

A Christian perspective of salvation in Àdìmùlà (Religion found among the Yoruba)

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Abstract

With the expanding scope of regional and global conversations around the idea of decolonisation, African ways of life are attracting new understanding in more contemporary times. However, when it comes to discussion about salvation in the religions found among the Africans, Christian doctrines are still interpreted to show the religions of the Africans as preparatory religions which require Christ to make them right. Catholicism discusses salvation in Àdìmùlà (the religion found among the Yoruba) from an etic perspective, applying the theory of inclusivism as a requirement for Àdìmùlà adherents to be saved. However, practitioners of Àdìmùlà strongly hold that they do not need an acceptance of Jesus Christ for salvation given their different understanding of the idea of salvation. This paper therefore investigates the understanding of salvation and means of salvation based on what has been revealed in Àdìmùlà from an emic interpretation to show why Àdìmùlà is believed to have inherent methods of salvation practiced by its adherents. The theory of Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ñ kọ sí oníkálukú (It is the side God wills that He reveals to different people) will be deployed to analyze the efficacy of the methods and means of salvation found in Àdìmùlà. Data were gathered through interviews with adherents of Àdìmùlà and as contained in literature. Practitioners of Àdìmùlà hold that it has the fundamentals to achieve salvation for its adherents without the influence of Christianity.

Keywords: Àdìmùlà, Christianity, decolonization, inclusivity, salvation, Yoruba

Introduction

The religions of the Africans have not enjoyed positive appraisal from Christian scholars such that Tinyiko (1998) responded to what he called, “denial, outright dismissal, distortion and dismissive containment from Christian mission and Christian scholarship” (Tinyiko 1998:121). Such comments painted the religions of the Africans as paths to condemnation because they were considered to be paganism and fetish in every aspect. This view has however changed. It is now accepted that Africans have religions and whoever lived well while practicing the religions of the Africans will make it through to heaven. These ideas developed because it is believed that members of other religions can be saved, but as of now, there is little understanding of what the religions of the Africans teach or practices. Among the Yoruba, there is a religion called Àdìmùlà. For the Yoruba, “Àdìmùlà as a religion is the worship of Olódùmarè, who is called

Òrìsà-Òkè (the divinity above)” (Akin-Otiko, 2015:39). And “Àdìmúlà finds expression within the worldview of Yoruba people. Reality for the Yoruba manifests in three realms: the first is the realm of God and heaven (*Olódùmarè* and *ìmò-rèrè*), the second realm is that of the divinities, the spirits and the ancestors (*òrìṣà* and *aṣíwájú*), and the third realm is the world and all that belongs to it: humans and ministering forces (*ayé*)” (Akin-Otiko, 2015:39).

The religions of the Africans have been viewed and studied from an etic perspective and there have been different interpretations. By etic interpretation, I refer to the scientist-oriented or outsider and colonialist approach that shifts the focus and interpretation from the context and understanding of the natives to those of the observer or, in this case, alternative religions. Etic approach to research is considered as one that embraces or adopts the “generalizations about human behavior that are considered universally true, and commonly links cultural practices to factors of interest to the researcher, such as economic or ecological conditions, that cultural insiders may not consider very relevant” (Morris et al., 1999).

The etic interpretations can therefore be linked to the effect of colonialism and, as such, the effort to decolorize African studies requires a reflexive approach in reinterpreting the African worldview. In this study, the idea of decolonization questions the claim that the religion found among the Africans, particularly *Àdìmúlà*, lacks sufficient grounds to provide salvation without the support of Christianity. While Christianity represents ideas and interpretations that were brought to Africa by missionaries through colonialism, in the sense of an importation of religion, one may want to ask: where were the Africans before Christianity and, what happened to those that died before the sacrifice of Christ?

Moving away from the etic and colonial views, there is the need for an emic interpretation of the religion of the Africans. In this emic sense, “knowledge and interpretations are those existing within a culture, that are ‘determined by local custom, meaning, and belief’ (Ager and Loughry, 2004: n.p.) and best described by a ‘native’ of the culture. The emic perspective usually provides positions that are different and not easily perceived by outsiders. It is an approach that “investigates how local people think...” (Kottak, 2006:47). How they perceive and categorize the world, their rules for behavior, what has meaning for them, and how they imagine and explain things. The idea of salvation has developed in history and the etic interpretation has influenced how particular religions view the religions found among Africans. For the most part, Christianity has been guided by the theory of inclusivism, just as most religions believe and hold their doctrines and teachings as the ultimate with regard to *ways* of salvation.

This study pays attention to how Christian and particularly Catholic scholars represent the teachings about salvation in the religions found among Africans and more precisely as taught in Àdìmùlà (the religion found among the Yoruba). This study is significant because the doctrine of salvation in Christianity has evolved to include the possibility of salvation among those who, to no fault of theirs, do not know or accept Christ. Before this inclusion, there were proponents of hyper-Calvinism (Reformed churches) who taught that Christ did not actually die for all men. This is based on the teaching of limited atonement also called “particular redemption.” There is also the Westminster Confession which says: “. . . Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed in Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only” (Ch. III, Sec. 4.).

The perspective of the Catholic Church, pre-Vatican II Council, was not too different as the Church taught that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church. This expression “*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*,” which means “Outside the Church there is no salvation,” is from the writings of Saint Cyprian of Carthage, a bishop of the 3rd century (cf. Letter LXXII, *Ad Jubajantum de haereticis baptizandis*, - *Salus extra ecclesiam non est*). The phrase is generally interpreted to mean that “all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body.” The doctrine that the Church is absolutely necessary for salvation is based on the fact that Jesus Christ himself established the Catholic Church (one church) and the Church established by Christ serves as the only means by which the graces are communicated to believers. There are Bible passages used to justify this teaching, such as “*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved: he that believes not shall be condemned*” (Mark 16:16).

This limiting understanding of salvation has however changed during and after the Second Vatican Council. The Church now sees the whole of creation as the work of God and every human person constitutes the people of God that Jesus Christ died for and saved. There is salvation through common grace. This means that all have been atoned for based on the common grace that flows from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Lumen Gentium, 16).

This evolved understanding of salvation teaches a universal effect of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ based on the belief that, although there are other religions, there can only be salvation through Jesus Christ and so the theory of inclusivism explains the possibility of salvation in other religions. The idea of salvation without Jesus Christ is difficult for many Christians based on some important scriptural passages such as: John 14:6, Jesus said; “*I am the way, the truth,*

and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.” St. Paul, writing to the Romans 10:9, said “if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

These and similar Bible passages form the basis for Christian teaching that humans fell through the original sin making it necessary for a saviour to come in the person of Jesus Christ. The effect of the original sin affected every human, and so there is a need for the effect of the salvation that Jesus Christ brought to affect all humans. The salvation of Jesus therefore saves every human person, Christian and non-Christians alike. Some have described non-Christians that do good and so get saved through the sacrifice of Jesus as anonymous Christians (reference. Lumen Gentium puts it this way;

...the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohamedians, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. Those also can attain to 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. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life (Lumen Gentium, 16).

This means that everyone can be saved through the guidance of the conscience, once the individual searches for God and lives a good life. The acceptable belief after Rahner, is that

papal statements have moved cautiously in Rahner’s direction, affirming the work of the Holy Spirit not only in the people in other religions, but also in those religions themselves, so that in the practice of what is good in those religions, people may respond to God’s grace and be saved, unbeknownst to them, by Christ. Nonetheless, the Roman Catholic church remains the unique divine instrument; no one is saved without some positive relation to it (Dupuis 2001, 170-9; Neuner and Dupuis 2001, 350-1).

This means that this teaching still considers Christianity the source of salvation through whose instrumentality other religions find salvation.

The contention in this paper is not the existence of pluralism of religion but

to argue that other religions, and Àdìmùlà in particular, can provide salvation without the intervention of Christianity. This engagement is important from two significant fronts; first because Àdìmùlà teaches salvation from a different understanding when compared to the teachings of the Christianity and, second, the practitioners of Àdìmùlà find fulfillment in, and are committed to the teachings that their religion provides. The commitment and fulfillment of the practitioners of Àdìmùlà have nothing to do with efforts from other religions; they are solely committed to their religion and trust that they will be saved through the methods and provision of Àdìmùlà as a religion.

It is the dichotomy of the reality of experience and the difficulty in denying the practitioners of Àdìmùlà direct link to God that makes it imperative to engage the theory of inclusivity in dialogue with the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ñ kọ sí oníkálukú* (It is the side God wills that He reveals to different people). The theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ñ kọ sí oníkálukú* simply states that God reveals Himself to whomever He wills, however He wants, whenever He chooses and every revelation is adequate for salvation on its own, even when it is significantly different from or contradictory to Christianity. This claim stems from the fact that no religion can claim TOTAL knowledge of God. It is safer to speak about differences in religions than to speak of right and wrong ways of encountering God in the discussion of pluralism of religions.

Statement of Problem

The main problem of this study is the etic (mis)interpretation of salvation in Àdìmùlà. Christianity discusses Àdìmùlà – the religion found among the Yoruba – from an etic perspective, thus making the theory of inclusivity a requirement for its adherents to be saved. The concern is not religious pluralism which is the fact that there are significant differences in religious beliefs and practices. The concern is the lack of clarity in the arguments of other religions to show that they do not need the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross for the salvation of their members. They disagree with the position that salvation is possible only through the principle of inclusivity; that is, practitioners of other religions can only be saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Here, inclusivism is characterized by the belief that although one religion has absolute truth about salvation, other religions can benefit when they conform to the demands of the teachings of Christianity.

Conceptualizing Salvation

In conceptualizing salvation in this study, I will be comparing the ideas of salvation taught in Àdìmùlà with the idea of salvation in Christianity. The first

prominent thing in *Àdìmùlà* is that ‘salvation is the freedom from elements, spiritual or physical, that can deny or derail a human being from achieving the purpose of his/her existence on earth and achieving reward after life on earth.’ This idea is linked to the Greek word *soteria* and the Hebrew *yasha*, which are generally understood to mean ‘to experience deliverance; to be rescued; to be freed or liberated’. In this context, it is important to ask the question, ‘to be delivered, rescued, saved from what?’ In Christianity, however, salvation generally means to be delivered, rescued, saved from sin, either the original or actual sins. Salvation in Christianity is a spiritual experience achieved during and after life on earth through Jesus Christ. Humans are freed from sin’s penalty, as the Bible says: “Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing” (Galatians 3:13). In addition, St. Paul added, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

Those who need salvation (levels)	Reason for salvation in <i>Àdìmùlà</i>	Reason for salvation in Christianity
All human beings	Separation - exposure to <i>ajogun</i> Solution: divination to find one’s path	Original sin - wounded nature Solution: Incarnation of Jesus Christ and baptism
Individuals (afflictions)	Existence of <i>Ajogun</i> - affliction of <i>ibi</i> (evil). Solution: <i>Òrisà</i> (divinity) engagement and <i>aájò</i> (aid), <i>ḙḙbḙ</i> (sacrifices), <i>orí</i> (individual personality-soul)	Existence of evil forces - Attack on individuals Solution: use of the name of Jesus
Individuals (after life)	Reward and punishment after death - Solution: avoidance of bad character (<i>ìwà búburú</i>) and cultivating good character and being good towards one’s neighbour and community.	Reward and punishment after death- Solution: avoid vices and use grace and virtue

To understand salvation in the context of *Àdìmùlà*, and as conceptualized in this paper, there are three contexts that make salvation necessary and provide understanding for the need for salvation. First, there is the separation of heaven from earth as a result of (human) misbehaviour, and this made reaching God more difficult. Salvation is to be able to bridge this gap by knowing what to do in order to achieve one’s destiny on earth. This salvation is predicated on the belief that every life has a purpose on earth and the possibility of achieving this purpose is more difficult because heaven is far from earth; an individual may

be denied the possibility of attaining of his/her purposes if it is difficult to access *Olódùmarè*. Second, there is the belief that, since the separation between heaven and earth occurred, humans have been most exposed to affliction from *ajogun* (malignant spirits); the second way to have salvation is to be protected from these spirits. And third, since humans are on earth away from *Olódùmarè*, to successfully live on earth, return to *Olódùmarè* and be rewarded for good action, one needs to develop and maintain good character on earth, in order to be saved, there is the belief that salvation is to develop and live in good character while on earth. To be saved, one therefore needs to cultivate and sustain good character; this is the third form of salvation in *Àdìmùlà*.

The first and second aspects of salvation in *Àdìmùlà* are absent in Christianity. That is, the idea of salvation in Christianity does not include making up for the distance between heaven and earth; and the ‘protection from forces, whether spiritual or physical, that can deny or derail a human from achieving the purpose of his/her existence on earth’. The differences between the idea of salvation in Christianity and *Àdìmùlà* explain (or account for the reason) why certain cultural practices are not considered *necessary* for salvation in Christianity. As St. Paul puts it, even for Jewish Christians like himself, certain religious practices that were allowed under the Law of Moses were no longer necessary as these had been superseded by the supreme sacrifice made by Christ on the Cross. Consequently, circumcision and the offering of the blood of animals were no longer necessary for the Jews and for Africans, sacrifices of animals in forms of appeasement to divinities for protection and freedom from evil on earth are no longer necessary. St. Paul says:

“25As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they must abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality.” 26So the next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he entered the temple to give notice of the date when their purification would be complete and the offering would be made for each of them” (Acts 21:25-6).

However, in *Àdìmùlà*, all three contexts of salvation are present. The idea of salvation has not always existed in *Àdìmùlà* because:

Humans were believed to have existed in the presence of God thereby making the thought of returning to *Olódùmarè* superfluous. Religious tales have it that at some point in the history of humans, physical separation took place, and so the need for religion as it exists today. *Àdìmùlà* has it that before the separation, there was a link between God and humans. The separation/fall took place at a

point in time when humans misbehaved and heaven and earth separated (Akin-Otiko, 2015:44).

One thing that is conspicuous in *Àdìmùlà* is that the idea of salvation came about in three contexts because of the separation between heaven and earth; humans became vulnerable to attacks from malignant spirits on earth and to achieve rest after life on earth became more difficult, requiring help to live well and to act well towards one's fellow humans. Now it is held that 'salvation is to be able to make up for the separation between heaven and earth, to provide shield from spiritual or physical forces that can deny or derail a human being from achieving the purpose of his/her existence on earth and finally the possibility of developing and maintaining a good character that can earn one reward after life on earth.'

These contexts of salvation explain the importance of the three realms and relationships that exist in *Àdìmùlà*.

All three realms engage in three types of relationships. The first kind of relationship is between the first and the third realm; this is the creator relating to the created, this means that, *Olódùmarè* relates to humans [This is the beginning of religion and the revelation of what to do for salvation]. The second type of relationship is the interaction of the second and the first realm. In this relationship, *Òrìṣà* relate to *Olódùmarè* through worship, this is vital because *Olódùmarè* is their source and sustenance. This is a religious relationship in the realm of the divine. This level is vital because *Olódùmarè* made, empowered, and gave the *òrìṣà* directives on how they are to interact with the human world. The third type of relationship is between the second and the third realm; in this relationship, humans relate to *Òrìṣà* and ask for earth related things (wealth, children, healing, etc.). [it is in this relationship that the first part of salvation is achieved. The level of 'freedom from elements, spiritual or physical, that can deny or derail a human being from achieving the purpose of existence on earth.' This is a realm of culture and traditions – How 'we' do things (Akin-Otiko, 2015:40).

Theory: the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú*

It is possible to speak of salvation in different religions based on the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* (It is the side God wills that He reveals to different people). This theory stems from the reality that God has revealed Himself in different ways to different people at different times in different contexts (Hebrews 1:1-2). The theory affirms that:

there is an indisputable reality that reveals Himself in different religions, It is

known only through what It chooses to reveal of Himself at different times, in different contexts, to different people. Since religions are revealed by the indisputable reality Himself, each religion is true; and because the indisputable reveals Himself in multiple ways, the truth in each religion is relative because only a part of the indisputable reality is revealed in each religion. And since it is the indisputable reality that reveals Himself, whatever is revealed should be considered true within the group to which it is revealed, even when what is revealed is either uniform across multiple religions or contradictory when compared across multiple religions (cf. Akin-Otiko, 2022).

There are seven basic characteristics of the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* (Akin-Otiko, 2022). These will be discussed in the section that discusses the findings of this study to show how this theory justifies the method of salvation found in Àdìmùlà.

Methodology

I had interviews with four *Babaláwo* about the nature of salvation, what one is saved from and the efficacy of the process of salvation in Àdìmùlà. The four *Babaláwo* were selected because they represent the basic teachings found in Àdìmùlà. It is of interest that whatever they say would have been repeated if more *Babaláwo* were interviewed. However, four *Babaláwo* were selected to establish a consistency of teaching that transcended sheer personal views about salvation in Àdìmùlà. Three *Babaláwo* were interviewed in Nigeria and the fourth was selected and interviewed from Quidah, Benin Republic. These were selected because the religion found among the Yoruba is present in both Nigeria and Quidah. To complement the interviews, existing literature on the idea of salvation in Àdìmùlà, the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* along with the Christian understanding of salvation and its implications were reviewed. Thereafter, there was a comparative analysis of the idea of salvation in Christianity and Àdìmùlà using the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* as a guide to show how and why practitioners of Àdìmùlà insist that there is the possibility of salvation in Àdìmùlà without the inclusion of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Findings

I had a unique experience interviewing *Babaláwo* Atindehou Geoffroy while talking about the possibility of salvation in Àdìmùlà. During the interview, he was shedding tears which was a reflection of the awe that he felt discussing salvation. He spoke with so much passion about the possibility of salvation based

on the power of being a good person and acting rightly towards the other person. “*Kò sí eni tí ó ní inú rere tí kò ní wo òrun* (no one with a good heart will be prevented from entering heaven)” (Atindehou, 2022). The three *Babaláwo* that were interviewed across Southwest Nigeria were also very convinced about the possibility of salvation through the method found in *Àdìmúlà*. Findings were built around the study research questions.

The first question was: *what needs to be done in order for one to be saved - Kíni mo ní láti se kí n baà lè gba èmû mi là?* To explain what ought to be done in order to be saved, the respondents began by talking about the idea of salvation in *Àdìmúlà*. For the Yoruba, salvation is “*Ìgbàlà tàbí ítúsílè* (setting free or release)” that is, being saved from the anions of *Ajogun* (malignant forces). These forces manifest their power in the seven evil (*Ibi*)” (Olakunle, 2022). This view was affirmed by Oba Fakayode Faluade, who said *Ìgbàlà is ítúsílè*, that is, deliverance from bondage, sickness., affliction, etc. According to Ifá, deliverance is possible. According to the *odù-Ifá* of *Odi meji*,

*È jé ká kọ́lẹ kótópó f’òòsà,
 Bí òòsà bá ní kò tó,
 È ní kó r’ẹgbó rẹ́e sá’ké,
 È ní kó r’òdàn rẹ́e s’ámò,
 È ní kó wá rí jàjára ibi igbó ti n jà’mọ,
 A díá fún Òdì ọmọ Òdì,
 A díá fún Òdì ọmọ Òja,
 A díá fún Òdìlẹ̀ndilẹ̀ tí n s’ọmọ bíbí inú Òrúnmìlà...
 Let’s erect a modest dwelling for the deity,
 If the deity says it is not enough,
 Tell it to go skirt the forests for latex,
 Tell it to go comb the grassland for clay,
 Tell it to come see the little thicket where the forest overtakes a child,
 Being the oracular principle divined for Òdì, the offspring of Òdì,
 Being the oracular principle divined for Òdì, the offspring of Òja,
 Being the oracular principle divined for Òdìlẹ̀ndilẹ̀, the direct offspring
 of Òrúnmìlà...
 This divination was performed to prevent sudden death and enjoy long
 life (Oba Fákáyòdẹ Fálúádé, 2022).*

If salvation is *ìgbàlà tàbí ítúsílè*, one then needs to know what has to be done in

order for one to be saved. For Okunola Ifalere, salvation means Ìràpadà (buying back) which presumes that one had been successful before and requires restoration or there is a destiny that is becoming difficult to achieve. Ìràpadà means that one had been successful at doing something before, and it subsequently became difficult to achieve the same feat. Ìràpadà is about restoring past or lost power, possibility, opportunity” (Ifalere, 2022).

According to Olúwo Qláwòlé Qlákúnlé, ‘the first thing that one needs to do to be saved is to know oneself.’ He said, ‘we all have different identities and this is revealed through the process of *Ifá* initiation (*títẹ Ifá*) or *wíwọ ıgbó odú* (to perform initiation rituals in the forest of *Ifá*). The process of initiation into *Ifá* will shed light on the personality and the purpose of one’s existence on earth’ (Olakunle, 2022). This is in agreement with Okùnlá Ifálèrè, who said the first thing to do is not medicine of spiritual assistance, but to *dá Ifá* (consult *Ifá* through divination). *Ifá* will discern and prescribe what is responsible for the present situation and what should be done. Ìràpadà (redemption) can also come in the form of knowledge of food which are considered to be forbidden so that an individual can avoid it. Ìràpadà may also come in the form of dedication to a particular òrìṣà or sacrifice to cleanse one’s *orí* (individual personality-soul) or to appease a particular divinity. This was also affirmed by Oba Fákáyòdé Fálùádé (2022).

Èjì Ogbè says:

Gbogbo orí àfín iwú ni

Abuké ló ru erù òrìṣà mọṣọ

Lágbájá ló ti kó ıse ẹ dé

Ojojúmọ là n ránṣé ogun sọba

A dífá fún Ọrúnmùlà tí a bá lo rẹè rẹmí

Tí n ıse èmí ọmọ Olódùmarè, obinrin... (Ifalere, 2022)

The hair of an albino is wholly gray

The hunchback bears the burden of the divinity about

It is such and such who has exhibited their typical behavior

A war message is sent to the king on a daily basis

*Being the oracular principle divined for Ọrúnmùlà, for whom an extra
life was being procured*

By extension, I, the progeny of Olódùmarè, woman...

What ought one do to be saved from the effect of the separation between heaven and earth?

There is the idea of separation that took place when early humans misbehaved (Akin-Otiko, 2015:130), but this did not destroy the possibility of humans coming to the world without the consequence of sin. According to *Odù Ifá, Ìwòrì Méjì*, there was a time when humans existed without the thought of death, humans existed and moved freely between heaven and earth. This means there was a time when seamless movement between heaven and earth existed. However, this was destroyed through disobedience or misbehaviour of humans (Olakunle, 2022). To be protected from the consequence of separation, that is to be saved, it is recommended that the rite of initiation into *Ifá (títẹ Ifá)* is needed to mitigate the effect of the separation. Olúwo Ọláwọlé Ọlákúnlé narrated his conversion story, saying

I was a Christian before now, and my journey in life was rough until I found my way back to what my great-grandfather was doing, and I performed the rite of *títẹ Ifá* (initiation into *Ifá*), it was not until then that I began to succeed in the things I was doing, and now I find fulfillment in what I do and achieve huge success in the things that I do. Things started coming to me with ease the moment I got initiated into *Ifá*, that is my salvation (Olakunle, 2022).

According to Atindehou Geoffroy, a saved person is one who is able to carry out his/her identified destiny on earth. For example, if *Ifá* chooses one to be a voodoo believer, there will be a process of initiation that will include the use of kola nut, bitter kola, and some monetary gift. And the individual will have to make commitments (*jé'jèé*)" (Atindehou, 2022).

What does one need to be saved from *ibi* (evil) and ensure *ire* (good) or àyànmó (destiny)?

Salvation or protection from malignant forces can take two forms. There are people who are born naturally powerful, and this kind of power shields the individual away from attacks (Atindehou, 2022). *Babaláwo* Okunola Ifalere agreed and added that; in the teachings of *Ifá*,

it is believed that individuals choose destiny and come to earth with chosen destiny. Some are destined to be powerful and successful. This is defined and revealed through *Ifá* divination, this is what reveals what one needs to do to avoid the attacks from malignant forces. It is first believed that if one does what was revealed through divination, it will become difficult for malignant forces to successfully attack such a person (Ifalere, 2022).

It is also believed that:

Some individuals are born with natural power that will ward away evil. In such cases, the individuals are protected from attacks and whatever good that the individual has chosen as his destiny will be protected. Beyond the natural power which is not for everyone, it is important to avoid evil on earth, one needs to ‘*so tóótó l’áyé* (tell the truth on earth), avoid evil, do not harm others and one will enjoy peace on earth. In addition to good character, there are other forms of protection that can be done to shield one from evil forces or evil acts of other humans. This is usually borne by the earth/soil (Atindehou, 2022).

On the other hand, there are herbal or material aids that can be used to ward off evil attacks that are capable of preventing one from achieving success in what one is destined to achieve on earth. In addition, it is important “to know the food one must avoid, and to know one’s purpose in life, so as to be guided properly on earth, this prevents confusion and *ibi* (evil) which malignant forces attack humans with” (Olakunle, 2022). “There are also other things that one can do to prevent harm from reaching an individual; there is what is called *ájé ò gbòdò wọlé* (witches must not enter)” (Atindehou, 2022). In *Àdimùlà*, there is the belief in *Ajogun* (malignant spirits); this makes salvation include being saved from attacks from these spirits.

This belief stems from the fact that *Ifá* and *Òrìṣà* systems are bi-polarized, there is the belief in the existence of good and bad forces. To be able to have *ìgbàlà* or *ìṣégún* from these *ajogun* is to tilt towards the *orisa* who have been endowed with power to help humans on earth. The *òrìṣà* help individuals to achieve their chosen destiny on earth. Salvation is to be charged with positive energy to function outside the path of *Ajogun* and to achieve one’s destiny (Olakunle, 2022).

What must one do to ensure or sustain good character and merit eternal rest?

According to *Babaláwo* Geoffroy, to attain salvation after death, ‘it is basically for someone to be good in terms of character, once one is good, there is salvation’. *Babaláwo* Okùnṣà Ifáléré affirmed this and said, to make it to heaven, salvation will be determined by “*ìwà ọwọ o wa* (the works of our hand). Whoever behaves well will die, and the one who does not behave well will die; all are destined to die, what we are each left with is character. ‘*Ifá* did not talk about forgiveness of misdeeds. It is believed that one will face the consequences of one’s actions on earth.” It is believed that if one obeyed the laws or commandments that were given to the *òrìṣà* when they were coming to the earth, humans will

be able to develop and exhibit good character that will merit them reward at the end of life. “These ten directives (commandments) were given specifically to guide the relationship between the divinities and humans. And by extension, they guide the relationship between humans and humans on earth. This one set of commandment helps *Olódùmarè* to assess the relationship between humans and divinities and humans and humans” (Akin-Otiko, 2015:46).

In *Ifá* Corpus, *Èjì Ogbè*, it is said that “*a pín etí fún Ọ̀rúnmilà* (*Ọ̀rúnmilà* was given a listening ear) which represents a characteristic of *Olódùmarè*. This is the basis for the seamless system of communication between heaven and earth that is achieved through divination, and it helps to discern things to be done in order to navigate this world successfully. It is the process of *Ifá* divination that helps to resolve the issues and paths that can lead back to heaven. This is a form of salvation from any form of affliction or difficulty” (Olakunle, 2022).

In the case of Babalawo Geoffroy, “Anyone engaged in the religion of the Africans who hopes to be saved, *kò gbọ̀dò sè èké* (must not be corning), *kò gbọ̀dò paró* (must not be a liar), must be *èniyàn dáadáa* (a good person). Good behaviour is needed to be rewarded after death. One must avoid harming one’s fellow man; it is very important for an individual to do good. Once one is good, his character will be good and will be rewarded in the end” (Atindehou, 2022).

It is believed that where those that believe in God go to is the same place that the person that behaved well on earth will go to. It is said that no one knows where people go to, but it is believed that only God knows, but the good things that one does make way for individuals. The simple way to put it is that “*ilẹ̀ á gbé ẹ̀ni tí ó ẹ̀ se rere sí ibi rere, ẹ̀ni tí ó se ikà sí ibi ẹ̀san* (the earth/soil will carry one who did good to a good place, and the one who was wicked will be taken to a place of revenge)” (Atindehou, 2022).

In addition to all that has been said, *Ọ̀ba Fákáyòdé Fálùádé*, clarifies that in *Owonri Sikà* (*Ifá* corpus), *Ologo ẹ̀reẹ̀re* does good and was instructed to continue to do the good that he has been doing in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (*Ìjọba Ọ̀run*) and *Ologo ẹ̀kàsikà* (one who does evil) was also called and encouraged to stop doing evil in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Both died, since we know that *Ifá* sees the inside and the soil/earth sees the wicked, and *Olódùmarè* knows everything, we should not be wicked on earth, because a report will be given in heaven. To enter into heaven, one must act rightly. For one to be able to enter into heaven, there is first, *ìkìlò* (warning on what to do and avoid) and there are *etùtù* (appeasements) that can be done to assist individuals on their way to heaven. One must always examine one’s action towards his/her fellow humans otherwise there will be punishment even from earth (*Ọ̀ba Fákáyòdé Fálùádé*, 2022).

Discussion

The idea of salvation is differently understood in Àdìmùlà and Christianity, just as the ways to achieve salvation are different. Christianity speaks about salvation on a level, while Àdìmùlà achieves salvation on three levels. In Christianity, the first level is the most significant level of salvation and once that happens, the other levels are presumed. Whereas, in Àdìmùlà, salvation clearly includes the three levels, because of the experience of separation between heaven and earth and the bi-polarization between the good and the bad forces. The good and the bad forces are always in struggle, and salvation is to overcome at each and all three levels. These distinctions were well noted in the responses of the interviewees and it is believed that God supplied and approved the methods used in achieving salvation.

The differences in these religions show that God revealed salvation at different times, to different people using different epochs and contexts. This is a strong part of the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú*. God revealed the idea of salvation in Àdìmùlà which is different, independent and effective. The idea of salvation is not strange and believers and practitioners of Àdìmùlà strive to attain salvation on three levels. First, salvation is the successful making up for the space created by separation of heaven from earth. Second, salvation is in providing safety for humans against *ajogun* while on earth, and third, salvation is to provide a pathway to eternal rest/reward through the development of good character.

This is different from the contemporary teaching of salvation in Christianity where salvation is achieved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The idea of salvation in Àdìmùlà is similar to what Christianity teaches about those who are saved through the guidance of their conscience and living a good way of life. The agreement is largely on the third level of salvation which is directly focused on life after death. However, the concept of salvation in Àdìmùlà differs significantly from the teaching in Christianity on the first two levels or kinds of salvation because of the methods adopted and things allowed. This will be discussed below in the seven characteristics of the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú*. The theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* establishes the basis why inclusivism as a theory does not apply to the possibility of salvation in Àdìmùlà.

The theory of inclusivism is questioned based on the seven characteristics of the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú*. The first basic characteristic of the theory is that every established religion BEGINS from the revelation from God, which makes every religion true. God reveals Himself the way he wants to be known or perceived, and if God has revealed Himself in the

contexts and culture of the Yoruba without the idea of a FALLEN nature as the consequence of original sin, there will seem to be no need for the incarnation of the savior Jesus Christ for salvation. If all that God requires in the teaching of *Àdìmùlà* is good character as contained in the *Ifá* corpus and corroborated by the Babalawo that were interviewed, it would seem that for an individual to be saved, he/she only needs to cultivate a good character. It is difficult to dispute revelation from God in *Àdìmùlà*, which makes every religion true. God reveals Himself the way he wants to be known or perceived.

The second characteristic of the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* is that the truth of every religion is *relative*. God is too great to totally reveal Himself through any particular religion, which makes the truth/revelation relative because they *never* reveal the whole truth about God. This makes the claims of *Àdìmùlà* tenable because it is possible that the teachings are revealing that aspect of God that is not contained in Christianity. And so, the fact that an idea is not contained in Christianity does not mean that it is wrong because other religions contain it.

The third characteristic is that relative truth can be either *primary* or *secondary*. Primary relative truth when shared across more than one religion, and secondary when accepted in only one religion. The salvific truth found in *Àdìmùlà* is for the most part secondary truth, this is because it is not shared by Christianity. According to the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* the secondary nature of the truth of salvation does not make it less correct, it only means that God revealed it only in a particular context and in a particular religion.

The fourth characteristic is since truths are relative and valid at the same time, they can either be UNIFORM ACROSS religions or be perceived as CONTRADICTIONARY when compared across different religions. It all depends on the side God wills that He reveals to different people. This characteristic of the theory of *Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú* is important as it endorses what is perceived as contradictory in *Àdìmùlà*. The possibility of using different methods of protection as means of salvation from evil forces is not accepted in Christianity and is in fact seen as the opposite action that needs to be repented from in order to be saved. What *Àdìmùlà* accepts will be seen as emanating from divinities which are popularly conceived as idols and false gods.

The fifth characteristic is that whatever is revealed in any religion is GOOD ENOUGH for the purposes of religion which are: i) meeting human needs on earth, ii) providing safety on earth, and iii) pathway to salvation. This characteristic speaks to the focus and aim of this paper more than the other characteristics. The idea of salvation is contained and expressed in the three identified spaces. These spaces are adequately understood and pursued in *Àdìmùlà*. i) In

Àdìmùlà, it is taught that salvation includes the supply of humans' basic needs on earth. Not to have the basic needs is to be exposed to evil and oppression, unless the said lack was chosen by destiny. ii) The second element of salvation in Àdìmùlà is to have protection from malignant forces that roam the world, salvation is to have safety on earth. This can be achieved through different means, both natural and supernatural. And iii) the most important level of salvation is to be on the pathway to eternal rest with God. This is achieved through good character and love towards one's fellow human. The use of one's gifts, power or resources to help those that are less privileged on earth. This, in Àdìmùlà, is salvation and can be achieved without the need or support of any other religion.

Àdìmùlà does not look at any other religion for endorsement for salvation, and it teaches the end of salvation which is the rest of the soul with God. The end is achieved fully with the method that it has laid down, and this is done without any reference to the intervention of Jesus Christ or his sacrifice on the cross. This is possible because of the difference in the understanding of the consequences of original sin (creation of space between God and humans/ between heaven and earth).

The sixth characteristic is that religions emerge within particular CULTURES, CONTEXT and PERIOD, these define how each religion develops and the elements they adopt. In line with the characteristic that religions can be contradictory when compared, like every religion, Àdìmùlà emerged within the context of the Yoruba and has adopted the culture of the Yoruba, the language, the text, the sacrificial elements, the divinities, dances and chants. These do not agree with Christianity, and these do not need reform to perform the function of salvation that they are meant to perform.

The seventh characteristic is that, historically later religions DO NOT CANCEL or make previous ones inferior, at best they can complement previous religions and I like to make use of this quote from the Bible when Jesus said; *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them”* (Matthew 5:17).

Christianity clearly came after Àdìmùlà, as it is often described as Ìṣẹ̀ṣe (that which was done from the beginning). The final characteristic of the theory of Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó ní kọ sí oníkálukú has it that later religions do not cancel out the earlier ones. And that is the case between Christianity and Àdìmùlà. Different religions, but both provide methods of salvation for the followers. According to the theory of Ìhà tí ó wu Olódùmarè ni ó nko sí oníkálukú one does not need the approval or correction of the other for the members to be saved or for the method to be validated. each is good enough for the salvation of those that practice them.

Conclusion

The Christian perspective of salvation of those that are not Christian has been guided by the theory of inclusivism, this has made it possible to dismiss the possibility of salvation in other religions without the idea of the anonymous Christians as Karl Rahner presents it and the Second Vatican Council has adopted it. Rahner's first use of the term 'anonymous Christian' was in a lecture he gave in Barvaria in 1961. The term means that there can be "someone who has no concrete historical contact with the explicit preaching of Christianity, but nevertheless can be a justified person who lives in the grace of Christ" (Clinton, 1998). It is however important to understand the idea of salvation in different religions in order to be able to respond to the question of what people are saved from? And what is needed to be saved from those things. Present in *Àdìmùlà* is the central theme of every religion which is to love God and love one's neighbour, this is what is meant when one is told to develop a good character and one will be saved or will rest well after death on earth. The dichotomy in the idea of salvation between Christianity and *Àdìmùlà* stems from the emphasis on HOW salvation is achieved rather than the fact that salvation is possible and archived.

The rejection of the teaching of *Àdìmùlà* is linked to the fact that religion has become a symbol of authority, that is, importance is attached to 'who has more control and power'. Doctrines are strongly held onto to ensure a high number of followers who share a particular belief. This study shows that all that *Àdìmùlà* requires of believers is the keeping of the 'commandments' that *Olódùmarè* gave to the divinities when they were coming to live on earth and all the commandments can be summed up in care for the other person. The divinities were expected to be helpful and not to take advantage of the humans that they were sent to help on earth. The commandments form the simple requirements for salvation today, irrespective of the method or religion that one adopts. There will of course be variations in the methods, but the end of the method is to live well on earth and live with God in the hereafter. It simply means, "*È ʒe dada láyè, tí ẹ bá kú, ẹẹ r'àyè ní ọrun* (behave well on earth, when you die, you will have a space in heaven)" (Atindehou, 2022).

Recommendations

Pluralism should be considered in totality and not just partial, and differences in religions should be seen as identifiers and not indications of inferiority or incompleteness. This way the religions of the Africans will be better appreciated and understood. Evangelization will also be done with a different approach and conversion will be deeper and more sincere.

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Interviews

Babalawo, Atindehou Geoffroy, Interviewed on the 16th October, 2022 in Quidah, Benin Republic.

Oluwo, Olawole Olakunle, Interviewed on the 20th October, 2022, in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Okunola Ifalere, Ojugbona awo ilu ilobu, Interviewed on the 1st November, 2022 in Osun State.

Oba (Dr.) Fakayode Faluade, the Olu of Ibogun, Owu kingdom, Ogun State. The President and Founder of Ifa Olokun foundation. Interviewed on the 9th November, 2022.