

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

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## **Unmasking “Alekwu” Religious Experience among the Idoma People-Group of Nigeria**

**Onmoke Sylvester Allam**

Department of Christian Religious Studies,  
College of Education, Oju, Benue State.

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### **ABSTRACT**

The phenomenon of “worship” is as old as civilization. The history of “worship” in itself is also the history of the struggle of mankind to attain perfection. From primitive times up to the present, mankind struggled hard to attain perfect knowledge and bliss. The emergence of the spirits and man’s interaction with it is said to be a major way to attain “Bliss” or “self-delight”. This is not possible by the pleasures of the senses. Thus, some religious persons would argue that to attain pure knowledge and bliss, sacrifices and a relationship with spirits is necessary. However, the concepts of ‘spirit’ and ‘spirit worshipping’ remains the most controversial issue within religion and culture. This work attempts to investigate the Idoma concept of “Alekwu” - Ancestors worship. The Idoma people-group is based in modern-day Benue state, in the central part of Nigeria. The Idoma people believe strongly that the spirit of dead ancestors is ever-present within the community. Thus, the concept “Alekwu” indicates the continuous existence of dead ancestors with specific functions. This work is phenomenological in method and has avoided excursions into metaphysics as far as possible. Nevertheless, this work accepts that it positions poses some metaphysical questions and implications.

**Keywords:** Idoma, religion, culture, living dead, ancestor-worship.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most compelling institutions in human existence is religion, it guides and controls the spiritual notions in man’s existence. Religion in all manners brings to man a soothing hope of a better life and it provides meaning and confidence in living here and the afterlife. The living and dead go through religion, as a principle that human existence both individually and social co-operative existence, is guaranteed a sense of existence and this assures social mobilization and solidarity forum of its kind. In this manner, religion becomes both a point of spiritual resonance and temporal consolation for its adherents. Thus, Ada Uga (1998, pp. 22) defines Idoma religion and culture, “as sacred engagement with the grand deity, Owo-icho, who gives life, wealth and co-



operate existence to the dependents. He enlightens them with spiritual reality, this guides and influences all humanity”.

Religion generally is undoubtedly a worldwide human activity that remains influential in culture. Proper understanding of religion must recognize the main qualities and different aspects of human experiences as manifested into various cultures of the world. Every human culture emanates from the prolonged existence and experience of spiritual contact with power outside their reach. Such powers may be of gods, spirits, ancestors or some other identified or unidentified sacred beings, which human beings believed to have been linked with. It is generally opined that: “Religious practices and experiences cannot be comprehended outside the people’s culture. The culture here means the pattern of behavior and thinking that people who shared the same social status shared, (or created shared) in common” Ada Ugah (1998, pp. 42) held that culture distinguishes one human group from others and also from animals. Thus a people’s culture includes their beliefs, rules of behavior, language, rituals, arts, style of dress, ways of producing and cooking their foods, religion, politics and economic system. Taylor, Edward (1979) suggests, culture is the complete whole which includes, knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a maker of society. Culture is said to be viewed in terms of its universal and specific usages and applications. A religious culture, (here in view, the Idoma religious culture) may be considered as the specialization of the complex, way of life, experience and physical features. It refers to the deep sacred and awe-inspiring attitude of the living towards their supernatural reality. All objects and icons of religious culture are regarded as sacred and treated always with religious reverence and care.

## **ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL BASIS OF WORSHIP**

The mysterious “origin of worship” conceals itself in primitive culture and religion (Edet 2009). Primitive religion cannot be explained only employing instinct. The development of religion depends upon the development of rationality in man. With the development of art and culture religion is also rationalized. Religion is a mental factor, it arises at a certain stage of human culture when humanity feels a natural need for it. Its primary characteristics depend upon certain mental factors that are common in all religions. Its primary stages are spontaneous and automatic in the nature of mankind, but its developments depend upon certain dynamic forces of evolution that are inherent in religion. As Whitehead says, “A religion is a force of belief, cleansing the inward parts” (Ames 1927). We may call religion as a part of human nature (Essien 2005). Just as the nature of the ideal modifies art, knowledge, ethics, etc., so also religion is modified by the nature and ideas of the' ideal. If we analyse the origin of religion, we find that it grew out of certain mental attitudes of people which they could not avoid, and these attitudes are common in all religions.

Robert Roberts (1977) calls the feeling “Absolute dependence” on religion. According to his theory, religion arises out of human feelings of absolute dependence. It can also be called pietism (Hermann 2009). The primitive people felt that there must be certain power which is controlling the universe, and they emended upon that power and recognised it in their heart of hearts by showing obedience, pietism is found in Mohammadanism and among the Quietists in Christianity. This piety or “feeling of absolute dependence” is active, obligatory and volitional in many religions. For example in Zoroastrianism, in the religion of the Teutons, and in Christianity certain rites and customs refer to this form of feeling (Hermann 2009). Such a kind of feeling, though it is dependence, is a sort of freedom independence because by a union with the Divine it seeks' absolute freedom through absolute dependence; With such a feeling of dependence, there is also a complex emotion consisting of tenderness and self-abasement (Roberts 1977). This is the feeling of gratitude that is found in all religions. It is a sense of providence of God and a feeling of thanks-giving -which arises in the mind of man for the benefits which God gives us. A sense of gratitude is the norm on the touchstone of all true religions.

The psychological factors which give rise to religion have been described and analysed by Otto as “*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” (Fox 1990). Holy is something that is both mysterious and tremendous. But it is another form of a feeling of piety. In awe, the attitude is receptive and submissive, in wonder, there is hesitation, and in fascination, it is the influence of holy that exerts upon the believer. The feeling of devotion towards supernatural power is natural in man, and it grows in man with a natural hankering and need for it. The need had been felt by primitive men and they wanted to reconcile themselves with the supernatural powers in the external world. Forces of spiritual evolution are 'immanent in all the religions of man and it remodelled the wants and rites at every stage of culture. On the one hand, primitive man had the feelings of fear, awe, wonder, etc., which we find in analysing the aspects of holy and which are negative aspects, and on the other hand, he had submissiveness, humility, reverence, etc., as the positive aspects of the holy. The positive aspects were called mana and the negative aspects were called tabu within the Indian culture (Fox 1990). This tabu-mana formula determined the nature of the supernatural in primitive religion. These tabus and mana were also involved in primitive rituals. The tabus were something bad to meddle with and primitive people made certain rules not to meddle with them.

The existence of the supernatural in primitive religion was established by certain psychological factors. We now come to the various means and ways which primitive people adopted for the benefit of society. These means may be called rites and practices and are mainly the source from which worship draws its materials and ideas. Some of the rites and practices were meant for inducing or compelling the ghosts or spirits for the benefit of man. These rites were both magical and religious in nature. In primitive

religion, it is not possible to distinguish between the magical and the religious rites. Just as from the historical standpoint we can show an age of stone before the age of intellect, so also we can show in the history of religions an age of magic before the age of religion (Cilliers 2009). There are various theories regarding the connection between magic and religion. J.G. Frazer represents magic as “next of kin to science” (Geraci 2017). In the evolution of thought, he considered magic as representing a lower intellectual stratum preceding religion.

Magic and religion have a common root in primitive man’s emotional reaction to his environment and his experiments with the unseen forces of the universe in his struggle for existence, in magic the operation of the spirits is assumed and an attempt is made to win their favour by prayer and sacrifice. In magic, we are unable to draw any causal connection. Magic becomes science -when a causal connection is established. In magic, there is the belief in supernatural powers, who are “superior to man and who control the course of nature and of man. his part of belief is religious in character on the ground that human being submitted themselves to these power” (Cilliers 2009, pp. 65). People gave up magic only when they could realise that they are powerless to influence the course of nature by means of magic. At that time they resorted to faith by giving up certain incantations for inducing the supernatural powers. This progress did not take place in a very short period. It took ages for the primitive man to resort to faith. Even in advanced religions of today, we find magic interwoven with religious rites. In certain Vedic rites, there are witchcrafts. Some witchcrafts are parts of religion. In primitive ages, magicians, priests, monks, etc., were all on the same level. There was no distinction between a priest and a sorcerer. Though religion and magic are blended together at a certain stage of culture, we must call the religious- attitude as an advance upon the magical. Two kinds of personalities are found in man.

Primitive people wanted to make arrangements with the supernatural powers in the external world which they could not avoid. As it is human nature to live well, to live better, primitive people worked out certain means to appease the supernatural powers. These means and ways of appeasement are the origins of worship. Certain bodily activities of worship are spontaneous and automatic in man (Edor & Odok 2010). As it was believed that there are supernatural powers outside man, human beings out of awe, wonder and fear appeased them through prayers or sacrifices, and there was no other alternative save this. Magic is unable to control these powers. Thus in worship, we find two assumptions: namely, the existence of powers and attempt to please them through certain rites and ceremonies. Moreover, with the progress of civilization the rites and ceremonies were refined and modified according to the satisfaction of the different cults. Jevons believes that worship springs from Man original sentiment native to the mind, underived from experience and a given datum of consciousness. It is through the dim sense of perception that he has some business with the unseen realities that encircle

his life that primitive man is led to make offerings to these unseen presences with whom his life is continuous or to seek appeals to them and seek converse with them.

Out of weakness and dependence, the individual sought communion with the supernatural. The need was of an individual but it was also the need for a group or society. The group prayed for the sake of the individual so also the individual cried first in distress and calamities for the sake of the group. What the individual took up, spontaneously entered in the group, because the individual and group or society are relative terms. One cannot exist without the other. Before prayer there were spells or charms to ward off evil spirits which environed primitive man's life. In early prayers we do not find allusions of blessings, rather / they are certain kinds of petitions made for the fulfillment of immediate needs e.g. food, help, strength, etc. Psychologically viewed we find that such prayers arose out of sorrow, fear, wrath, worry, etc. The main point which we should note in this connection is this, that with such prayers the primitive people learned to trust the spirits and they had a sense of humility or dependence towards them. Moreover, as they wanted to establish a relationship with the friendly spirits, there grew in them the sense of self-giving and surrender. This sense of self-giving, surrender, humility, trust, and dependence is the beginning of true religion. Here we find the origins of religious attitudes. With the above religious senses, primitive people began to pray with certain postures and gestures showing the sign of dependence and humility. These postures and gestures during the time of prayer have been inherited from the primitive people by the developed religions of the present age. For example, the posture of folded hands is found in Hinduism during puja, the kneeling posture in Christianity during prayer, the standing posture in Islam which indicates that God is in front of us. Primitive people considered the supernatural as something great and they behaved with that power just as they behaved with a chief or a king. The behaviours were to some extent magical, they were the prototypes of human relations and customs. As gifts are offered to a chief or king to satisfy him, so did the primitive people make sacrifices in front of spirits or Gods# Gifts or sacrifices were made to win the favour of Gods or spirits. Some of these forms of sacrifices have survived to-day even in developed religions. The Hindus perform Huja with "Haivedya" (offerings to God) for favour of getting blessings from God. In sacrifice, we find the origin of blessings and the sense of spiritual power received through sacrifice. Whatever the primitive modes of worship had been, the origin of worship is drawn from the desire to avert possible evils to individuals and society.

With the development of primitive society prayer and sacrifice became a group affair. Certain values were given to sacrifice. People sacrificed something which they considered to be good and pleasing to the Gods or spirits. It was assumed that favour could be achieved only when the spirits were propitious and pleased. This is possible when people offer the best things which they possess. With this idea came the idea of

offering of the first-born child. In developed religions, money is offered to God. That something possessing value should be given to God is accepted even today.

## **THE OBJECTS OF WORSHIP**

Worship manifests objectively through various objects. Those objects are considered as objects of worship (Geraci 2017). The various objects became the objects of worship when they were raised to divinity or the supernatural rank. Mere physical objects are not adored because they do not inspire us in any way. Objects become epistemological when they are objects of knowledge and thus they naturally draw our attention. They are distinguished from physical objects on the ground that they invoke certain charms in our minds. Such charms may arise from awe, wonder or from the mysterious character of the object. For example, stones and trees have been adored by human beings because they invoke awe, wonder, reverence, etc. Religious objects of worship are not merely physical objects (Edor 2016). They possess certain extraordinary qualities for which we show spiritual regard towards them. Sometimes we picture divinity with the likeness of human society. People pictured Gods as warriors, judges, lords, kings, etc., and attributed to them the love of parents, friends or showed conjugal affection towards them. Religious ideas are images manifested in the external world. The object of worship is always a power transcending the worshipper. As the object transcends the worshipper (subject), he necessarily behaves in front of the object timidly, in a panic-stricken manner or with a sense of friendship. The personification of an object is on the intellectual process, it takes place with the intellectual interpretation of the worshipper. For instance fetishes, medicine, talismans have been vehicles of grace. It happened with the intellectual behaviour and wishes of the worshipper, stones or trees have become objects of Worship when people found them resembling the appearance of a man or a giant or considered them to be inhabited by spirits. Worship is a relation existing between the subject (worshipper) and the object of worship. A sense of duality always exists between the subject and the object.

This duality between the subject and the object is different from that dualism which is a theory of two powers opposing one another. One power is good, the other is bad. In Plato there: is such a dualism. His dualism was the separation of the world of ideas from the world of sense. In Descartes, the dualism is the distinction between mind and matter (Baab 2016). Descartes wanted to overcome this difficulty by combining the physical and the psychological in the pineal gland (Baab 2016). From the dualistic hypothesis, we draw this conclusion that the ideal and the factual do not coincide. A dualist exposes the world as full of sorrows and he wants to overcome them. But the duality which exists between the subject i.e., the worshipper and the object of worship exposes the fact that one is more powerful than the other. The subject does not want to overcome the object but wants its favour or benefit. As the object is mysterious

tremendous power, the subject with awe and wonder shows adoration and reverence in front of it. The object with its highest development possesses attributes like omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence. Thus the object is the deity personified by the worshipper (Ajang 2016; Edet 2008; Edet 2011; Edet 2015). The object of worship determined by the subject varies with the intellectual development of the subject. In the objects of worship progress from the gross to the refined spiritual objects is discernible with the development of the intellect of the worshipper. There are several objects of worship.

### **Sun, Moon and Stars are Objects of Worship**

Among the celestial bodies, sun, moon and stars are the most important. Primitive people worshipped the star-studded heavens because they found it needful. Sun and moon were regarded as quasi-human in nature. Their sex differs among various races. There are various stories as regards sun and moon. The Masai people say that once sun wanted to marry the moon and they had a fight (Oesterdiekhoff 2008). The sun being ashamed becomes bright so that people may not look at him. The Eskimos consider the moon as male as his marks on the face are explained in different ways. The marks on the moon are the ashes which were smeared on the face of the moon by his sister the sun, when he wanted to embrace her. The most important celestial God is the sun and it is the sustainer and fertilizer of the earth. For this reason, it has received reverence throughout the world. In India, certain royal dynasties have been named after the sun. In India, certain royal dynasties have been named after the sun. Sun has been worshipped by Indians, Persians, Amerinds, Egyptians, Dravidians (Haven 2012). In Egypt, Sun is the moral-God because nothing can be kept secret in front of its light. In the Rig, Veda Sun has been worshipped under many forms and various names. The Dravidians and the Kolarians consider the sun as the highest God, Parameswar (Haven 2012).

### **Worship of Terrestrial objects**

Various terrestrial objects have been worshipped by primitive people of various countries, .Among the terrestrial objects, some are living and some are non-living (Aboh 2015; Asira & Francis 2012). Among the living objects, we allude to certain trees and plants. Trees had been worshipped as they were considered as the dwelling places of the spirits and supernatural powers. The savage people maintain that the souls of the dead the oak to Jupiter, the laurel to Apollo, the olive to Minerva, the myrtle to Venus, the white-poplar to Hercules, Plants were worshipped in China, Japan, Germany and Scandinavia (Haven 2012).

### **Animals as Objects of Worship**

Among the living objects, certain animals have been worshipped by the people of various countries not because they are animated by spirits but because they are objects of awe, wonder, fear and have been raised to the rank 'of Divinity. Dr. Marrett

suggests - “they are propitiated by a primitive man neither because they are in a word uncanny. Religious awe is towards powers, and these are not necessarily spirits or ghosts though they tend to become so” (Sarfati 2010, pp. 54). The Syrians worshipped the shark fishes, probably because they are feared. The swan or *hansa* is revered in India because its lofty flight typified an elevated spirit. The dove is adored by Mexicans and the Semites. The owl is considered sacred by Germans. The Eagle is revered by some Arabs and Amerinds. The Battas of Sumatra considers tigers as dead ancestors (Sarfati 2010). Sometimes certain animals are considered as symbols for certain deities. For example, Owl for Pallas Athena in Greece, the vulture for Suben, the eagle was sacred to Jupiter, the peacock to Juno, the dove to Venus (Sarfati 2010). Again the Christians symbolise the dove as the Holy Ghost, the lamb is represented as Jesus, or lamb of God, the snake as devil.

### **Ancestors and heroes as Objects of Worship**

Among the living objects of worship, certain human beings known as ancestors or heroes became the objects of worship in various parts of the world (Oesterdiekhoff 2008). The conception of the soul residing in the body gave the primitive man the idea that the spirit exists even if the body is destroyed. Primitive men considered the spirits of the dead ancestors as both good and harmful (Oesterdiekhoff 2008). It is the fear of spirits that led the primitive men to worship the dead ancestors. Herbert Spencer in his “Principles of Sociology” writes –

Anything which transcends the ordinary, savage thinks of as supernatural or divine; the remarkable man amongst the rest. This remarkable man may be simply the founder of the tribe, he may be a chief famed for strength or bravery, he may be a medicine man of great repute or he may be an ancestor of something new being at first one or other, of these regarded with awe during his life, he is regarded with increased awe after his death; and the propitiation of ghosts becoming greater than the propitiation of ghosts less feared, develops into an established worship” (Small 1897, pp. 741).

He again writes - “Using the phrase ancestor-worship in its broadest sense as corresponding to all worship of the dead, be they of the same blood or not, we conclude that ancestor worship is the root of every religion” (Small 1897, pp. 742). In Bantu and Hamitic races of north and east Africa, we find the prevalence of ancestor-worship. The people of Madagascar, in South Seas, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Polynesia give the first fruits of their fields to their ancestors (Curzon-Sluggers 2017). Throughout America, genuine ancestor-worship is rare except in Peru. In Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania ancestor-worship is found in the embryonic stage (Curzon-Sluggers 2017). The cult of ancestor-worship is firmly established in Polynesia and Melanesia. The influence of ancestor-worship became animistic in Malay. In Japan, we find ancestor-worship in the



highest vigour. The idea of God came after the idea of ghosts to the primitive man. We cannot historically prove that the God idea, was before “ghost-idea”. We do not know any savages who are aware of gods but ignorant of ghosts. It is also true that the idea of god may exist in germ without explicitly involving the idea of ghosts. The animistic theory which holds the conception of ghosts or spirits before gods should not be necessarily accepted. We have seen that H. Spencer holds that ancestor-worship is the root of all religions. The theory may be considered to be true in the case of many countries but not for all countries.

## **IDOMA RELIGION**

Religion cannot be restricted to Idoma tribe alone as it is seen to be a worldwide experience. It plays major considerable role in human cultures. Religion is a complex category than a mere set of beliefs or practices found in all religious traditions. Religion involves a sacred engagement with what is considered supernatural-spiritual reality. Religion accounts for the distinctive qualities and patterns of human experience as well as the similarities and differences in religion across human cultures.

**EGBA O’ GBO – OWOICHO** is the Idoma word for religion literally denoting something of God.

**EGBA O’ GBO** meaning giving something back, worships, and or sacrifices. Owiocho is the “fate on high” these two words form the basic concept of God, who is high in the sky Ichu, and above everything on earth while Owo means fate. Therefore, the one deserving of respect, sacrifice and worship is God who is on high.

**Owoicho** – God; refers to the ultimate being, the Supreme Being, identified celestially by Idoma people (**EGBA’OOGBA** by Idoma.) Owo; the fate controller, while Owiocho confirms the celestial reality; this encompasses Idoma beliefs and practices of sacred affairs that pertain to the overwhelming knowledge of Owo-ichu. Idoma religious experience may be expressed in visual symbols, like dance, performance and elaborate physical systems.

Ijiga Pius (2008, pp. 30) opined that: Idoma religion recognizes the existence of a supreme being: Owo-ichu as the creator of all that is and the belief in other spiritual beings and forces that saves. E.g the Alekwu ancestral spirits, as intermediary and agents between Owoicho and Ache’ Ogbegba-worshippers such recognition forms Idoma pillar of religion.

## **IDOMA CONCEPT OF ANCESTORS**

We shall take a look at the concept of an ancestor in general, take cognizance of scholarly thoughts and end up with consideration of Idoma perception of ancestors and ancestral worship in their land. The first general perception; I wish to put forward here is; Ancestors or living dead are still part of their human families and people have

personal memories of them; they are the guardians of family affairs, tradition, ethics and activities. They know the needs of men and provide the channel of communication to the Supreme God. They intercede and serve as intermediaries to bring fortune to their physical living members and also serve as moral advocates and controllers.

The views of Enyikwola John A. (1999, pp. 104) tallies with the perception held above; Enyikwola states that “ancestors are society’s projection of its authority system onto the supernatural realm, digging from his Agatu (IDOMA) background, he went further to say,” “Ancestors are not only concerned with, for example, personal moral virtue or with the performance of good deeds but rather with adherence to public norms”. Ancestors in essence control and function as a basic category of moral and legal agents. However, between the scholarly perceptive and particular Idoma notions, there is general agreement, that wherever it occurs, the concept of ancestors is rooted in domestic, kingship and descent relations as institutions. Ancestor/ancestral worship is seen by some as an extension of these relations to the supernatural sphere, and others as the reflection of these relations, yet again as their ritual and symbolic expression. Ancestors worship has a remarkable uniform structural framework.

In Idoma, particularly in Otukpo area, the descendants of worshippers variably comprises either an exclusive common descent group or such group augmented by collateral cognates, who may be of restricted, range or specific facilitative provenance or may come from an unrestricted range; or else the worshippers in a given situation may comprise only a domestic group, be it an elementary family or to a family of an extended type. Fortes Meyes (2007, pp. 122).

The ‘Alekwu’ cult illustrates that the leading elder or Ad’alekwu is one who appeals to the ancestors on behalf of the nation, as headman might do in the more limited descent group context at the yearly or annual sacrifice to the ancestors. This becomes obligatory and descendants of each ancestor according to their kindred make the most of such accession, as the renewal of allegiance and memorial sacrifices are made. Considering other African societies where the idea of ancestors exists, they are not worshipped but venerated. This is why the ritual of ancestors veneration is an important aspect of African religious theology and thoughts. The respect given to the dead is not worshipping but participatory symbolic roles showing that the African world is inhabited by the living, the dead and yet unborn. Thus ancestor worship is subsumed under the worship of the dead then its meaning must be sought in customary beliefs and practices concerning death, the soul, ghost, spirits and the cycles of life.

## **ANCESTORS AND IDOMA RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW**

There are very few pieces of literature written and published on Idoma religion and culture, due to the mysterious nature of all topics regarding ancestral worship, not much discussion are equally allowed for those who dare to cleave into it, they try to



make us live with ideas about their religion and the particularly the unanswered challenges of whether ancestors are worshiped, venerated or there are specific cults for them among Idoma people. Herein we shall critically Xray some claims made by Ada Ugah, on the existence and veneration of ancestors in Idoma religious culture. According to Ada Ugah (2008, pp. 39) ancestors exist in Idoma religious culture and are known as Alekwu. They are elders of high moral rectitude. At least such elders are incorporated into the community of the unseen world. The living elders of Idoma. Idoma deity is said to commune with the living dead at night through the Ad'alekwu. Ancestors are shown in the discussions above in Idoma religious sense as not just dead old members of the tribal kin. They are very special people who satisfied certain conditions as living and death. They are a special breed of people who have lived significant lives which affected the people positively and are believed to concern with the influence on their families, society, etc even after death.

The question normally would arise when Idoma nation seeks leaders to be made into the club of ancestral spirits. There is generally also no consideration given to women. It is all men's affairs should we seek deeper understanding into the cult of the ancestors, it is usually met with stiff resistance as it is shrouded in mysterious, taboos and incursion into the land of the living dead. Thus Allah Onmoke M. (1979, pp. 80) contains, we must be prepared to avoid concluding deductive reasoning that would lead us into some avoidable errors. This is because what is done or present in other African tribal societies no matter how viable must not be wrongly thought to exist in others. Ancestral cults may properly exist in some societies but for the Idoma the assertion of Allah (1999) is apt in stressing that Idoma people have and strongly uphold a stick sense of this practice. To qualify to be an ancestor or Alekwu an individual elder shall command great respect due to his high moral life and dignity. When an elder has lived and exhibited the above characteristics during his lifetime on earth, death is given on befitting burial. This category of persons intended as appreciation is for good deeds in the physical world and prayer to them to continue such good deeds in the spiritual world to the advantage of the physically living. Ancestor veneration according to Peter Boyle (1999) is sacred appreciation and for respect the accomplished living deed of families, clans and lineage. This is strongly upheld in Idoma religious and cultural tenents.

## **CONCLUSION**

The concept of ancestor, ancestor worship or veneration occupies a central practice in all kinds of societies. This is because of the relationship between death and burial in the world. Attitudes towards the spirit of the dead vary from love, respect and trust, mingled with special feelings of reverence, to outright fear. The attitude may sometimes be ambivalent. The concept of ancestors among other things is hinged on the belief that the spirit of the dead is often thought to help the living but also that they

do harm if they are not propitiated. All societies are known to give ritual attention to death or to the souls of the dead but not all of these practices may appropriately be called ancestor worship. In Idoma religious culture, the kinship system is organized pertinently and the trace of ancestral descent is from male lineage. That is why you may not find any ancestral shrine in Idoma society that contains female names or portraits. Alekwu cult is widely embraced in Idoma societies, this act of ancestral worship and veneration is religiously celebrated annually.

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