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Name: Akinmayowa Akin-Otiko

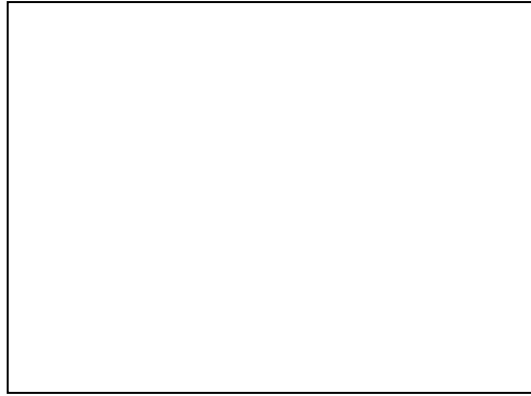
Title: *Ìràpadà* (Redemption) In The Religions of the Africans: Do You Really Understand What they mean?

Abstract

*The religions of the Africans have ached due to the interpretations of colonial missionaries, although colonialism has formally ended; the effects can still be felt in the attribution of certain concepts as imports from Christianity or outright denial of their existence in the context of African religions. When believer in Yoruba religion talk about *Ìràpadà* (redemption) they mean redemption, but Christian theologians do not agree that redemption occurs in the religion of the Africans. This paper highlights the understanding of *Ìràpadà* in *Àdìmùlà* and draws up possible similarities and differences between the idea of redemption in *Àdìmùlà* and Christianity. This is first an empirical investigation of the meaning and use of redemption (*Ìràpadà*) in the religion of the Yoruba and second a comparative study of the idea of redemption in Christianity and *Àdìmùlà*. Practitioners of *Àdìmùlà* will be interviewed to elicit their understanding of *Ìràpadà*, as contained in the *Ifá* corpus. To analyse the finds, tables will be drawn to highlight and compare the differences and similarities in the use and understanding of *Ìràpadà* as a concept in *Àdìmùlà* and Christianity. Justification for the differences and similarities will be done in discussing the findings. The findings show a huge denial of the possibility of *Ìràpadà* in *Àdìmùlà*, basically because of the centrality of Jesus Christ in Christianity. Christianity professes that only Jesus can save –*ra eniyan padà*, “Jesus answered, I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6); and since *Àdìmùlà* does not profess belief in Jesus Christ there cannot be *Ìràpadà* in *Àdìmùlà*. There is therefore the need for a reflexive interrogation of meaning and interpretation of concepts used in African religions and the roles they play in the path of interreligious dialogue as it may be difficult to exclude redemption from the religion of the Africans.*

Keywords: *Àdìmùlà*, *Ifá* corpus, *Ìràpadà*, Redemption, Religion, Yoruba

Biographical information and preferably also a picture of yourself/yourselves



AKIN-OTIKO, Akinmayowa is a researcher in the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, (IADS) University of Lagos. He defended his Ph.D. in African Religion and Belief System in 2013, from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. His researches are in African Traditional Religion and Moralities. He has published books, chapters in books, and articles in journals. He has been involved in different researches and was a Fellow of the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies (BA) in February-March 2020.

Introduction

The idea of salvation is central to every religion because it describes the 'means' employed to deliver a soul from pain and suffering that is experienced on earth, as a result of some departure from original good or relationship with God. The earth is considered to be less than the best of places or the final resting place for humans. Different religious orientations have attributed the possibility of salvation; that is, the release of human soul to paradise after spending some time on earth. The method of release varies from one religion to another, for some religions, personal efforts are good enough while some other religions think that salvation requires the intervention of the divine. However, there is the general belief that both personal effort and divine action are required for an individual to be saved.

The idea of the release of the soul from the earth has generated many discussions and comparison between different religions, but in the midst of this lively discourses, little is mentioned of the method of salvation or release of souls as practiced in the religions of the African. Adamo (2011) observes that “the question still remains whether there is any value of salvation in [African Indigenous Religion] AIR? To put the question in a different way, is salvation possible outside the visible institutional church?” Questions such as these, make one wonder if there are 'means' of salvation in the in the religions of the African or is it that scholars have been influenced to think that the religions of the Africans have no means of saving human souls. “Since Western scholarship of African religion has been analyzed from a Christian-based perspective, the study of African religion has barely been explored.” (Douglas, 2004:51)

However, one thing is certain, “When the European and American missionaries came to Africa, they did not meet a vacuum instead they met the people with traditional religion and they were already aware of the Supreme Being God who they gave different names in accordance with their culture and worship Him the way they understood best” (Ekiran, 2011:8).

This paper moves from the popular, general discussion on the nature of the religions of the Africans, to a particular discourse on the idea of salvation – *Ìràpadà* as contained in the teaching of *Ifá* literary corpus particularly because “the merit of any serious religion depends on whether it can bring salvation to its adherent or not” (Adamo, 2011). This exercise goes beyond the narrative that we have been having in the discusses of religion, the concern here is to examine if the idea of *Ìràpadà* (redemption) in *Àdìmùlà* is different from what redemption means for the Christian and draw up the similarities and differences where they exists.

To achieve this, the meaning and means of salvation in *Àdìmùlà* and Christian will be examined, and compared to show how Christian theologians perceive redemption in *Àdìmùlà*. This will be discussed with a view to explain why Christian theologians perceived *Àdìmùlà* as not capable of saving souls. There was literature review of the idea of *Ìràpadà* (redemption) in both Christianity and *Àdìmùlà* (the religion of the Yoruba). Practitioners of *Àdìmùlà* and Christians were interviewed to elicit their understanding of *Ìràpadà*, as contained in the *Ifá* corpus as well as the Bible. These views were compared to highlight how Christian theologians perceive the idea of redemption in *Àdìmùlà*.

Statement of problem

Christianity has over the years been given the position of complementing earlier religions, it is seen as the fulfillment of earlier religions, while the other religions before it are perceived as precursory religions for Christianity. This is why Christianity is seen by Christian theologians as 'the' way to salvation; quoting the words of Jesus, "*I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me*" (John 14:6). The Christian views have in particular affected the way African religions are perceived. "Terms used to discuss African religion are in many ways foreign to African religio-social ideas. The interpretation of African deities in terms of the Christian God does not help us understand the nature of the African deities as African peoples conceive them." (Douglas (2004:50)

Such that Christian views have assumed the position of either fulfilling other religions or a means of evaluating other religions. The misconceptions that take place have been argued to flow from the "condescending idea that the 'primitive' are in need of conversion to Christianity. This without any prejudice stems from the mission of the Church, which "consists in extending Christ's life throughout the world and in helping mankind to participate in his mysteries" (p'Bitek, 1971:50). To overcome this prejudice, it is important to consider the religions of the Africans the way it is naturally practiced in order to be able to understand and interpret her teachings regarding salvation and how it interprets 'original sin' as separation of heaven from earth and how this has warranted reconciliation. Such that man cannot gain salvation without assistance *Olódùmarè*, and the continuation of redemption because of the effect of the misdeed of the *òrìsà*, making it possible to attain *imorere/ile-onimo* (heaven).

Literature Review

The concept of salvation in *Àdimùlà* - Yoruba traditional religion. The concept *Ìràpadà* (redemption) in Yoruba is one of those concepts that are thought to be imports from Christianity. But to show that it is not an import from Christianity, the etymology is important. *Ìràpadà* is a combination of two words, *rírà* and *padà*, which means to buy back or to buy again. In the religious context, *Ìràpadà* means to redeem, to save, or to buy back from what was overshadowing one's initial goodness. To fully understand the idea of *Ìràpadà*, one must be familiar with the following; first, what existed at creation and second, what happened after creation to warrant a buying back of the soul of humans. According to Idowu, African stories, basically show that at creation, that is, "when the world began, everyone could travel to heaven and back as one wished, and that all could have immediate, direct contact with *Olódùmarè*. ...[after creation] Then man sinned against the Lord of heaven (original sin) and there was immediately raised a barrier which cut him off from the unrestricted bliss of heaven. The privilege of free intercourse, of man taking the bounty of heaven as he liked, disappeared" (E. Idowu, 1996:20).

The understanding of original sin is rendered in different African folklores; the content of these folklores determine what necessitated *Ìràpadà* (redemption) and the consequence of sin in the religions of the Africans. "In *Àdimùlà*, the human nature was not disfigured by the fall. The 'fall' in *Àdimùlà* only brought about the separation of heaven and earth and its attendant consequences. Redemption in *Àdimùlà* essentially concerns the ability to survive here on earth, and the supply of spiritual support for the journey back to heaven" (Akin-Otiko, 2015:148). Death is not the only requirement for achieving salvation or attaining the position of ancestors. Old age, life lived very well according to the accepted

standard of the group, off-spring and appropriate funeral ritual are other important requirements for the salvation (Mbiti 1991:68–69). This shows that there is the idea of redemption in *Àdìmùlà* even though;

humans did not lose the ability to live virtuous lives through ‘the fall’. What the fall did was to make returning to God arduous. The concern has not been whether humans can return to God, it is about how to succeed in returning to God. The response to the question ‘how does one return to God’ is discovered through the help and support that the different divinities render to humans. Many scholars have erroneously excluded the concept of salvation in the discussion of religion among Africans, and it has seemed that African religions are just earth bound. The fact is that the many religions in Africa clearly have methods and means of returning to God. (Akin-Otiko, 2015:151-152).

Redemption in Christianity

In the Old Testament, the word *redemptio* is the Latin Vulgate rendering of Hebrew *kopher* and Greek *lytron* which generally means a ransom-price, whereas, in the New Testament, *redemptio* is the classic term designating the ‘great price’ referred to in 1 Corinthians 6:20 “you were bought at a price” (Sollier, 1911, Redemption).

In Christianity the need for redemption is based on two linked realities; first, the consequence of the fall or original sin, which brought about a fallen nature. This first reality made it necessary to have Jesus assume the nature of humans; “*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*” (Philippians 2:6-8); in order to heal/redeem the fallen nature. The second reality that makes redemption necessary is the fact of continued sin in the world. These two realities are linked, because humans still have a need of redemption from everyday sin. The traditional Catholic teaching is that “after that first sin, the world is virtually inundated by sin. There is Cain’s murder of his brother Abel and the universal corruption which follows in the wake of sin” (CCC, no. 401).

The history of Christianity highlights two moments of God’s intervention; first, when God created humans in his own image (Genesis 1 & 2), and second, after the fall as contained in Genesis (3), the human acts in Genesis 3 made restoration a requirement for humans to return to what they were before the fall. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans (5:12-19) stated the doctrine of original sin and the consequences it had on humanity. For Paul, “sin and death have entered into all men” (12), “in the transgression of the one, the rest died” (15), “consequent upon the judgment passed on one man, all men were condemned” (18), “through the disobedience of one man the rest were constituted sinners” (19). It is the restoration of man from the consequences of the fall or sin to the liberty of the children of God that Jesus came to do, that is why in Christianity, redemption takes place only through the satisfactions and merits of the suffering and death of Christ on the cross and his rising from the dead.

Christianity teaches that all have sinned against God and deserve judgment. And “the sin of the highest angel was the cause of the others sinning; not as compelling them, but as

inducing them by a kind of exhortation” (Aquinas,Q 63. A.8). This reflects the belief that all the demons are subjects of the Devil. The Lord said: “go, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matt 25:41). But Jesus never sinned (1 Pet. 2:22). He lived the Law of God perfectly. In this He has a perfectly righteous standing before God. This is when Jesus took upon himself the sins of humans as St. Paul says: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). It was at the crucifixion that Jesus bore our sins in His body and suffered in our place. This was predicted in the prophesy of Isaiah; “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Christians believe that Jesus had to do this because no one else could offer a perfect sacrifice to God, for the redemption humans; Isaiah 64:6 says our righteous deeds are filthy rags, only Jesus who is God in flesh, could redeem the fallen nature of man.

Justification of the method of Redemption in *Àdìmùlà*

African religions have been discussed by both indigenous and Western writers like; Idowu, Mbiti, Parinder, Ray, Tempels, and others. These writers have shown that Africans are not intellectually impoverished as to be lacking in sophisticated conception of the Supreme Being, who has the power to save his worshippers. Scholars such as Fatokun have argued that “Salvation, like in the Old Testament Jewish cultural thought, is very central to African religious thought. And with this background, the African indigenous churches place emphasis on salvation, above all other things. In fact, the cultural relevance of these churches to African milieu lies more especially on their views of salvation” (Fatokun, 2010:196). The place of salvation among Africans has made it difficult to say that without Christianity, African Religion would never have been able to express how humans can regain paradise. In *Àdìmùlà*, the need for *Ìràpadà* is traced to *Odù Ìká 'fun*, where *Olódùmarè* gave the following instructions to the 401 *òrìsàs* who were leaving heaven, *Olódùmarè* gave them instructions on what should be done and what should not be done, He said to them:

Bí e bá dé ilé ayé (once you arrive on earth):

E má fì esùrù pe 'sùrù (don't tell lies)

E má fì esùrù pe 'sùrù (don't deceive anyone)

E má mu omi tòkítòkí abé erùwà (don't covet another man's wife)

E má fì òdòdè pe oode (be straight forward)

E má gba òpá lówó afójú (don't worsen the condition of the suffering person)

E má lèè omo kéré kéré ilé-ifè gba isu epo je lówó o won (don't add to the pain of the poor)

Tí e bá nfè iyá, kí e má fèè omo, (don't commit adultery)

E má fèè òsù ailohan (don't kill)

Ti e bá ngba ojù ilé wolé, kí e má gba ònà èbùrù bó só òde, (don't steal)

E má fì ikó ide bòdi omo yebeyebe (don't betray)

yourselves) (Akin-Otiko, 2015:45).

When the *òrìsà* arrived on earth, some of them, broke the rule that *Olódùmarè* gave, this act of disobedience made them to return to heaven (*òde òrun*), while leaving the consequences of their sins back on earth for humans to inherit. This happened because many humans began to follow their lead. The consequences of sin and following the example of the fallen *òrìsà* made *Olódùmarè* plan to redeem the world and the humans in it through the process of *ìwènùmó* (cleansing).

How Christianity perceives salvation in the *Àdìmùlà*

When talking about the remedy for original sin, there are two foci; first is the restoration of paradise on earth, that is, a situation of being at peace with God in the world; and second, a relationship with God and the possibility of eternal union with God in heaven. These two are not diametrically opposed but distinct (Akin-Otiko, 2015:139). The importance of these two remedies is because humans have not stopped breaking the covenant with God through sin and infidelity; whereas God, constantly renews and reaffirms His salvation to all mankind (Kalilombe 1981:62–63).

To fully grasp the way Christians perceive redemption in *Àdìmùlà*, one has to understand the difference between the idea of redemption in these two religions. Although Christianity and *Àdìmùlà* “commonly teach three consequences: i) sin and death, ii) loss of immortality, iii) loss of harmony between heaven/God and earth” (Akin-Otiko, 2015:133); Christian view of salvation is different from what is taught in *Àdìmùlà* in the following ways:

First, in Christianity, Original sin diminished the natural inclination to virtue in man and this “first sin of the first man is transmitted to his descendants, by way of origin” (Aquinas, ,,, Q:81 art.1). This made it necessary to teach the doctrine of baptism; that through it all may be washed from the uncleanness of sin inherited. It is believed that “all men born of Adam may be considered as one man, in as much as they have one common nature, which they received from their first parents” (Aquinas, ... Q:81 Art.1).

Whereas, in *Àdìmùlà*, it is taught that original sin did not affect human nature, making it unnecessary to have teaching about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; his suffering and death on the cross. *Àdìmùlà*, does not teach:

Christian idea that humanity came under slavery to sin through the fall of the primeval man and therefore needed a Saviour or Redeemer, has earlier mentioned, finds no place in African indigenous religious thought. Even the deity *Èlà*, a type of Christ in Yoruba pantheon of gods, is not conceived as a sacrificial victim for the redemption from slavery to sin but rather as *Olódùmarè's* special emissary solely entrusted with the responsibility of restoring order to the world set upside down... Hence, the title *A t'áyé se* (repairer of the world) (Fatokun, 2010:133).

Second, Christianity holds that the source of original sin is linked to the influence of the devil, for “by the envy of the devil, death came into the world” (Wisdom 2:24). This understanding is responsible for the Christian teaching that the remedy for the consequences of original sin is found in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is not too

different from the teachings of *Àdìmúlà*, where it is taught that “original sin brought about: i) great influence of evil forces on earth and particularly on human beings, and ii) the institution of the divinities” (Akin-Otiko, 2015:133). Like Baptism, *esèn tayé* and *ifá títè*, are meant to take care of the inherited sin and one is expected not to fall again. That is why the *èèwò* (taboo) are spelt out during the *oro ifá títè* (initiation into *Ifá* cult).

Third, redemption in Christianity comes through one man, Jesus Christ, just as sin and death came through one man. This teaching is possible because Christ alone is exempt from sin, as “all men descended from Adam contract original sin from him, else all would not need redemption which is through Christ” (Aquinas, ... Q:81 art.3)

This is different in *Àdìmúlà* where it is taught that the reason for salvation is the misdeed of some fallen *òrìsà*. Since the consequence of the fall is that human beings started following their examples. Humans are thereby redeemed when they are prevented from following the bad example of the fallen *òrìsà*.

Fourth, Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ’s sufferings, crucifixion and resurrection, was a once and for all atonement for original sin, and these events equally strengthen humans who believe in them against further attacks and temptations to fall from redemption. This does not stop individual or personal purification through baptism. Whereas, in *Àdìmúlà*, there are sacrifices for every occasion of redemption as determined by each sin situation. Just as it is recommended to be baptized, and be nurtured in the flesh and blood of Christ so do practitioners of *Àdìmúlà* believe that no one, who has been destined to enter *imorere/ile-onimo* will do so unless he/she does the *ifá títè*. This marks the individual as a candidate for *imorere/ile-onimo* and Orunmila constantly pleads his/her cause as someone who has fulfilled the required *oro*.

If after the initial cleansing, one commits a *kìí seé* (taboo), in Yoruba traditional religion, there is what is called *irábàbà* – the act of pleading and begging *Olódùmarè* for mercy for sins committed. This process is embarked upon through divination to know the kind of *ètùtù* that will be good enough for the re-cleansing of an individual. After the *ètùtù*, there is a process of *ótán tàbí o kun* (is this all or there are still things to be done?), among other things, to know if *Olódùmarè* has forgiven the individual the offences or not. It is ideal to avoid sin completely, so as to make it to *Ile-Onimo*.

Given these differences, Christianity views salvation in *Àdìmúlà* as inadequate. This “has been a great problem in the effort of the church to dialogue with AIR” (Adamo, 2011). The fact that Christianity does not consider *Àdìmúlà* trusted enough as a means of salvation does not mean that the whole idea of salvation does not exist in *Àdìmúlà*. The Vatican II teaches that; “those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience (Kalilombe 1981:51).

This position clearly encourages a positive attitude towards other religions; Christian teaching sees the meaning of salvation in *Àdìmúlà* as inadequate and the only way to make up for the inadequacy is the sacrifice of Christ, which is aimed at the salvation of all humanity. This teaching justifies the universal teaching of the redemptive power of

Christ and so gives room for believers in *Àdìmùlà* to be saved by the power of Jesus Christ and not by the sacrifices done in *Àdìmùlà*. Christianity affirms that salvation is possible for other believers outside the visible Christian fold, for:

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator... with us, adore the one and merciful God who will judge mankind on the last day. Nor is God far from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God; for He gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour desires all men to be saved. For those also can attain eternal salvation who without fault on their part do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but seek God with a sincere heart, and under the influence of grace endeavour to do His will as recognised through the promptings of their conscience (**Przewozny, 1979**).

Conclusion

The narratives around the religions of the Africans have moved from whether it existed at all to a modified narrative of existence, with a qualifier that the religion was at a lower level, compared to neo-religions because those that engaged in the narratives were either Europeans or people with backgrounds in the neo-religions. This narrative took a contemporary dimension when the qualities of God found in the African religions tallied for the most part with the quality of the almighty found in the neo-religions. This then changed the narrative to claims of influence from the neo-religions, and this new narrative is built around concepts and teaching that theologians believed were introduced into the religions of the Africans through encounter with the neo-religions. Salvation is one of such concepts, and this study has briefly examine the idea of salvation in the religion of the Yoruba in comparism with Christianity to show that the idea of salvation was not introduced by the encounter with Christianity. What is evident is the difference in the understanding and method of salvation in the two religions. This is intended to set the ball rolling for more detailed comparative works in African studies. The major reason why Christianity views salvation in *Àdìmùlà* as inadequate is because it does not teach fallen nature and the need for the redemption brought about by Jesus Christ, otherwise, Christianity considers redemption in *Àdìmùlà* as real and a pre-figurative for the redemption in Christ Jesus.

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