

Research Report

The long lost Ebionites. A relook at the Ibo region of West Africa

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Abstract - The Ebionites were a Jewish sect that knew Jesus intimately; had their own Nazarene Gospel; but held immovable beliefs that challenged key tenets of Christianity. They disappeared in the fourth century leaving a vacuum physically and ideologically. About a millennium later, the Portuguese reported of a people in West Africa with a Pope and Papacy similar in structure and veneration as the Roman Catholic Pope. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, missionaries and anthropologists scouring the region confirmed those reports, as well as the presence of other Levitical influences amongst the Igbos of Nigeria. This paper researches those similarities with a focus on the religious cosmology of the Ibo people of Asaba. It applies ethnographic qualitative research, then places the findings over the tenets of Catholicism with respect to their organizational structure; sacraments; rites; and steps to becoming sons of God. The results show that the ideologies of the Ibo and the Romans were deeply intertwined in every area of the study. The paper posits that the only way the religious ideologies of the Romans and the Ibos could have so closely mirrored each other, is if they were both in the same place at the same time. Thus, concludes that the Ibos [Eboe, Igbo] are the Ebionites. The paper offers hypotheses to explain the role of the ego in creating the core tenet of this unifying cosmology, and possibly how the convergence occurred. The paper could form the basis for renewed research in Hebraic-African studies; Black-American dispersion; Mary Magdalene; Jesus' crown of thorns; the sequence of biblical gospel events; and even a template for future religion in this ego-driven civilization.

Keywords: Ibo, Asaba, Ebionites, Ego, Jesus, Eze, Roman Catholic, Nri, Civilization

Introduction

What would have been the current state of the Christian world if the early Jewish Christians called the Ebionites had not disappeared from history over a thousand years ago – and is it possible that they are still around somewhere? The Ebionites, also called *Nazarene Christians*, were a sect who were building a “distinct Jewish Christian consciousness” (Schonfield 1936). The Ebionites were introduced to much of the world through *Antiquities of the Jews* - the works of Flavius Josephus, the Jewish-Roman historian, Ebionite, and army general of the Jewish forces that surrendered to the Romans in 67 AD. The Ebionites disregarded the notion of Jesus’ immaculate conception at birth (Maccoby 1986, p. 176). They despised Paul who they regarded as a perverter of Jesus’ message and founder of a new religion which Jesus himself would have rejected. (Josephus 1811, p. 105) (Maccoby 1986, p. 60). They disappeared from history around the time of the assembly of the First Council of Nicaea—a massive ecumenical gathering of bishops convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine I, in A.D. 325, to discuss Christianity, especially *Arianism*, a similar position to that of the Ebionites.

A millennium later, in A.D 1486, the King of Portugal received a report from his expedition exploring the coast of West Africa, of a people who had a Pope and Papacy similar in structure and venerated as their Roman Catholic Pope (Leyden & Murray 1818, p. 76) – sparking very enthusiastic explorations. It would be four centuries later, that the anthropologist, Basden, exploring the region would write about the Igbos who lived in that region of having customs which point to a “Levitical influence at a more or less remote period” with respect to sacrifice, circumcision, and a language “with parallels with the Hebrew idiom,” (Basden 1921, p. 31). Adolphe Burdo, traveling in 1884 in the interior of Igboland noted that “The people of Ibo believe in an all-powerful God who rules over their destinies.” He also noted that “like the Jews and Mohammedans who venerate Jerusalem and Mecca, the people of Ebo have their holy city, to which they make frequent pilgrimages,” (Burdo & Sturge 1880, p. 150).

The question is—are these the Ebionites?

“All my attempts to trace the origin of the name, Ibo, have been unsuccessful. My most reliable informants have been able to offer no other alternative, than that it is most probably, an abbreviation of a longer name connected with an ancestor long since forgotten” (Basden 1921, p. 31).

This paper seeks to answer that question. The research does not take the somewhat conventional Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) human molecular approach to plotting ancestry; rather, it applies an ethnographic and observational approach. The study analyzes similarities in religious cosmology, which it compares against the key tenets of Catholicism. Finally, it compares the concept of the *Son-of-God* between the people of Asaba; Roman Catholicism, and the Ebionites.

The Ebionites

Quoting *Eusebius*, Hugh Schonfield writes of the grace of the church in the fourth century, “A bright and splendid day with no overshadowing cloud irradiated the churches in the whole world with its celestial grace” (Schonfield 1936, p. 50). Little did they know that storms were brewing which would see the vengeful massacre and prosecution of the Jewish Christians by Emperor Constantine, leading to “Palestine losing its Jewish population ... and the name of Nazarene, formally honored by every follower of the *Man of Nazareth*, was now wholly discarded by the Catholic Church” (Schonfield 1936, p. 50). But what were those views? The fourth-century Bishop and historian *Eusebius of Caesarea* documented the view of the Ebionites, that Jesus was “simply a man chosen by God, receiving a power at his baptism” (Caesarea 325) *Ecclesiastical History*. In 324 AD, the Bishop Alexandria of Alexandria sent a letter to Bishop Constantinople which was preserved by historian Theodoret (Gregg 1981, p. 2). In the letter, he informed of the nature, progress, and synodal results of Arius’ heresy. The Arians had taken very theological viewpoints, which they buttressed with Biblical passages, (Gregg 1981, pp. 4-5). The thrust was that the Arians believed that “God the creator had promoted Christ to the rank of a divine son,” which negated an immaculate conception (Gregg 1981, pp. 1-2). Schonfield, quoting *Epiphanius of Salamis* – the fourth century Bishop of Salamis, Cyprus, says, “He was begotten of the seed of man... and by the choice he was called Son-of-God from the Christ that had entered into him from above in the likeness of a dove” (Schonfield 1936, p. 60). This was a big conflict. The Ebionites were from Nazareth, the birthplace of Jesus. They knew him. Yet, their views were outside of mainstream ideology. Upon prosecution, they took refuge east in Persia and Mesopotamia (Schonfield 1936, p. 50), leaving Palestine between A.D 70 and A.D 135 (Schoeps 1953,

p. 219). Some finality was put to the presence of the Ebionites in Palestine centuries later when the “Venerable text of the Hebrew Gospel preserved in the Palmphilian Library at Caesarea was burnt to ashes at the sack of the city by the Mohammedans in A.D 653” (Schonfield 1936, p. 81).

Hypothesis on the journey to West Africa.

A millennium later, in 1486, subjects of King John II of Portugal reported,

“Among the many things which the King João learnt ... was that to the east of Beny at twenty moons' journey ... About two hundred and fifty of our leagues, there lived the most powerful monarch of these parts, who was called Ogané. Among the pagan chiefs of the territories of Beny, he was held in as great veneration as is the Supreme Pontiff with us...” (Leyden & Murray 1818, p. 76).

Their initial research pointed to a kingly figure called Prester John, who may have been in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) - leading to King John II simultaneously sending two expeditions the next year. Leyden John called it “the guiding star to the Portuguese in their career of discovery” (Leyden & Murray 1818, p. 50). But it didn't add up. Researchers believed twenty moons' journey would end up well short of Ethiopia, which was about 3,000 miles away. If plausible - what then could have motivated their possible catapulting into West Africa? This paper offers a hypothesis through a connection to the *Kisra legend*.

The Kisra Legend has many versions (Stevens Jr 1975, p. 188). But all point to people who came from Iran. The German explorer Leo Frobenius, interviewing descendants of Kisra wrote about a group of people who left Iran in the days of the prophet Mohammed, abandoning the Iranian city where they were already in exile from Jerusalem and arriving in the city of Borgu in present-day Nigeria, before migrating down south to their current location. D. F. Heath called the story of Kisra, the “almost mythical hero and ancestor of the Borgu chiefs” (Heath 1937, p. 77). A. B. Mathews says, “It tells of a magician king who came from the East.” Magical, because of their many miraculous feats like “parting the River Niger to allow his men to cross,” which halted their pursuit (Stevens Jr 1975, p. 189). Mathews says the name may be identified with that of the Persian dynasty *Chosroes*. He further mentions that “there was a great migration in the seventh

century A.D. from Sudan to the west” (Mathews 2007, p. 144). Frobenius associates the arrival of the Kisra people with the introduction of Coptic Christianity into Southern Sudan and posits that Kisra and his progeny were Christians (Stevens Jr 1975, p. 190). Angulu Onwuejeogwu references the pattern of movements of the Igbo people, (Onwuejeogwu 1979, p. 120), where he shows a map of the Ézé-Chima movement from Benin going eastward in the 17th century intersecting at Asaba with the Nri movement of the 900 AD to 1910 period going westward also intersecting at Asaba. Nri was the first son of Eri (Onwuejeogwu 1979, p. 122) who is said to be the founder of the Igbo people. Thus, you have a plausible hypothesis for the migration; However, the ethnographic approach, rather than DNA will confirm. John Creswell defines ethnography as “qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group’s shared pattern of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time” (Creswell 2008, p. 473). The objective identified was to examine:

1. The steps and processes to take the Alor title and the Ézé title.
2. Burial ceremonies particular to both the Alor title holder and the Ézé title holder.
3. The responsibilities of both the Alor title holder and Ézé title holder.

The core method used in this study is the sociocultural participation in the social life of the Asaba people, from which the primary data was collected. The author himself is from Asaba and also took the Alor title during the process of the study. Pictures and videos were extensively captured. Books written by local and foreign anthropologists on the subjects were also analyzed.

Hypothesis on why the Romans chose Christianity as the vehicle.

The Romans swept into the region through the conquests of Alexander the Great. After Alexander died in 323 BC, his generals shared the spoils of war. General Ptolemy took over Egypt and started the Macedonian-Greek dynasty. But it was also the age of philosophy. The ideology of life and the afterlife - of the ego, the self, and eternal life. Socrates, who is said to be a father of philosophy, died about seventy years earlier. Other pioneers of philosophy, Plato had died just two decades earlier. Aristotle - of whom Alexander the Great was his student - would live to witness this sweeping conquest. So,

when the Romans military conquered Judea in A.D 67, they discovered a people who had advanced the discourse of the *ideology of the ego* that their ancient Greek philosophers had espoused —and were living it out as a *way of life*. While the Romans had been theoretical about their perception of God, the Judeans were practical about it. Thus, the Romans chose the cosmology of the Judeans as the standard for living out life. What did they discover, and how did they create that ideology, which like a product would be exported globally covering the ends of the earth?

Ego in theory; Christianity in practice.

The ego has been studied from time immemorial. Plato believed that the soul was like a chariot pulled by two wild horses. “The horses represent our desires, both noble and ignoble, and it is only through the skill of the *veteran* charioteer (wisdom) that we can control the direction of the chariot and avoid the catastrophe of letting our desires run rampant” (Socrates 2016). In Aristotle’s theory of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he postulates that a man must befriend himself before he can befriend others. (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2022). The blogger Ulf Wolf puts the idea of killing the ego more bluntly. He starts by paraphrasing Sigmund Freud: “Threaten the ego with extinction and it will think and think and think... we would do much better ... assassinate it” (Wolf 2021). Roberta Grimes, an afterlife expert, moves the discourse on the ego to the spiritual realm. “The ego is idolatry; the sign of a limited and separated self, born in a body, doomed to suffer and to end its life in death. It is the will that sees the will of God as enemy and takes a form in which it is denied” (Grimes 2018). Plato, using the analogy of the *veteran* charioteer gives us an indication as to when serious thoughts on killing the ego should start. A *veteran* according to the Oxford Dictionary is “a person who has long experience in a particular field.” In the Ibo town of Asaba, Nigeria - that choice to think and act like a “veteran charioteer” starts when such a person is established; is about thirty years old; is married, and has lost his father to death. At that point he is qualified to commence the journey of priesthood. The journey in itself necessitates and initiates the process of killing the ego. In Asaba they call it ‘*Igbu Mmadu*’ [Igbu = to kill. Mmadu = person/self]. The killing of the ego, in a sense, is where religion starts for the Asaba person. Incidentally, it is the point at which Jesus started his ministry.

Similarities between the path taken by Jesus on his *journey of the egoless self*, vis-à-vis that of the Asaba candidate.

Comparing the stages of the spiritual journey of the Ibo of Asaba vs. that of Jesus the Christ as they both seek to become 'Sons of God'

AFTER LIFE

'Egwu Ota' (dance of heaven) on 3rd day they escort the dead to the gates of heaven.

His wife cries around town that he has risen (Ima agogo)



Jesus rises on 3rd day John 20:11

Mary Magdalene cries around town that Jesus has risen John 20: 18

SON OF GOD

Becomes a king (Eze) of the Asaba-Ibo community

He has a dance parade throughout the main roads of Asaba (Imalokwa) carrying a donkeys tail.

Aspiration met he is now called 'Mwa Eze mmuo' (son of God)



"In the view of the Ebionites, Jesus was the messiah not through birth, but being chosen by God at baptism. Any who similarly fulfilled the law, would similarly become Christ"— Hippolytus (Philos. vii. 34, 1 f.) on the beliefs of the Ebionites

Becomes the King of the jews. Mark 15:2

Jesus had a triumphant entry into Jerusalem on a donkey

Aspiration met, Jesus is now called son of God Matthew 3:17



PATH TO BE A CHILD OF GOD

1. The journey to be a son of God commences. Called 'ichi eze' [to become king] not a king of Asaba

He goes for baptism in the river (called 'Ije Udo')

At baptism, a white dove supposedly lands on his head

2. He wears the red cap with eagle feathers tied together with thorns (a crown of thorns)

3. He goes into the wilderness (symbolically, a corner of his compound— the act is called 'Iba Nichi')

He goes into seclusion for 24 days -the place is called 'Igba agu Ichi'

He is tempted in seclusion



The journey to be Christ (son of God) commences. Not the king of the Jews.

He goes for baptism in the river. Matthew 3:13

At baptism, a white dove lands on his head. Matthew 3:16

Was this the real reason why they thought to tie a crown of thorns over Jesus head AND mock him as the king of the Jews

He goes into seclusion for 40 days. Matthew 4:2

Jesus goes into the wilderness Matthew 4:1

He is tempted in seclusion Matthew 4:3-11

PRIESTHOOD

Leads prayer by breaking kolanuts

Becomes a priest of his household

He does not become an Altar Priest. That is for the lineage of Nri



Jesus leads prayer by breaking bread. luke 22:19-20

Jesus becomes a priest of his household Heb 7:13, 14

Jesus was not an Altar priest. That was for those of the Leviticus /Melchizedek order

QUALIFICATION

1. Candidate will be married. Wife will be with him for the journey, death, and resurrection (if she outlives him)

2. His father will be deasead and candidate will be of a good age (30+)



1 .Was Jesus married to Mary Magdalene? She was there for the the anointing, crucifixion, and resurrection

2 .Jesus waited till 30yrs to commence his ministry. Nbr 4.3. Luke 3.23. It is believed that Joseph the father of Jesus was deasead at the time Jesus started his ministry.



The evidence is remarkable. The first being that their fathers would be deceased. The Western anthropologist Northcote Thomas, who lived in Asaba between 1912 and 1914 in order to research the customs of the Asaba people, wrote of this process: “The next title is known as Alor, so called from the ceremonial staff which the bearer of it carries... Properly speaking, a man can only make Alor after his father's death, he is called Mkpakor... The next title is that of Ézé,” (Thomas 1914, p. 54). While the death of Jesus’ father, Joseph, is not in the Bible, Bible Scholars believe he was not alive when Jesus started his ministry. The Book of Numbers 4:3 states the work in the tabernacle starts from 30 years. In Asaba, the minimum age for qualification would be about 30 years.

Just as Jesus starts off as a priest but not of the Levitical priesthood of Aaron (Hebrews 7:13-14), the Asaba-Ibo Mkpakor similarly starts off as a priest but not of the priesthood of Nri, (Basden 1921, p. 27). Another expectation is that the wife would be present for his ‘anointing’ as the Alor ceremony commences. She would subsequently be present throughout his journey of life, being involved in every significant event as an equal. And if he were sufficiently prepared to continue the journey of the egoless self thus becoming *Nwa Ézé mmuo* (Son-of-God), she would also be present. If she outlived him, she would be present for his journey to the afterlife. Mary Magdalene did these for Jesus. She was there for his Anointing (Mark 14:3-9); Crucifixion (Matthew 27:55-56); and Resurrection (John 20:11-18). He thus becomes a priest over his household. In that stead he would officiate over his family and in gatherings where others are not so titled. The prayer would involve breaking kola nuts which he would lead in prayer. Jesus broke-bread and shared to those present (Matthew 26:26-29).

In Asaba, the date of burial is the day of the *Egwuota*. That is a series of dances which symbolize the dead being taken to heaven. Three days after that is the *resurrection* where the *Ima Agogo* ritual is performed, whereby she goes to the tomb, calls upon the deceased and proceeds to announce around the town the resurrection, (Maduemezia 2003, p. 12). Mary Magdalene did the same. She went to Jesus’ tomb, (John 20:11), and went around announcing his resurrection (John 20:18).

In Asaba, the Mkpakor would wait a few years living out life before proceeding to become an Ézé. Jesus likewise started as a priest at thirty-years of age, and culminated in being the Son-of-God about two to three years later. According to (Maduemezia 2003, pp. 84-90), in Asaba the journey to evolve from Priest to Son-of-God, are in five steps which can be observed till this day when anyone chooses to take the Eze Title:

Igbu Mmadu: The conscious step of living the ideology of letting go of the ego.

Iba Nichi: Going into the wilderness. The Asaba candidate would do that at a corner of his compound. Jesus went into the wilderness.

Iba agu ichi: Going into seclusion for 24 days, fasting during the period and undergoing temptation. Jesus went into seclusion for 40 days; he fasted during the period; and underwent temptation (Matthew 4:1).

Ebinugboma: Bringing together elements of nature: mineral, animal, plant, elemental to acquire mastery over the kingdoms of nature. Jesus, coming out of the wilderness started showing his mastery of nature. He walked on water, (Matthew 14:22-33).

Ije Udo: The baptism at a bank of the River Niger, and the expectation of a bird appearing from the sky to sit on his head after which a white ribbon is tied around the ankles of the aspirant. Jesus went for Baptism, and a bird came down to sit on his head (Matthew 3:16).

In differing, their similarities become apparent.

Asaba Candidate

Comes of Age.

Father must be late.

Must be married to commence

Becomes Priest. Not of
priesthood lineage.

Starts the journey to becoming
son of God

Goes into Seclusion

Conquers Temptation

Conquers Elements

Performs Signs And Wonders

Is baptized in River

Dove from heaven

Becomes Son of God

Does Triumphant Entry

Wears Crown Of Thorns

Death

Upon Death Rises on the 3rd
day

Wife tells all he has risen

Jesus

Comes of Age.

Father (Joseph) is late.

Is Married to M. Magdalene.

Becomes Priest. Not of
priesthood lineage.

Starts the journey to becoming
son of God

Is baptized in River

Dove from heaven

Becomes Son of God

Goes into Seclusion

Conquers Temptation

Conquers Elements

Performs Signs And Wonders

Does Triumphant Entry

Wears Crown Of Thorns

Crucifixion

Upon Death Rises on the 3rd
day

Wife, M. Magdalene tells he
has risen

Comparing the path to becoming the Son-of-God between the Asaba candidate and Jesus.

The findings show that the arrangement in Asaba of the process to the path of becoming the Son-of-God is similar in ideology and structure, but different in execution from that taken by Jesus. Stepping back, one would wonder why Jesus would start with a baptism; rather than end with a baptism, as is done in Asaba — especially if the objective is to have the final act of a dove appear from above, with God affirming Jesus as his son. This is the climax. Why do it first, not last? For the Asaba candidate the climax is the triumphant entry: At Asaba, the Ézé will hold an *Nza*, the tail of a donkey in his hand and he will be carried on the shoulders of another into the town depicting the arrival of one with a new God consciousness. Though none appear to know why the Eze will hold the donkey tail. Basden in an unrelated note, mentions that over time many attempts had been made to keep horses but they survived a short time owing to the tropical tsetse fly, (Basden 1921, p. 56). Jesus had his triumphant entry upon a donkey, (Luke 19:28-44). Jesus did this some days before his crucifixion, “To fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah,” (Matthew 21: 1–11).

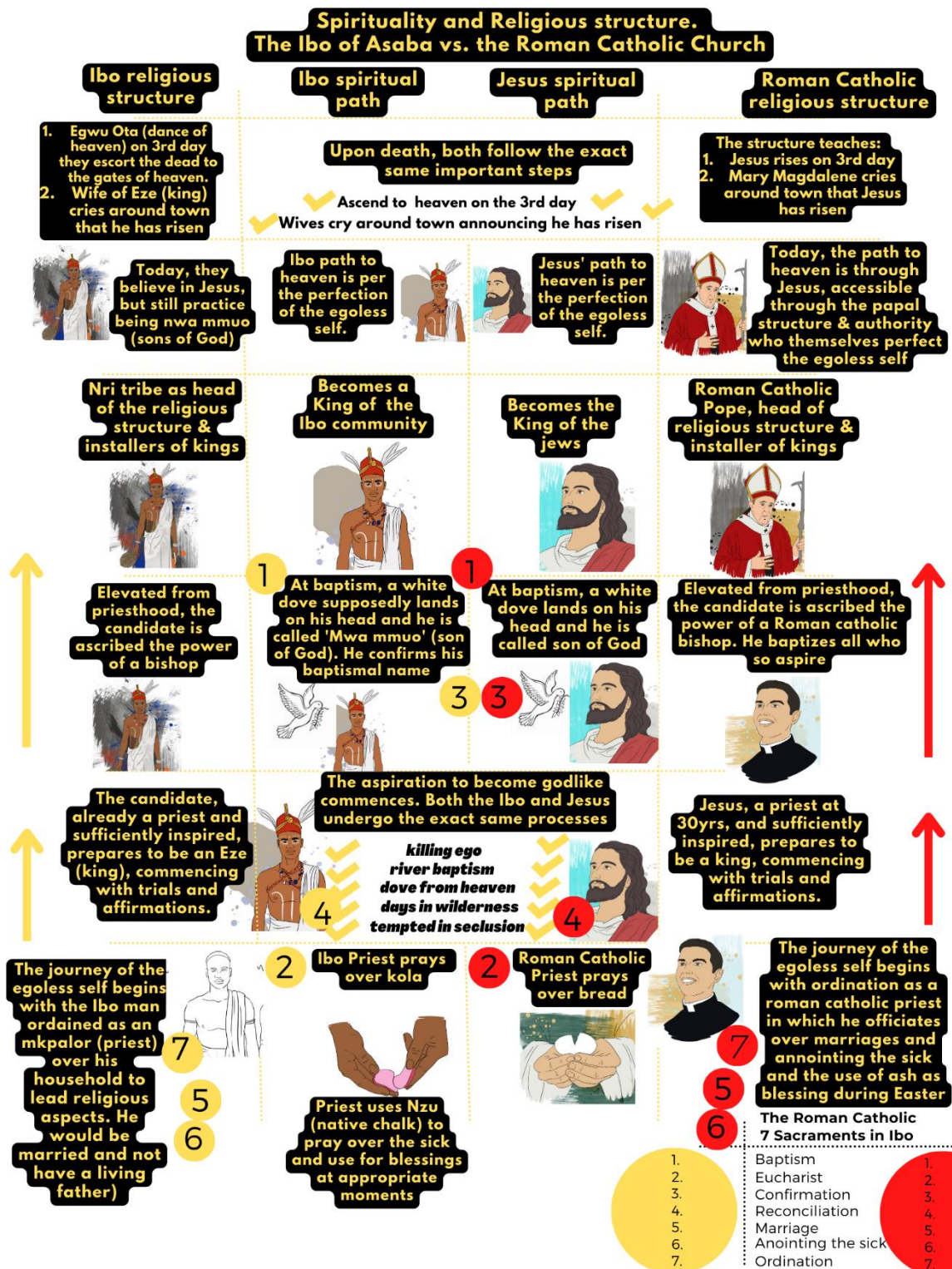
Yet another important distinction is that of when to wear the crown of thorns. The Ézé wears a crown made of Aziza, a type of plant tied over a red cap, which is made from the *Ekwe*, a thorn bearing plant. Tucked into the cap are 6 eagle feathers. The Ézé wears his crown of thorns upon coronation as king, the *Son-of-God*. Jesus was forced to wear one prior to being crucified. In thrusting the crown of thorns upon Jesus’ head, he was mocked, ‘king of the Jews.’

If one appreciates the essence of the path to killing the ego is to become the Son-of-God, then the path taken by the Asaba Ézé is more of a natural sequence. In the Roman Catholic path, Jesus becomes Son-of-God before going into seclusion, temptation, etc. In differing, their similarities become more apparent – opening up the potential for further research into the Biblical Gospel sequences, as well as giving credence to a conclusion that Catholicism was cloned out of this cosmology found today in Africa.

Mirroring the seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism within the Asaba cosmology

The Roman Catholic Church has seven holy sacraments that are seen as mystical channels of divine grace instituted by Jesus. In this, Roman Catholicism extends the egoless self to everyone and manages it within the structure of the church. It is this extensibility and manageability that converts the theory of the ego, into the product, Catholicism.

In this diagram, we begin to see how the Asaba-Ibo spirituality and Roman Catholicism mirror each other. We find that they have similar structures in authority of priests, bishops, and the pope - with the aspiration to become the Son-of-God as the central driver and the seven sacraments as the rules of engagement for adherents of their faith.



Mirroring the Roman Catholic seven sacraments within the Asaba Spiritual and Religious structure.

The Priest / Bishop

The table below shows the similarities between the Asaba priest and the Roman Catholic priest, mapping both back to the 7 Sacraments of Catholicism.

The 7 Sacraments of Catholicism	Definition of sacrament	Sacrament # (re: diagram)	Asaba Spiritual path to becoming egoless	Jesus' spiritual path to becoming egoless	Catholic Church creating a structure (Priest / Bishop)
Sacrament of ordination	Ordination is a sacrament available only to men who are ordained as deacons, priests, or bishops.	7	The Asaba male who is about 30 yrs and whose father is late, starts his journey. He becomes a priest of his family. Not an Altar priest.	Jesus is about 30 yrs and his father, Joseph is late, starts his journey. He becomes a priest of his family. Not an Altar priest	In the catholic church, a male having qualified through studies becomes a priest. He becomes a priest of the parish administering to a community.
Sacrament of Marriage	In Catholicism, marriage is a sacrament of marriage vows and lifelong partnership of an indissoluble union.	5	One pre-qualification for priesthood is marriage. A prequalification of an Asaba Mkpolor (priest) is marriage. And can only present the first wife for this journey. She has lifelong guarantees baked into the nuptial	Was Jesus married to Mary Magdalene? It would appear so, because if Jesus were not married, he could not be called a priest in the context of this cosmology.	Though the Catholic priest opts not to marry, they officiate over marriages with vows supposed to be lifelong.
Sacrament of Eucharist	Eucharist , or Holy Communion, is a sacrament of initiation that can be received daily if desired.	2	The Asaba person breaks kola and shares to all present	Jesus broke bread and shared to those present	The Catholic priest breaks bread on a plate and shares it to the community.
Sacrament of Anointing the sick	Anointing of the sick, also known as Unction, is a form of religious anointing for the benefit of a sick person.	6	During the ceremony, the candidate has <i>Nzu</i> , (native chalk), which he rubs on the arm or forearm of people at every opportunity. It is a sign of good luck, and as having powers to heal body and soul, and to ward off evil.	Jesus gave the disciples the instruction to drive out the devil and heal sick people with oil. Mark 6: 8-12	The Catholic priest uses chalk /ash like substance to mark the forehead (Ash Wednesday) while in prayer with powers to heal body and soul, reconcile with God, and ward off evil.

Sacrament of confirmation	<p>“Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation which completes baptism through sealing in the Holy Spirit and anoints the recipient as <u>priest, prophet, and king.</u>” (About Catholics Team, n.d.). *This quote from <i>About Catholics</i>, amazingly depicts the journey of Christ/Asaba Ézé as on their journey of becoming the ‘Son-of-God’</p>	3	Baptism for the Asaba priest starts the process of <i>killing the ego</i> , which is called <i>Igbu madu</i> (Maduemezia, 2003, p. 79). When sufficiently prepared, he continues the process of becoming a king [Ichi Ézé]. He becomes priest, prophet, and king	Jesus was a priest, prophet, king.	The Catholic priest gives each member of his flock a confirmational name which they choose depicting their journey and aspirations to emulate the virtues of a saint. (The Saint Anne's helper, n.d.)
Sacrament of Baptism	<p>For Catholics, baptism brings us into a new life in Christ. "Amen, amen I say to thee unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is the very mark of a Christian. (The Sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic Church, n.d.)</p>	1	For the Asaba-Ibo, the “baptism” in the water is a crucial part of the process of purity before coming into the presence of God.	For Jesus, the “baptism” in the water was a crucial part of the process of purity before coming into the presence of God.	The Catholic Priest brings all into this new life in Christ by the act of baptism.
Sacrament of Reconciliation	<p>Catholics are absolved from sins committed after baptism and reconciled with the Christian community. During reconciliation mortal sins must be confessed and venial sins may be confessed for devotional reasons</p>	4	During the process of becoming an Ézé (Christ-like), there is a time for purification by confession and by ensuring that there are no quarrels in the community during that period. Likewise, upon death, his wife or daughter goes to reconcile him with God by going to absolve him of any debt in a process that follows what they call the <i>ima agogo</i>	During the period of performing signs and wonders, in becoming Christ-like, Jesus healed the sick. He would say, “your sins are forgiven” saying, “know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins”	The Catholic church brings all into reconciliation through confession

Similarities between the Asaba priest and the Roman Catholic priest, mapping both back to the 7 Sacraments of Catholicism.

The pope, the papal structure, and religion.

The Ibo ‘papacy’ structure is captured by both (Basden 1921), and (Thomas 1914). “Nri, is a name well known over a considerable portion of the Ibo country. It is the name of a small town which is the headquarters of a priestly cult whose special functions are connected with the coronation of kings,” (Basden 1921, p. 27). Basden expatiated on the priestly, Nri people,

“The men of Nri are the priests whose presence is essential for a valid celebration of the ceremonial rites in connection with the coronation of kings, and they travel far and wide in the performance of these priestly functions. The men of *Uniu-di-Awka* journey from place to place practicing the art of cicatrization, they being recognized experts in the cutting of *Ichi* or tribal mark,” (Basden 1921, pp. 78-79)

The anthropologist, Northcote Thomas, similarly mentions it in his anthropological report on Asaba, “During certain parts of the ceremonies, the candidates are secluded, and Nri men are sometimes called in,” (Thomas 1914, p. 55). As it was for kings, so it was for Queens.

“In every town there is a sort of committee of women which controls all women's affairs and exercises great influence in various directions. The leader is chosen, and a ceremonial crowning is performed by a Nri (priest), similar to the coronation rites observed in the making of a king. The woman chosen is known as the *Awmu*, a title equivalent to a Queen. She is never the wife of the king [overall king of the town].” (Basden 1921, pp. 94-95).

This reference to priests, which Basden, and Thomas make, is akin to the Levitical priests of the family of Aaron - different from the Asaba *Alor*, who is a priest unto his own family, just like Jesus was a priest but not of the priesthood of Aaron. Just as Basden, and also Thomas noted - Elisabeth Isichei similarly notes: "An Nri man must be present at the ceremonies appointing an Asaba *Ézéz*," (Isichei 1969, p. 28).

Again, the similarities between the Igbos and the Roman Catholic Church can be found on the Papal level. For over a thousand years, the Pope would anoint Kings. In the Roman Catholic Church, this merger of the priestly element in Christianity the *Sacerdotium*, and the royal element, the *Imperium* or *Regnum* continued till the time of King Charles V, in 1530, who was the last king to be crowned by a pope (Cowdrey 1998). In an early map of Africa drawn in 1540 by Sebastian Münster, when he published a Latin edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia* with illustrations, he took the bold step for the first time to depict Iboland with two words Sacerdotium & Imperium with an image of the crown and staff running through.

Is this finding limited to the Asaba Ibo?

It is not limited to the Asaba people. It is generally found to a lesser degree of detail amongst the children of their common ancestor, Eri. Quoting *Stone's Intelligence Reports*, Elizabeth Isichei states that like Nteje, Asaba belonged to the Umueri clan of descendants from the common ancestor, Eri, who had seven sons: Nri, Agulu, Igbariam, Anuke, Nteje, Nsugbe and Araba. And while they acknowledge their maternal roots to Igboland, specifically, Nteje, a town about thirty kilometers east of Asaba, recorded history has it that in 1912 the elders of Nteje visited Asaba to suggest that its people should return to their ancestral home. The suggestion was declined, but they were given a hearty welcome (Isichei 1969, p.28).

In the city of Awka, a town about fifty kilometers east of Asaba - according to Basden, the Ozo title is split into two: *Uno* (house) and then passes on to the complete title, i.e., *Nnukwu* (great)" (Basden 1921, p. 261). This would map back to the two stages Mkpalar and Ézé of Asaba, the titles of which Basden similarly called, "Ogbuefi (to kill a cow), and Otigbu-Inyinya (to kill a horse). As with Asaba, Basden describes the series of purification and time. In Awka it is sixty days. "The first part of the concluding ceremonies is performed at night, and then ensues a rather protracted series of purifications. The newly made Ozo must not venture forth in public for two months" (Basden 1921, p. 261). In Igboland there is a faint understanding of a wilderness incorporated into it: "He may not sleep in his own compound; indeed, his feet must not

come under the roof of a house... a small booth is specially erected for his benefit (Basden 1921, p. 261).” This is then followed by his triumphant entry, “After all these preliminaries are fulfilled, he makes ready to parade the town.... On reaching the marketplace, or other recognized open space, the Ozo publicly embraces his wife and eldest son” (Basden 1921, p. 261). Basden concludes by alluding to the once greatness of this title and its degeneration over the years to “a little more than a money-making concern ... for the sake of temporary gain, they have sacrificed the dignity and the privileges of the Ozo order and are chiefs in the proper meaning of the term no longer” (Basden 1921, p. 264).

In Africa, religious ceremonies were mostly of fetishism and animism - a general conclusion by anthropologists borne out of decades of access to information. One may also see the practice as a devolution related to how oblivious the people were of the meanings behind their religious processes and how far deviated such practices were from the ideal. For instance, by 1966 when Basden was writing his second book, even the title ‘*A description of the primitive life, customs and animistic beliefs, etc., of the Ibo people of Nigeria*’ said it all. Basden’s description of the taking of the Ozo title in Obosi, a town about twenty kilometers east of Asaba, was one of fetishism — with the candidate going before a deity in a shrine to which the candidate was already bonded, and with an understanding that if he lived afterwards for a period of three years, it would be proof that the deity found no fault in him. Nonetheless, the process even in Obosi did end with the new candidate going into a form of wilderness for twenty-eight days (Basden 1966, p. 42). Would this be fetishism or degeneration? With what we now know, perhaps it would be the latter.

Are the Ibo the Ebionites?

The people of Asaba practice their culture symbolically but fervently. They do this alongside Christianity. In Asaba culture, every individual has the ability to attain godliness by the process of killing the ego. That idea is replicated in the path Jesus took. If perfectly attained and attracting the grace of God, a dove would land on the head of the candidate during baptism. This is what the Ebionites say happened to Jesus. That this event signaled a specific choice by God. This is what the Asaba people practice till this day. It is also why the Ebionites assert with confidence as recorded by the Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, that a virgin birth noble as it is, was not necessary and did not occur

to the best of their knowledge. What they say did occur was the perfection at baptism. This is as recorded in the Bible.

"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-23.

Reading the first part of the first sentence, "when all people were baptized." This tells you that others were also going in for baptism alongside Jesus at that very time. This is during the lifetime of Jesus. It was not a baptism "to bring us into a new life in Christ," according to the sacraments of Catholicism. So what baptism were they all going for at that very time if not the concluding process of the journey of the egoless self, alongside Jesus? In Jesus, the Ebionites saw the teacher and the pattern of perfect Chassiduth... a Messianic Prophet ... had any similarly fulfilled the precepts of the law, he would similarly have become the Christ, for in virtue of like deeds others also can become a Christ," (Schoeps 1953, p. 220).

Jesus himself said, "For ye are all sons of God." What did that really mean? In view of this paper, what could that mean? The objective was to become Christ-like even though at the time Jesus said it, he was not yet the Christ. That fulfillment can be found in that moment interpreted by the authors of the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in saying: "Thou art my beloved son." We can now take that to mean that everyone baptized by *John the Baptist* was in the throes of becoming the *Son of God*, but Jesus was the chosen beloved. The Asaba people believe the same about baptism as did the Ebionite Christians. *Ichi Ézé* is an aspiration to become a *Son-of-God*. Having been tempted for twenty-four days of isolation [*Iba n'ichi*], (Maduemezia 2003, p. 167) and purified [*Igbu Mmadu*] (Maduemezia 2003, pp. 82, 166) - the hope, when they go to the river [*Ije Udo*] is that a dove would fall on their heads during baptism (Maduemezia 2003, pp. 88-89). The Ebionites saw in Jesus the *Saddiq* (honest, truthful), who in a unique degree perfectly fulfilled the law (Schoeps 1953, p. 220). This is how the Mkpolor or Ézé is seen as in Asaba: An honest, truthful, and exemplary person (Maduemezia 2003, pp. 82, 166, 167).

Conclusion

The only way Roman Catholicism and the Ibo people could have so closely mirrored the ideology and practice of each other represented in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church; The role of the Roman Pope in the Sacerdotium & Imperium; The role of Jesus in the journey of the egoless self; And of the sacraments —is only *if the Romans, the Ibos, the Nri were at the same place at the same time*. Thus, the implication is that the Ebionites are the Ibo, and the Aaronites are the Nri.

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*Note. It is assumed that readers are conversant with the biblical passages mentioned; hence are neither cited nor included in the reference section.

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