

## CHAPTER 17

# DEATH AND BURIAL OF THE FAITHFUL IN ETSAKỌ PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS FOR AUCHI DIOCESE

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### Introduction

Death ends the temporal existence of a human being on earth. It is a mystery that has been a part of the human existence. Given that only the remembrance of a person survives after death, the family of the deceased would love to do all that is humanly possible to show the last respect with elaborate funeral ceremonies even if the deceased was not well taken care of while on earth. In the context of the 2006 pastoral letter of Bishop Gabriel G. Dunia, the Catholic bishop of Auchi, titled: *“Let the dead rest in peace”*, we can discuss the mystery of death and what death means to the bereaved. In the pastoral letter the bishop reminded the faithful of the decree which he issued on Good Friday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 2005. This decree states that: “Ecclesiastical funerals, by which the Church seeks spiritual support for the deceased, honour their bodies and at the same time brings the solace of hope to the living” (Canon 11776: § 2), must be celebrated within two weeks

in the diocese of Auchi, counting from the day when the particular death must have occurred”.<sup>1</sup>

Death has always been a mystery that threatens human existence. The fear of death is attended by the major questions of manner, time and place of death. Elizabeth Kübler-Rose, a psychiatrist and a world-renowned authority and counsellor on death sees death as the final stage of growth. According to her, “Human mortality may not be denied, for death is the common end to all life. To the individual or traditional faith, death is not an end but a transition from one state of human existence to another”.<sup>2</sup> R.A. Moody sees death only as the demise of the corporeal body, hence he says that death is “that state of the body from which it is impossible to be revived.”<sup>3</sup>

Death is a riddle that many tribes and authors have attempted to find answers to. H. Koster attempts an explanation from the Jewish point of view. Koster says that for the man of the ancient Orient, life and death were not two abstract entities, but two opposing spheres. Death which in Hebrew is *māwet* was experienced not only spatially as the realm of the dead, but also dynamically through its power. The Israelite did not meditate on death as a physiological process; neither did he describe death as a separation of body and soul in the Greek manner. Rather, he viewed death as the ultimate and undesired weakening and loss of vitality. Only in advanced age did death become acceptable as something natural.<sup>4</sup>

Bolaji Idowu devoted a whole chapter to explicate man’s final destiny in his book *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*. He submitted at the very beginning that “The fact of death is a baffling and disturbing question mark written conspicuously on the face of things. Man has been forced, therefore, since he became acquainted with it, to apply his mind to the question of its origin and purpose.”<sup>5</sup> Idowu did not lay emphasis on the definition of death rather he tried to trace the origin which he ascribed to *Iku* as the agent of *Olodumare* to take people

away from the earth. “The common orthodox belief is that *Iku* is a creation of *Olodumare*: he was made for the specific purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled. When they think of death as ‘dying’, then they describe it as a ‘debt’ – the debt which everyone must pay. This is as much as to say that death is the inevitable and ultimate lot of every person who comes into the world”.<sup>6</sup>

Mbiti calls death sleep into an everlasting home. He seems to be the first African theologian that defines death in the context of the living. He calls the dead the living-dead. For him, “Death is conceived of as a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person. He moves on to join the company of the departed, and the only major change is the decay of the physical body, but the spirit moves on to another state of existence. Some of the words describing death imply that a person goes ‘home’, which means that this life is like a pilgrimage. The real ‘home’ is the hereafter”.<sup>7</sup>

Luke Nnamdi Mbefo gives the following narrative: “In Igbo mythology, a delegation from the Igbos to God had failed to lobby for immortality. The frog has ever been hated by the Igbos because it succeeded in arguing for death for humans before God’s court. Since God’s decree is irrevocable, people have still to continue to live in such a way as to find meaning in the time allotted them even though they know they will certainly die.”<sup>8</sup>

The above analysis is to help the reader understand why burial of the human person is attended with so much passion and feeling of separation. The early thinking of the Jews sees death as a total annihilation because they did not believe in life after death and the resurrection. It was the Maccabean history and the Wisdom literature that first emphasized the teaching of another life and the resurrection from the dead. This became the central point of the teaching of Jesus Christ from the very beginning, the Etsako people see the dead and

the living as still belonging to the same family. Death for the Etsako thus becomes a transition to *Alimhi'afemha* or *Ogbanakido*. *Alimhi'afemha* literally means the Spirit world of our people while *Ogbanakido* is rendered in Avhianwu as *Oba za lẹ ora enwe* (a place where the firewood is not identified in the ashes). *Ogbanakido* also means a perfect market from where no one ever returns.

### **Dying and Death among the Jews:**

At a point in the history of the Jewish people, the fact of death was so real to them that they have to prepare for their final exit from the physical world. This preparation above all is the radical confrontation of the family not with the distribution of material possessions but with ethical instruction. The Patriarch Isaac, recognizing that his days were numbered, called his first born to him. He charged Esau; “So I may give you my blessing before I die” (Gen 27). Joseph took his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh to the bedside of Grandfather Jacob so that they might receive his blessing. Jacob then called his twelve sons to him and pronounced his ethical will.

Some parents have instructed their children regarding family unity, loyalty to religious traditions and ethical imperatives before they died. Elizabeth kübler-Rose says that each of these procedures involves repentance, confession, the ordering of one's material affairs, the blessing of family, and ethical instruction. All these take account of the theological, practical and emotional needs of the terminal patient. They enable the patient to express fears, find comfort and inner strength, and communicate meaningfully with those close to him.<sup>9</sup>

The first stage in the preparation for death is the ***Mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim***. This in Hebrew is the visitation of the sick and terminally ill patient. Contemporary programmes to alleviate the

distress of terminally ill and dying patients are very much in consonance with the teachings of the Jewish tradition which stress the normalcy of these events of the life cycle. The patient's emotional equilibrium is maintained, with the continued support of family and community, who perform the *mitzvah* of "*Bikkur Cholim*". This visitation of the sick is nurtured by their religious tradition. When death, the natural end of human existence, inevitably does come it is accepted as the decree of human mortality by the Eternal and Righteous Judge.<sup>10</sup>

***Shechiv Mera*** is the period of terminal illness while ***Goses*** is the dying moment. Jewish tradition confronts death directly and specifically. The Jews revere this period as a time when loved ones should surround, comfort, and encourage the patient". ***Hallacha***, the Jewish legal system, forbids that dying patients should be left alone. The dying person must be treated as he was always treated, as a complete person capable of conducting his own affairs and able to enter fully into human relations even unto death. Further, the Jewish tradition of not leaving the bedside of the dying is of immense value, not only to the dying person but also to those about to be bereaved. How helpless and how guilty we must feel when we hear of the death of a loved one, especially if no one was there to ease the fear of uncertainty and the pain of separation.<sup>11</sup>

***Chockmah*** is the acceptance of death as God's will. When death eventually occurs, the Jew accepts it as the will of God. However, the major concern is not the dead but the bereaved and so the Jews have the rite of mourning which they called *Chockmah (Wisdom)*. This wisdom in the bible means, doing what is right in each situation. It is in this sense that the Jewish perspectives on death and the Jewish mourning practices are wise. They are wise because they provide a total framework within which man learns to accept death, to mourn completely, and to live again fully. When the family and community

are faced with the prospect of the death of one of its members, Jewish law reminds us that “a dying man is considered the same as a living man in every respect”.<sup>12</sup>

The bedside vigil serves one more purpose. As death approaches, a crisis of faith occurs as the life-cycle draws to an end. A personal confession is encouraged from the dying as a rite of passage to another phase of existence. This confession in Hebrew is called *Teshuvah*. This type of confession occurs throughout the Jewish life cycle whenever one stage has been completed. So we confess on the Day of Atonement as we end one year of life and begin another. So brides and grooms traditionally confessed and fasted on their wedding day for they sensed that it marked the end of one stage in their lives and the beginning of another.

The confession on the death-bed is the recognition of the ending cycle and the beginning of another. This together with the recitation of the *Shema* in the last moments before death helps to affirm faith in God precisely when it is most challenged and helps the dying person focus on those most familiar rituals of his life just at the moment when he enters the most mysterious and unknowable experience of his life. This comforts him together with those who share his vigil.<sup>13</sup> This is in harmony with psychiatric literature which abounds with examples of the fearful consequences of death-denial and repression of grief. The *Talmudic* sages, centuries ago, seemed to have sensed the same truth that psychiatrists now articulate, which is that “the recognition of death is a necessity for continuing life (and grief), is a necessary process in normative psychological functioning”.<sup>14</sup>

Among the Jews, burial is the principal duty of the first son of the dead man. “When Abraham had breathed his last, dying at a happy ripe age, old and full of years, he was gathered to his people. His son Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah facing Mamre, in the field of Ephron, the Hittite, son of Zohar” (Gen 25, 8-10). When

Isaac died at the age of one hundred and eighty years, “his sons Esau and Jacob buried him” (Gen 35, 29). The funeral of Jacob was extraordinary because Joseph played the role of a first born whereas he was not. This prominent role seems to be an exception because it was a combination of the Egyptian and Jewish rite. The situation of Jacob’s children and the privileged position of Joseph must have also contributed to this exception (Gen 50, 1-14).

Tobit summoned his son Tobias and told him “When I die, give me an honourable burial” (Tob 4, 1). Tobit also advised Tobias regarding the mother: “Remember my child, all the risks she ran for your sake when you were in her womb. And when she dies, bury her at my side in the same grave (Tob 4, 2-3; 6, 15; 14, 10). Funeral rites in the Old Testament are known only from casual allusions. Hebrew law prohibits some practices, such as shaving the head and incisions of the body (Deut 14, 1) and food offering for the dead (Deut 26, 14). Contact with the dead rendered a person unclean and was not permitted to the priests (Lev 21, 1).

The dead were mourned by ritual lamentation. Because of the climate of the Near East, there was no practice of preservation of the body of the dead such as Egyptian mummification. This made early burial imperative, and it was usually done on the same day. A number of tokens of mourning are mentioned in the Old Testament: the rending of garments (2 Sam 1, 2; 3, 31; 15, 32); the wearing of sackcloth (2 Sam 3, 31); or other mourning garments (Ezek 26, 16; 2 Sam 14, 2) the smearing of dust on the head (2 Sam 1:2); the covering of the head (2 Sam 15, 30); walking bare foot (2 Sam 15, 30) and wearing the hair loose (Lev 10, 6).

Burial took place, if possible, on the day of death, and in the Old Testament times, no preparation of the body was made as far as we know. In the New Testament, the body was washed (Acts 9, 37) and anointed with ointment and spices (Mark 16, 1; Luke 16, 56; John 19,

39). All four Gospels mention the wrapping in linen, but only John mentions *othonia*, that is the addition of spices to perfume his body. “They took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen clothes with the spices, following the Jewish burial custom”(John 19, 40); and a handkerchief over the face. The nature of the wrapping is not clear; the word used by John suggests that the body was found in linen bands. A similar word (*keiria*) is used of Lazarus (John 11, 44) and such binding is further suggested by Jesus’ command to untie him.

Burial was granted even to criminals after execution, and privation of burial was a great curse (Deut 28, 26; 1 Kgs 21, 23; 2 Kgs 9, 36; Isa 34, 3; 66:24; Jer.7, 33; 14, 16; 16, 4; 19:7; 22, 19; 25, 33).<sup>15</sup>The gospel account of the burial of Jesus, relates that the body was washed, anointed, and bound tightly in linen. The Jews encourage very simple burial. The simplicity of the Jewish burial averts another psychological pitfall. The religious prescription for plain unadorned simple coffins and for the avoidance of ostentation in the funeral itself serves as a deterrent to the excessive expenditure of family funds for irrational reasons. This is similar to the Islamic funeral rites. The members of the family physically take part in the interment of the deceased. Burying the dead by actually doing some of the shoveling themselves helps the mourners and the mourning community to ease the pain of parting by performing one last act of love and concern. What more familiar and poignant act is there than that of “putting to rest” as children are put to rest at night by their parents.

### **Dying and Death in *Etsako***

Death in *Etsako* is called *egwi*. It is a dreaded phenomenon that terminates life on earth. In *Etsako*, a person is certified dead at the cessation of cardiac function. Once a person stops breathing the person is arranged properly and neatly on the bed to avoid any form of stiffness in any part of the body. In the past, children were sent out of the environment in order not to see the corpse. Ordinarily, *Etsako* people do not like to discuss death. The *Etsako* people describe death as the

mighty evil storm that does not wait for the child to remove clothes from the line (*Egwi lọ kho' kpame ọbe nọ zọ 'mọ na ne ma ato re*). For the Etsakọ people, death is a transition into the ancestral world, (*Ọgbanakido or Alimhi'afemha*). Death is personified as “*olimhi obe*” (a terrifying ghost). Death is feared because of its suddenness. When, where and the how of death is shrouded in a deep mystery.<sup>16</sup>

The reaction to death varies according to individuals and communities. This reaction is influenced by the traditional belief of the individual or community. For the Etsakọ people of Edo state of Nigeria, every death has a cause. So there is distinction between natural and unnatural death. The former refers to an elder while the latter refers to a youth. The causes and agents of unnatural death are attributed to the machination of the witches, wizards, and evil people. The wrath of the deities and ancestors can also cause premature death.

According to one of the Etsakọ mythologies, the original intention of God was that human beings would live forever. Consequently, God was very close to human beings. The sky was very close to the earth and from the sky human beings got their food. There was no labour of any kind. All one needed to do was to cut bread (*ẹko*) from the sky. However, there was a rule that one must finish the quantity to prevent rats from eating from it. This rule was disobeyed by a woman called *Ọvhabumhẹ* who cut more than she could eat. The remnant was eaten by rats. God was angry and divined providence departed far away into the sky. When the people pleaded for forgiveness they were asked to choose between eternal suffering from starvation and temporal suffering that would end in death after which human beings will find rest.

The people, because of the distance of “*Osi*” (the transcendent God), asked the dog to run to heaven and tell God that they would prefer to die but that a home should be provided for human beings who die. Secondly, that people who have died should have the

opportunity to come back in the form of reincarnation after a moment of rest. Finally, human beings should be allowed to live up to a hundred years before they die. The dog (*agwa*), did not deliver the message well; instead, it reported to God that Human beings wanted to die and never come back. God out of his own discretion chose death for human beings and every living creature. In the case of man, a home was provided in the spirit world and after a while people who died at ripe old age and who lived uprightly could come back in form of reincarnation. This story accounts for the proverb: “*Qvha bumhẹ lọ khio okhui ye*” (It is greed that drove away the sky, and brought to humanity, pain and death) <sup>17</sup>

It is obvious from the above story that disobedience is the major cause of death. This is also the message the author of the book of Genesis tried to teach in the story of Adam and Eve. The Etsakọ now sees death as a messenger of God that beckon on the living person that time is up. In this understanding, the world is considered as a market. Human beings normally go home after trading in the market. In other words, we are traders in the world. Consequently, human beings are helpless in the face of death. “No one argues when one’s time is up” (*Anwai Ede’ ogba*).<sup>18</sup> Death is a debt that must be paid in Etsakọ traditional thoughts. In funeral ceremonies the following song is very prominent: *Vha ye le re, ukpele egwi , ode to khẹ mha, okhi lo otsa ni mha lo li ni mha nwema ra fa* – (Remember that the day of death is waiting for us. It is a debt that we must pay some day).

E.B. Idowu talking about death among the Yorubas affirms the Etsakọ understanding of dying and death. He says that “the common, orthodox belief is that *Iku* is a creation of *Olodumare*: he was made for the specific purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled. When they think of death as ‘dying’, then they describe it as a ‘debt’ – the debt which everyone must pay. This is as much as to say that death is the inevitable and ultimate lot of every person who comes into the world.”<sup>19</sup> Idowu however acknowledged that “the fact

of death is a baffling and disturbing question mark written conspicuously on the face of things. Man has been forced, therefore, since he became acquainted with it, to apply his mind to the question of its origin and purpose.”<sup>20</sup>

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a child or a person who died while the parents were still living or died childless was called *olimhi ebikha* (plantain or banana leaf). The corpse was wrapped with *ebikhai* (plantain or banana leaf) and buried immediately in the forest. A person who died after the demise and burial of the parents was called *olimhi okpisha* (matured death). The funeral of an old person begins at his sick bed. When the elder is sick, it is expected that the children and neighbours should always be around to give the sick a sense of community belonging. The sick is not to be left alone and lonely on the bed. It is a privilege and special blessing for children to witness the death of a parent. Very often you hear parents praying for the children: *Osinegba ze mię mhe vhe egwi*, (May you witness my death).

The presence of loved ones assist the dying to die peacefully. Elizabeth Kübler-Rose condemns the abandonment of the sick to a lonely bed. According to her,

It has been noted that only a minority of people today die in the familiar surroundings of their homes or place of occupation. We usually automatically remove the terminally ill to the sterile atmosphere of the medical centre. Consequently, the dying patient is estranged from the emotional security of the family and the familiar at the point of greatest emotional trauma.<sup>21</sup>

A corpse is called *ekwi olimhi* in Etsako. The body is highly respected and so must be buried with the utmost respect. Once a person is certified dead, the children first go to the maternal family (*adi*) of the deceased with a penny to tell them that their son or daughter had passed on. Today five naira takes the place of the penny. Burial in Etsako is in

two phases, *the ceremony of interment and the ceremony of the final rites of burial (Itolimhi)*. The former is the interment of the corpse while the latter involves sacrifices that open the gates of the ancestral home (*Alimhi'afemha*). In Avianwu, this is defined as a perfect market where the wood is not recognized in the ashes (*Ogbanakido -oba za lẹ ora enwẹ*).

The burial ceremonies depend on the age of the deceased. There are no ceremonies in the burial of the child. When a baby dies it is buried immediately without a coffin. It is covered and tied with a white cloth and taken to the cemetery (*atalimhi*). The youth is also buried immediately but sometimes with a coffin. People who died after drinking the water used in bathing the corpse or some liquid used for swearing (*amolimhi or osaki*) were thrown into the forest. This is the case when the death of a person is highly suspicious and people are suspected to have a hand in the death of the person. Those accused were made to swear by drinking the water used in washing the body of the deceased (*amolimhi*). If the suspect refused to drink the water, they were given *osaki* to drink. *Osaki* was a drink produced from the bark of *osaki* tree, fermented in a pot and preserved in a clay pot or calabash. If the suspect drinks the *osaki* and vomited, the person was declared innocent but if the person did not vomit, it meant that the person was guilty and the result was immediate death. Today, the *osaki* is regarded by the educated Etsakọ as poison. In the past, anybody that died after drinking the bath water of the dead (*amolimhi*) or *osaki* was thrown into the forest.

Those who die before their parents are not given full traditional burial rites. Before the advent of hospital mortuary, the body was preserved locally by placing a knife (*ayū'wẹrẹ*) or an axe blade (*olẹmhi uze*) on the chest while messages are sent to all the relations of the deceased. It is the belief of the Etsakọ people that the knife or the axe will prevent the fast decay of the body of the dead person. Ajayi Obotse

who granted me an interview on this topic could not tell me the content of the axe (*uze*) knife (*ayu'wẹrẹ*) but he believes that the action was effective because corpses treated this way could stay for four days on the event that the first son or those they are waiting for did not arrive on time. Local gin (*kaika*) is also used by some people to embalm the body of the dead person. This gin was poured in the mouth of the deceased. The belief was that the dry gin would dry up the body.<sup>22</sup>

In the past, there was no lying-in state; the body (*ekwi olimhi*) was interred the same day if all the people required especially the first son was available. Before the interment, the body was washed and prepared for burial. The washing (*ikhue olimhi*) was first done physically with water. After that the ritual “washing” commenced. Ajayi Obotse, a member of the local undertakers (*ikha'gba*) in Afowa, Uzairue, Etsako West of Edo State said that the first stage of the interment was the washing of the corpse (*Ekwi olimhi*) by the first son who used the leaves from *ogheghe* tree with water to touch the body seven times. If the deceased has more than a wife; the first son of each of the wives does the same. The meaning of the *washing* is that when the deceased was a child he was bathed with *ogheghe* leaves or (*ebi iromo*).<sup>23</sup>

This could be compared to the Christian baptismal and funeral rites. The minister sprinkles the body of the deceased saying: “*Let this water call to mind our baptism into Christ, who by his death and resurrection has redeemed us*”<sup>24</sup>. At baptism when the deceased, was a child, the minister poured water on the head of the child saying: “*N., I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*”.<sup>25</sup> The minister also gives the child a white cloth saying: “*N. you have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven. All say: Amen*”.<sup>26</sup>

At death this rite is performed again. The minister places a white cloth on the coffin or casket of the dead person as a reminder of the person’s Christian dignity. Then the corpse is taken into the Church for

the funeral mass. In Etsako, water is used to ritually cleanse the body of the dead with *ogheghe* leaves while in the Christian religion, Holy water is used to bless the body. At baptism, water is used in the Christian religion, while in Etsako, the water from *ebiromo* and *ogheghe* is used to cleanse the child at initiation and circumcision.

The next stage of ritual washing is pure sacrifice. This involves the sacrifice of a cock or hen. For a man, a cock is killed and the blood is dropped on the right hand of the dead, the right hand, (*Obe era*), is called *obekhai*, (a triumphant hand). For the woman, a hen (*uwokho*) is killed and the blood is dropped on the left hand. When the corpse leaves the room, it is placed outside and the family and well-wishers “*washed the corpse with money*”. The money is collected by the undertakers (*Ikha’gba*) who share this money and also give to those who helped in watching over the corpse while lying in state. These people who also attended the corpse are called, *ebere*. The expression is: “*Take, this is your share of the effort to watch over the dead*” (*vha mọ, ebere natse vha lọ khọ na*).<sup>27</sup> According to J.O. Awolalu “It is believed that if a corpse is not washed in this ceremonial way, it will have no place with the ancestors and will become a wandering ghost, called *iwin* or *iseku*.”<sup>28</sup>

While the children are “*washing*” the body with money, the *ikha’gba* (undertakers) sings at intervals: *Olimhi, ọnọ khiu ugba ne re ye, re ro’ nọ oya* (who ever does not wash you to reach your ancestors watch the person with care). This “*washing*” with money is symbolic. After the “*washing*” the undertakers (*ikha’gba*) sing again: *Zẹ ni ikha’gba zẹ nikha gba ne edu zẹ ni kha gba ne du olimhi*. (Give to the undertakers to enable them move the corpse). Then the body is dressed and covered with a white cloth and for those who can afford a coffin; the body is put in a coffin and the procession to the grave begins. In Etsako, if this “*washing*” (*ikwe olimhi*) is not properly done the corpse bearers at a point would stop and say: *olimhi oge khia* (the corpse has refused to proceed. To move the corpse the family again “*wash*” the body with money properly.

Many parts of Etsako have public and Church cemeteries but elders very often are buried at home. The practice is similar to that of

the Yoruba as recorded by J. O. Awolalu.”In very early days, graves were dug inside the house and in particular rooms; but that practice has changed. Graves are now usually dug in the family compounds. To the Yoruba, to bury somebody in the common cemeteries is to cast him out and to lose contact with him, because regular ancestral veneration which involves pouring libations, breaking kola-nuts and praying on the grave of the deceased would not be convenient and domestic”.<sup>29</sup>

This rite is the declaration of the assets of the deceased. The properties are shared among the children and those who have a right to the assets. This concludes the funeral rites (*Itolimhi*). The children select items from the property of the deceased and take them to *Adi* (the maternal home). The venue is normally the house of the eldest man in the *adi*. These items are selected depending on if the deceased is a man or a woman. For the woman it depends on if she is *Onabo* or *Adegbe*. *Onabo* is a woman bought and paid for from another village. She is a full member of the family and all her funeral rites take place in the husband’s house where she is buried. It is the children of *Onabo* that inherit the property of the mother and father. Another name for *Onabo* is *amho’oya*. *Adegbe* or *Oriso* is not bought. She is married normally with the normal bride prize. The children of *Adegbe* belong to the mother and the mother’s family. These children can not inherit the properties of their father.

If the children want to claim the right of the children of *Amoya*, the children perform a simple ceremony. This ceremony is simply to say: *Ifiu udoko eramhe yo ekpa* (I put in my pocket the tools of my father). This declaration must be made with full consciousness in the presence of reliable witnesses preferably the elders and young people.<sup>30</sup> The items presented at *Adi* are not the same for every *adi*. The following is the most common: For a man, the children present twenty one ears of corn, twenty one tubers of yam, a pair of shirts, a pair of trousers, one hoe, one cutlass, one *ebuma* (farm bag), and the amount of money found in the pocket of the deceased. (No person can say that nothing was found since the *adi* will charge the person for not taking care of the

parent). The first four elders share these items among themselves. The eldest man takes the clothes, ten tubers of yam, one ear of corn. From his share he now gives the other members of the *adi*. The money is shared among the elders according to the order of seniority. The children then take eleven ears of corn and eleven tubers of yam. Once this ceremony is done, the children are then free to inherit the parent's property. In the past, the *adi* share the entire property of the deceased with the children. It is not so anymore.<sup>31</sup>

For a woman who was *Onabọ* or *Amhọ'ọya*, the children present a packet of *Ugba* (locust beans), *emhe* (clay pot), *atasa* (plate), *ugbude* (clay oven pot for drying meat), *Umei* (salt) *atalabi* (big basin) *asuaisua* (medium basin). The items presented should also remind the family of the gifts she received at marriage. In the case of a woman, the eldest women did the sharing like the men. In the case of the *Adegbe* or *Oriso*, (a woman that was not bought), when she dies, she is taken back to her family. The children present the same items like that of *Onabọ* or *amhọ'ọya*. After this the children shave their heads for the late parent.<sup>32</sup>

The Ekperi of Etsakọ Central Local Government has some variations from the above analysis. The date of the second burial of the deceased is normally arranged by the mother's family except the deceased is an *amhọ'ọya*. (A woman bought outside the immediate community). *Itolimhi* can be done immediately after interment or can be done later depending on the financial readiness of the children or the relations of the deceased. The rite is as follows: The date is fixed to coincide with Uzairue Market Day, that is, *Elumhi nokhua*. It is an all night celebration of dancing, eating and drinking. The ceremony concludes with a gun shot marking the beginning of the rites.

### **Implication for the Catholic Diocese of Auchi**

The question of death and burial has been a major concern for the Church. The question has always been the difference between Christian

burial and Etsako traditional burial. It is obvious today that the spiritual meaning of funerals is giving way to unnecessary show off and self-aggrandizement. Some people who did not even care about the housing and feeding of their parents would want to keep the bodies in the mortuary for years and months to enable them build houses and prepare for the social aspects of the burial ceremonies. To suggest some recommendations for the Etsako Christian, there is need to compare the burial rites of the Jews, the Etsako and the Christian rites. Since this recommendation is for the Etsako Christians, the Christian rite will be normative but with relevance in the context of the Etsako burial customs.

Among the Jews, preparation for death begins when a person is very sick. He or she is surrounded by relatives and friends. Prayers are offered either for the healing or peaceful exit of the person. In Etsako, the patient is surrounded by the relatives and friends. An oracle is consulted to inquire the cause of the illness. The Christians call for the priest to anoint the sick. I recommend therefore that this practice should be sustained in Etsako with the exception of the oracle for the Etsako Christian. The physician should be consulted for medical care and the priest to administer the sacrament of reconciliation and anointing of the sick

When death occurs, the funeral service for the Jew is usually brief and simple. This is done in the synagogue or by the graveside. This usually includes the chanting of psalms and *El Malei Rachamim*. The Etsako gives a loud cry and invokes the ancestors. Reactions to death in Etsako depend on the age of the deceased. The Christian calls a priest who blesses the corpse before the body is taken to the mortuary. I suggest that the presence of the priest should be re-emphasized. However, I recommend that unnecessary delay of burials should be avoided in Etsako. The practice of preventing a bereaved widow from

going to Church and hospital during the period of mourning should be stopped in Etsako.

Viewing the body either publicly or privately is contrary to Jewish tradition. Etsako and the Christian religion allow this. I suggest that viewing the body for the Etsako should be sustained. It has some therapeutic effects for the mourners. For the Jews, the casket is lowered into the earth and the grave filled, using a reversed shovel until a mound is formed over the casket. This is similar in Etsako except that a mat and some physical materials are buried with the corpse. I suggest that burying a person with mats and material objects are only symbolic and so should be eliminated from the burial rites in Etsako. I suggest that the Catholic Church funeral rites should be sustained and practised by Catholics in Etsako. The Jews recite the *Kaddish* at the graveside after **the burial** is completed. Recitation of orations and prayers should be sustained in Etsako. **The Jews, the Etsako** and the Christian ensure that those who were involved in the burial, wash their hands when leaving the cemetery or before entering the house of mourning. This is ideal for hygienic purposes and should be sustained in Etsako.

From the above brief comparison, we may be right to conclude that burial is quite a simple ceremony. What complicates burial in Etsako is the rite of passage which is called *second burial (itolimhi)*. The essence of this rite is the sacrifice of a goat. However, this ceremony is loaded with all sorts of social ceremonies that the main rite is forgotten. The Christians in Etsako are often entangled in these traditional rites such that they do both the traditional and Christian rite in the same burial ceremony.

This directive of two weeks to prepare for burial in the Catholic Diocese of Auchi was informed by the abuses in funeral ceremonies. It has been observed from our enquiry in this research that a good funeral ceremony begins when the parent is still living. The Children should

further be encouraged to care for their parents as this would be a good beginning for their funeral. The death of Jesus has given a very new meaning to death. The crucifixion and Jesus' death on the cross is the consummation of the sacrifice that takes the place of animals. In this unique sacrifice, Jesus is the priest and the victim.

## **Conclusion**

So far, we have been able to draw some similarities with the Jews. It is true that Jesus was buried according to the custom of the Jews. It follows therefore that the Church should study carefully the burial customs of the Etsakọ people for the purpose of inculturation and contextualization. The problem of burial is very serious in Etsakọ especially the sacrificial aspect. However, it is gratifying to note that recently, the goat is no longer sacrificed to any idol in many places but simply slaughtered and shared to those who should partake in it especially members of the *adi* (*maternal home*) who were not disposed to attend the burial ceremonies. It is therefore hoped that this chapter will contribute to providing an enduring solution if not permanent to the burial puzzle of the Etsakọ Christian. I suggest that the Church should allow the social aspects of the Etsakọ burial ceremony and educate the people about the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice as priest and victim on the Cross. The mass today is a re-enactment of this sacrifice in a bloodless manner.

I recommend strongly that the living should witness their funeral before death. How? When a person is above sixty years of age let the children perform all the ceremonies for the parent while still living and strong enough to share in the feasting of food, drink, dance and every other thing. This is already being practiced in Ekperi in the festivals of *Ikpelo* and *Ibaki*. At death, the person can be interred quietly with all the attendant prayers and rituals.

The recommendation of the Holy Eucharist in place of the sacrifice of a goat is for the Etsako Christian alone. Etsako people who are strictly traditional adherents of the Etsako primal religion may continue with the traditional rites. I recommend however that the discrimination between the children of *amhoya*, *adegbe* and *oriso* in the sharing of the property of the late parent should be abolished in Etsako. The children should be treated equally and should all be accepted as members of the father's lineage. I also recommend that Etsako Christians who do not qualify for Christian funeral rites based on the fact that they could not rectify their marriages in the Church should do something fast about their conditions to join the community of Christ's faithful before death calls. However, these people should not be neglected completely or humanly sentenced to hell. Their fate and faith is known to God alone who is full of mercy and compassion.

### End Note

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<sup>1</sup>G. G. Dunia, *Let the Dead Rest in PEACE*, (Igarra: God's times 2006) 2. *The author is the Catholic Bishop of Auchi.*

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth kübler-Rose, *Death: the final Stage of Growth*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1975), 38.

<sup>3</sup> R.A. Moody, *Life after Life*, (London: Bantam books, 1976), 150.

<sup>4</sup> H. Koster, *Death in the Bible*, in William J. MC Donald (eds.) *New Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. IV* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America, 1967), 685

<sup>5</sup> E.B. Idowu, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*, (Nigeria, Longman: 1996), 201.

<sup>6</sup> Idowu, 202.

<sup>7</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, (London, Heinemann, 1982), 157

<sup>8</sup> Mbefo, *The True African: Impulses for Self-Affirmation*, (Onitsha: Spiritan publications, 2001), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Kübler-Rose, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Kübler-Rose, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Kübler-Rose, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Dov Zlotnick, *The Tractate: Mourning*, Yale Judaica Series, Vol. XVII, (New Haven: Conn, 1966), 31.

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- <sup>13</sup> Kübler-Rose, 45.
- <sup>14</sup> V.M. Rakoff, "Psychiatric Aspect of Death in America", in Vivian M. Rakoff (ed) *Death in American Experience*, (New York, Schocken Books, 1974), 159.
- <sup>15</sup> McKenzie, 110.
- <sup>16</sup> Okhifo A. Omonokhua, *Oral interview* ca.90 at Irekpai Uzairue on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1989
- <sup>17</sup> Veronica Alcabu Omonokhua, *Oral interview*, ca 90 at Irekpai Uzairue on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2002
- <sup>18</sup> Veronica Omonokhua, *Oral Interview, January 21, 1999.*
- <sup>19</sup> Idowu, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba belief*, (Ibadan: Longman, 1996), 202.
- <sup>20</sup> Idowu, 201.
- <sup>21</sup> kübler-Rose, 39.
- <sup>22</sup> Ajayi Obotse, *Oral interview*, ca.85 at Afowa on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, 2007.
- <sup>23</sup> Ajayi Obotse, *Oral interview.*
- <sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI, *The Rites of the Catholic Church, Vol One*, (Collegeville, Minnesota, The liturgical Press, 1990), 960.
- <sup>25</sup> Pope Paul VI, 440-441.
- <sup>26</sup> Pope Paul VI, 387.
- <sup>27</sup> Ajayi Obotse, *Oral interview*
- <sup>28</sup> J. O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and sacrificial rites*, (London: Longman, 1979), 55.
- <sup>29</sup> Awolalu, 54- 55.
- <sup>30</sup> Jimoh Egwakhide, *Oral interview*, ca 87 at Irekpai on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 2007.
- <sup>31</sup> Helena Omonokhua, *Oral interview*, ca 58 at Irekpai on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 2007.
- <sup>32</sup> Simon Awenegiemhe, *Oral interview*, ca 60 at Holy Rosary, Uzairue on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, 2007.