
- vii. To know and understand the similarities and differences between ancestors in Agenebode Tradition and Saints in Roman catholic church

1.4 Definition of Terms

For a clearer understanding of Ancestor-hood in Agenebode tradition and Sainthood in the Catholic Church, some key terms needs to be defined, some of these key terms includes:

Death:

Death according to Idowu, is the creation of God, he was made for the purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled. Thus death is the inevitable lot of everybody who comes into the world (Idowu, 1962). Mbiti sees death as a process, which removes a person gradually from the 'Sasa' period to the 'Zamani'. The Sasa period means the time of physical existence on earth and the

period after death within which the departed is remembered by relatives and friends who knew him. When the last of these survivors die off, the departed now enters the 'Zamani' which is complete death (Mbiti, 1980). Opoku explained further by stating that death is not the end of life, but a transition from this world to the land of the spirits. Death does not sever family connections, but the dead become ancestors (Opoku, 1978).

Afterlife

Many Africans believe that the dead go to the land of the spirits or ancestors which is underground. However, some do not visualize any physical or geographical separation between the physical and spiritual world as they believe that the dead simply arrives there in his spirit form (Mbiti, 1980). In the afterlife, the dead are not cut off from the living, for they may reveal themselves in dreams or appear to their living relations to give instructions, warnings or information. However, those who died bad deaths and those who lived bad lives

cannot become ancestors, they are regarded as evil ghosts (Opoku, 1978).

Ancestor

Mbiti (1975) maintained that the term “Ancestors” refers to: All the dead departed who are physically dead but are still believed to be alive in the memory of those who remember them when they were in the community. They are regarded as integral members of the family in Africa. They are seen as always present and have interests in the affairs of their families. This however, makes their family members to venerate them and to offer sacrifices to seek for their protection, blessing and intervention in times of wars and difficulties.

It is paramount to know that among the people of Agenebode, there is a belief that those who lived good life while on earth and died a natural death, and thereafter, accorded a befitting burial, normally partake in the offerings with their kith’s and kin who are still living; those are regarded as ancestors.

Saint

According to Cambridge dictionary, a person who has received an official honor from the Christian, especially the Roman Catholic Church for having lived a good and holy way.

Agenebode

Agenebode is located in Edo State, Nigeria. It is situated in the Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State in the southern part of Nigeria. The geographical coordinates of Agenebode are approximately latitude 7.2500° North and longitude 6.1167° East.

Roman Catholic Church

According to Catholic Encyclopedia, Roman Catholic Church is the Christian church of which the pope, or bishop of Rome, is the supreme head.

1.5 Significance of Study

This research work is of the following importance:

- i. It will enlighten the public on the concept of death and afterlife

- ii. The public will be educated on the concept of ancestors and saints
- iii. Pastors, Priests, Imams and other clergy personalities will find information from this research useful while teaching on eschatological matters.
- iv. Information from this research will help in clear understanding of the ancestor-factor in Agenebode and Africa at large.
- v. Information from this research will help to clear the discrepancies in the idea of ancestors and saints.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of the study is on Ancestor hood in Agenebode tradition And Sainthood in Roman Catholic Church; A Comparative Study.

1.7 Methodology

The research method adopted in this study is the analytical approach. Finally, secondary materials such as books (published and unpublished), Library Journals, Dictionaries and Wikipedia were used in course of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Meaning of Death

Death can be said to be the permanent cessation of all biological functions that sustain a living organism. It is a natural and inevitable part of the life cycle of all-natural beings. Death is a natural phenomenon, an unavoidable certainty and a trail everyone is bound to pass. It is the tinniest bridge between the ephemeral world of mortals and the abode of spirits. Death, although a dreaded event, is perceived as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation, the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. Hornby (2000) defines death as; “the end of life, the state of being dead”. It is the power that destroys life. It is pertinent to know that Hornby’s definition of death has been questioned by both Christians and adherents of African traditional religion alike, it is pertinent to know that death according to each religion is not an end nor annihilation, rather it is a transition from one realm to the other. It is believed to be a rite of passage into the world beyond.

Death to an African man is not the end, rather a transition to another realm or world. According to Anyanwu (1983), Death is a

transitional process which sends an individual into another world of existence which is regarded as a carbon copy of this world but invisible. Mbiti (1969) says that “death is a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person.” Furthermore, he opined that “many Africans believe that their beloved ones who are dead do not actually leave them but hover around and protect them. Death is a transition which involves transformation from the physical into the spiritual as the dead continue to live as ancestors (Opoku, 1978). Also, Ugwu (2001) buttressing the idea of death in African cosmology stated that; death is not the end of a man but a transition from a physical world and the deceased is only from one state of existence to another. Death appears to be the last phase of man’s life on earth. It is the only medium that channel man into the abode of the spirits, whether good or evil spirits.

Christians sees death as a tool of perfection that brings man closer to the likeness of God. It is not the end of life but only a means that ushers one into the realm of eternity.

Ancestor

Aside the Supreme Being, deities and divinities, Africans recognize the presence and efficacy of another spirit being known as the ancestors. The Supreme Being (God) and the divinities belong to the supra-sensible world, while the ancestors are part and parcel of the existence of the living (Kalu, 1978). Death does not alter or end the life or the personality of an individual, but only causes a change in its conditions. This is expressed in the concept of "ancestors," people who have died but who continue to "live" in the community and communicate with their families (Temple, 1969). In African religious thought, the departed who have left the visible world, are believed to continue their existence in the invisible and metaphysical worlds. This makes the Africans to interpret death as a rite of passage to the ancestral world (Mbiti, 1969)

Mbiti (1975) maintained that the term "Ancestors" refers to: All the dead departed who are physically dead but are still believed to be alive in the memory of those who remember them when

they were in the community. They are regarded as integral members of the family in Africa. They are seen as always present and have interests in the affairs of their families. This however, makes their family members to venerate them and to offer sacrifices to seek for their protection, blessing and intervention in times of wars and difficulties.

The belief in the existence of these beings is so strong that in the past some scholars had labeled African traditional religion as ancestral worship (Mbiti, 1969). There are divergent views about the ancestors in the various localities in Africa, however, their activities are so common and similar that people can draw a clear-cut difference between the Supreme Being and the ancestors. According to Mbiti (1975) Ancestors are called the “living-dead”. The term is used to refer to good spirits of those departed who are recently dead but are perceived as still related to the living in the community. Imasogie (1982), opined that they (ancestors) are guardians of the tradition and intermediaries between God and the community. Hence to some extent they tend to maintain the peaceful coexistence of human with the

cosmic forces. They ensure a good and successful life of their upright descendants who continue to acknowledge them as mediators between the Supreme Being, divinities and the living (Eliade, 1986). This belief in the active existence of the departed in the community is so common that the ancestors are conceived as custodians and symbols of customs, traditions and morals in African society. The ancestors watch over their descendants positively, ensuring their happiness and welfare and guaranteeing their general well-being. They are seen as immediate sources or avenues to a successful life, good health, children and prosperity (Idowu, 1973). The ancestors also bless and protect their family members. If the community or individuals break the moral law, ancestors punish them to remind the living of their duties (Adegbola, 1998). They visit the community in dreams and visions and give specific orders.

During sacrifices, pouring of libations, when homage is paid and prayers are said; it is only those within living memory that are mentioned. However, it is believed that though not remembered by

name, they can still share in the offerings made to the dead and even exert some influence over the living

In African religious thought, the ancestors are believed to be in the state of personal immortality and are externalized in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation so that the children bear the traits of their deceased parents or progenitors. This belief in “personal immortality” according to Mbiti (1975) is further expressed in acts like respecting the dead, giving portions of food to them, pouring out libations and carrying out instructions given by them. As a sign of profound respect for the ancestors, some Africans usually do not go to sleep with their pots empty. In fact, food is always left outside at night for any visiting ancestor. Water is not poured away at night without first announcing it so as to avoid injuring any ancestor that is around. When people drink wine or hot drinks, they pour a little on the ground for the ancestors. All this is to acknowledge and strengthen then the interpersonal relationship between the living and the dead. The Africans have a strong belief that the ancestors, though still related to the living, they are no longer material beings since they

have crossed to the supernatural level and have been freed from all the restrictions of the physical world (Yuhe, 1978). The basis for Africans belief in immortality of the ancestors lies in the general worldwide view that communication takes place between the living and the dead; and that the departed can still be of help to the living members.

Male ancestors are prominent in many African communities due the dominance of patrilineal system in family and social integration in the community. However, some parts still recognize both male and females as ancestors, on the bases of complete funeral burial rites. With the completion of prescribed funeral rites, a deceased person is believed to transform into an ancestor. The ancestors, or the living-dead, are believed to be disembodied spirits of people who lived upright lives here on earth, died 'good' and natural death, that is at ripe old age, and received the acknowledged funerary rites.

It is pertinent to know that Ancestors can be angered, and thereby can bring calamity to their descendants, especially when their

instructions are not carried out. Being a spiritual parent figure, they have the responsibility of disciplining their children when they misbehave. Sometimes it is believed that their punishments are milder than that of the deities and supreme. It is important to note that the reason behind their punishment most times is not wickedness, rather it is aimed at correcting the erring person in the community.

Functions of Ancestors

Ancestors are believed to be saddled with enormous responsibilities, serving as a bridge between the divinities and human, they tend to maintain a holistic and mutual cooperation between the two parties. An ancestor is, therefore, expected to be faithful to his earthly kin, who expect from him a favourable response or reward for their prayers and ritual donations to him when recourse to the ancestors fails to procure the desired effects, the living normally turn to the Supreme Being as a last resort (Njamiti, 2006). Mbiti (1969) summarized the roles of the ancestors thus:

1. Mediating between people and the Divinity.

2. Unifying families and people, caring for each other, empowering, blessing, rewarding and inspiring
3. Protecting families and clans from diseases, evil, enemies, even in war.
4. Enforcing discipline—in case of the breaking social values.
5. Facilitating holistic healing.

Man is an insatiable being who needs to communicate his needs and desire to a higher being, but due to the unclean nature of man he cannot have a direct access to the Supreme Being, hence he goes through the ancestors who are close to the Supreme Being. Furthermore, when there is a message from the Supreme Being, the ancestors serve as a channel through which this message is conveyed to man. Hence it can be said that the living-dead are bilingual; they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently', and they speak the language of the spirits and of men. They are still part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them. Ancestors also have a bonding effect in the family. They unify all the members of the family, both living and dead. With their super natural

powers, they bless and reward the good deeds of their descendants. Problems encountered by evil doers is believed to be punishments from the ancestors in order to instill discipline and social order. During war, epidemic and pandemics it is believed that the ancestors protect their families and clans. Healing from sickness and protection from malicious spirits is also another function of the ancestors. Finally, ancestors to some extent promote the continuity of family lineage through reincarnation.

Requirements to Ancestor hood

To be considered an ancestor, they must have lived an exemplary life, and have done much to enhance the prestige of the family, clan, or tribe.

Not all dead people are called ancestor. Ancestor-hood is a special office or position in African cosmology; hence it is accorded to only those who lived a life worthy of emulation. There are criteria that need to be attained before one is allowed into the circle of the ancestors. Perhaps the ultimate qualification to become an ancestor is

death. Death is the dividing line between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It is however not the only criteria. Not all dead people are considered as ancestors. These qualifications include:

- 1. Natural death at Old age:** It is generally accepted in Africa that before one can become an ancestor he must die at good old age. His death is expected to be natural and peaceful. Death through leprosy, dropsy, epilepsy, lightening, swollen abdomen, sleeping sickness, child birth, suicide, prolonged sickness or motor accident are not considered natural death, hence people that died any of these death are not considered as ancestor. Teenagers who died cannot become ancestors because it is believed they were nipped at the bud, hence didn't fulfill their destiny on earth. Such young people are not regard as the living-dead because they have not achieved the highest spiritual status or fulfilled the laid down qualifications for becoming an ancestors in African traditional religion.
- 2. Befitting Burial:** the deceased is expected to be given a proper and befitting burial, with strict observation of all the funeral rites.

Burial rites are very crucial in gaining access to the circle of ancestors. As Metuh (1981) rightly said, it ensures that the deceased gains entrance to the spirit land. Agha (2012), “The happiness of the dead according to African beliefs, depend largely on the type of burial accorded him during the first and second burial”. The celebration of a second burial by the children of the deceased is also very important. It is this that enables the deceased to enter into a place of rest where he enjoys the company of other ancestors. If the second burial is not done some believed that the deceased soul shall remain in a dirty place and shall not be properly cared for in his new world. The funeral rites are geared towards facilitating the settlement of the deceased into the ancestral world.

3. **Male offspring:** Ezekwugo (1992), opined that “the death of one who has no offspring is seen as the end of the continuity of life, the discontinuance of family tree and the quenching of the flame of life of the pedigree”. An ancestor is expected to have at least one male child in his lifetime, who will remember him

when he is gone. This is to ensure the continuity of the family lineage and strict observation of the burial rites.

4. **High Moral Standard:** To become an ancestor, one must have been a role model in the community, life worthy of emulation. He must have led a transparently good moral life as dictated by the ethical standard of the society. His name will not be associated with immorality and ill behaviors. He is expected to be sincere in his dealings with people, just and fair in his judgement. There is the belief that if a living person is not good his ghost also cannot be good, hence only those who were good in their lifetime are qualified to be recognized as ancestors because their spirit is believed to be good.

2.3. Saints

In religious belief, a saint is a person who is recognized as having an exceptional degree of holiness, likeness, or closeness to God. However, the use of the term *saint* depends on the context and denomination. The English word saint comes from the Latin *sanctus*,

with the Greek equivalent being *hagios* 'holy. The word *sanctus* was originally a technical one in ancient Roman religion, but due to its globalized use in Christianity the modern word *saint* is now also used as a translation of comparable terms for persons "worthy of veneration for their holiness or sanctity" in other religions (Jones 2005). Many religions also use similar concepts (but different terminology) to venerate persons worthy of some honor. According to anthropologist Babb (1987), a saint is image of a certain extraordinary spiritual king's "miraculous powers", to whom frequently a certain moral presence is attributed. These saintly figures, he asserts, are "the focal points of spiritual force-fields". They exert "powerful attractive influence on followers but touch the inner lives of others in transforming ways as well. Author John A. Coleman (1987) of the Graduate Theological Union, avers that saints across various cultures and religions have the following family resemblances:

1. exemplary model
2. extraordinary teacher
3. wonder worker or source of benevolent power

4. intercessor
5. a life often refusing material attachments or comforts
6. possession of a special and revelatory relation to the holy.

According to the Catholic Church, a saint may be anyone in Heaven, whether recognized on Earth or not, who forms the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) (Kevin Cotter 2017). These "may include our own mothers, grandmothers or other loved ones (2 Tim 1:5)" who may have not always lived perfect lives, but "amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to God. Woodward (1996), avers that according to Catholic doctrine, all of their faithful deceased in Heaven are considered to be saints, but some are considered worthy of greater honor or emulation.

2.4 Concept of Afterlife in Agenebode

In African religious thought, the departed who have left the visible world, are believed to continue their existence in the invisible and metaphysical worlds. This makes the Africans to interpret death as a rite of passage to the ancestral world (Mbiti, 1969). Death as a form

of passage is further explained in the strong belief of the living dead, who are active participants in the activities of the universe. Quarcoopome (1987) underscores the traditional belief about here after as this; "when the breath of life leaves a person, he is declared death. Death in African ontology is not the end of life, rather it is a channel that opens a new phase of life in another realm. Its ushers' people into a world that is beyond the human eye. Hence when a person closes his eye in this world of mortals, he will definitely open them in the world of spirits. The physical frame rot, in the ground but the spirit which is the essential person survives death and return to God". In Agenebode it is believed that man's life does not cease in this ephemeral world of mortal, hence the reason they accord their dead one's burial rites so as not to be rejected in the spirit world where existence continues. Traditionalists believe that the spirit of the deceased go to live in another place called the spirit world. Okeke (2012) captures it well, according to him, "after a successful career on earth, one happily gathers with his forefathers in the land of the living-dead and continues the interminable cycle of life. Failure to

carry out all the burial rites on the deceased means that he would be ostracized by his community in the world of the living dead. Thus, he would become a roaming malevolent spirit”. This is buttressed by Okafor (1996) as he says that “it is funeral rite that enables the spirit of the dead to reach the spirit land. Without funeral ceremonies the deceased wander the earth restlessly and cause havoc on those responsible.

It is pertinent to note that the idea of afterlife among the Agenebode people can be compartmentalized. At death one can either be a benevolent spirit or malevolent spirit. The category of spirit one becomes at death is determined by the kind of life style the person lived while on earth, and also the kind of burial rite that was given to the person. People that led a good life, died a good death and were given a befitting burial with strict observation of the burial rites are welcome to join the league of the ancestors and as such becomes a benevolent spirit, which guides and protects his family. On the other hand, when a person lived a corrupt life, died a miserable death and

without the proper burial rites, the deceased becomes a roaming and malevolent spirit which causes havoc in the family and society at large. After death, an individual lives in a spirit world, receiving a new body which is identical to the earthly body, but with the capacity to move about as an ancestor. Becoming an ancestor after death is thus a desirable goal of every individual and it is believed that this cannot be achieved if an individual did not live a meaningful life, or had his or her life cut short say through an accident or by an unnatural death. With the belief in the afterlife, a person is given a proper burial after death as failure to do this may result in the individual becoming a wandering ghost, unable to live properly after death, and constituting a danger to those who are still alive. Meticulous care is taken to fulfill the funeral rites and to avoid causing any offence to the departed for death rites are performed to send the departed peacefully to sever his links with the living and to ensure that normal life continues among the survivors and to also to ensure the smooth acceptance of the deceased into the world of spirits.

2.5. Heaven and Hell

Just like the idea of afterlife in African cosmology, there is a version of the concept of afterlife Christians. Like adherents of African traditional religion Christians believe that death is not the end of life. Rather it is only a cessation of human existence in the ephemeral world of mortals which ushers the deceased into eternity. Eternity according to Christians is of two ways, either in heaven or in hell.

However, according to the Christian theology, at death man either goes to heaven or hell, all dependent on his behaviour while he was living. In Christianity, the concept of heaven and hell is fundamental to its theology, Christians believe that heaven is the eternal dwelling place of God and the destination for the souls of the righteous. It is depicted as a place of perfect happiness, peace, and communion with God. According to Christian teachings, those who accept Jesus Christ as their savior and live according to God's will are granted entrance to heaven. It is a place free from suffering and sin. While hell is seen as the opposite of heaven, a place of eternal separation from God. It is

often described as a place of torment and suffering. Christians believe that those who reject God's grace and live in sin will face judgment and be condemned to hell. The severity of punishment in hell varies among Christian denominations, but it is generally considered a place of spiritual anguish.

These concepts are derived from various passages in the Bible, and interpretations may differ among Christian denominations. While some emphasize the metaphorical nature of hell, others view it as a literal place of punishment. The understanding of heaven and hell plays a significant role in Christian moral teachings and the hope of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Cross (2005), opined that in Christian theology, Hell is the place or state into which, by God's definitive judgment, unrepentant sinners pass in the general judgment, or, as some Christians believe, immediately after death (particular judgment). Its character is inferred from teaching in the biblical texts, some of which, interpreted literally, have given rise to the popular idea of Hell. Theologians today

generally see Hell as the logical consequence of rejecting union with God and with God's justice and mercy. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines hell as self-exclusion from Heaven, a freely chosen consequence of final impenitence, i.e., deliberately and willingly refusing to repent of mortal sin at death and accept divine mercy. According to Baltimore Catechism hell is a state to which the wicked are condemned, and in which they are deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, and are in dreadful torments." However, suffering is characterized as both mental and physical: "The damned will suffer in both mind and body, because both mind and body had a share in their sins" (Catholic news Agency).

Heaven is often described as a "highest place", the holiest place, a Paradise, in contrast to hell or the Underworld or the "low places" and universally or conditionally accessible by earthly beings according to various standards of divinity, goodness, piety, faith, or other virtues or right beliefs or simply divine will.

The two phenomena in the Christian theology still points to the idea of afterlife which compartmentalizes people based on their lifestyles while on earth. It is believed to be the reward everyone is bound to get, either to suffer eternally or to be in bliss eternally.

CHAPTER THREE

ANCESTORHOOD IN AGENEBODE

3.1 Historical Background of Agenebode

Agenebode is a historical water-side town located by the banks of the Niger River in Edo State, South South part of Nigeria. It is the headquarters of Etsako-East local Government Area, the host of the local council and the traditional capital of WeppaWanno Clan/Kingdom. Agenebode is bounded by Ivioghe, Egor, Emokweme villages and the River Niger. Agenebode city is the ancestral home city of all Weppa and Uwanno people, both at home and in the diaspora. There's a general market at the center of the city and people attend every five days to buy fresh groceries. People are friendly and content in Agenebode. Agenebode is divided into different quarters, which are called Ighaewo, Egbado, Otoukwe, Igegbo (upland). The major towns are Emokweme, Egor and Ivioghe villages, Iviebua Igbagba and Agiele. Agenebode was the regional headquarters of the Royal Niger Company, a mercantile company owned by the British Colonialists and currently the headquarters of Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.^[3] The city of Agenebode is known today to be a non-Nupe town inhabited by and belonging to the Uwanno people who speak the Etsako language.

Agenebode's history is intertwined with the rise and fall of various African empires, notably the Edo and Bini Kingdoms, both of which left indelible marks on the region. Before the colonial era, the indigenous Afenmai people were the predominant inhabitants of this area. Their social structure, governance systems, and religious practices formed the bedrock of Agenebode's pre-colonial society. The Niger River, often referred to as the "African Amazon," was a lifeline for Agenebode and its people. Its fertile banks facilitated agriculture and trade, connecting the region to distant corners of Africa. Agenebode, like much of Nigeria, is a melting pot of diverse ethnicities and cultures. The town's location at the confluence of the Niger and other smaller rivers facilitated interactions between different groups, fostering a vibrant exchange of customs, languages, and traditions. This cultural fusion is reflected in the town's festivals, music, dance, and cuisine.

The Afenmai people, with their unique language and cultural practices, remain a significant part of Agenebode's identity. However, over the centuries, other ethnic groups such as the Bini, Yoruba, and Igbo have also settled in the town, adding to its cultural mosaic. The late 19th

century marked a turning point in Agenebode's history, as British colonial powers began to assert their control over Nigeria. This period saw the imposition of new administrative structures, legal systems, and economic policies that significantly altered the local way of life. Agenebode, like many other African communities, became a focal point of the colonial enterprise. The British introduced cash crops such as cocoa, palm oil, and rubber, which led to the transformation of Agenebode's agricultural practices. The town also became a hub for river transportation, enabling the export of these valuable commodities.

3.2 The geographical Location of Agenebode

Agenebode is located in Edo State, Nigeria. It is situated in the Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State in the southern part of Nigeria. The geographical coordinates of Agenebode are approximately latitude 7.2500° North and longitude 6.1167° East.

3.3 Political Organization of Agenebode

The chieftdom was in two sections-the headquarters Eguale and the outlying villages Igule. As would be expected, the Onojie lived at

Egualé. He was the head of state and ruled through his chiefs Ekhaimon and elders, edion. The position of the Onojie is hereditary the succession passing to the eldest surviving son. If he is still a minor, a guardian usually his senior uncle is appointed a regent. The Onojie had the right of requesting performance of work by villages except those granted exemption as a privilege. He took the head of all persons slain in war and captives caught from whom he made presents to his friends (N.A. I. HLM Butcher, 1933. P. 13). The Onojie also gave titles and summoned the Ekhaimon to discuss peculiar or general policy. He had a certain number of actual titled men in Egualé whom he sends out to the Igule as his messengers. The Onojie had a great number of privileges. Adultery committed with his wife meant the death of both parties unless the Onojie wished to retain them as slaves (B. T. Okhiria, 200. P. 116-118). If any woman pronounced the word 'Igben' or if any person said it to her she at once became the property of the Onojie and only the Oshodi one of the prominent chiefs could undo the action. Likewise, any woman sitting on the throne of the Onojie became his wife. The Onojie could take any

woman he liked by hanging a coral necklace round her neck. He was entitled to a leg of any big game killed in his land. As the supreme executive authority in Agenebode village group, and the unifying influence of the whole group, is the Onojie himself, who was/is seen as the father of all, the chief judge, the giver of titles, the supreme commander of the armed forces, the supreme judge of the highest court, the granter of state pardon, the chief priest extraordinary and the representative of the founding fathers of the land. All these functions and attributes of the king put him as an integrative and social cohesive factor of the land. Another political instrument of intra-village relation was the regulation of the internal affairs of a village or quarter carried out by the Otu system or age-grade organization. These age grades were three each with special duties, and a man's passage from one to another was marked with ceremonial offerings and general rejoicing. When a child becomes old enough to take his share of the work of the village, he enters the Otu Egbonughele the sweepers of the streets. This is so called because the central part of a village where meetings are held is called the "Ughele". He has sundry duties to perform,

cleaning, running errands, clearing farm paths and much other menial work in the village.

3.4 Socio-economic system of Agenebode

Agenebode, like many other Nigerian towns, celebrates a variety of cultural festivals that are deeply rooted in its history and traditions. These festivals are vibrant and colorful events that bring the community together to celebrate their heritage, spirituality, and social bonds. Here are some of the cultural festivals commonly celebrated in Agenebode:

Ikelebe Festival: The Ikelebe Festival is one of the most prominent festivals in Agenebode. It is a celebration of the Afenmai people's rich cultural heritage and is held annually in November. During this festival, the town comes alive with traditional music, dance, and elaborate masquerades. The festival features the iconic Ikelebe masquerade, which is adorned with colorful costumes and masks. Ikelebe Festival serves as a platform to showcase Afenmai artistry and spirituality.

Ekasa Festival: Ekasa is another important festival in Agenebode, typically celebrated in August. It is a time when the community pays homage to their ancestors and deities. During Ekasa, rituals and ceremonies are performed to seek the blessings and protection of the spirits. Traditional dances and drumming are an integral part of the festival, creating a lively and spiritual atmosphere.

Ilede Festival: The Ilede Festival is celebrated by the Afenmai people to commemorate the founding of their towns and villages, including Agenebode. It typically takes place in January and involves rituals, storytelling, and cultural performances that recount the town's history and origins. Ilede Festival is an opportunity for the community to reflect on their ancestral connections and shared identity.

New Yam Festival: Like many other Nigerian communities, Agenebode also celebrates the New Yam Festival, known locally as "Igue." This festival typically occurs in August or September and marks the beginning of the harvest season. It is a time to offer thanks to the gods for a bountiful harvest and to celebrate with feasting, cultural

displays, and traditional dances. The first yams of the season are typically presented to the community's leaders and deities during this festival.

Egungun Festival: The Egungun Festival is a masquerade festival celebrated in various parts of Nigeria, including Agenebode. During this festival, masked performers called "Egungun" dance through the streets, wearing elaborate costumes and masks. The Egungun masquerades are believed to embody the spirits of the ancestors, and their performances are both entertaining and spiritually significant.

Iwu Festival: The Iwu Festival is another traditional celebration in Agenebode that focuses on the veneration of ancestral spirits. It involves ceremonies, rituals, and communal gatherings to honor and seek the guidance of the ancestors. This festival plays a crucial role in reinforcing the cultural and spiritual bonds within the community. These cultural festivals in Agenebode not only serve as a means of preserving the town's rich heritage but also provide opportunities for social cohesion, storytelling, and the passing down of traditions from

one generation to the next. They are an integral part of the town's identity and continue to play a significant role in the lives of its residents.

Agenebode's economic activities have evolved in tandem with its historical development. In the pre-colonial era, subsistence farming and fishing were the primary means of livelihood for its residents. However, the advent of cash crops and the expansion of river trade brought about economic diversification. Today, Agenebode is a thriving trading center. Its markets bustle with activity as traders and merchants from neighboring towns and regions converge to exchange goods. Agriculture remains a vital sector, with crops like yam, cassava, and maize being cultivated alongside the traditional cash crops.

3.5 Belief System among Agenebode

Traditional African religious beliefs form the foundation of the Agenebode people's spirituality. Central to these beliefs is the veneration of ancestors and spirits of the land. The Agenebode people believe that their ancestors continue to play a vital role in their lives

and communities. Ancestral spirits are often consulted for guidance, protection, and blessings. Agenebode people are known to be adherent of their indigenous religion. There were the belief and worship god of iron, trees, river and medicine. As there are no hills in the chiefdom, there were no gods of mountains or rocks. Iron worship was common over the chiefdom. The god of iron was Idigun and its priest was the Ogun Blacksmith. In cases of poor harvest from the farm, the goddess of the earth was appeased. Osun the god of medicine was worshipped on the advice of an oracle for the purpose of good health and wealth. A notable god worshipped in the chiefdom was the Onokun, the goddess of the sea. This was introduced from Benin and mainly worshipped by women so that they might be fertile and rich. All these gods were, however, a means to an end. They were regarded as intermediaries between the Supreme Being Osenobulua, and the people. The people believe that God is omnipotent and just, that without His sanction none of the request made to any of the lesser gods would be granted. During the worship of these gods, cleanliness, honesty, patience perseverance was expected and so exhibited among the

worshippers gave first consideration. The days set aside for the worship of these gods were regarded as sacred and nobody goes to the farm on such days. The whole house kept clean and white clothes were worn on such days. There were exchanges of visits among believers of the same god. Ancestral worship was prominent among the people and this contributed to stability and cohesion in the society. It prevented married women from committing adultery and men from engaging in promiscuous sexual life. Any man or woman found guilty of adultery would have to appease the dead ancestors with the sacrifice of a goat among other demands by the chief priest.

However, the emergence of Christianity and Islam through colonization and business, Christianity seems to be the prevalent religion in the contemporary Agenebode. The presence of churches in almost every street in Irukepe shows the rate at which Christianity have taken over Agenebode. It is important to note also that there are people who practice more than one religion. This is seen as people still hold firmly their traditional heritage which has religious connotation while going to church. Hence, religious life among the

Agenebode people can be said to be mixed, each of the religions respecting and tolerating the other.

3.6 Occupation of Agenebode People

The people of Agenebode engage in a variety of occupations that reflect the town's economic and cultural diversity. These occupations are influenced by the region's geography, historical development, and contemporary opportunities.

Agriculture is a fundamental occupation in Agenebode. The fertile lands along the Niger River and its tributaries support the cultivation of a wide range of crops. Farmers grow staples such as yam, cassava, maize, and rice, along with cash crops like oil palm, cocoa, rubber, and plantains. Agriculture remains a vital source of livelihood for many residents, with both subsistence and commercial farming practices prevalent.

Given its proximity to the Niger River, fishing is a significant occupation in Agenebode. Fishermen cast their nets and lines into the river to catch a variety of fish species, including tilapia, catfish, and others. Fishing provides not only a source of food for the community but also income through the sale of fish at local markets. The Niger River and its tributaries have historically been important transportation routes. Many Agenebode residents are involved in the transportation sector, operating boats and canoes to ferry people and goods along the river. River transport remains crucial for connecting the town to neighboring communities and markets. Agenebode serves as a regional trading hub, attracting merchants and traders from nearby towns and villages. The town's markets bustle with activity, offering a wide range of goods, including foodstuffs, clothing, household items, and more. Local entrepreneurs engage in various trade activities, contributing to the town's economic vibrancy. Skilled craftsmen and artisans in Agenebode produce a variety of traditional crafts and products. These include pottery, beadwork, woodcarvings, and basketry. Craftsmanship

is not only a means of income but also a way of preserving cultural heritage and traditions.

3.7 Burial in Agenebode Tradition

In as much as death do not segregate, it is a natural phenomenon that unites all humanity irrespective of social status, age, occupation or race, yet the burial rites accorded to each individual is distinct from the other. In Agenebode the burial rites of the deceased is dependent on the manner of death the person died and the social status of the person. The burial rites given to a person that died at ripe old age is totally different from the one given to a teenager whose life was nipped at the bud. Generally burial is seen as the final respect one owes the dead, hence it comes with a lot of rites and rituals in order to ensure that the deceased reaches the land of the spirit without hindrances. Death in Africa is one of the last transition stages of life requiring passage rite. The deceased must be completely detached from the living and make a smooth transition to the next life. Rituals are needed for the progress into the other phase of life which is called

here-after, these rituals needed for the progress in to the next life is what is popularly known as burial rites. Anizoba (1990) asserts that, “The rites and rituals performed at this phase of human ontological circle are purposeful” (p. 110). For instance, the ritual ceremonies concerning the preparation of corpse for burial were mainly intended to make the passage of the departed into this phase i.e. death and hereafter of the deceased hitch free. The African belief in life after death is so strong to the point that they can pass message to the past relatives. Agenebode people believes in the compartmentalization of human beings, being made up of the body and soul. At death the body rotten while the soul returns to the Supreme Being. The journey of the soul to the spirit world is made hitch-free by observing strictly to the burial rites of that particular people. The funeral rites are geared towards facilitating the settlement of the deceased into the ancestral world. These rituals which are passage rites re-direct the personality soul back to the ancestors and not to God, for the “life-soul” has already departed to God, its maker (Imasogie, 1982). Mbiti (1975) affirms that, ‘Death marks a physical separation of the individual from

the human beings (p.133). This is a radical, change and the funeral rites and rituals are intended to draw attention to the permanent separation. Meticulous care is taken to fulfill the funeral rites and to avoid causing any offence to the departed for death rites are performed to send the departed peacefully to sever his links with the living and to ensure that normal life continues among the survivors

The burial rites of a person that died a good death is also different from the person who committed suicide or died as a result of one strange sickness like swollen abdomen. Hence in as much as death do not segregate, it is a natural phenomenon that unites all humanity irrespective of social status, age, occupation or race, yet the burial rites accorded to each individual is distinct from the other. In Agenebode the burial rites of the deceased are dependent on the manner of death the person died and the social status of the person. The burial rites given to a person that died at ripe old age is totally different from the one given to a teenager whose life was nipped at the bud. just like every other African society, the burial rite of a person is largely dependent on the nature of death of the person. While some are given

befitting burial to ensure the acceptance into the league of ancestors, others are aimed at cleansing the land and atoning for the evil committed by the deceased.

The aims of death rituals are; first to absolve the deceased of his transgression and to rid of all obstacles which could impede his entrance into the spirit land. And then pray for the deceased to-reincarnate and bring greater blessing to the family. During the ritual ceremony, the gods are asked to receive the dead and keep him in peace and also the deceased not to obstruct the family on earth rather to send them more blessing. One of the importance of burial rites according to Metuh (1981), “is to ensure that the deceased gains entrance to the spirit land” (p. 114). Death rites and rituals are very significant not just in Agenebode but to African traditional faithful at large. This shows that death rites and rituals are necessary for the dead to enter into the spirit land. According to Agha (2012), “The happiness of the dead according to African beliefs, depend largely on the type of burial accorded him during the first and second burial” (p. 120).

In Agenebode the negligence of these burial rites can be very disastrous. The spirit of the deceased is believed to constantly visit the family members to torment them. There is no doubt that the coming of bad spirit is not a healthy visit to the living. Such bad visit could result to accident, barrenness, late marriages and hard lucks. This is often regarded as generational curses because it continues recurring in the family.

3.9 Ancestor Veneration and Practices in Agenebode

According to Asare Opoku (1978, 35), “West African societies believe that, after death, the departed ones enter into a spiritual state of existence. Africans believe that “those who are dead are not gone...the dead are not dead.” Opoku (1978, 35) argues that “The dead are believed to be everywhere, at any time; they continue to live but in another kind of existence. To him, “the ancestors are always revered and held in high esteem.” Ancestor veneration in Africa is a profound and intricate practice that forms the bedrock of many African cultures and societies.

It is pertinent to note that ancestors are not worshiped, because they are not gods, rather they are venerated. Sarpong (2001, p.130) argues that Africans do not worship the Ancestors. He said, “the ancestors are not worshipped. They are no deified. The ancestors remain human beings, relatives of the living and they are referred to as such...no African will consider an ancestor as a god, although there are cases of exceptional nature where an ancestor has come to be regarded as a god”. Ancestor veneration rooted in ancient traditions and deeply embedded in the continent's social fabric, it is a rich tapestry of beliefs, rituals, and customs that honor and connect with the spirits of deceased ancestors. Ekenga-Metuh (1987, p.147) said, “Ancestors are intermediaries between God and man and elder members of the family and are venerated as such, not worshipped.” The ancestors are those who once lived among us in human societies but now live in the spirit realm.

Ancestor veneration is a common practice in many African cultures, and is often closely tied to concepts of community and lineage. Ancestors are seen as important members of the community, and their

influence can extend beyond the family to the wider community as well. The ancestors are often viewed as a source of continuity between generations, linking the past and the present and ensuring the survival of cultural traditions and values over time. It is a common practice in many cultures around the world, including the people of Agenebode. The Agenebode people have a rich tradition of ancestor veneration. They believe that the spirits of their ancestors continue to exist after death and play an active role in the lives of their descendants. Ancestors are believed to be able to provide guidance, protection, and blessings. They are also believed to be able to punish those who displease them. They therefore venerate their ancestors in order to maintain a good relationship with them and to ensure their continued support. There are many different practices associated with ancestor veneration in Agenebode tradition.

Ancestor veneration is an important part of the Agenebode people's cultural and religious identity. It is a way for them to connect with their past and to honor their ancestors and to ensure the continued support of their ancestors. Ancestor veneration is seen as a

way of maintaining harmony with the spirit world. Ancestor veneration is also seen as a way to ensure the well-being of the living. By appeasing the ancestors and seeking their blessings, the Agenebode people believe that they can ensure good health, prosperity, and protection from harm. Ancestor veneration is a complex, multi-faceted and important part of Agenebode tradition.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAINTHOOD IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

4.1. The Concept of Sainthood in Catholicism

In Roman Catholicism traditions, a saint is a holy person who is known for his or her “heroic sanctity” and who is thought to be in heaven. Most people use the word “saint” to refer to someone who is exceptionally good or “holy.” In the Catholic Church, however, a “saint” has a more specific meaning: someone who has led a life of “heroic virtue.” This definition includes the four “cardinal” virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice; as well as the “theological” virtues: faith, hope and charity. A saint displays these qualities in a consistent and exceptional way. When someone is proclaimed a saint by the pope which can happen only after death – public devotion to

the saint, called a “cultus,” is authorized for Catholics throughout the world.

Simply speaking, a saint could be said to be anyone who is currently residing in heaven. The Catholic Church, through the process of canonization, officially recognizes this fact. In the book "Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma", we read that a saint is "...a member of the Church [who] has been assumed into eternal bliss and may be the object of general veneration." A saint is also a person of remarkable holiness who lived a life of heroic virtue, assisted by the Church, during their pilgrimage on earth. They are as varied and exceptional as only God could create them, and each has his own distinct story.

The use of the term saint depends on the context and denomination, in Catholic doctrine, all of their faithful deceased in Heaven are considered to be saints, but some are considered worthy of greater honor or emulation. Woodward (1996), avers that the official ecclesiastical recognition, and consequently a public cult of veneration, is conferred on some denominational saints through the process of

canonization in the Catholic Church or glorification in the Eastern Orthodox Church after their approval.

The title Saint denotes a person who has been formally canonized, that is, officially and authoritatively declared a saint, by the church as holder of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and is therefore believed to be in Heaven by the grace of God. There are many persons that the church believes to be in Heaven who have not been formally canonized and who are otherwise titled saints because of the fame of their holiness, Sometimes the word saint also denotes living Christians (Catechism of the Catholic Church). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "The patriarchs, prophets, and certain other Old Testament figures have been and always will be honored as saints in all the church's liturgical traditions."

The Catholic Church teaches that it does not "make" or "create" saints, but rather recognizes them. Proofs of heroic virtue required in the process of beatification will serve to illustrate in detail the general

principles exposed above upon proof of their holiness or likeness to God.

A saint may be designated as a patron saint of a particular cause, profession, or locale, or invoked as a protector against specific illnesses or disasters, sometimes by popular custom and sometimes by official declarations of the church. Saints are not believed to have power of their own, but only that granted by God. Relics of saints are respected, or venerated, similar to the veneration of holy images and icons. The practice in past centuries of venerating relics of saints with the intention of obtaining healing from God through their intercession is taken from the early church (Catholic Encyclopedia 1913). Once a person has been canonized, the deceased body of the saint is considered holy as a relic. The remains of saints are called holy relics and are usually used in churches. Saints' personal belongings may also be used as relics. Some of the saints have a special symbol by tradition, e.g., Saint Lawrence, deacon and martyr, is identified by a gridiron because he is believed to have been burned to death on one.

This symbol is found, for instance, in the Canadian heraldry of the office responsible for the St. Lawrence Seaway.

4.2 Canonization Process and Criteria for Sainthood

The process for being named a saint in the Catholic Church is called “canonization,” the word “canon” meaning an authoritative list. Persons who are named “saints” are listed in the “canon” as saints and given a special day, called a “feast,” in the Catholic calendar. Canonization is the formal process by which the Church declares a person to be a saint and worthy of universal. Official Church procedures there are three steps to sainthood: a candidate becomes "Venerable," then "Blessed" and then "Saint." Venerable is the title given to a deceased person recognized formally by the pope as having lived a heroically virtuous life or offered their life (McBrien, 1995). To be beatified and recognized as a Blessed, one miracle acquired through the candidate's intercession is required in addition to recognition of heroic virtue or offering of life. Canonization requires a second miracle after beatification. The pope may waive these

requirements. A miracle is not required prior to a martyr's beatification, but one is required before canonization.

The process for canonization typically begins at the local level, where the candidate's life and writings are investigated to determine their suitability for sainthood. This investigation is carried out by a diocesan bishop or a postulator appointed by the bishop. If the bishop finds evidence of heroic virtue or martyrdom, the candidate may be declared a "Servant of God."

Stages of Canonization

1. Examining the Life of a Candidate for Sainthood (Diocesan or Eparchial Level):

Five years must pass from the time of a candidate's death before a cause may begin. This is to allow greater balance and objectivity in evaluating the case and to let the emotions of the moment dissipate. The pope can dispense from this waiting period. The bishop of the diocese or eparchy in which the person died is responsible for beginning the investigation. The petitioner (who for example can be

the diocese/eparchy, bishop, religious order or association of the faithful) asks the bishop through a person known as the postulator to open the investigation.

The bishop then begins a series of consultations with the episcopal conference, the faithful of his diocese or eparchy and the Holy See.

Once these consultations are done and he has received the 'nihil obstat' of the Holy See, he forms a diocesan or eparchial tribunal. The tribunal will investigate the martyrdom or how the candidate lived a life of heroic virtues, that is, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, and others specific to his or her state in life. Witnesses will be called and documents written by and about the candidate must be gathered and examined.

Once the diocesan or eparchial investigation is finished, the documentation is sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The postulator for this phase, residing in Rome, under the direction of a member of the Congregation's staff called a relator prepares the

'Positio,' or summary of the documentary evidence from the diocesan or eparchial phase in order to prove the heroic exercise of virtue or the martyrdom.

The 'Positio' undergoes an examination by nine theologians who vote on whether or not the candidate lived a heroic life or suffered martyrdom. If the majority of the theologians are in favor, the cause is passed on for examination by cardinals and bishops who are members of the Congregation. If their judgment is favorable, the prefect of the Congregation presents the results of the entire course of the cause to the pope, who gives his approval and authorizes the Congregation to draft a decree declaring one Venerable if they have lived a virtuous life or a Blessed if they have been martyred.

2. Beatification

For the beatification of a Venerable, a miracle attributed to his intercession, verified after his death, is necessary. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation, following a procedure analogous to that for heroic virtues. This

investigation too is concluded with the appropriate decree. Once the decree on the miracle is promulgated the pope grants the beatification, which is the concession of limited public veneration – usually only in the diocese, eparchy, region, or religious community in which the Blessed lived. With beatification the candidate receives the titled of Blessed. For a martyr, no miracle is required. Thus, when the pope approves the positio declaring that the person was a martyred for the faith, the title Blessed is granted to the martyr at that time.

3. Canonization

For canonization another miracle is needed for both Blessed martyrs and Blesseds who lived a virtuous life, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed and having occurred after his or her beatification. The methods for affirming the miracle are the same as those followed for beatification. Canonization allows for the public veneration of the Saint by the Universal Church. With canonization, the Blessed acquires the title of Saint.

4.3 Miracles and veneration of saints

For sainthood miracle to be accepted it must be "organic, immediate and irreversible." Nearly all the miracles that are acknowledged take place after the candidate is dead. Catholics believed that a saint will remain active after death in responding to prayers of the faithful (with the actual miracles performed by God). Miracles are usually "healing" miracles that science can't explain. Because eyewitness accounts run the risk of being clouded by human error, theologians demand a miracle in the form of a sign of God, which usually means a miraculous healing of some sort that cannot be explained by science. The evidence is judged by both medical experts and a panel of theologians. Doctors are often brought in. They don't have to vouch for a miracle "they only have to declare that there is no natural explanation for a sudden cure." Whether something is indeed a miracle is judged by the Vatican beautification tribunal of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints, which consists of eight Roman doctors and 25 cardinals and bishops and their staff. Their job mainly is to determine scientifically if medical miracles are indeed miracles. There is also often a lot of public relations involved. After a saint

candidate dies, the sick and disabled are encouraged to pray to him or her and the word is spread through guilds, and newsletters. Often candidates have their own prayer bulletins with reports of miracles attributed them. Confirmed miracles are rare. The Congregation for the Causes has hundreds of candidates for sainthood, some of them centuries old, that have not moved forward because no evidence of a miracle has been produced. The pope has the power to waive the miracle rule. It is pertinent to know that all the rules regarding beatification and canonization are Church rules, part of Canon Law. The Pope is above the law, and could in theory make Mother Teresa a saint tomorrow."

Mother Katherine Drexel, the founder of a Sisters of the Blessed Sacraments died in 1955 and was beautified in 1988. One of her miracles involved Robert Gutherman, a boy who was diagnosed with a bone-eating disease that rendered him deaf in one ear. He suffered from great pain and prayed to Mother Katherine and was not only cured but his hearing returned. "When I went back for a checkup," Gutherman later said, the doctor "was looking in my ears and he said,

'I can't believe what I'm seeing. His body is healing itself? In his record the doctor wrote "Is this possible?" In 1988, after years of investigation, Gutherman's case was judged miraculous. Mother Katherine Drexel was canonized in March 2000. (Brandan Koerner, U.S. News and World Report, January 11, 1999).

Among the miracles that were rejected were from a priest who regained sight on one eye because his recovery was only 90 percent. The reasoning goes that God would not perform a miracle halfway. Cancer cases are usually regarded with skepticism until after 10 years and no remission has occurred.

According to Lindsay (2005), veneration of saints is the act of honoring a saint, a person who has been identified as having a high degree of sanctity or holiness. In the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, veneration is shown outwardly by respectfully bowing or making the sign of the cross before a saint's icon, relics, or statue, or by going on pilgrimage to sites associated with saints.

Lindsay (2005) stated that Veneration towards those who were considered holy began in early Christianity, with the martyrs first being given special honor. Official commemoration of saints in churches began as early as the first century. The apostle Paul mentioned saints by name in his writings. Icons depicting saints were created in the catacombs. The Orthodox Church of Byzantine began official church commemoration very early and even in Rome, commemoration is documented in the third century. Over time, the honor also began to be given to those Christians who lived lives of holiness and sanctity. Various denominations venerate and determine saints in different ways, with some having a formal canonization or glorification process. It is also the first step to becoming a saint.

In Catholicism, veneration is a type of honor distinct from the true worship (veritable adoration), which is due to God alone. St, Thomas Aquinas cited in Mark Miravalle (2006), differentiated between worship and veneration stated thus:

As St. Thomas Aquinas once explained, adoration, which is known as latria in classical theology, is the worship and

homage that is rightly offered to God alone. It is the manifestation of submission, and acknowledgement of dependence, appropriately shown towards the excellence of an uncreated divine person and to his absolute Lordship. It is the worship of the Creator that God alone deserves. Although we see in English a broader usage of the word "adoration" which may not refer to a form of worship exclusive to God; for example, when a husband says that he "adores his wife", in general it can be maintained that adoration is the best English denotation for the worship of latria.

Veneration, known as *dulia* in classical theology, is the honor and reverence appropriately due to the excellence of a created person. Excellence exhibited by created beings likewise deserves recognition and honor. We see a general example of veneration in events like the awarding of academic awards for excellence in school, or the awarding of Olympic medals for excellence in sports. There is nothing contrary to the proper adoration of God when we offer the appropriate honor and recognition that created persons deserve based on achievement in excellence.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also affirm that the Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, "the honor rendered to an image passes to its prototype," and "whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it." The honor paid to sacred images is a "respectful veneration," not the adoration due to God alone. Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but

under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as image, but tends toward that whose image it is.

In the Catholic Church, there are many different forms of veneration of saints, such as a pilgrimage to a grave (e.g. those of Saint Peter (Vatican), Saint Anthony of Padua (Italy), Santiago de Compostela (Spain), or Holy Sepulcher (Israel)). It is also usual to make a pilgrimage to places associated with the life of a saint, such as the Cave of Santo Hermano Pedro (Spain), the Cave of the Apocalypse (Greece) or the Aya Tekla Church (Turkey). Veneration of images and relics; Lord of Miracles (Peru), the Virgin of Guadalupe and Saint Jude Thaddeus (Mexico), Holy Dexter (Hungary), Reliquary of the Three Kings (Germany), etc.

4.4 The Role of Saints in Catholic Worship and Devotion

In Catholicism, saints play a significant role in worship and devotion. Saints are individuals who are believed to have lived holy lives and are now in the presence of God in heaven. They serve as

role models for Catholics and intermediaries between God and humanity. Here are some key roles of saints in Catholic worship and devotion:

1. **Intercessors:** Saints are often invoked as intercessors in prayer. Catholics believe that saints can pray to God on behalf of the living, interceding for them in times of need. People may ask for a saint's help and guidance in various aspects of life, such as health, relationships, and protection.
2. **Role Models:** Saints are seen as examples of virtuous and devout Christian living. Catholics look to their lives as models to emulate, seeking to follow their path of holiness and faithfulness. The stories of saints' struggles and triumphs can inspire and guide believers in their own spiritual journeys.
3. **Feast Days:** Each saint is assigned a feast day in the Catholic liturgical calendar, which is celebrated to honor their life and contributions to the faith. These feast days often involve special Masses, prayers, and devotions dedicated to the particular saint.

4. Patron Saints: Many saints are associated with specific roles, occupations, or causes. For example, Saint Christopher is the patron saint of travelers, and Saint Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals and the environment. Catholics often turn to their patron saints for assistance and protection in these specific areas of life.
5. Devotional Practices: There are various devotional practices and traditions centered around saints. These include the veneration of relics (physical remains or objects associated with a saint), pilgrimages to shrines and holy sites, and the recitation of prayers and novenas (nine-day prayers) dedicated to specific saints.
6. Art and Iconography: Saints are often depicted in religious art and iconography, serving as a visual reminder of their importance in the Catholic tradition. Statues, paintings, and icons of saints can be found in churches, homes, and other places of worship.

7. Communion of Saints: Catholics believe in the "communion of saints," which includes the Church Militant (those on Earth), the Church Suffering (those in purgatory), and the Church Triumphant (those in heaven). Saints are considered part of the Church Triumphant, and Catholics seek their prayers and assistance in their earthly journey.

It's important to note that while saints hold a special place in Catholic devotion, they are not worshiped in the same way that God is worshiped. Instead, they are venerated and honored as holy individuals who can help guide and intercede for believers on their spiritual journeys.

4.5 Intercession and Patronage of Saints

Intercession and patronage of saints are important aspects of Catholic devotion and belief. They involve the role of saints as intermediaries between individuals and God, as well as their specific associations with certain causes, professions, or places. The intercession and patronage of saints are essential elements of Catholic spirituality

and tradition. Saints are seen as powerful intercessors who can pray to God on behalf of the faithful, and their patronage offers guidance and protection in specific areas of life. This rich tradition of invoking the intercession of saints and seeking their patronage is an integral part of Catholic devotion and culture.

Intercession of Saints:

1. **Prayer Intercession:** Catholics believe that saints, being in the presence of God in heaven, can intercede on behalf of those on Earth. This means that saints can pray to God for the needs, requests, and petitions of individuals. Catholics often seek the intercession of saints when they have specific concerns or challenges in their lives.
2. **Miracles and Assistance:** Saints are often associated with performing miracles or providing assistance in times of need. Many Catholics believe that by asking for a saint's intercession, they may receive divine help, healing, or guidance. Miracles

attributed to the intercession of saints are sometimes a significant factor in the canonization process.

3. Devotional Prayers: There are specific prayers dedicated to seeking the intercession of particular saints. For example, the "St. Jude Novena" is a well-known prayer for desperate or seemingly hopeless cases, invoking the intercession of St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes.
4. Feast Days and Memorials: On the feast days of saints, Catholics may attend Mass, engage in special prayers, and seek their intercession more fervently. These feast days often serve as reminders of the saint's life and the help they can provide.
5. The Communion of Saints: The Catholic Church teaches the concept of the "communion of saints," which consists of three parts: the Church Militant (believers on Earth), the Church Suffering (souls in purgatory), and the Church Triumphant (saints in heaven). This belief underscores the idea that all members of the Church, regardless of their earthly or heavenly status, can

pray for and support one another. Catholics often ask saints to intercede for them with God as part of this communion.

Patronage of Saints:

1. **Specific Associations:** Many saints are associated with particular causes, professions, or situations. For example, Saint Christopher is the patron saint of travelers, Saint Luke is the patron saint of artists and physicians, and Saint Anthony is the patron saint of lost things. Catholics turn to these patron saints for assistance and protection in their respective domains.
2. **Icons and Symbols:** Patron saints are often depicted in art with symbols or attributes related to their patronage. For instance, Saint Francis of Assisi is often shown with animals, emphasizing his patronage of animals and the environment.
3. **Practical Guidance:** Believers may look to their patron saints for practical and spiritual guidance in their daily lives. They may seek inspiration from the saint's life and emulate their virtues and values. Many saints are associated with specific causes,

professions, or aspects of life. These associations are known as patronages. For example, Saint Valentine is the patron saint of lovers and beekeepers, Saint Christopher is the patron saint of travelers, and Saint Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals and the environment. Believers often turn to their patron saints for guidance and protection related to their particular needs or circumstances.

4. Local and National Patronage: In addition to individual patron saints, many cities, regions, and countries have their own patron saints. These patron saints are often associated with the history and culture of the place and may be celebrated on special occasions or national holidays.
5. Protection and Advocacy: Catholics believe that patron saints advocate for their causes and provide protection in times of need.
6. Feast Days: Each saint is assigned a feast day in the Catholic liturgical calendar, which is celebrated annually to honor their life and contributions. These feast days often involve special Masses and devotions dedicated to the saint. For example, the

Feast of Saint Patrick is celebrated on March 17th in honor of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland.

4.6 Pilgrimage and Relics of Saints

Pilgrimage is a profoundly spiritual journey, an ancient practice that transcends religious boundaries and speaks to the universal human desire for connection with the divine. At its core, pilgrimage is about embarking on a special voyage to a sacred or holy place. These destinations can vary widely, from grand religious centers like Jerusalem, Mecca, or Santiago de Compostela to local shrines or churches closely associated with saints or miraculous events. The idea behind pilgrimage is to embark on a physical and spiritual journey that goes beyond the everyday routine of life. Pilgrims set out with a purpose, often driven by a deep desire to seek something greater than themselves. The reasons for undertaking a pilgrimage are as diverse as the people who embark on them.

For some, it's a form of penance, a way to seek forgiveness or purification. Others undertake pilgrimages to express gratitude or to fulfill a vow. Many see it as an opportunity for spiritual growth and

self-discovery. The physical challenges encountered along the journey, whether it involves long walks, hikes, or other forms of arduous travel, are seen as opportunities for personal transformation.

Throughout history, pilgrimage has been a significant aspect of Catholic theology. In Catholicism for example, pilgrimages to places like the Holy Land, Rome, or the tombs of saints have been practiced for centuries. Each pilgrimage site holds unique religious and historical significance, drawing believers from around the world.

Devotional practices are an integral part of the pilgrimage experience. Pilgrims engage in prayer, reflection, and rituals along the way, deepening their connection with their faith. Confession, participation in religious ceremonies, and the veneration of relics are common practices. These rituals help pilgrims connect with the spirituality of the place they're visiting and the profound significance of their journey.

Relics of Saints are a tangible link to the lives of holy individuals within Christianity and other religious traditions. In simple terms, they are physical remains or objects associated with saints.

These relics hold a unique place in the hearts of the faithful, representing a direct connection to the divine through the lives of these exemplary individuals.

Relics are categorized into three classes, each with its own significance:

1. First-class relics: These are parts of the saint's physical body, such as bones, hair, or nails.
2. Second-class relics: These are items that the saint used or touched during their lifetime, such as clothing, personal possessions, or pieces of their writings.
3. Third-class relics: These are objects that have come into contact with a first-class relic or have been touched to a first-class relic. This contact is believed to imbue them with the spiritual presence and intercessory power of the saint.

The veneration of relics is a deeply rooted tradition within Christianity, particularly in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. It's a practice that underscores the belief in the ongoing connection between the living and the saints in heaven. The faithful regard relics

with great reverence, and these objects are often enshrined in ornate containers known as reliquaries.

Relics play various roles in the lives of believers:

1. **Spiritual Connection:** Relics are seen as a direct link to the saint's holiness and the divine. Touching or being near a relic is believed to bring the believer closer to God through the saint's intercession.
2. **Miracles and Healing:** Many believe that relics have the power to perform miracles and bring about healing, both physical and spiritual. Pilgrims often visit relics with specific intentions, asking the saint for assistance or blessings in times of need.
3. **Liturgical Use:** In the liturgical life of the Church, relics are sometimes incorporated into ceremonies, particularly in the consecration of altars. This practice symbolizes the unity of the Church across time and space.

pilgrimage and relics of saints are profound expressions of faith and devotion. Pilgrimage represents a physical and spiritual journey

undertaken for various reasons, from seeking forgiveness to spiritual growth. Relics, on the other hand, serve as tangible reminders of the lives of saints, offering believers a connection to the divine through these holy individuals. Both practices are deeply ingrained in religious traditions and continue to be sources of inspiration and spiritual enrichment for people around the world.

4.7 Similarities and Differences between Ancestors and Saints

While saints and ancestors are recognized and revered in different cultural and religious contexts, there are some similarities in the roles they play and the way they are venerated. Here are some key similarities:

1. **Intercessors:** Both saints and ancestors are often seen as intermediaries between the living and the divine. People believe that they can intercede on behalf of the living, whether it's with God (in the case of saints) or with the spirit world (in the case of ancestors). People may pray to them or offer rituals and sacrifices, seeking their assistance or blessings.

2. Veneration and Respect: Saints and ancestors are venerated and held in high esteem by their respective communities. They are seen as virtuous and influential figures whose lives and actions are worthy of respect and emulation.
3. Feast Days and Rituals: Both saints and ancestors have dedicated days or rituals associated with their veneration. For saints, these are often feast days in the liturgical calendar, while for ancestors, there may be specific rituals or festivals commemorating them.
4. Connection to the Past: Both saints and ancestors are linked to the past and are considered important parts of the cultural or religious heritage of a community. They serve as a connection to history, tradition, and the values of the past.
5. Offerings and Prayers: Offerings, prayers, and rituals are common ways of showing reverence to both saints and ancestors. These offerings can include candles, incense, food, and other symbolic items.
6. Guidance and Protection: People often turn to both saints and ancestors for guidance, protection, and support in various aspects

of life, including health, family, and daily challenges. They are believed to watch over and care for the living.

7. **Cultural Significance:** Saints and ancestors hold cultural significance in their respective traditions. They often play a role in shaping cultural practices, traditions, and values within their communities.

It's important to note that while there are these similarities, there are also significant differences between the two. Saints are recognized figures in Christianity and are officially canonized by the Church, whereas ancestors are typically individuals from one's own family lineage or community who have passed away. Additionally, the theological and religious beliefs surrounding saints and ancestors can vary widely across different cultures and religions. The differences include:

1. Religious Tradition:

Saints are primarily a concept within Christianity, particularly in the Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions. In these branches of

Christianity, individuals who have demonstrated exceptional holiness and have been officially recognized by the church can become saints. Saints are considered holy and righteous individuals who have a special connection with God and are often venerated by Christians.

Ancestors are a concept found in various religious and cultural traditions worldwide, including African, Asian, and indigenous belief systems. Ancestors are typically deceased family members or community members who are believed to have a continued presence in the spiritual realm and hold a special role in the lives of their descendants.

2. Role and Function:

Saints serve as intermediaries between the living and God in Christian traditions. People may pray to saints to intercede on their behalf, seek their guidance, or request their blessings. Saints are often associated with specific areas of expertise or patronage, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment.

Ancestors are believed to be protective and benevolent spirits who watch over their living descendants. They are often invoked for guidance, blessings, and protection in various aspects of life, including family matters, health, and community harmony.

3. Canonization Process:

In Christianity, the process of becoming a saint involves canonization by the church. This process includes rigorous investigation, miracles attributed to the individual, and official recognition by the church hierarchy. Canonized saints are often commemorated on specific feast days.

Ancestors do not go through a formal canonization process. Their status as revered figures are typically based on familial or cultural traditions, passed down through generations. Ancestors may be honored through rituals, offerings, and storytelling within their respective communities.

4. Formal Recognition:

Saints are formally recognized by the church, and their lives and virtues are documented in religious texts and official records. The

names of saints are widely known and celebrated within Christian communities.

Ancestors may or may not be known beyond their immediate or extended families and communities. Their recognition and veneration are often rooted in oral traditions, folklore, and local customs.

5. Geographic and Cultural Variations:

The veneration of saints is primarily associated with Christianity, and it is practiced worldwide, with variations in how saints are honored and celebrated in different cultures and regions.

Ancestor veneration is practiced in various cultural and religious contexts, including African, Asian, indigenous, and other traditions. The specific beliefs, rituals, and customs associated with ancestor veneration can vary significantly from one culture to another.

6. Singular vs. Collective Veneration:

Saints are typically venerated individually, with each saint having a distinct identity and area of patronage. People may choose to venerate specific saints based on their personal needs or circumstances.

Ancestor veneration often involves the collective veneration of multiple ancestors as a group. Ancestors are honored collectively within the family or community, and offerings and rituals are often conducted to appease and honor the entire ancestral lineage.

In summary, saints and ancestors are distinct concepts within their respective religious and cultural traditions. Saints are individuals recognized by the Christian church for their exceptional holiness and serve as intermediaries between the living and God. Ancestors, on the other hand, are deceased family members or community members honored in various cultural and religious contexts for their protective and guiding roles in the lives of their descendants. While both involve a form of veneration, the specific beliefs, practices, and cultural contexts surrounding saints and ancestors differ significantly.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Evaluation

Sainthood and ancestor hood are two distinct religious phenomena that are greatly imbued by the cultures and traditions of the different religion. Hence, they enjoy a level of peculiarity, however, the two religious phenomena hold the concept of death on same point view; as only a means to an end not the end in itself.

Saints are not canonized while alive, neither is the titled of ancestor conferred while the person is still alive. The two phenomena approach death as a necessary evil, though a cessation of existence in the ephemeral world of mortal yet not annihilation of life, as life continues in different realm. The Agenebodes consider life hereafter as

a real home. This implies that this world is temporal. On the other hand, the Catholic would say "...you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:19). That death is a passage to God is also a common belief. For the Agenebode, death enables one to commune with the ancestors and with the supreme Being; while the Catholics hopes to enjoy eternal Happiness with God and with all the angels and saints.

Both sainthood and ancestor-hood affirm the idea of communion with a deceased. That is to say, the deceased's are also participant in the cosmic activities of humans.

Both religions see individual's life as a pilgrimage for our eternal home in heaven. Death then becomes a means of transition from this life to eternal life, or to a life of condemnation. It is on this account that emphasis is laid on a good life here on earth in both religions; for it is the determinant factor for either living eternal life or a life of condemnation in hell (a wandering in African ontology).

5.2 Recommendation

An understanding of the concept of ancestor-hood and sainthood will help people to appreciate and respect the religions from where it emanated, without placing one religion above the other. The researcher made the following recommendations for better understanding:

1. Religious adherents should understand that religious teachings, doctrines and dogmas are all influenced by the geographical culture and traditions of where that religion sprung up.
2. People should understand that religious practices most times points/conveys same meaning but with different word expression and explanations. For instance, saints and ancestors are set of people that had led a good, moral exemplary life, and a believed to have attain eternal bliss, hence are believed to be closer to God.
3. The researcher also recommend that religious adherents should not despise either of the religious intermediaries (saints and ancestors). Both should be approached with respect and regard.

5.3 Conclusion

Ancestors and saints are two important religious figures in African traditional religion and Roman Catholicism. Imasogie (1982) opined that they (ancestors) are guardians of the tradition and intermediaries between God and the community. Hence to some extent they tend to maintain the peaceful coexistence of human with the cosmic forces. They ensure a good and successful life of their upright descendants who continue to acknowledge them as mediators between the Supreme Being, divinities and the living (Eliade, 1986).

A saint is also a person of remarkable holiness who lived a life of heroic virtue, assisted by the Church, during their pilgrimage on earth. Saints are often invoked as intercessors in prayer. Catholics believe that saints can pray to God on behalf of the living, interceding for them in times of need. People may ask for a saint's help and guidance in various aspects of life, such as health, relationships, and protection.

Saints and ancestors are venerated and held in high esteem by their respective communities. They are seen as virtuous and influential figures whose lives and actions are worthy of respect and emulation.

It's important to note that while there are these similarities, there are also significant differences between the two. Saints are recognized figures in Christianity and are officially canonized by the Church, whereas ancestors are typically individuals from one's own family lineage or community who have passed away.

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