

# Tiv Traditionalists and the Crave for Christian Burial

<sup>1</sup>Andrew Philips Adegga PhD (MNASR, FTPD) and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Franca Shimenenge Jando

Corresponding author : Adegga AP E-mail: aadega@bsum.edu.ng

wantorshimmy@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup>Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria  
E-mail: aadega@bsum.edu.ng , andy4everyoung@gmail.com  
Mobile Phone Nos : +2347031280203 ; +2348055220744

<sup>2</sup>Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria  
e-mail:wantorshimmy@gmail.com  
Mobile Phone Nos : +2348036510552 ; +2349018705719.

Corresponding author:

Adegga AP : Received: 16/7/2022 | Accepted: 19/7/2022 |

Published: 21/7/2022

**Abstract:** *The paper Tiv Traditionalists and the crave for Christian burial examines the fast-moving trend in Tiv society where avowed traditionalists crave for Christian burial at the twilight of their existence. The motivation to unravel the circumstance behind this crave necessitated this research. In collecting materials for the documentation of this paper, two main sources of data collection procedures were followed; the primary and secondary sources of data collection. In the primary source of data collection, the phenomenological, observation, and oral interview methods were used. In the secondary source, library materials from documented sources related to the topic under discussion from books, journals, e-sources, newspapers and magazines were collated for use. The paper established that several factors account for why some Tiv traditionalists are seen “defecting” to Christianity. Some of the reasons uncovered include: The promise of salvation by Christian clergy, the fear of exhumation by the Mbatsav after burial and the glamour associated with Christian burials. It is the belief of most Tiv that deceased persons given full Christian burial rites involving the sprinkling of holy water, incense, holy oil etc makes the exhumation of such corpses by the Mbatsav (witches) nearby impossible. This has made many a Tiv traditionalists take refuge in Christianity to enjoy these spiritual benefits after death. Some priests have also been going about in villages indiscriminately baptizing and “converting” many elderly traditionalists to Christianity. However, some elders are found one leg in and one leg out of Christianity as they have no groundings in the faith. Most often these elders are seen observing the traditional practices they have so abandoned for Christianity thus casting doubts as to which of these faiths they owe true allegiance. The paper thus calls on Tiv traditionalists to hold onto their faith since there is also God and salvation in traditionalism instead of converting to Christianity not for concrete beliefs but to escape some form of torture in the afterlife. The paper encourages the Tiv to live good lives, as against evil lives so as to see the face of God when they pass on. The paper notes that it is not the kind of burial which one was accorded after death that matters; but the kind of life lived.*

**Keywords:** Tiv, Traditionalists, Christian Burial.

**Publish by IJAH 2022.**

## INTRODUCTION

“Birth is a beginning and death is a destination and life is a journey... a sacred pilgrimage to life everlasting”- Rabbi Alvin Fine (cited by Medwin 3).

Corroborating the above, there are two key events in the life of every individual. These are the periods of birth and death. The first ushers in life whereas the second takes life away. In the period of birth, an individual makes an entry into the world and is welcomed and

celebrated and at death, the person departs and is mourned. The two opposing realities make these period i.e joy and sadness very important episodes in the life of the person.

In most societies across the globe, the period of death is marked by grief and mourning of the departed soul. In the midst of these, arrangements are put in place on how to dispose the body in the most dignifying way. This is when the act of burial comes into the picture.

Almost all religious traditions subscribe to a dignified way of burying a person when death occurs. Adega posits that death (*ku*) among the Tiv marks the physical separation of the individual from the living. It heralds the end of human existence and opens up the anxiety and fear of the unknown destiny. Death ushers in several related rituals in honour of the departed. One of these rituals that accompany the occurrence of death is the ritual of burial or interment (291).

The practice of disposing off the corpses of human after their death has been in place in both the pre-literate and literate societies. The burial or disposal of human corpses could be by mummification, cremation, water/sky burial and inhumation which involve digging the soil and placing the body in it and covering the excavated portion back. Most societies across Africa also observe the later form of disposing the corpse of deceased kith or kin.

The Tiv also dispose of the corpse of deceased relations in the most dignifying way through inhumation; burial in the soil. This goes a long way in proving the indigene ship of such a person, his/her children as in the case of doubt of indigene ship, a person may be asked to show the grave of his or her father or mother or forefathers in the village where he/she claims indigene ship. The same goes for the umbilical cord. This attitude explains why the Tiv go an extra mile to ensure the graves are marked for easy identification and remembrance. It is this same attitude which has pushed the counterparty Tiv into architecturally building the graves of deceased loved ones.

However, the researchers are worried by the new trend which has been witnessed over time in Tivland. This is the crave for Christian burial by most Tiv traditionalists in the contemporary Tiv society. The research interrogates the following questions: who is a Tiv traditionalist? Who is a Tiv Christian? Why has there been a crave for Christian burial rites by Tiv traditionalists? Is anything the matter with Tiv traditional burial? Who is responsible for this turn of event? What do they stand to gain by this action? How can this anomaly be rectified?

### **Burying the Concept**

Several scholars have written on the concept burial. While the ideas of these scholars are varied and diverse; a common string weaves through the definitions and that is the fact that only the dead are buried in whichever form a particular society follows; though in some few instances, a person could be buried alive for the purpose of sacrifice as was Inikpi the Igala princess (Adega 149). Specifically, to bury is to excavate the soil and place something in it and covering the soil back. This could be a human corpse, a dead animal or something valuable and treasurable as in the case of gold. Something could also be buried in order to conceal it from public glare. Thus, if what is buried is the remains of a person; the burial site/place becomes a grave or tomb depending on how it is constructed.

*The Encyclopedia Britannica* explained that burial

connotes the disposal of human remains by depositing in the earth, a grave or a tomb, by consigning to the water or by exposing to the elements or to carrion – consuming animals (1). It maintained that the geography, religion and the social system all influence burial practices. As such, climate and topography determine whether the body is buried under the ground, placed in water, burned or exposed to the air (1). Furthermore, Religious and social attitudes determine how elaborate the burial should be. For instance, rank may determine whether the body is placed in the shallow trench of a simple burial or in an underground chamber of impressive dimensions and construction (1).

According to Duru, burials are rituals performed in order to create a bond between temporal processes and archetypal patterns so as to give form, and meaningful transformation in life cycle of death. Citing Okaba and Genep, she observed that burial rites are rituals or procedures which are followed to transform one state of physical decorporation through the period of transition which is between the physical and spiritual world (101). Burial embraces the whole processes of disposing the dead body and the funeral rites or ceremonies of the dead. She opines that burial rites differ based on sex, age and status (101).

The Neanderthals are credited as the first hominids to intentionally bury the dead; this act dates back to over 130,000 years. Information regarding this followed the excavation of human skeletal remains the *Skhul* cave at *Qafzeh*-Israel (293). Several factors account for humans burying their dead. The first and foremost being that after death, a corpse starts to decompose and emit unpleasant odours due to activities of bacteria on the corpse.

Also, when humans bury the dead, it demonstrates their respect for the dead. Similarly, burial prevents the prospects of the decomposing corpse harming those living (293). In African cultures, burial facilitate the spirit of the deceased to reach the spirit world. Burial also lessens the pains of seeing a loved one die and begin to decompose.

**Traditionalist:** This refers to someone who adheres to tradition, especially in cultural or religious practices. Tiv traditionalist would therefore mean a Tiv person who adheres to Tiv indigenous religious and cultural practices as opposed to such other believes as Christianity and Islam.

### **Christian Burial**

It is to be noted that Christian burial is synonymous to Christian funeral. They imply the ceremonies held in honour of a deceased Christian - faithful. In fact, a burial is part and parcel of a long range and diverse funeral rites accorded the dead. In this perspective, Igbum and Gberikon averred that funeral which is from the Latin word *funus* refers to the

ceremony of burying, disposing of the dead or obsequies (72).

Further giving insight, Igbum and Gberikon citing Onyekachukwu proffered that funeral is a term representative of certain rites and services of a more or less formal sort which surround the treatment of the human corpse from the time of death until its final disposition. They therefore concluded by stating that Christian funeral refers to the Christian way of treating a deceased Christian from the time s/he dies up to the time s/he is finally buried (72).

Thus, a Christian burial is the burial of a deceased person with specifically Christian ecclesiastical rites; typically, in consecrated ground. However, it is to be noted that until recently, Christians generally objected to cremation because it interfered with the concept of the resurrection of the body and practiced inhumation almost exclusively. Today, this opposition has all but vanished among Protestants. Catholics are now able to be cremated also and while this is rapidly becoming more common, the Eastern Orthodox churches still mostly forbid cremation (1).

Commenting on Christian funeral, Graber opined that Christians believe that dying is the end of a person's life on earth, but the soul lives on in an afterlife. An attendance of Christian funeral is therefore an abundance of prayer and reference to heaven. She pointed out that the Christian funeral has three official goals:

- (i) To reflect on someone's life on earth.
- (ii) To pray to God that the loved one (deceased) gets into Heaven
- (iii) To give strength to friends and family to cope with their loss (1).

According to Burke, praying for the dead is an integral part of Christian life; it is one of the spiritual works of mercy. Prayer for the dead both honours their memory and expresses our faithful love as we assist them to be purified of any temporal punishment due to sin and to reach their final destiny and lasting home with God. Above all, the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The church similarly commends almsgiving, indulgence, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead (3).

Commenting further, Graber explained that traditionally, Christian funerals serve to reflect on the righteousness of the life of the deceased. This gives the family hope that their loved one's soul will go to Heaven. In so doing, praying for the deceased is meant to comfort the family, and inspire the Christian community at large. The message at a Christian funeral is therefore that of hope; live a righteous life without sin and you will live in heaven in the afterlife (1).

While it is not expected that everyone in attendance at a Christian funeral share the beliefs above; it is however, expected that everyone present will respect the Christian traditions during the funeral and burial. Igbum and

Gberikon give a three pronged model of Christian rites of funerals of baptized adults as follows:

- (a) The first model has stations in the home of the deceased, in the church and at the cemetery.
- (b) The second model has stations in the cemetery chapel and at the graveside.
- (c) The third model is when the funeral rite is celebrated in the home of the deceased. The Local Ordinary (Bishop) due to pastoral reasons may permit the funeral mass to be celebrated in the home of the deceased (78). The three stages above are celebrated including the funeral (Requiem) mass, must be celebrated by a priest. While the church is favourably disposed to conducting a funeral for deceased members; it does so particularly for "practicing" Christians who are wedded in the church.

On how early Christians were buried, little is known with regard to this. However, early Christians did store the skeletal remains of the saints at rest in Christ. This practice could have originated from the use of the same among second temple Jews. Other Christians may have followed the customs of the people whom they lived among as long as these customs were not idolatrous. By the fourth and fifth centuries, the offering of the Eucharist became an essential feature in the last solemn rites (Wikipedia).

On the importance of Christian burial, Charles stated that the importance of a Christian or biblical burial is related to belief in the resurrection. According to him, the Judeo-Christian view of proper burial is well rendered in the Bible and the importance both religions have placed on proper burial is clearly seen throughout the old and new testaments. He noted that from Genesis to Revelation, death is a recurring and resounding theme – one which has a strong connection to Jewish and Christian faith in the afterlife. Both Jews and Christians believed in a future resurrection for dead persons who died faithfully (1). This implies that God will remember these persons when the time comes to resurrect the dead (1).

To Decker, the importance of the Christian burial lies in the fact that: (i) it symbolizes the beliefs of the society, its hopes, its ideas, its religious concepts. It enables Christians to deal with grief; (ii) it serves as a time of instruction and encouragement, both for family members as well as for other believers (iii) it is a public testimony of one's faith in Jesus Christ (9-10). Burke is of the view that the care with which Christians bury the dead expresses their faith in the victory over everlasting death which the Lord Jesus Christ has won in their human nature by his own death and resurrection. The dead are so buried in the same hope of the resurrection of the body, when their mortal bodies will share fully in the glory of the risen Christ (1).

The time for a Christian funeral from the time death occurs, use of caskets/coffins, place of burial, the

grave/tomb, the wake/vigil, viewing of the corpse and all other sundry matters are dependent on the status of the deceased, age, rank, culture, his/her family, environment as well as rules regarding these and the local church concerned.

A typical Christian funeral of the Roman Catholic denomination would show that the priest sprinkles holy water on the body of the deceased, the casket/coffin and grave during the final internment/inhumation. Prayers are said, songs and chants from the Psalms and other relevant biblical passages read and sermon delivered. The body/casket and the grave are incensed and anointed oil sprinkled etc.

### Tiv Traditional Funeral Practices

Tiv traditional funeral practices are the ceremonies observed in honour of a deceased Tiv person, man or woman when s/he dies. These ceremonies are performed in line with Tiv cultural stipulations given the age and status in both the family and society. The death of a loved one is one of the most devastating experiences human beings face. At times, the loss of a loved one may seem unbearable. The occurrence of death heralds sorrow; it is a phenomenon that concerns everybody in the community. In view of the above, the Tiv observe many complex and even long rituals and ceremonies associated with death in their society.

Adegga explained that death (*ku*) marks a physical separation of the deceased from other human beings, the Tiv are very sensitive in observing several rituals associated with death whenever it occurs in the family (*Tiv ritual...*3). Igbum and Gberikon are of the view that Tiv cultural funeral rites are intended to ensure that the dead person leaves this world with full ceremonies and enter safely into the company of *mbayiase* (ancestors) (76).

The long rituals and ceremonies associated with death (*ku*) in Tiv society from when it occurs right to the time of burial include but not limited to the high points discussed here: *ku zungwen* (mourning) in which family members and friends of the deceased express grief of the loss of a loved one. Some of the signs of mourning among the Tiv, is the shelving of the hair, wearing of black cloth and abstinence from food (Adegga 118-120).

Following the practice of *ku zungwen* (mourning) is the announcement of the occurrence of death (*ku yôôn*). This involves sending notices to friends, loved ones, well wishers and family members both near and far. A branch of *ule* (palm frond) is cut and stuck by the roadside or in the compound where death occurs to announce that someone in the neighbourhood/household has died. The *indyer* (large hewn talking drum) and *ilyu* (small hewn talking drum) may also be sounded.

Furthermore, the corpse (*kyom*) is bathed by elderly women is laid in state. Camwood (*kpagh*) and

*akweshi* (palm kernel oil) are rubbed on the corpse to prevent decomposition. This was followed by the digging of the grave (*war*) for disposing the corpse. The mode of the grave is dependent on the age of the deceased, the nature of the soil and even laziness on the part of the grave diggers (Torkula qtd in Adegga, *Tiv Ritual...*129). The elders show where a grave is to be dug. Prior to the introduction of coffins in Tiv society, corpses were interred in Tiv traditional burial clothes such as *tugudu* and *anger*. For wealthy men (*asagbajor*), a canoe like canoe dug from *vambe* tree or banana trunk were used (144).

Also, prior to the burial, a wake (*ku tsan*) in honour of the deceased was observed culminating in the burial the following day. Culturally, the Tiv buried their dead towards evening, but children could be buried much earlier. Inhumation, burial or internment is the commonest way of disposing the corpse. The grave is dug according to specification from the elders of the family. The grave is dug within the ancestral home; while for family heads or elders, they could be buried in the *ate* (reception hut) normally situated in the middle of the compound.

The high point of Tiv cultural funerary practices is the *ku oron* (inquest) in which the Tiv investigate into the cause of the death, the agents responsible and why. The reason for the *ku oron* being that the Tiv do not subscribe to natural death but attribute all deaths to human machination through *tsav* (witchcraft). When investigations into the cause of death are over, the elders grant permission for the corpse to be interred – and warning against the further occurrence of death in the family. The *ku oron* brings about healing of the bereaved (Adegga 216). Burials took place within 1-3 days in traditional Tiv society.

It is worthy to note that while most of these traditional funerary practices and ceremonies of the Tiv are still being observed, they have undergone a lot of changes and modifications owing to civilisation, socialization, western education, wealth and affluence of individual Tiv persons and the role of Christianity.

### Tiv Traditionalists and the Grave for Christian Burials

All cultures of the world from the pre-literate to the contemporary literate and modern society have had certain rites and ceremonies which regulate the treatment of the human corpse from the time of occurrence of death to when it is disposed finally. The above reality explains why both the Tiv and Christianity observe long and complex ceremonies in funerary accorded a dead member.

Discussions in the early segments of this paper have taken time to highlight funeral or burial practices in Tiv traditional society and those obtainable from the Christian religion. In both instances, burials/funerals were conducted for only members who adhered to these faiths i.e. traditionalists in African religion and Christians for the Christian faith.



Duruh must have also had the Tiv society in mind when she wrote that: “the advent of Christianity has changed a lot of things, changes which were not anticipated by African religion and its adherents, the traditionalists (102). Thus, concerning death and burial rites, when a person dies in Tiv society, be it an infant or adult if s/he is a fully registered member of the church, the corpse is considered as belonging to the church and not the clan or community. If the deceased is an infant, s/he is immediately interred and the funeral activities handled by the church; but if the deceased were an adult; certain procedures including notifying the church leaders who consequently informs the priests (102).

The priest may permit the ringing of the church bell to notify members that one of the faithful had departed. This is followed with the burial programme planned in conjunction with the family, elders and the priest. On the eve of the burial, members of the church converge at the compound of the deceased for the wake. The funeral mass takes place in the church and by permission of the priest may be held at the compound of the deceased. Readings are taken from the Bible, Psalms chanted, prayers offered and a sermon delivered by the priest who equally blesses, incenses and sprinkles the corpse, coffin and grave with holy water following which burial takes place.

Christian burials are accorded both male and female practicing adherents as there is no special ceremony for any of the sexes. It is the conception of Christianity that both male and female are equal before the Lord; thus, they are treated equally without gender discrimination. In Tivland, two major Christian denominations are dominant i.e. the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Universal Reformed Christian Church (URCC/NKST). The Pentecostals are just making an inroad into the religious space in Tivland. Christian burial takes place between 10-14 days of the occurrence of death in NKST and the Catholic dioceses in Tivland i.e. Katsina-Ala, Makurdi and Gboko.

The discussion in this paper is centred on the Roman Catholic Church in Tivland and its practices regarding death and burial ceremonies, though instances may be cited in other denominations like the URCC/NKST. In view of the preceding, Igbum and Gberikon posits that the Catholic Church also celebrates the paschal mystery of Christ confidently in the funeral of Christians. They maintained that the significance of this celebration lies in the fact that, those who by baptism are made one with Christ may with him pass from death to life (78).

Sequel to the above understanding when one of its members dies the church encourages the celebration of the mass. The church does encourage the celebration of the Eucharist with the funeral rites for the repose of the dead and the comfort of the living (78). Although the church marks the passage of her members in a funeral rite, form the order of Christian funerals, the rites so

observed are not sacraments. This explains why according to them, the church encourages the celebration of the mass for the dead (78).

The Code of Canon Law clearly states those for whom the church funeral should be celebrated. Canon 1176#1 states that: “Christ’s faithful who have died are to be given a church funeral according to the norms of law” (79). By this canonical stipulation, it is therefore only proper that a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table; should have mass publicly celebrated for him/her (79).

Despite the fact of the clarity of the provisions of the Canon Law on Christian burial, there are strong indications that other category of persons in Tivland apart from professed Catholics benefit from the ceremonies of Christian burial even though they may not be professed Catholics or Christians at that. This has instigated a crave for Christian burial from Tiv traditionalists. In this manner, when a traditionalist becomes ill and envisages that death is imminent, s/he calls the attention of the priest (Reverend Father) in the locality/parish that baptizes the traditionalist who is thus deemed be converted to Christianity in the Catholic faith.

In the event of death, such a “convert” is given full Christian burial ceremony even though technically such a person may not have been grounded in Christian doctrines and teachings. Some of the benefiting traditionalists in this category are nominalists who are one leg in and one leg out of the church. Such are only seen in the church during solemn occasions like *Lenten* season, *Easter*, *Christmas*, *New Year* masses, or *Bazaar* while some do not attend the Church and mass at all.

Information conducted with some Tiv Christians indicate that there are several reasons which propel Tiv traditionalists to crave for Christian burial. First among these being that to die and be buried as a Christian is now the vogue in Tiv society. Thus, it is not uncommon to hear a Tiv traditionalist express his/her disdain to be buried as a non-Christian thus: “*ka kwagh u kunya u kpen ken tar ainge*” literary “it is a big shame to die in the “world”-outside Christianity nowadays. This makes being buried as a Christian fashionable and a garb to be admired by all irrespective of the motive.

Subscribing to the above line of thought, Mama Hannah Sareun Ahua in an interview averred that: “Going to church and being a member of the Christian congregation is a plan for her future funeral and burial and not necessarily a plan for the afterlife. According to her, she is always emotionally uplifted anytime she attends the funeral ceremony of a church member. The honour of being accorded Christian burial after death she maintained is inestimable (Oral interview).

In what could pass for a direct collaboration of the above Revd. Fr. Isaac Aondohemba Jacob in a sermon at St. Joseph’s Parish Akpehe stated that the common thing in Tiv society today is that non-

Christians/Church goers are seen as *u dasan mba iorov* – worthless people who do not think rightly. According to him, non-Christian Tiv think aloud that: *shie u me va kpe yo alu mba ken tar man mba man gogoro vea lu hen ku wam ye*, meaning “if I do not belong to a Christian Church, it would be “worldly people” and ogogoro drinkers who would grace my burial.

It becomes very glaring that Tiv traditionalists crave for Christian burial not for its importance or perceived benefits but because they would like to be buried as Christians and for the Christian community to grace their burials not men of the world and drinkers of ogogoro; whereas, they are not Christians in the real sense of it. Furthermore, the complacency of some overzealous priests who in a bid to show their Deans and Local Ordinary that they are working in their parishes go about indiscriminately “converting/baptizing” and sometimes solemnizing the marriages of community elders who are firm believers of African Religion – traditionalists. Such elders are ascribed names like Abraham, Jacob, Isaac and Maria for elderly women.

These priests erroneously think that by baptizing such elderly people and accepting them in the church would discourage the elders from practicing *tsav* (witchcraft) thereby saving the community from the negative effects of *tsav*. However, it is to be noted that witchcraft is not a physical but spiritual activity. Thus, mere baptism cannot stop these elderly persons from partaking in an activity they have participated in all their lives. Moreover, since 1927 when Captain R.M. Downes the British colonial administrator in Tivland launched the *Namakaa/Haakaa* (surrender things) anti witchcraft movement in Tivland and other subsequent movements that emerged, Tiv society has not been completely rid of the activities of witches and witchcraft (Adegas, *An African Perspective* 303)

Funny enough, these so-called conversions to Christianity is that these elders with little or no firm roots in Christianity often lapse back to traditional practices. Similarly, some of the converts who were already polygamous find themselves in a web of conflict as they are now expected to be monogamous. This brews a controversy as to which wife they are to wed and which should be divorced. Most often the elders settle for the younger wives. This further fuels the embers of envy and jealousy from the other wives and their children. In this drama, children born to the man by the other wives who are now technically divorced by him remain his children and he is obliged to cater for them but he is now expected not to have anything to do with the divorced wives such as sexual obligation and in their day to day up keep.

Furthermore, these elderly converts are seen where the *ityo* (patrikins) are converged and actively take part in death inquisitions (*ku oron*) and are also in attendance at community moots discussing matters of witchcraft, bewitchment, sicknesses and afflictions all bothering on Tiv traditional practices. This behaviour

according to Bem Raphael Wende has succeeded in swelling the members of nominal Christians in most communities across Tivland (Oral interview). Apart from the above, there seems to be a fusion of Tiv cultural practices into Christianity by these converts who are on both fringes of the divide. Moreover, because of the dominance of Christianity in Tivland the observance of Christian burial for a deceased becomes an opportunity for public declaration of faith (*African Religions...5*).

It is also observable that some priests in a bid to strengthen the financial base of their parishes randomly convert/baptize just about anyone into the church. The ploy is that during church fund raising; these are also levied as members belonging to the church. This often boosts the finances of the church with the donations of widow's mite by these “Christian” members. In the event that such “members” pass on, they may on the strength of their financial contributions be accorded full Christian burial. Augustine Torkuma informs of a case where a nominal Christian just because he had paid the family bazaar levy was accorded Christian burial by the priest of his parish in Makurdi (oral interview).

On the other hand, out-station churches which are unable to meet up the financial obligations of their parishes are sanctioned and priests never visits such churches to say the mass let alone the funerals of members from such churches (Anenge Reginald and Kuma Iorhija, Oral interview). Those not wedded in the church may also be denied the rites of Christian burial just as those who for one reason or the other may not have signed their Catholic testimonial book- baptism card.

Another factor that fuels the crave for Christian burial by Tiv traditionalist is the verbal onslaught on African religion and the claim by the clergy that there is no heaven or salvation in African Religion. Confused by these claims, some traditionalists have often abandoned their faith for the more popular Christianity so as to die as Christians and be accorded Christian burial and to obtain salvation. The truth of the matter however, is that, salvation is found in all religions no matter how remote the explanation on it may be. This explains why adherents of all religions struggle to do good as oppose to evil so as to be at a peace with both man and God and make heaven at the end of their tenure ship on earth. All religious affiliation promotes the virtue of good over evil. This is the number one goal of practitioners of African Religion

Thus, those who live good and moral lives attain ancestor hood following their demise. The honour given to such deceased person is a sign of immortalization of members of such a society. Such good and morally upright people according to Abba are collectively retained in the memory of members of their community; whereas the bad and evil ones who had no positive contribution or anything to be emulated for are cancelled from the collective memory of members of their community (35).

Furthermore, those who are candidates of heaven in Tiv traditional society are those who would

proudly take the *Swem* oath and publicly declare their innocence and good stand in their communities as captured by Dzurgba thus:

Tiv	English
Swem ne a ungwam!	Swem listen to me!
Aluer mea er or iyuhe yo!	If I have envied anybody!
Mea ta wan chovor igyoor!	If I have maltreated an orphan!
Mea nzuul a or iwan !	If I have frustrated a disabled person!
Mea vihi or makwagh!	If I have destroyed anybody's thing!
Mea er ma or ifer yo!	If I have done evil to anybody!
Mea wua ma or wan!	If I have killed anybody's child!
Mea vihi ma or yiav !	If I have destroyed any body's crop!
Mea vihi ma or kyegh !	If I have destroyed any body's chicken!
Mea vihi ma or ilev !	If I have destroyed anybody's animal!
Mea kaa me tar u vihi !	If I have said society should be bad!
Swem ne a moron yav me kpe	You, Swem, swell my stomach let me die!
Kpa aluer ka sha apera ilu wuan mo yo ! Mba vea fa kwagh shami cii! Swem a mor ve iyav ve kpe!	But if it is by false allegation that I am being killed! You Swem swell their stomachs and let them die! (180)

This proves that heaven and immortality are also found in African/Tiv Religion. It depends on who is writing and saying what. It may interest one to note that evil persons who are hell bound would desist from taking the *Swem* oath in Tiv society when matters became critical and they were promptly known by their actions – absence, excuses/unwillingness to take the oath.

But above all, the enumerated factors, the one reason that is most striking and which increases the anxiety and crave or need for Christian burial by Tiv traditionalists is the fear of being exhumed by the *Mbatsav* after a deceased is buried. In Tiv cosmology, one of the high points of witchcraft as reported by Moti and Wegh is the eating of human flesh in which the *Mbatsav* revive selected buried corpses which they again “kill” and eat (59).

This is actualised when the *Mbatsav* (witches) gather at the graveside of their victim and exhume the body without actually excavating it. Shishima explained that the *mbatsav* make this possible by using either *tsue* (hook) which actually looks like a fishing hook or by simply invoking the name of their victims (58). The Tiv believe that, not only is the exhumed body made to take its original shape but talks and walks as well. As Adega further pointed out, the resurrected body is tied to a tree in the forest for fattening before being killed again and the

“meat” shared and consumed by the coven of *mbatsav* (*The Ritual Symbolism...75*).

The prospect of being exhumed, tortured and fattened for consumption by the *mbatsav* dreads most Tiv and to escape such an unwholesome fate many would trade their traditional/cultural faith for Christianity. As Azua Mzungu explained, “*msoo me mbatsav ve va ya inyam yang a*” (I do not intend for the witches to eat up my flesh) (oral interview). With this mentality and phobia of the witches, Christian burial becomes a very big necessity for some Tiv traditionalists.

It is a common belief among the Tiv that when a deceased is given proper Christian burial, the witches are unable to access his/her grave/tomb for exhumation of the body. According to Gilbert Faave, the grave of a deceased Christian faithful is usually blessed by the priest in various rituals such as sprinkling it with holy water, incensing, holy oil which makes the grave and its vicinity inaccessible and impregnable to witches (Oral interview).

According to Moses Iorhemen the holy water used by the priest floods the grave and its vicinity and disguises its location from witches; while the incense dispels evil forces with its sweet fragrance and makes the grave appear hazy and in a cloud of smoke to the witches and other malevolent forces. These ritual ceremonies makes the task of witches seeking to exhume a corpse quite difficult, inconvenient and impossible (Oral interview).

### The Effects of the Crave for Christian Burial by Tiv Traditionalists

The crave and or desire for Christian burial by some Tiv traditionalists is not without some accompanying effects. The attempt to escape certain fate i.e exhumation and other secondary issues has witnessed an influx of persons to the Church. These are mostly returnees/nominalists who had lapsed into traditionalism having been converted earlier. These take cover in the believe that God cares for every soul and gladly welcomes the lost sheep even at the very last moment as depicted in one of the robbers crucified with Christ (cf. Luke 23:39-43).

For the above category of people among the Tiv, it becomes very difficult to ascertain their true status and whether to ascribe to them the toga or cloak of Christianity or traditionalism. In the like manner; the crave for Christian burial by Tiv traditionalists has equally attracted the attention of artisans and craftsmen. For instance, most coffins and caskets are designed with crucifixes of varying shapes and colours. These are bought for burial by both Christians and traditionalists. One is actually bemused by this development as avowed traditionalists are interred in coffins marked with the Christian symbol of the cross. Some of the coffins and caskets made by carpenters' nowadays are also embossed with animal symbols like goats, donkeys, horses and pigs.



**Plate 1:** A coffin laid in a grave ready to be covered. Note the Christian Cross on the coffin. Carpenters in contemporary Tiv Society emboss the coffins with the Cross irrespective of who would be buried in it; Christian or Traditionalist. This is one impact of the crave for Christian burial by Tiv traditionalists.  
**Source:** Field trip observation by the researchers.

In a related manner, masons in Tivland who are engaged to build the graves of deceased family members inscribe the sign of the cross or make patterns of the cross using tiles. As in the case of coffins/caskets above; it does not really matter if it is a traditionalist or a Christian that is buried in such a grave. It would appear the Church has not woken up to its responsibility of cautioning these artisans on the fragrant use of the Christian symbol. Some

artisans interviewed on their use of the cross on caskets/graves explained that they use the cross on caskets, coffins and graves to enhance the beauty and aesthetics of their products or crafts. In other words the cross is used merely for decoration not for what it represent or who will make use of the product or the end user (Oral interview).





**Plate 2:** A grave designed, built and beautifully tiled by a mason using a combination of bright colours. Note the Christian Cross on the grave. Like in the case of the coffin, the grave irrespective of who is buried in it (Christian/Traditionalist) bears the symbol of Christianity-the Cross. On the face value, the person buried in this grave should be a Christian, but the impact of the grave for Christian burial has ensured that such a grave could be housing the remains of a Tiv traditionalist and not a Christian. The building of and beautifully designing graves has reduced the impact of thanatology characterised by the red earth coverings on graves in contemporary society  
**Source:** Field trip observation by the researchers.

Also, most of the caskets and coffins that Christians purchase for the interment of loved ones are painted white to symbolize their pure state as Christians. This tallies with the white apparels worn on such occasions as baptism and weddings. The traditional black attire used for mourning by the Tiv is now frowned upon

as satanic capable of retarding the safe passage of the deceased to heaven



**Plate 3:** A white coffin embossed with the Christian Cross and flowers. White coffins in contemporary Christian burials are symbolic of the “pure” state of the deceased buried in the coffin as s/he is envisaged to have died in a state of grace in Christ. The deceased is worn white garments as well. White symbolizes holiness which explains why mourners are encouraged to wear white apparels/clothes during the one year mourning period. The traditional black colour mourning clothes demonized by Tiv Christians as representing “darkness”-Evil and thus, no longer en vogue. **Source:** Field trip observation by the researchers.

But most importantly, the use of the cross on caskets, coffins and tombs in Tivland today can be attributed to the fact that Christianity has assumed the dominant religion among the Tiv and everything that is aligned to it is seen as being good or better; which explains the consternation some Tiv have in not being buried as Christians when they pass on. Not only that, the use of the Christian symbol also facilitate the fast sale of

the products more so as such products gain much acceptance and appreciation.

On the whole, artisans - carpenters and masons in Tivland may be economical with the truth or feign ignorance of the actual reason for their usage of the Christian symbol of the cross on their products claiming there is no meaning implied. However, seeing that symbols carry deeper meaning than they actually appear

in the sense that a symbol is something which is associated with something else that it signifies or represents (Adega, *An African Perspective* 263); It is the contention of the researchers that coffins and caskets which carry animal symbols like goats, donkey, horses and pigs could most likely mean that the departed souls interred in such coffins/caskets could assume the characters of these animals in the spirit world.

### **Between a worthy Life and Christian Burial: Whither the Tiv Traditionalist?**

The paper has examined the crave for Christian burial by some Tiv traditionalists. Several factors have been fingered as being responsible for this turn of events. The researchers at this juncture explore a way forward with this rhetorical question: between a worthy life and Christian burial: whither the Tiv traditionalist? It is the view of this researchers that living a worthy life is an important aspect of existence in African and Tiv religion in particular. People who live morally good lives by protecting and defending the less privileged and seeking the good of all are remembered even when they die and depart from this world. They remain collectively in the minds of members of their communities. Their memories are cherished and the good deeds ever remembered.

Their communities often invoke their names when they run into trouble and such become ancestors. While such individuals lived, they impacted the lives of so many people in their communities. Among the Tiv, such worthy men would not defile another person's wife/daughter; they would not help a girl procure abortion; poison their perceived enemies; they would protect the animals of neighbours, even stray animals are not killed and eaten; but the owners of such missing animals find them tethered to a post in their compound and claim same.

These are morally upright Tiv in whose compounds one would find shelter, food, water and security. Not the evil ones that would orchestrate chaos in society and plot the downfall of members of their community. Not dubious persons who are mostly fingered in almost all the evil mechanizations in their communities. These are men and women destined for "hell"; people of bad influence who you would do good to but would turn round to curse you; orchestrate accidents, death and pain for members of their communities. While the good ones are remembered even after death, and their children and other family members reap the fruits of their moral lives; the same cannot be said of people who had lived evil lives. They are blotted out of the collective memories of members of their community and members of their families also suffer dire consequences. This is attested to, by the Christian Holy Bible in Psalm 37:27-28.

In view of the above reality, the paper calls on adherents of African Religion (Traditionalists) to value and live morally good lives that impact the whole of society so

that when they depart from this world; the wailings of the people would be heard as far as the heavens and God would grant them eternal rest in his abode. It would therefore be foolhardy for any traditionalist to think that they would see the face of God (obtain salvation), after perpetrating evil; just because they were accorded Christian burial at their demise. The truth must be told that if a person had not lived a morally good life while alive, even if buried by the Pope, it would do such a person no good. One's good standing with both God and man ushers in peaceful repose of the soul at death not the kind of burial accorded a person-Traditional or Christian.

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper has examined the phenomenal of burial and the crave for Christian burial by adherents to Tiv traditional religion. Several factors are responsible for the Christian burial by Tiv traditionalist. Prominent among these factors is the desire for salvation and the desire for escape exhumation after burial by the *mbatsav*. The truth of the matter is that freedom of Religion is guaranteed in the Nigerian Constitution (chapter 4) which deals with fundamental human rights. However, while these rights are there for the individual "converting" to a religion on the basis of salvation are not cogent enough. This is because no one religion holds a monopoly to salvation.

Salvation is an act of God preached and believed in by most religious traditions including African/Tiv religion. This explains why the virtue of good is encouraged well and above evil. If salvation is salvation, which of these do adherents of traditionalism hope to find in Christianity that is not found in traditionalism? One's moral life in the society would gain one salvation; doing the will of God, treating another human being as yourself, etc. These tenets are preached in both traditional religion and Christianity.

Secondly, if some Tiv traditionalists frivolously convert to Christianity because they would want to escape being exhumed, maltreated, butchered and eaten by the nocturnal witches; they should learn to live good lives for indeed, those tortured after exhumation are mostly the souls of wicked people who did not allow society to be in peace while they lived. Also, as pointed out by Azakondugh Igba: what would the Tiv traditionalists do when they die and are buried only to discover that the witches using their newly invented nocturnal technology of a "mystic canoe" are able to access their graves and succeed in exhuming their corpses even though they were buried by a priest in full Christian funeral rites? (Oral interview)

The assertion above also goes a long way to prove that nocturnal technology also keeps advancing to meet up with emerging nocturnal challenges. Tiv traditionalists are thus called upon to hold onto their faith and live good lives so as to see the face of God when they



make their departure from this world. It is the kind of life that one lived while alive that matters, a life that impacted several other persons/society, an existence that supported justice, equal rights and fair play and peace not how a person was buried and the glamour and crowd that witnessed the burial nor the priest and how he buried them that matters, for these are all but vanity.

## WORKS CITED

- Abba, Williams. "African Notion of Immortality and Hereafter". *The Searchers' Delight Magazine*, Maiden Edition. A Publication of St. Thomas Aquinas major Seminary (STAMS), Makurdi, 2009/2010. Print.
- Adegas, Andrew Philips. "Death and Burial Ceremonies in Tivland and the Emerging Culture of Extortion". *The Making of a Man: Essays in Honour of Very Revd. Dr. Chris I. Utov*. Enugu: Obeta Printing and Publishing, 2013. Print.
- - -. *An African Perspective on Phenomenology of Religion*. Makurdi: Gwatex Publishers, 2019. Print.
- - -. *The Ritual Symbolism of Death, Burial and Ku oron (inquest) in Tiv Religious Culture*. Enugu: Hossannah Books, 2018. Print.
- "African Religions". <http://www.deathreference.com/A-Bi/African-Religions.html>. accessed 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.
- "Burial". <https://www.britannica.com/topic/burial-death-rite>. accessed 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2020. web.
- Burke, Cardinal Raymond L. "On the Christian Burial of the Dead". <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3448>. accessed 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2020. web.
- Charles, Aaron. "Importance of a Proper Burial in the Bible". Classroom.synonym.com. <https://classroom.synonym.com/importance-of-a-proper-burial-in-the-bible-12085510.html>. accessed 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2020. Web.
- Decker, Rodney J. "If you meet the undertaker before you meet the "upper taker": A Christian view of Death, Dying and Funerals". *Baptist Bible Seminary*, March 12, 2007. Print.
- Duruh, Lilian C. "Economic Effects of Death and Burial Rites on Christian Families in Igbo Land: Implications for Early Childhood Care and Education". *International Advanced Journal of Teaching and Learning* Vol.4 Number 1. Zeetaz Publishing, 2018. Print.
- Dzurgba, Akpenpuun. *On the Tiv of Central Nigeria: A Cultural Perspective*. Ibadan: John Archers, 2007. Print.
- Graber, Amanda. "Christian Funerals guide: Etiquette and Traditions". burialplanning.com. 2019. web.
- Igbum, Victor and Gberikon Gabriel. "Death and Burial Among the Tiv in the Light of the New Rite of Christian Funeral". *SWEM: Journal of Religion and Philosophy* (2:1.) August, 2008.
- Moti, James Shagba and Francis Shagbaor Wegh. *An Encounter Between Tiv Religion and Christianity*. Enugu: Snaap Press, 2001. Print.
- Rabbi, Michele Brand Medwin. *Guide to Jewish Customs Regarding Death and Mourning*. Tempel Sholom, Monticello, New York (nd). Print.
- Shishima, Sarwuan Daniel. "A Re-appraisal of the Institution of Tsav (witchcraft) and the Stability of the Tiv Nation: Lessons for Nigeria". *Bulletin of African Religion and Culture (BARC)* (5:1), 1990. Print.

## LIST OF RESPONDENTS

S/n	Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date
1.	Mama Hannah Sarem Ahua	68yrs	F	Farming	Tse Ahua bua, Mbakyobo, Mbakuha, Ushongo LGA, Benue State	02-12-2018
2.	Revd. Fr. Isaac Aondohemba Jacob	Ad	M	Clergy	St. Joseph's Parish, Akpehe, Makurdi	17-11-2019
3.	Bem Raphael Wende	40yrs	M	Farming	Betse-Mbaduku Vandeikya LGA, Benue State	22-08-2020
4.	Augustine Torkuma	43yrs	M	Artisan	Iorhom Village, Makurdi	12-06-2018
5.	Anenge Reginald	52yrs	M	Civil servant	Tse-Duger, Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA, Benue State	29-04-2019
6.	Kuma Iorhija	36yrs	M	Student	Tombo, Buruku LGA, Benue State	07-04-2022
7.	Azua Mzungu	55yrs	M	Teaching	Gbeji, Ukum LGA, Benue State	29-04-2022
8.	Gilbert Faave	62yrs	M	Farming	Betse-Mbaduku, Vandeikya LGA, Benue State	20-08-2021
9.	Moses Iorhemem	31yrs	M	Student	Tse-Akpi, Makurdi LGA, Benue State	15-05-2020
10.	Azakondugh Igba	56yrs	F	Farming	Adaka, Makurdi LGA, Benue State	15-02-2019