



## Comparative Analysis of Ritual in World Religions

EMMANUEL ECHEZOLOCHIN AMADI, PIUS BARINAADAA KII  
Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

**Abstract.** This essay examines the comparative analysis of ritual in world religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and African traditional religion. Ritual is one essential element that cut across religions. Ritual like symbol, vary from one religion to another. In Christianity. Eucharist or Sacrament believed to be prominent is the re-enactment of the last supper Jesus had with His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion. In Islam, it is the *Hajj*, believed to be one of the most important rites Moslem pilgrims undertake in Mecca. In Judaism, it is the feast of Passover, also known as the feast of freedom; which symbolically reminds the Jewish people of how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Remarkable things about ritual in all these religions is that it is believed not only to be real but also make sense to the adherents of these religions. But of paramount importance of it all is that it creates an avenue for communion and communication between the adherents and the object of worship on one hand and among the worshippers on the other hand. The study relied more on secondary sources (published-materials). The study adopts phenomenological approach to describe and interpret the rituals relating to these religions. Findings reveal that ritual has helped to promote religious and social solidarity; enhance the integration of Christianity, Islam and Judaism respectively.

**Keywords:** Religion, Ritual, Christianity, Islam and Judaism

### 1. Introduction

Ritual represents an important element in all religions of mankind. Through ritual, religion lives and grows and phases out when ritual is abandoned. One noticeable hallmark about ritual is its multiplicity of meaning; meaning that only those who practices and

belong to that worshipping community knows the value and meaning. For instance, ritual celebration of “*Hajj*” as done by the Muslims makes more sense to them than other religious groups vise-a-vis. Since religious expressions deals with two realms at the same time, the physical visible realm and the spiritual invisible realm, here, ritual creates an avenue through which worshippers participate simultaneously in both realms (Arnold, 2000, p. 31).

The aim of this essay, therefore, is to examine the forms of ritual elements in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, though comparatively.

### 2. Conceptual Clarification

#### 2.1 Religion

Religion is a complex word and very hard to define satisfactory. This explains why scholars have not agreed on any definition. In any case, the examination of some definitions proffered by scholars will enable us have a glimpse of what religion is all about. Eliade (2010) defined it as ‘as a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, ultimate non material fact and has a dynamo-genic quality, (p.35). Deton (2006) defines religion as a fixed relationship between the human and non-human entities, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute or simply, Good (P.54). Okwueze (2003) defines it ‘as a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experience, beliefs and knowledge are reflected in man’s conception of himself in relation to others, his social world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world (p.3). Ugwu (1999) defined religion as faith and practices involving the relationship between mankind and what is regarded as sacred. According to him, religion generally includes the belief in the supernatural and a

code of ethical behaviour; the outward act or form by which men indicate their recognition of the existence of God or of gods having power over their destiny, to whom obedience, service and honour are due; the feeling or expression of human love, fear or awe of some super human and over-ruling power, whether by profession of belief, by observances of rites and ceremonies or by the conduct of life“ (p.2). Alfred (1960) defines it as ‘the art and the theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things’ furthermore, he defines religion as what an individual does with his solitariness (p.15). William James (1960) defines religion as ‘the feelings, act and experiences of individual in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine’ (p.50).

Radcliff Brown (1973) opines ‘any religion normally involves certain ideas or beliefs on the one hand, and on the other certain observances; these observances may be positive or negative. However, in substance, religion involves a pattern of behaviour or practices based on common beliefs patterns (p.1). for Emile Durkheim (1947), religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to scared things, that is to say, to things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community all those who adhere to them (p.37). According to A.C. Boughet (1954) religion cannot wisely or safely be ignored or neglected as it is by frivolous persons today. Even a selective or obsolete scheme of religion will serve the individual better than none at all. This is why so many old-fashioned persons possess, in spite of their defective views on some topics, a wholesome and completeness of character, which is absent in young ultra-moderns (p.154). For Anyacho (1994) religion is a belief in or worship of God or gods or a particular system of belief or worship. He further defines it as the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established, a cosmization in a sacred mode; a quality of mysterious and awesome power than man and not related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience (p.28). For Madu (1996) religion can be defined subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, religion for him, is the very consciousness of dependence on a transcendent being and the very propensity or inclination to exhibit cult or worship. Objectively, religion according to him is a complex of truths, law and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being (p.19). Idowu (1973) defines religion as the serious and social attitude of individuals or communities toward the powers of power which they receive as having ultimate control over their interest and destinations (p.72). For Max Muller, religion is a perception of the

infinite (in Idowu, 1973, p.70). Immanuel Kant describes religion as the recognition of our duties as divine commands. For him, religion is the belief which sets what is essential in all adoration of God in human morality (in Tasie, 2012, pp. 3 – 4). Religion is the law in us, in so far as it obtains emphasis from a giver and judge over us, it is morality, directed to the recognition of God (Idowu, 1973, pp. 70 -71).The most overriding interest in all these definitions as Omoregbe (1999) has pointed out show that through religion a link is established between God and man (p.3).

### 3. Features World’s Religions

The world religions in spite of their divergent views still have some features that cut across all of them. Such features include the following:

#### 3.1 The Sacred

In most religions, a distinction is made between the sacred or holy and the profane or ordinary states. Well developed religions usually have sacred writings, such as the Bible and the Koran. Islam has its holy cities especially Mecca (*Kaaba* – the sacred stone) while the cow is sacred to Hindus. Every religion has sacred objects usually kept in well designated places for the worshippers to see and or make use of. The Holy of Holies in the temple of Jerusalem is a telling example of a place where the laity do not enter but is reserved only for the clergy.

Certain persons are equally considered holy, such as Mohammed for Moslems, Jesus for Christians, Buddha for the Buddhists, *Dibia* (medicine men) for the African traditionalists, etc.

#### 3.2 Belief in the Existence of the Supernatural

Every religion has profound belief in God or gods or some supernatural power. Most primitive men believe that certain natural objects such as mountains or trees have souls or spirits. Such religions are referred to as animism or naturism. The Greeks, Romans and other ancient kingdoms had many gods (Polytheism); Jews, Christians and Moslems believe in one God which is a belief called Monotheism. Members of these religions also believe in a personal God who has the same peculiar qualities. In most oriental religions, the Supreme Reality is regarded as impersonal.

#### 3.3 The Soul

Most religions involve the belief that every person has a spiritual entity called soul. In modern religions, the soul is generally regarded as the vital or essential principle of human personality (spiritual double).

### 3.4 Belief in an After-Life

A handsome number of world religions include in their belief system that a person's soul lives on spiritually after the body dies. In some religions, such as Hinduism, it is believed that when a person dies his soul becomes reborn or is reincarnated in another person or living object.

### 3.5 Salvation

In nearly every religion, there is the belief that man must be saved from something (hell or heaven for examples). This pronounces loudly the eschatological perspective from which these religions view life in the here and hereafter concepts. Christianity has the concept of salvation from sin being an act that ultimately produces separation from God.

### 3.6 Worship

This refers to adoration and reverence for God. Through worship, man acknowledges his dependence on God and seeks to do His will or on a lower level he tries to win God's favour. People of various religions do this in many ways such as by prayer, sacrifice, and incantation, use of incense, chants and rituals.

### 3.7 Priesthood

In the early stage of religion, there was no separate priestly class. Then, kings and heads of clans and families were known to carry out sacrifices and other sacred activities. Later, a special class of priests developed to take charge of worship services.

### 3.8 Pilgrimage

The idea of moving from profane to holy or sacred places as a fulfillment of religious obligation or for the acquisition of salvation is very prevalent among the world religions. They perform this religious ritual once a year or as time or occasion demands (Ugwu, 1999, pp. 4 – 6).

## 4. Christianity

Christianity which began in Palestine is traceable to the person and activities of Jesus of Nazareth. Despite this, no one can ascertain the exact date which Christianity began. Although, the spectacular visit of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles is believed to be the official date for the beginning of the Church or Christianity. Be that as it may, one can rightly say that Christianity gradually comes into limelight out of the

person and work of Jesus Christ. Through the ages, Christianity has through the work of Jesus Christ and that of His disciples expands and become a universal witness with overwhelming number of adherents among the known world religions. Although, there is elements of Judaism in Christianity in the sense that the form and indeed laid the foundation for the speed up of Christianity. Affirming this Ekwunife (1995) assert:

“The prophetic good shepherd came not to abolish the laws but rather, to bring them to perfection” (P. 25).

The laws refer to here are the Jewish laws and traditions which Christ did not abrogate but rather put them right. Today, Christianity which gradually began in Palestine through the person and activities of Jesus of Nazareth has become the largest known world religion (Intonia, 2002, p.35).

## 4.1 Basic doctrines and Practices

### 4.1.1 Belief in God

Christians believe that there is one God who is the creator and the controller of the whole universe. They believe that He is not only the creator of the whole universe “created owner”, but also created man in His own image” in order for man to do His will”. Therefore, the belief in God the father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, is a belief, which the Christians hold tenaciously to justify the belief in the all-powerful nature of God who is beyond human imagination. Thus, they strongly believe in the universal fatherhood of God who made man the centre of His creations (Pecka, 1997, p.52). Summarizing the Christians doctrines about God Anyacho (1995) further states that they believe in:

The personality of God, God as the creator, God is the Lord of history and God as Judge. The Old Testament presents God as a person and as speaking like a person to Moses. He is often described with some human attributes of goodness, wisdom, mercy, grace, love and kindness, in addition to the attributes of holiness and righteousness, which are His exclusive attributes. As the creator, Christians view God as having omnipotent power, which enables Him to fashion whatever He decides to create based on some principles and laws known only to Him. As the lord of history, God selects for Himself a special people, covenant community which has a mission of passing the knowledge of God to other nations. The Jews as being solely meant for them through the covenant with their fathers originally conceived elective process. But Christians now see themselves as the new covenant community, which is

commissioned to teach other people about God (pp.184 — 85).

#### 4.1.2 Belief in Jesus Christ

Christians see Jesus Christ as the centre of Christianity. Christians believe strongly that Jesus is the “Son of God” and by extension their “Lord and Savior” one major declaration in the Apostles’ Creed is the belief in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born by Virgin Mary. So, Christians believe that it was for the salvation of mankind that Jesus Christ came down from heaven after taking the human form and born in the human way. The New Testament accounts in point plank state the nature of His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension and His subsequent return to earth in a rapturous dispatch. The New Testament accounts of the pre-existence of Christ, its description of Jesus as the Logos or the light giving word of God, is responsible for the Christians belief in the divinity of Christ. Thus, they believe that Christ was both divine and human; the symbol of the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah. They see Jesus as the son of man who is the herald of the kingdom of God; the symbol and the very manifestation of that kingdom. For the Christians, He is the Saviour who after completing the work of salvation (consummated in his death and resurrection), ascended to sit at the right hand of God from there He is expected to come back to take the Christians saints away and thereafter usher in the Kingdom of God (Anyacho, 1994, p. 186)

#### 4.1.3 Belief in the Holy Spirit

Christians strongly believe in the Holy Spirit as a true creative element in the life of the church. The existence of this being according to the Bible started in the period “in the beginning “when the world was without “form and void. The prophecy of Joel (Joel 2:28) contains a promise of out pouring of the Holy Spirit to the people of God. In the New Testament, John’s gospel declares that Jesus promises the gift of Holy Spirit as the comforter who after His departure, will guide the church in recalling and interpreting the words of Christ and through which the eternal presence of Christ in the church will be manifested (John 14; 16,25-26). Significantly, the Day of Pentecost was regarded as that special day when the comforter promised eventually came; speaking in tongues and other languages were the prove (Ituma, 2001, p.127). Also, the accounts in Matthew and Luke’s Gospel also present the Holy Spirit as the first to declare the Sonship of Christ to God in the statement ascribed to the Holy Spirit during Jesus ‘baptism in River Jordan. Here, God presented Him as His beloved

son “this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased “(Matt 3: 17; Lk 3: 22). As earlier noted, It is the same spirit that “poured “on the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1: 8) in order to endure the church with power and boldness, fulfill the Prophecy in Joel (2: 28,), and the promise of the father” which Jesus asked the disciples to wait for (Acts 14).

Christians therefore believe that the Holy Spirit has a significant role to put in their mission to the World. For them, it is a power giving Spirit, and energizer, who is in dispensable in the propagation of the gospel. They believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Trinity. The Trinitarian doctrine emphasizes that God vealed Himself to mankind in a threefold figure God the Father, God the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit (p. 187). Also, the Holy Spirit has been referred to in the Bible as the counselor, Teacher, Helper and Comforter, Thus, going by the teaching of Christianity, the Christian life may not be complete without the presence of the Holy Spirit (Owete and Onu, 2006 p.76).

#### 4.1.4 Belief about the Church

Christians strongly believe that Christ instituted the Church. This for the Christians not only suggests that Christ is the head of the church, but also the one who laid the foundation of the Church. This also explains why St. Paul sees the Church as the “body of Christ” (Colossians 1:18). That is why Christians, irrespective of their denominations, vehemently believe in the divine foundation of the church. Going by this, Christians see themselves as the church, the body of Christ, and elected community charged with the responsibility of spreading the gospel. The implication here is that the church is believed not only to be holy, but also universal; hence its based entry requirement is belief and faith in Jesus Church (P.187).

#### 4.1.5 The Belief in Resurrection and Everlasting life

Christianity teaches that there will be a resurrection of the dead which will precede the final judgment. Christian teaching on physical resurrection is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven and already seated at the right hand of God. Therefore, the resurrection of the dead according to the Christian belief is such that will be determined by the second coming of Jesus Christ. Thereafter, the dead will be raised while the living will be physically transformed before they will join the throne of the resurrection.

Consequently, resurrection of the dead according to the Christian belief not only heralds the final day of

judgment of the world, but also a judgment which thereafter, the wicked will be punished with an everlasting torture in hell. Christians use the term heaven and hell to describe places of bliss and torture respectively, made for the righteous and the unrighteous.

Here, heaven is believed to be a place of an unending happiness and joy; which in-turn denote a place of reward for the Christians who have victoriously and righteously lived their lives. While hell on the other hand, is believed to be eternal inheritance of the wicked that failed to live righteously while on earth which in-turn believed to be a place of unquenchable fire, torture and thirsty (P.188).

#### 4.1.6 Belief in Angels

Christianity teaches that there are spiritual beings, called angels. Christians believe that the angels were not only created by God, but also serve as His messengers. Christians believe that the angels not only play a significant role in the life of Jesus but also featured prominently in the life of Jesus. It was one of the angels, by name, Gabriel, that was sent by God to announce to Mary the birth of Jesus, that is, that she would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit and give birth to a son. The same angel had earlier also been sent to announce to Zachariah that his wife Elizabeth would give birth to John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus. Also, when Jesus was born an Angel appeared to some shepherds and announced to them the birth of Jesus; here upon several other angels appeared, joined the first one, and they all began to sing and praise God. Thus when King Herod heard about the birth of Jesus and planned to kill him, an angel appeared to Joseph, the child's father, in a dream and told him to take the child and flee into Egypt. After the death of King Herod, the angel again appeared to Joseph and instructed him to go back to the land of Israel with the child since the man who wanted to kill the child was dead.

Consequently, after the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness angels came down, from heaven and worshipped Him. After the death and burial of Jesus, an angel descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone with which the tomb was covered. The same angel told the women who came to the tomb early in the morning that Jesus was no longer in the tomb; but had risen. After His resurrection and subsequent ascension into heaven, as the disciples were gazing into the sky two angels appeared to them and told them that Jesus who had just been taken into heaven and would eventually come back in the same way He went. Earlier, before, the death of Jesus especially when He

was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus spoke of God sending him "legions of angels" to fight for Him if He had wanted to fight. This was when Peter, one of His disciples, cut off one ear of one of those that arrested him, in order to defend Jesus (Matt. 26:47-54) (Omogrebe, 1999, pp.26 —27).

#### 4.1.7 The Christian Concept of Man

Christianity teaches that man is not only very special to God but also created by God "in His own image and likeness". For, man, as he is conceived in Christianity, is composed of both material and spiritual elements. The material element is his physical body while the spiritual element is the soul. In the teachings of Christianity, the soul is conceived to be more important than the body and this explains why everything humanly possible must be done to ensure its welfare. This, however, further explains why Jesus was quoted as saying "what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul in the end"? It is as a result of this that Jesus admonished His followers not to fear those who can only kill the body but cannot harm the soul. In the teachings of Christianity, man abinitio was very close to God, enjoyed God's friendship and cordial relationship. But man eventually alienated himself from God when he committed the "original sin" and lost God's friendship and cordial relationship. That is why Christian teachings sees man as morally weak and corrupt, hence every effort is made by man through his son Jesus to restore his intimate and cordial relationship with God in. Despite this, God still love man, cares for him, provides for his daily sustenance, guards and protects man from the snares of the day (Omogrebe, 1999, P. 27).

#### 4.1.8 Christian Ethics

Christians' ethics are based on three strong pillars namely the teaching of Jesus Christ (the Gospel) the letters of Paul, (the epistles) but the most central was the Law of Moses, which was summarized in the Ten commandments. The Ten Commandments as enshrined in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5:1 —21 can be summarized as:

- I am the Lord thy God, do not have any other gods beside me.
- You shall not call the name of the Lord thy God in vain
- Keep the Sabbath day holy
- Honour your father and your mother
- Do not kill
- Do not commit adultery
- Do not steal

- Do not bear false witness against your neighbour
- Do not convert your neighbour's wife
- Do not convert your neighbour's goods (Olatona, 1977, p.27). More importantly, these are intended to guide man in his relationship with God on one hand and between man and his fellow man on the other hand (Obasiyi, 1971, P.23).

## 5. Islam

It is one of the world's great religions founded in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D Mohammed. The word Islam means submission (to the will of God). Followers of Islam are called Moslems or Muslims, terms that means "those who submit (to the will of God)". Islam began in Arabia in the seventh century A.D. That is, it supposedly placed of birth. From here it spread rapidly to other countries such as Northern Africa, Asia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc where it is practiced today as the official religion (Ugwu, 1999, pp.11-12).

### 5.1 Beliefs and Practices

Islamic doctrines can best be understood by referring to her articles of faith and the five pillars. The articles of faith consist of: belief in God; belief in Angels; belief in Books belief in prophets; belief, in last days. The five pillars refer to the practical duties of every Moslem. These are:

Confession of faith in  
 Allah prayer (Salat)  
 Almsgiving (Zakat)  
 Fasting (Swan)  
 Pilgrimage (Hajj) (Anyacho, 1994, p. 227) Judaism

#### 5.1.1 Belief in Allah

The word "Allah" is used throughout the Islamic world to refer to God. He is believed to be the creator of heaven and earth and all that inhabits them. He is one and indivisible. He is alone and has not begotten anybody neither was He begotten. Islam is an absolute monotheistic religion. It does not believe in other gods but Allah. This belief in the oneness of Allah is contained in the Shahada. It is commonly expressed as Laa: illaha illa Allah" which means; there is no god but God. Allah is very good, compassionate, living and kind. His goodness is expressed in ninety-nine names. Some of these names are:  
 Ar-Raham (The beneficent)  
 Ar-Rahim (Merciful)

Malik (Master or Owner (as in Owner of the Judgement day)  
 Rabb- (Lord)  
 Al-Khaliq (Creator)  
 Al-quddus (The Holy One)  
 As-Salem (The peace)  
 Al-Chafur (The Forgiving One)  
 Al-Hakam (The Judge)  
 Al-Alim (The all knowing)  
 All these names enhance the worshipper's belief, mediation and faith in the power of the omnipotent God.

#### 5.1.2 Belief in Angels

According to the Islamic tradition angels are invisible, and immortal beings created from light. They can appear in form of man to any messenger or prophet of God as was the case with Abraham, Lot and Mary (*Surah 11:71-80; 19:17-19*). They are heavenly servants of God who surround His throne and worship Him daily with songs and praises. They are sent by God to guard and watch people and record their deeds.

Angel Gabriel (Jibril) played a significant role in the life of the prophet and Islam as a whole. It is the angle of revelation. Gabriel was believed to be the Angel that sent the messages of the Koran to Prophet Mohammed. The same angel went to Mary before she conceived Jesus (*Surah 9:16-22*).

There are other angels among whom are Michael (Mika'l) an angel charged with the responsibility of giving life to mankind, animal, and plants; Israfil, the angel that will blow the trumpet on the day of judgement; Israel, the angel of death, etc. all these Angels exercise powers delegated to them by God, and therefore they are under His supreme control.

#### 5.1.3 Belief in Books

Moslems believe in sacred books. The Koran is the most sacred of these books. It is respected by every Moslem and treated with utmost care. Other sacred books recognized is Islam are the Jewish torah (tawrah) that is the Pentateuch, which was revealed to Moses; the psalm (the Zabor) which was revealed to David; and the Gospels (Injil) which was revealed to Jesus. They believe that the Koram is the last and the final revelation. Islamic doctrines are clearly stated in the Koran. It contains the prophet's revelations which was collected and compiled by his followers after his death. According to Islamic tradition the Koran was originally written on Palm leaves, parchment, stone and shoulder blades before it has a final compilation.

#### 5.1.4 Belief in Prophets

Prophets are human messengers of God who are sent by God to men to direct them. In Islam, many prophets are recognized both those in the Koran and those in the Bible. Each prophet was a messenger (result) who received a special revelation from God for mankind. Among the prophets mentioned in the Koran are Adam, Noah, Lot, Enoch, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Jonah, Job, Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Zechariah, John, Jesus and Mohammed. Mohammed is believed to be the last prophet, “the seal of the prophets”. He is believed to have received the last revelation. Mohammed believed that he came to accomplish the purpose for which other prophets had been sent. He was called to be the *resul* Allah to witness not only about the oneness of God but also to warn people about awaiting judgement for their deeds, and to help in reforming them.

#### 5.1.5 Belief in the Last Day

Moslems believe that there is a final day of judgement in which people will be rewarded for their deeds. The last day of judgement will follow a process of death, resurrection, then judgement before one enters into paradise or hell. The day of judgement will witness a gathering together of souls from every nation before the throne of God the supreme judge. Every person will give account of his life before Him. No one will be capable of helping another on the day. “No soul can help another soul” (*Surah 21:12-33*). After the judgement, the righteous ones will be sent to paradise (al-jannah, the garden) a joyful dwelling place for the righteous, the faithful. The wicked and sinners on the other hand will be sent to hell. (‘aljahim, the hot place’) a place of suffering and intolerable flames reserved for them as a reward for sin. This last article of faith instills fear in Moslems and makes devout ones conscious of their living on earth (Anyacho, 1994, pp. 227-232).

#### 5.1.6 Judaism

It is the Jewish religion. It is one of the oldest of the great world religions believed to be the mother religion of both Christianity and Islam. Many Old Testament writers would attribute the founder of Judaism to Abraham and Moses. However, Judaism, like most other religions was not founded by one particular person. Here Abraham was rather described as the father of the Hebrew people and Moses as the “Law giver”!

With the destruction of Solomon’s temple at Jerusalem in 586 B.C began the scattering of the Hebrew over

many Land. From then on, Judaism developed as a religion (Ugwu, 1999 in Rosenthal, 1979, p. 180).

### 5.2 Basic Beliefs

#### 5.2.1 Belief in God

Judaism is highly monotheistic. To the Jews God is one and indivisible. They therefore believe strongly in the oneness of God. This confession of the oneness of God is expressed in the Shema which is a pronouncement based on Deuteronomy 6:4; Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one. This statement highlights the faith of the Jews. They say it as a prayer in the morning, at night and in time of death. The Jews see Yahweh as their God. He is the infinite and personal creator of the whole universe. He is an invisible spirit being who alone should be worshipped. They see themselves as the chosen people; a peculiar people chosen by God to bear witness to Him in all the earth. They also see Yahweh as a just, compassionate, and loving God.

#### 5.2.2 The belief in the sacredness of the name of God

The Jews uphold the divine name of God. The third commandment *Exodus 20:7* warns worshippers not to use the name of God in vain. Similarly, Judaism teaches that God’s name is too holy to be pronounced. Thus rather than pronouncing the original name YHWH (Yahweh) or Adonai the Jews prefer to address him as Lord. Irrespective of the fact that God revealed himself to Moses as “I am who I am”, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, (a revelation which shows that He should be addressed with the same that Abraham called Him), the Jews still attached special importance to that name and feel that pronouncing God’s personal name is disrespectful.

#### 5.2.3 The belief in Torah

The Torah is made up of the Pentateuch the first five books in the Old Testament namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is the main source of Jewish legislation covering every aspect of social and religious behavior. The Jews believe in the authority of both the written and oral Torah.

They believe that in the encounter between God and Israel at Sinai, God deposited both written and oral Torah. They traditionally believe in the divine source of the Torah. The oral comprises the interpretations of the written Torah, collected in the midrashic literature, and the commentaries (Gemara) on the Mishnah, collected in the Talmud”. The Mishnah refers to a

collection of commandments based on the interpretations of the law by the Rabbis, called Tannaim (Anyacho, 1994, pp. 202-204).

#### 5.2.4 Ritual

Tasie (2012) defines ritual as all rites connected with a religious ceremony; or ways of conducting a religious ceremony (p.6). The *Watkins Dictionary of Religions and Secular Faiths* (2008) defines ritual as “the prescribed order or method for the performance of rites; whether religious or not (p. 491). According to *Encyclopedia of Religion*, rituals is a prescribe form of activity determined by consideration of tradition and symbolism (p. 33).

In much the same vein, for Mbiti (1977) ritual is a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony (p. 126). Njoku (2003) defines ritual as a repeated symbolic behavior; a way of communication with the divine for the purpose of changing the human situation (p. 39). According to *African Encyclopedia for schools and colleges*, ritual generally consists of general ceremony which celebrates special events (p. 427). For Madu (1996) through ritual man says something about his inner religious awareness; his visions and beliefs about the Cosmos (p. 24).

In the words of Anyacho (1994) rituals feature prominently in the reception of new converts, namely, in baptism, in the ordination and consecration of priests; in marriages, coronation of kings, burials, births even in transition programmes from one social status to the other; from one season to the other, in sickness and other areas as may be determined by a particular religion (p. 15). Ritual, indeed, is a paradigm and dramatization of the intent of religion itself; communicates something of religious significance but it also expresses the psych and social world of its participants in what is seen, said and done (Kemdirim, 1997, p.117).

#### 5.3 Types of Ritual

Ritual may be classified under:

- Piacular ritual
- Non-periodic ritual and,
- Calendrical ritual

Piacular rituals are performed in situation of danger often thought of as being brought about by some fault and in them ideas of propitiation and expiation are prominent. Non-periodic ritual is concerned with life crises. It has to do with change in social status; such change of status may be at marriage, birth, puberty and at death. Calendrical ritual is performed at a fixed

period known to be believing community. Examples include annual ritual, which reenacts the stories of faith. Such rituals include the Christian Eucharist, Muslim *Hajj* and Jewish Passover festival (James, 1998, p. 78).

#### 5.4 Ritual in Christianity

The Eucharist or sacrament is one of the most important rites performed in Christianity. It is a celebration of the Unity of the Church in Christ and the remembrance of His passion, death and resurrection. The Eucharist is referred to as the Holy Communion or Last Supper by the protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church calls it Eucharist or Mass. The Last Supper celebration in the Christian Churches is the re-enactment of the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. The celebration of this followed the instruction of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper when he said “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Bread and wine are used for the celebration of the Holy Communion or Eucharist. And after their consecration by the celebrating priest, they symbolically become for the Christian the body and blood of Jesus Christ respectively. However; the protestant churches use grape Juice instead of wine. Whereas, the Roman Catholics administer only consecrated bread, in the Anglican Church, the Chalice is used for every communicant in general. In this rite, the sacramental bread is deeped into the consecrated wine and given to the communicants. The observance of this rite is very important to Christians because of its significance. It reminds them of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.

#### 5.5 Ritual in Islam

Islam enjoins every true adult Muslim to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred mosque in Mecca as a ritual obligation. According to the Quran, the mosque in Mecca was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael, following God’s instruction that they should make a place of worship and visit for mankind. Ten religious rites are performed in Mecca by the pilgrims. They include *Ihram*, wearing the pilgrim garment, *Tawaf*, going round the *Kaba*, short prayer at the Magam Ibrahim. *Say*, running between the two hills of *Safa* and *Marwah*; the visit to the village of Mina to spend the night. The visit to the village of Arafat on the 9<sup>th</sup> day to stay up to sunset; the return of the pilgrim from Arafat and a one-hour halt at *Muzdalifah* before proceeding to the valley of Mina; the *ED* day, the day of sacrifice at the valley of Mina, the throwing of stones at the devil known as *Ramjah* (Offiong, 2005, p. 94).

It is important to note that on the Last day of the *Hajj* the pilgrims are required to throw stones at fixed places called *Jamrah*. Seven stones must be thrown at each *Jamrah* and the *Takbir* (*Allah Akbar*) recited. The rite of throwing of stones on Last day of the *Hajj* is very significant. The throwing of stones re-enacts the action of prophet Mohammed. It is believed that the prophet threw at each of the *Jamrah*, and then moved a little further, stood for a little time with his hands raised for prayer while facing the *Qiblah*, He finally departed after throwing stones at the Last *Jamrah*. The throwing of stones reminds the Muslims of the temptations of the evil one. The re-enactment of prophet Mohammed actions on the last day of the *Hajj* preserves the historical past of Islam in this respect.

### 5.6 Ritual in Judaism

Passover is one of the many festivals celebrated in Judaism. The festival is celebrated annually and lasts for eight days. Passover is sometimes referred to as the “feast of freedom” or the “feast of unleavened bread. The festival reminds the Jewish people of how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Passover recalls how God Passover the house of the children of Israel when the first born of the Egyptians were killed because Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go out of Egypt. The reference to the Passover as feast of the unleavened Bread is very significant to the Israelites. It reminds them of how they had to eat flat and thin unleavened cake called *Matzath* or “bread of the affliction” in the wilderness. The Passover is also celebrated as an agricultural festival Home service or seder, which illustrates the symbols and purposes of the Passover, is also observed. The festival is observed “in the winter season of the month of ripeness” of sown barley. Half a gallon of barley is offered on the second day of the festival. Again, the Passover synagogue service is also held. The synagogue, services consist of public reading from the scripture of events about the Passover and its influence passages read include account of the first Passover celebration in Egypt and the Exodus, the cross of the red Sea, and the first Passover observed by them in Palestine

### 6. Significance and Function of Rituals: Eucharist, *Hajj*, and the Passover Ritual

The Christian Eucharist, Islamic *Hajj* and Jewish Passover are calendrical rituals observed at a fixed period. Christian Eucharist is observed twice a month in many Orthodox churches whereas, the Jewish Passover and the Islamic *Hajj* are observed once a year. These religious rituals play significant role in the continuation of these three religions. The Eucharist, *Hajj* and Passover symbolically bring past events to

reality by offering the participants opportunity to initiate their divine models (Offiong, 2005, p. 94). In Christianity, the last supper which was taken by Christ with his disciples is re-enacted in the Eucharist. The rite of throwing stones at specific point during the *Hajj* is in imitation of the actions of the prophet. The celebration of the Passover festival recounts how God de-livered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Christianity, Islam and Judaism base their ritual in liturgical season. Thus, they tend to hold a Linear view of history and repeat rituals as the historical events of the community are retold and re-enacted.

Ritual in the three religions discussed here help to repeat and reaffirm the sacred origin of the liturgies. Furthermore, it recalls and preserves past events as well as transmits the foundation of their beliefs. The observance of Eucharist, *Hajj* and the Passover help to promote religious and social solidarity as well as enhance the integration of Christianity, Islam and Judaism respectively.

### 7. Conclusion

The study so far highlights the significance and functions of ritual in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It shows that the three religious traditions observe Calendrical and historical-liturgical ritual. Thus, they repeat events in the life of these religious traditions. By the performance of the Christian Eucharist, the Muslim *Hajj*, the Jewish Passover, the adherents of these religions partake in the divine sacred past. Although ritual behavior is sometimes motivated by the desire to obtain some practical benefits and satisfaction, such as health, fertility, change of status and general welfare, the three rituals discussed here re-enact their history. The celebration of the Christian Eucharist, Muslim *Hajj* and the Jewish Passover brings the people together as larger groups. This in turn has the effect of strengthening their unity and cohesion. Thus, ritual is more than the expression of man’s dependence on the supernatural world. It signifies the reinforcement of social solidarity. Above all, the participants re-enact their relationship to their sacred objects and beliefs.

### References

- Alfred, N.W. (1960). Religion in the Making. Chicago: New American Library.
- Anyacho, E.O. (1994). Essential Themes in the Study of Religion, Cross River: Niger Link Printing & Publishing.
- Bouquet, A.C. (1954), Man and Deity (Worcester, Billing and Sons Limited.

- Deton, M. (2006). *The Mind of God: The scientific Basis for a Rational World*: Simon and Shuster.
- Ekwumife, N.O. (1995). *Spiritual Explosions Reflections on Christian lives and Practices in Nigerian context*. Enugu: Snaap Press Limited.
- Eliade, M. (2010). *The Social Sacred and the Profane*. Harcourt Brace and world Inc.
- Emile Durkheim (1947). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: New York: Free Press.
- Idowu, E.B. (1973). *African Traditional Religion and Philosophy. A Definition*. London: SCM Press.
- Intonia, C.S. (2022). *Essential Writings in Christianity*. New York: University Standard Press.
- Ituma, E.A. (2001). *Introduction to Early Christianity*. Lagos: Chinedum Publishers Limited
- James, L. Cox (1998). *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa* (Cardiff; Academic Press).
- Kemdirim, P. O. (1997). "Rituals and Symbols in Religion" in E.S. Akamale.) *Man and It is Religion*. Lagos: Jetins International Ltd.
- Madu, J.E. (1996). *Fundamental of Religious Studies*. Calabar: Frenedoh Publishers (Nig)Ltd.
- Njoku, G. U. (2003). *African Socio-Cultural Heritage: Model for Preventive Counseling an Introduction*. Onitsha: Spiritan Publications.
- Obasiyi, D. I. (1971). *A Comprehensive Essay on Religious Studies*. Ibadan: Evans Printing Publisher.
- Offiong, E. A. (2005). "Ritual" Wotogbe Weneka, W.O. (ed.). *Themes in Comparative Religion* Port Harcourt: Stepson Printing Press.
- Okwueze, M.I. (2003). *Ethics, Religion & Society Biblical, Traditional & Contemporary Perspectives*. Nsukka: Prize Publishers.
- Olatona, B. (1977). *Essays on Religious Studies*. Ado Ekiti: Omolaya Printing Press.
- Omeregbe, J.I. (1999). *Comparative Religion: Christianity and other World Religions in Dialogu*. Ibadan: JoJa Educational Research and Publishers Limited.
- Onyeidu, S. O. (2001). *Introduction to the Study of Religion*. Nsukka: Fuladu Publishing Company.
- Owete, K.I. and Ben, O. Onu (2006). *Basic Teachings of Christianity in Caroline N. Mbonu and Benjamin O. Onu (ed.) World Religions: History, Structure and Teachings*. Port Harcourt: Chadik Printing Press.
- Pecka E. P. (1997). *The Universal Christianity*. New York: University Standard Press.
- Radcliff. B. (1973). *Structure and Function in primitive Society*. London: Cohen & Wheel Ltd.
- Rosenthal, G. S. (1979). *The many faces of Judaism* Behrmann House.
- Tasie, G.I.K. (2012). "Some Basic Terminologies in Religious and Cultural Studies" in Akama E.S. (ed.) *Introduction to Religious and Cultural Studies*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Tasie, G.I.K. and Obineche, J.O. (2012). "Theories of the Evolution of Religion" in Akama E.S. (ed.) *Introduction to Religious and Cultural Studies*. Port Harcourt University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Ugwu, C.O.T (1999). *Man and His Religion in a Contemporary Society*. Nsukka: Mek Social Press in Association with Iobus International Press.
- William J. (1960). *The Variety of Religious Experience*. New York: New York Modern Library.
- Colossians 1:18  
Deuteronomy 5:1-21  
Exodus 20  
John 14:16-26  
Joel 2:28  
Luke 3:22  
Matthew 26:47-54
- Acts 14 Acts 1:8