

The Impact of the Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation among Yorùbá Christians in Akurẹ

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Abstract

Reincarnation is the belief that after someone dies; his immortal soul separates from the body and lives again in another physical body. The traditional Yorùbá culture holds the belief in reincarnation (*atunwaye*). *Atunwaye* is believed to be possible in three different forms which are: *ipadawaye* (ancestor's rebirth), *akudaaya* (die and reappear) and *abiku* (born to die). The Christian culture does not accommodate such beliefs in reincarnation. Nevertheless, Yorùbá people who are converted to Christianity still hold on to the belief in reincarnation and this generates for them a problem of cultural dilemma. Yorùbá Christians of the Akurẹ division also hold on to the traditional belief in *atunwaye* which contradicts their Christian faith. This has negative influence on their beliefs and practices as Christians. The various reincarnation beliefs among the Yorùbá people in Akurẹ have been evaluated. Oral interviews were conducted among indigenes of Akurẹ, who are also clergymen and lay Church leaders in Akurẹ from selected denominations to understand the beliefs of Akurẹ Christians on reincarnation. 200 copies of a questionnaire were administered on Akurẹ indigenous Christians to determine the extent of their belief in reincarnation and its impact on their Christian faith. Findings show that Yorùbá Christians in Akurẹ still hold on to traditional belief in reincarnation (*atunwaye*) in its various forms. It has also been shown that this belief has a great influence on their other beliefs and practices, such as veneration of the dead, occult practices, worship activities and family living. It recommends that Akurẹ Christians be taught sound Biblical doctrine on the subject of reincarnation. It recommends further that the church needs to differentiate between reincarnation and resurrection, emphasising the importance of the belief in resurrection for a Christian.

Keywords: Reincarnation, Yoruba beliefs, *ipadawaye*, *abiku*, *akudaaya*.

1. Introduction

The belief that after someone dies; his immortal soul separates from the body and lives again in another physical body is the doctrine of reincarnation. This is a belief that is well established in the traditional Yorùbá African culture. Reincarnation known as *Atunwaye*, is believed to be possible in three different forms which are: *ipadawaye* (ancestor's rebirth), *akudaaya* (die and reappear) and *abiku* (born to die). Conversely, the Christian culture has difficulties in accommodating the belief in reincarnation as it contradicts major Christian doctrines. The dilemma is that Yorùbá people who are converted to Christianity still hold on to their traditional belief in reincarnation despite the fact that it contradicts their Christian faith. This article focuses on Yorùbá Christians of the Akurẹ division as caught in the web of this cultural dilemma. We shall affirm that Akure Yoruba Christians hold on to the traditional belief in reincarnation *atunwaye* which contradicts their Christian faith and examine the negative influences it has on their beliefs and practices as Christians.

2. Reincarnation

We begin by defining what reincarnation is. Reincarnation is the doctrine of the passing of the soul at death into another body or bodies either animal or human (Bouquet 2006). Reincarnation is the belief that after someone dies; his immortal soul separates from the body and lives again in another physical body. Reincarnation is a widely spread idea across cultures. For example, the Greeks, the Druids of Western Europe, Ancient Irish, Indians, and Buddhist hold beliefs in reincarnation (Bouquet 2006). Many African cultures also hold to the belief in reincarnation, among whom we have the Yorùbá.

3. Yorùbá People and Culture

The Yorùbá are people who are related culturally and share the same language, though with some variations. The Yorùbá tribe is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria and one of the largest homogenous groups in African. They live mostly in South-Western part Nigeria, comprising of Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos States. Some parts of Kwara and Kogi States also have Yorùbá people living there. Beyond Nigeria, Yorùbá people are found in Republic of Benin, Dahomey, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Jamaica.

The Yorùbá culture is their common way of doing things or way of life. It consists of their language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, rituals ceremonies, and symbols. These have been passed down from generation to generation, through their oral traditions, such as myths, folklores, stories, songs proverbs and wise sayings. They are also reflected in their art and crafts. Their festivals and traditional religion also reflect the culture and beliefs of the Yorùbá.

According to Bolaji Idowu, the Yorùbá people believe in: God, *Olodumare*; in divinities, *Òrìṣà*, in

spirits; ancestors and mysterious powers (Idowu 1962). This has also been affirmed by Awolalu and Dopamu (Awolalu & Dopamu 2005) Yorùbá belief in ancestors is that they are family members who have died and are deified. They are actively involved in the protection and guidance of their family members and are worshipped by them. Related to this is the belief in reincarnation which holds that the dead family members come back to life, usually as a new child into family where they previously lived. Many are identified through resemblance, dreams or divination as being reincarnations of particular ancestors, and are given names such as *Babatunde* ('father returns') or *Yetunde* ('mother returns'). These ancestors are invoked to help their descendants.

According to Sophie Oluwole, African Traditional thought claims three types of justification for the belief in reincarnation (Oluwole 1996). The first is family resemblance, in which case, children resemble their dead ancestors, having some physical and mental features identical with theirs. The unnatural and circumstantial marks made on some people, such as gun shot and deliberate and accidental deformities on the dead do also reappear in the child that is born. This cannot adequately be explained as a biological family trait. Another justification is the *Abiku* (among the Yorùbás) or *Ogbanje* (among the Igbos) syndrome. The deformities mete out on the bodies on the babies out of desperation to stop them from coming back, appear on those children when they are reborn. The third justification is memory transfer. This is attested to by the stories of children who could recount real life experiences of their ancestors with astonishing details, yet had no first hand access to the stories of such ancestors. All these justifications for reincarnation are well maintained among the Yorùbá people as well. There are obvious problems with the belief in reincarnation. One of it is that, how do we identify a person who is said to be incarnate in another person? That is, can there be common criteria of identifying incarnate persons? This is a problem of personal identity. Moreover, how do we establish the truth or otherwise that the soul of a person is the soul of a dead ancestor? (Ayiba 1989)

4. Reincarnation Belief among Yorùbá People

There are different types of reincarnation beliefs among the Yorùbá. One is the belief that someone who dies in good old age may return, out of affection for his children, grand children or relatives, to be reborn into the family to live with them again. This type of reincarnation is called *ipadawaye* (ancestors' rebirth). This is the most common and enduring belief in reincarnation among the Yorùbá. The Yorùbá strongly believe that the souls of the departed good ancestors were reincarnated and reborn as grandchildren in the family for them to continue their existence in the family. The ancestors do this as a result of the love they have for their family members or for the world (Awolalu & Dopamu 2005). Children born into the family shortly after the death of an aged person are believed to be reincarnated, especially if they share the same gender with the departed. Children believed to be reincarnated by ancestors are given such names as *Yetunde* [mother has returned], *Iyabo* [mother has come], *Babatide* [father has come] and *Babatunde* [father has come again]. Others are *Ayedun* [life is sweet] *Dehinbo* [come back] *Sehinde* [come again]. When a child is born, the oracle is consulted to know which ancestor or ancestress has reincarnated in the child. Some are obvious if certain marks that appeared on the dead also appear on the child (Awolalu & Dopamu 2005).

The Yorùbá expresses the desire for reincarnation at life, but more at death. An aged dying man or woman can express the desire to be reincarnated in the family of his or children's family as a grandchild. More reincarnation expressions are made at death.

Whenever somebody died after a life of much suffering either from a protracted illness or some similar varied ills like barrenness, ill luck, and other related life misfortunes, the corpse was usually addressed as follows: In the next life, make sure you change your destiny. Others simply said at the death of a beloved after a life of misfortunes: *O ti lo tun yan* (A Yorùbá expression meaning He or she has gone back to change his or her destiny.) (Fatokun & Hofmyer)

There is also the belief in *abiku*, (born to die children) which is a phenomenon of repeated mortality and birth by the same mother. It is believed that it is the same soul reoccurring to be born as child many times over. "This is based upon the belief that there is a circle of wicked spirits who, of their own volition enter the wombs of pregnant women and are born only to die shortly after" (Awolalu & Dopamu 2005.) Marks are made on the dead child before it is buried to disfigure it and discourage it from appearing again. However, the fact that these marks reappear on the child that comes after, is a strong evidence to show that it is the same child that has appeared and a strong support for the belief in this phenomenon.

Such children are usually named *Maku* [Do not die], *Kokumo* [It will not die again], *Kasimaawo* [Let us watch this one], *Arinka* [Unstable walker], *Igbokoyi/Igbekoyi* (the burial ground rejects this), *Malomo* (Do not go again), *Ayedun* (Life or the earth is sweet), *Durojaiye* (Wait and enjoy life), *Durosinmi* (Wait and bury me), *Kokumo* (Not dying again), *Apara* (One who comes and goes), *Ikujore* (Death leaves him), *Biobaku* (If he does not die), *Petirin* (He has been walking for a long time). These names are given to serve as an appeal to the children to stay and not die again. Some are given in hope that the child will not die again. Others express doubt on whether the child will stay for long or they simply reserve judgement on it. Some others however are believed

to taunt the children, make them realise that they have been identified as *abiku* children, which will make them stay or worse still, die and never reincarnate again.

Abiku children give their parents a lot of psychological problems, because they fall sick many times, faint some of the times and are resuscitated. The parents usually try their best to prevent the child from dying again until she dies and they helplessly give up. Nevertheless, the Yorùbá also believes that the circle can be stopped by the intervention of a powerful *Babalawo* [spiritualist].

There are some connections between this belief and the Yorùbá belief in *emere*, which is a phenomenon of familiar spirits believed to come to the world for a short time to play, achieve nothing or to punish some persons. The Yorùbá believe that *emere* cause the *abiku* phenomenon, but not all *emere* are *abiku*. The *emere* children are believed to possibly live longer than the *abiku* children. However, they do not live to achieve anything or that they die when expectations about them are high, dashing the hopes of their parents. They are believed to be cruel and have some irrational behaviours, which some attribute to their relationship with their playmates in heaven.

Their impressions of *emere* may be summarized as “bad kids from bad parents, who bring bad luck to their parents.” Their problems are seen as predominantly behavioral and experiential. There is no “date with death” or physical illness issues as with *abiku*. An additional twist is the notion that medical science has actually reduced the number of *abiku* worldwide, and they boast an ability to diagnose *abiku* in utero, by divination. But since *emere* could cause *abiku*, the *abiku* has the potential both to die on a date or at will and to be associated with psychological problems. The comparison of *emere* with witchcraft is noted (Ilechukwu 2007).

Akudaaya is believed to be another manifestation of reincarnation. In this situation, the dead person is believed to live in another place different from where he used to live and died. It is usually interpreted in relation to untimely death. It is believed that if the destiny that the *ori* of that person was to fulfil was terminated abruptly without fulfilment, or if he is not properly buried, he will not be qualified to enter the ancestral cult but will reincarnate another body and keep roaming the world. There have been reported cases of such people who appeared in another location different from where they use to live and died and continued their normal life. Some of the cases report that they got married, gave birth to children, worked and invested in the other places where they lived.

The existence of the *akudaaya* is usually terminated by the discovery of someone who can recognise him to be the dead fellow or a situation that will make those who know him as the dead recognise him as living again. However, after they have died again or disappeared, the evidences abound in the relationships they have had, the children they have got and the works they have done at their second existence.

5. Akurẹ People and Culture

Akurẹ people are Yorùbá people who live in South Western Nigeria. Oral tradition states that Akurẹ was founded by *Omoremi Omoluabi*, son of *Ekun* and grandson of *Oduduwa Omoluabi*, the royal progenitor of the Yorùbá tribe, who left Ile-Ife in search of a place to settle. Thus, descendant of the Akurẹ clan are addressed as *Omo Ekun*. *Omoremi* was said to have stayed for a while at *Igbo Ooye*, hunting with his entourage while on his way from Ile Ife. For his bravery, he was called *Oloyemekun* (caught the leopard in *Ooye* forest). The totem of Akurẹ is the Leopard arising from the prince’s father’s name, *Ekun* and from his hunting adventure. He arrived in Akurẹ and was proclaimed *Asodeboyede* (the *Person* who hunted and arrived with royalty). At the point where the prince and his party arrived at the exact location of the modern city, the string holding the heavy royal beads on his neck is said to have snapped, thus causing the people to exclaim “*Àkún rẹ*” (The beads have snapped), this later became the name of the settlement they established on the site. By constant use overtime, the phrase was twisted to become Akurẹ.

The *Deji* is the paramount ruler of the Akurẹ kingdom and is supported by six high chiefs called *Iwarefa* or *Iare*. The *Iare* chiefs were the elder statesmen and used to act as the chief advisers to the *Deji*. The first six of these chiefs; *Olisa*, *Odopetu*, *Elemo*, *Aro*, *Ojumu* and *Asae*, popularly known as the *Iarafamefa*, were the representatives of their different quarters making up Akurẹ (Afe, 2014). Akurẹ people shared the traditional beliefs of the Yorùbá culture. They believe in the Supreme Being, divinities, ancestral spirits, life hereafter, reincarnation and supremacy of morals.

6. Reincarnation Beliefs among Yorùbá People in Akurẹ

Since Akurẹ people are Yorùbá people who share their traditional cultural beliefs, they by implication believe in reincarnation. Samuel Ajayi (Ajayi, 2015) holds that reincarnation is part of the traditional belief that is present in the Akurẹ traditional culture. Akurẹ people have always believed in reincarnation from time immemorial and this belief is still very present among them today. Julius Jemilugba (Jemilugba 2015) opines that the evidences that Akurẹ Yorùbá people believe in reincarnation abound in the names that depict such belief that abound

among Yorùbá people. Such names are *Iyabo* (mother has come) *Babatunde* (father has come) *Babasehinde* (father has returned). If the Akurẹ people do not believe in reincarnation, there would have been no reason why they should give such names to their children.

Stephen Fagbemi (Fagbemi 2015) holds that the sayings of the Akurẹ people betray their belief in reincarnation. Some of the sayings are: “*Ojo omiran to o ba pada waye, o ko ni se eyi, o ko ni se tohun*” (next time when you come back to the world, you will not do this or do that.) All forms of next life wishes or another life expectation that is this worldly are evidences of reincarnation beliefs among the Akurẹ people. Some other sayings are references to experiences in the previous lives. For example: “*O dabi eni wipe nigba ti mo koko waye lojo naa lohun, mi o bi omo, ni mo se feran awon omo mi to bayi*” (It is like, when I first came into the world, I was barren, that is why I love my children this much in this second coming.) Moreover, there are cases of people are also believed to be older than their age among Akurẹ people, because they are believed to be some ancestors that reincarnated. Such people are believed to be so because they bear some unique marks that were present in those ancestors or some special resemblances. Others are believed to have some wisdom, skills, lifestyle or birth circumstances that are similar to that of some dead ancestors.

Traditional cultural beliefs are not easy to refute, because it has been part of the people for a long time. Father Adedeji (Adedeji 2015) is of the opinion that the belief of the Yorùbá people of Akurẹ in reincarnation is not based on flimsy evidences. It is a product of many years of experimentation. They have enough empirical evidences to show that the belief is actually true. It is scientific because they have observed it, subjected it to experimentations and drawn a theory from it.

7. Christianity in Akurẹ

For the purpose of this paper, a Christian is one who accepts and practices the Christian faith and belongs to one Christian denomination or another. Christianity is the most popular and most advertised religion in Nigeria and especially in Yorùbá land. Christianity came into South-West Nigeria in the nineteenth century through the activities of missionaries from the Europe. Christian religion has taken root in among the Yorùbás people. Before the advent of Christianity in Akure and its environs, traditional religion has a deep root among the people. Some of the popular gods worshiped are *egungun*, *olofin*, *ifa*, *sango*, *ogun*, mountains of different names, trees, and snakes. It was basically Africans who evangelised Akure and its environs (First Century of Christianity in Akure, 1997).

Christianity dates back to 2nd February, 1897 in Akure when Mr T. A. J. Ogunbiyi, who was a catechist and missionary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) arrived Akure for a mission work, from where he took Christianity to other surrounding towns such as Ilara-mokin, Iju, Itaogbolu, Ipogun, Ibule-soro, Ero, Ikota, Irese and Oda. Christianity has since flourished in Akure and its environs with other Church missions also making their presence known such as the Roman Catholic Mission, Methodist Church, African Church, Baptist Church, Christ Apostolic Church, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Winners Chapel, Deeper Christian Life, Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial Church of Christ, Gospel Faith Mission, to mention a few.

8. Reincarnation Beliefs among Akurẹ Christians

The Yorùbá, like other Africans are traditional people. Though, the advent of Islam and Christianity really robbed off on their traditions and customs with many of them abandoning their traditional religions and the way of life for the revealed religions. That notwithstanding, substantial number are still traditionalists while a good number of those who cross-carpet, unable to break completely from their origin, still syncretise, thereby mixing between traditional beliefs and practices and those of Islam and Christianity as the case may be (Jimoh 2012).

The above is a description of the experience of the Akurẹ Christians. Akurẹ Christians still hold on to cultural and traditional beliefs, though they are converted to Christianity. While they are not rejecting Christianity on one hand, they are not ready to let go the traditional beliefs on the other hand. Thus, they try to hold the two simultaneously. One of such traditional beliefs is reincarnation.

Julius Jemilugba (Jemilugba 2015) is of the opinion that Akurẹ Christians still believe in reincarnation. The evidence of the prevalence of this belief abounds in the fact that Christians still give their children names that depict reincarnation beliefs. There are Christians who still make consultations about the destiny of their children as to know which ancestor reincarnated in the child or whose destiny will his be similar to in the family history. Christians still believe in finding out about what caused the death of a person and challenging him to rise up and revenge his death from the culprits. The dilemma is that, though some Christians still consult the native doctor for these, some of the consultations and divinations are now done with prophets in Church. Dele Ogunsola (Ogunsola 2015) believes that Yorùbá Christians still believe in reincarnation because they cannot shy away from the obvious. The evidences that confirm reincarnation stares at Akurẹ people in the face, and they cannot throw it away with just a wave of hand despite their Christian inclinations.

9. Data Analysis

A research conducted among Akure Yorùbá Christians, who are also resident in Akure with the use of questionnaire, reveals that 75% of the respondents do believe in reincarnation whereas 81.2% thinks that reincarnation is true. Therefore, reincarnation is a popular belief among Akure Yoruba Christians. 60% of respondents affirmed that they have evidences to prove that reincarnation is true, while 23.8% stated personal experiences of reincarnation cases they have witnessed. 82.4% of the respondents responded positively, either as strongly in agreement or simply agreeing that a Yorùbá Christian should believe that reincarnation is true. 80% of the respondents agree that reincarnation (*atunwaye*) is compatible with the Christian doctrines and Biblical teachings which they hold. It suggests that Akure Yorùbá Christians do not see holding on to this belief as a problem or a contradiction to their Christian faith.

10. Reasons for the Belief in Reincarnation among Akure Christians

The foregoing shows that Akure Yorùbá Christians still hold on to the belief in reincarnation. What could have accounted for the extent of the belief in reincarnation among Akure Christians? Stephen Fagbemi (Fagbemi 2015) expressed that he will not be surprised if any Yorùbá Christian believes in reincarnation because it is a popular traditional belief among the Yorùbá. He is however of the opinion that there now exist different of opinions among Christians about the subject. Those who hold on to this belief to a large extent are Christians of the older generation. Christians of the younger generation may likely disagree or express disbelief.

Julius Jemilugba (Jemilugba 2015) is of the opinion that belief in reincarnation among Yoruba Christians in Akure can be attributed to the fact they do not have a sound knowledge of the Bible. Jemilugba also attests to the fact that there is syncretism in the Church. Akure Yorùbá Christians want to carry their old religion into the new one. As touching having evidences for their beliefs in reincarnation, Jemilugba associates what the Akure Yorùbá people call evidences for the belief in reincarnation as demonic and occultism. To him, any reappearance of the dead is identical with the sorcery that brought Samuel back for Saul to consult. It was not Samuel that appeared, it was a demon that was mimicking him. Christians should desist from not practicing occultism.

Adebisi Adedeji (Adedeji 2015) is of the opinion that Akure Yorùbá Christians are first of all Yorùbá people, be they Christian, Muslim, traditionalist or any other religion they hold on to. Therefore, they are bound by the same cultural beliefs and practices. However, their later religious choice and dispositions account for little variations, amendments and interpretations of the traditional beliefs.

11. Impact of reincarnation on the beliefs and practices of Akure Yorùbá Christians

Reincarnation may appear like an unpronounced belief among Akure Yorùbá Christians. However, it has some subtle influences on their other beliefs and practices. The prayers and deliverance services of the African Indigenous Churches (AIC) attests to the fact that the Yorùbá belief about *àbikú* is having an impact on the Yoruba Christians. Prayers and deliverance, especially for barren women or pregnant women focus on prayers against *àbikú* and deliverance from the spirit of *àbikú* which they believe is preventing the women from having children. The idea of dissociating an *àbikú* and *emèrè* (*yíyo kúrò légbé*) from their heavenly mates in the traditional practice by the *Ifá* priests is equivalent to deliverance from the spirit of *àbikú* and *emèrè* by the deliverance ministers and preachers in the African Indigenous Churches in the contemporary society (Ajibade 2014). This practice has moved beyond the African indigenous Churches to other Churches that believe that some spiritual forces can and do prevent some women from getting pregnant or from having surviving children. For example, the Christ Apostolic Churches do have Traditional Birth Attendants (*Iya Agbebi*), who serve as midwives to provide ante-natal and post natal care for women. They express the belief that cases of unsuccessful and stillbirths are caused by *abiku* children. Special deliverance prayers are offered for women who have problems with infertility to deliver them from *emere* spirit that prevents them from giving birth. Although, the belief in reincarnation does not appear pronounced in this practice, the belief subtly influences the thought and motivation for such practices, and they cannot be accepted as true without an underlining belief in reincarnation to support the proof.

This idea of spirit-children among the Christians in Yorùbá land is not limited to prayer and deliverance services, it is finding its way in the Christian home videos. The *Captive of the Mighty* and *Forgotten ones* produced by Mike Bamiloye of The Mount Zion Faith Ministries are good examples that illustrate the belief of Yorùbá Christians in the existence of *àbikú/emèrè* even in the contemporary society¹. Although, Bamiloye do not intend to teach about this belief but to prove that God's power can solve all human problems entrenched in the Yorùbá traditional belief system, the problems brought about by reincarnation beliefs inclusive, a regular contact

¹ This idea, though provoked a further study of this trend in Mount Zion Films, is originally Ajibade's in Goerge Olusola Ajibade, "Abiku Songs in Yorùbá Land."

with such presentation as a real problem establishes the actual belief in the sub consciousness of the people. Thus, it is a way of revitalizing the Yorùbá indigenous cultural forms. The danger is that, instead of a decline, such documentation and emphasis to the Christian continues to fuel the people's belief in this traditional belief and make it stronger over Biblical stands.

The truth is that Akurẹ Yorùbá people have tried to adapt this Yorùbá belief in reincarnation to fit their new Christian beliefs. This is syncretism. This syncretic living draws Akurẹ Yorùbá people into participating in idolatry, yet holding on to their identity as Christians. Akurẹ Christians join their idolatrous family members to venerate the dead, speak to the dead, make certain requests from them or even challenge them to fight those who killed them. They participate in ritual activities that are connected with identifying which ancestor has reincarnated in a child and how he/she can be welcomed and given special attention.

There have been prophecies about a child being a reincarnate of an old ancestor or being an *abiku/emere*. There is no doubt that such prophets have been influenced by their traditional belief in reincarnation. Since such prophecies are contrary to the Scriptures, they are false prophecies. Moreover, such disclosures lead to negative social implications on the child. Those children become ostracised and isolated. Their colleagues do stigmatise them and ask them questions they think they should know, which they are usually not be able to answer. They can also develop a negative self image which usually makes them to develop deviant behaviours. It is unethical to subject a child to such a suffering that he did not cause.

This belief also has adverse effects on the family structure, as children believed to be reincarnated ancestors are treated with utmost respect. The Yorùbá traditional culture has as one of its core values respect for the elders and it is expressed in various ways, which includes greetings, obedience, care and accepting guidance. Elders are respected while living or when dead and become ancestors or when they reincarnate. The parent of the child believed to be the ancestors' reincarnate sees the child as his parent or grand parent and so extends to him the usual respect. The extent can be so embarrassing that it leads to the dilemma of who is the parent or who is the child among the two. As a result, such children usually lack the required discipline they need to be well groomed because of the neglect of their child turned parent. Moreover, it also causes favouritism and partial treatment between the child believed to be reincarnated and his/her sibling by their parents. All these threaten the family structure and by extension, they threaten the society.

The unpronounced belief that underlies the insistence by many people to have their dead buried at home and not at the Church cemetery is the Yorùbá belief about death, immortality and reincarnation. There is the belief that the dead can watch over the loved ones and family if he is close by physically. Obviously, the Yorùbá do not let go of the dead so easily that they want them to come back as many times as possible. This belief also fuels the many Christian prayers that are made for the dead. Expressing the wish for reincarnation of the dead parent is common among Akurẹ Yorùbá Christians. The radio and television announcements of the burial arrangements of a dead aged parent usually end with such words like:

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|---|---|
| <i>“Oju ti o fi n so wa laye, ki o ma fi sun lorun.</i> | The eyes that you used to watch us on earth, do not use it to sleep in heaven |
| <i>Ma jokun, ma je ekole, ohun ti won ba n je lorun ni o ba won je.</i> | Do not eat Millipede, do not eat earthworm, eat only what they eat in heaven |
| <i>Ma je ko pe ki o to tete wa ya lodo awon omo”</i> | Do not stay so long before you come to reincarnate among your children. |

Christians do not want to walk around the grave in the night, for the fear that the dead could rise up from the grave. Pregnant women do not walk in the night or around a burial ground, so that the foetuses they carry do not become incarnated by some evil powers of by the spirit of some ancestors. Church burial grounds have been reported to have been invaded by family members or some other people for various reasons that are related to belief in the potency of the power of the dead.

The lavished and wasteful spending that characterise our burial ceremonies rest on the assumptions that the dead should be given befitting burials for them to be able to pass into the realm of the ancestors and the departed could be attracted to be reborn into the family and avoid his possibility of roaming about without finding rest. It is a special privilege to be the lucky child to have the parent or grandparent come again through his/her lineage. Children of the dead want to impress their dead parents that they really love them by giving a befitting burial so that the parent can consider being reborn into his/her family.

12. Conclusion

The challenge Akurẹ Yorùbá Christians need to overcome is how to balance the relationship between his Christian faith and his traditional culture. The Akurẹ Yorùbá man sees his Christian faith as priceless. At the same time, he does not want to be alienated from his culture. This should not be a problem, but for the various ways his traditional culture is inconsistent and at variance with the Christian faith. It is a challenge when he tries to hold on to the truth of one without denying the other. This will not work.

The Christian faith has not made enough impact in its interrogation with the Yorùbá traditional culture,

thereby resulting in undecided positions of Yorùbá Christians on issues that conflict with their faith. A simple condemnation of traditional beliefs does not stop people from believing their culture because it is part of them. To sweep the issues of contradictions between the two cultures under the carpet will not also help. Instead there is the need to bring them into the lime light and scrutinize them to determine which one is true or justifiable.

Compounding this type of problem further is the fact that the evidences upon which the belief in reincarnation rests are not easy to throw away by the wave of the hand. One way is to claim that these evidences are false and illusory. This may be true especially because the belief and the occurrences of reincarnation cannot be said to be universal. There are some Western cultures that do not have such experiences. If the experience is peculiar to a particular culture, it could be some deception and illusion that abide in their culture. Truth is universal. But that will be difficult to defend because the Yorùbá people have subjected them to series of observation and conditions to attest to their truth. Yorùbá people believe that reincarnation is true and scientifically proven, because the evidences are empirical. Another way to interpret these evidences is to claim that it is demons at work reappearing in forms of the dead. This is a position common among Christians of the Pentecostal sect, some of whom do not believe in reincarnation. They believe that the evidences of reincarnation are direct attempts by the devil to contradict the Biblical truth in Hebrews 9:27 which affirms that it is appointed for man to die once, and after it follows judgment (Fatokun & Homfyer 2014). The implication is that, at least the truth of the evidences is accepted first to be able to prove who is responsible for them. This will further complicate and contribute to the stigmatisation of the people believed to be reincarnated as demonic people. Besides, it is difficult to prove scientifically that reincarnation is caused by demons as the evidences are not as clear as the evidences that the phenomenon is true. How to explain the phenomenon of reincarnation among the Yorùbá Christians may not be easy, but it does not deny the fact that the phenomenon really exists.

However, the Christian, whichever culture he belongs should know that there are other ways of life, but he has chosen to accept and live by the Christian culture which takes precedence over other culture. This is because, taking the Scriptures as infallible is one of the fundamental Christian beliefs. Although there are human errors that are results of human elements in the Bible such as perspective, documentation and translation, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that brings about the Bible is infallible. It should therefore be the standard which all other beliefs must align with for them to be true. The Yorùbá Christian should not see his culture as so sacred and above interrogation that Christianity should not tamper with. Rather, it should be seen in the light of Biblical standards which should serve as its sieve. Anything that is consistent with this standard can remain, whereas anything that does not should be reviewed.

Akure Yorùbá Christians are yet to realise the danger the contradictions that reincarnation beliefs make on their Christian faith. It shows that ignorance is not a disease that sufferer gets to identify easily. As a result, they are yet to see this as a problem that needs to be addressed.

In the light of this study, we therefore recommend that sound teachings should be done in the Church as touching the subject of reincarnation. By this, the Church will be able to get rid of all philosophies of men and traditions of the people that negatively affect the beliefs of Yorùbá Christians. We also recommend that the Church should emphasise absolute faith in Christ for salvation and not in any human effort, which the Yorùbá belief on good death and reincarnation upholds. Christians should be made aware that Syncretism is a sin and contrary to God's expectations for a true Christian. We further recommend that ministers of the Gospel must be truly born again and must take the Word of God as priority over all other beliefs and practices. Christians should accept that any other belief that contradicts the Word of God is false, because the Word of God is infallible.

Yoruba Christians should translate their belief in reincarnation to belief in resurrection. As Fr. Adedeji (Adedeji 2015) opines that the belief in reincarnation can enhance the belief in resurrection. Reincarnation belief can help understand resurrection, because both hold the belief that the soul is immortal. However, the Church should clarify the difference between the two and make Christians choose resurrection.

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