Comparative Ethical Analysis of Sin in African Traditional Religion and Christianity

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ABSTRACT
Sin is a religious concept that is paramount to every religion of the world. Every religion has moral conduct that prohibits sin. Sin is any lack of conformity, either active or passive to the law of God. Carefree attitude to sin in both religions is promoting social vices in the society, which makes the society to be rotten. Sin in Christianity is described as transgression and violation of God’s word as revealed in the Bible. Sin in ATR is called “Éewo” known as taboo, and it is a violation of divine instructions from ancestors, divinities, and Supreme Being. Christianity holds that sin destroys the relationship between God and man through Jesus Christ. Sin leads to eternal destruction but anyone who confesses Jesus Christ and believes in his atoned work on the cross will be forgiven and inherit the kingdom of God. Abuse of grace in Christianity among some individuals is the rationale for trivialization which must be jettisoned. Sin in both religions spoilt relationship between God and man and it has consequences upon individuals, generation and society. Running away from sin will promote moral uprightness for peaceful co-existence in the society.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, Christianity, God, Sin

INTRODUCTION
Sin is a religious concept that is paramount to every religion of the world. Every religion has moral conduct that prohibits sin. Sin is a prominent concept in both African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity, which has attracted intellectual discourse among scholars today. Sin is any lack of conformity, either active or passive to the law of God. This may be a matter of act or thought. Sin has severe punishment, and it is required of a man to run away from sin. God of heavens and earth created man as a moral being. This makes every man to be responsible for his action. Man is able to respond to God’s instruction because he is created as a moral being with a conscience; and capable of differentiating between good and evil. Sin and its consequences have been trivialized among some people today due to carefree attitude. Carefree to sin in both religions is promoting social vices in the society, which makes the society to be rotten. Some individuals are calling right wrong and wrong right due to their wrong value system.

Sin in Christianity is described as transgression and violation of God’s word as revealed in the Bible. Sin in ATR is called “Éewo” known as taboo, and it is a violation of divine instructions from ancestors, divinities, and Supreme Being. Christianity in this paper is conceived from the evangelical point of view, and ATR is discussed from Yoruba Indigenous Religion in South-West Nigeria. This paper compares sin in African Traditional Religion and Christianity from an ethical point of view.

Sin as a Religious Concept
Sin is wrongdoing or transgression of God’s law. It includes a failure to do what is right. Sin offends people; it is violence and lovelessness toward other people, and ultimately, rebellion against God. The Bible teaches that sin involves a condition in which the heart is corrupt and inclined toward evil (Daniel, 2009:145). Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature. It includes not only individual acts such as stealing or lying or committing murder, but also attitudes that are contrary to the attitudes God requires from man (Wayne 2000:490). Reflections on the above positions show that sin involves the relationship between
man and God; the relationship between man and nature; and the relationship among human beings. Thus, sin is a violation of God’s moral law that guides the relationships.

**Man as a Responsible Being**

Man is the image of God on earth. One of the fundamental beliefs of ATR is that man is the head of all creation and was created as a moral agent, gifted with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong (Awolalu, June 1976: 275). Idowu (1996:155) also affirms that God as Supreme Being brought into existence divinities and spirits as well as the ancestral spirits for the orderly government of the universe. God and His functionaries are interested in the moment-to-moment behaviour in the society. Man is capable of responding to the divine instructions due to his nature as a moral agent created with a conscience to distinguish between good and bad. Idowu (1996) added that man, as conceived by Africans, is created as being who can relate to God, his creator and his fellow men. African society is community-oriented, and this connects the extended members of the family, the clan, the various societies and organizations in the community together with the strong tie. This tie is connected with the ancestors who are interested in the day-to-day life of their living children. Africans hold that God created society as a moral institution. In African communities, there is punishment stated as the authorised standard of social and spiritual habits for us in the society and of the region as an institution. A breach of, or failure to adhere to the sanctions is sin, and this incurs the displeasure of Deity and His functionaries. Sin is, therefore, doing that which is opposite to the will and directions of Deity. It consists of any immoral behaviour, ritual mistakes, and any offences closer to God or man, breach of covenant, breaking of taboos and doing some other things regarded as abominable and polluting. Sin in ATR cannot be noted in isolation; it is associated with God and man.

Awolalu (1976:282) corroborates this assertion that Africans do not have an inflexible difference between an offence committed towards a man or woman or society and one committed towards Deity or divinities and spirits. There is no sharp dividing line in this line in this regard between the sacred and the secular such as assumed by means of the Western world. God is regarded as the founder and guardian of morality. To put God aside, the divinities and the ancestral spirits is to commit sin. To disregard the norms and taboos of the society is to commit sin. Human relationships must have moral foundations; they cannot be constructed on something else. If a man steals or practices sorcery, his antisocial action, his antisocial action, reasons, displeasure and damage to some participants of the God-ordained society, and such an evil deed will no longer go unpunished.

**Concept of Sin in African Traditional Religion**

African Traditional Religion is an indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been surpassed down from technology to generation with the aid of the forbears of the current generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (an element of the past) but a faith that Africans today have made theirs via residing it and practising it. This is a faith that has no written literature, but it is “written” in all places for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the peoples’ myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings. It is a faith whose historical founder is neither recognised nor worshipped; it is a faith that has no zeal for membership drive, but it affords persistent fascination for Africans, young and old (Awolalu, 1976:275).

Mbiti (1978:214) affirms that African Religion is the product of the questioning and experiences of our forefathers. They formed non-secular ideas, they formulated non-secular beliefs, and they located non-secular ceremonies and rituals. They used proverbs and myths which carried non-secular meanings, and they advanced laws and customs which safeguarded the existence of the character and his community. Thus, every African person regards his/her regular religion as his/her distinct way of life; it is his/her protection and identity. No African can exist except his/her extensive religion. The most essential skill of faith as described above is a belief in the Supreme Being. This has self-belief compels one to behave the way one believes. African people behave the way they have confidence according to their everyday religion. Idowu (1973: 134) affirms that African Traditional Religion results from man’s spontaneous recognition of a dwelling power. Therefore, sin in African Religious belief means violations of acceptable moral standard of the society. The violations may be in speech, action or reaction. Awolalu (1976) adds that, Africans have deep trip of sin and understand the massive difference between ritual mistakes which are calculated to be offences in opposition to divinities,
derelictions of filial obligations which may additionally arouse the anger of the aggrieved ancestors, and the breach of Deity’s behests which is in simple terms an ethical issue. Sometimes it is no longer convenient to draw the line between the basically ritual and the simply ethical, as they are often worried one in the other. Olademo (2008) corroborates the above positions, that sin in African Traditional Religious trust, therefore, encompasses immoral acts, ritual mistake, and breach of covenant and violation of taboos, to mention a few. Again, sin is a wondering linked to the shape of African communities such as the cult of the divinities, the ancestors and ritual members of the family with others in the society. There are outstanding kinds and directions of sin in African Traditional Religion. Some sins are constrained to the moral setting, and examples are theft, lying, rudeness and disrespect to elders and slander. But the scope of specific sorts of sins may additionally be wider and serious, and punitive measures accrue to such. These consist of ritual violations, murder, incest and adultery. According to Daniel (2009:1), “sin is existent in African religious consciousness because the moral perspective of African religion is quite concrete and pragmatic.” The morality of the peoples of West Africa is mostly indicated through the taboos, with which their lives are surrounded (Parinder, 1949:45). This assertion may be assumed valid if it were the adherents of Yoruba indigenous religion alone that is subjected to the keeping of taboo. Every religion develops ways of behaviour that alone are proper in the presence of the sacred. According to Mbiti (1978:214), the essence of African morality is that it is more societal oriented than spiritual; it is a morality of conduct as a substitute than a morality of being. This is what one would possibly title dynamic ethics as an alternative than statics for it defines what a character does as a replacement than what he is. Mbiti, (1975:175) further adds that morals deal with the query of what is proper and good, and what is incorrect and evil, inhuman conduct. African peoples have a deep feeling of right and wrong, which has produced customs, rules, laws, traditions and taboos, which can be positioned in every society. Human habits have two dimensions; personal conduct, which has to do particularly with the existence of the individual. The large variety of morals has to do with social conduct, that is, the existence of the society, the behaviour of the personal internal, the crew or regional or nations. African morals lay an excellent emphasis on social conduct because a necessary African view is that the man or woman exists only due to the reality others exist. Morals evolved in order to keep society not only alive but in harmony. Without morals, there would be chaos and confusion. Reflections on the above assertions show that morals guide people in doing what is right and good for both their own sake and that of their community. Presence of moral standard in the society makes wrong attitudes and evil practices sin against God and man.

In Christianity, at creation, man was given a number of duties. He was to reproduce his species in (one –flesh) marriage (Gen. 1:27-28, 2:24). He was to work to gather the fruit of the earth for food, and he was expected to rule over other living creatures. These God-given instructions are known as ‘creation ordinances’ and show that from the beginning, man was accountable to God for his behaviours (actions) (Geisler, 1994 and Wright, 2004). Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and both of them were held responsible (Gen. 3). Cain was held responsible for and was punished for murdering his brother Abel (Gen. 4). The flood in Genesis 5-8 revealed God’s punishment for evil practices. The Bible affirms that anyone who sheds the blood of a human being would have his blood taken. Men were accountable by moral values that are written on their hearts (i.e., what is often called ‘natural law’).

Consequences of Sin in African Traditional Religion
The penalties of sin are paramount to every religion. ATR view on consequences of sin holds that God loves man but will now no longer condone sin. Awolalu (1976) holds that delinquency of man creates a gap between him and God. Man has relationships with God and his fellow-men. Both relationships are to be maintained due to the reality; it is in the protection of the two that man has peace and happiness. In both case God and His functionaries (divinities and ancestors) are the judges. Man’s disobedience isolated him from God and disrupted his total well-being, and delivered tragic penalties to him. For a man to bypass over God’s fellowship and training is to incur God’s displeasure and to carry misfortune, pain and death upon himself. Thus, sin brings war, suffering and sadness.

Olademo (2008:57) adds that in some African societies, sin is frequently linked with illness of physique or brain. Consequently, indisposed human beings are many times inspired to confess any hidden violations of insurance policies in society. Constant misfortunes, incurable illnesses and customary penury have been all
construed as warning signs that the supernatural powers had been punishing an unconfessed sin in the existence of the man or woman so afflicted. Again, pregnant women who have difficulty in childbirth are encouraged to confess their sins so as to have a smooth childbirth because sin is believed to be accountable for the prolongation in childbirth. Idowu (1973:155) submits that reward and punishment on the grounds of morality are spoken of for the cause of keeping recalcitrant humanity eternally in check. That which is right is certain with goodness as that which by nature is improper is tied up with evil. Reward and punishment as measured out in this world are entirely translations to the human reality of that which is of the fundamental essence of things.

Forgiveness of Sin in African Traditional Religion
Evils and misfortunes are associated with sin in ATR context. Awolalu cited Evans-Pritchard (1976:284.) that a man’s spiritual state is changed; he is polluted, contaminated or unclean. This means every transgression is of nature and renders a man filthy and unacceptable. It causes a strained relationship between him and the supersensible world. Sins are forgiven in ATR through purification, confession and reparation and sacrifice. This is to make a man acceptable to Deity and escape the punishment attached to sin. According to Olademo (2008:56), confession and acceptance of guilt are an indispensable aspect to the eradication of sins dedicated in African Traditional Religion, and this is normally observed via processes to ratify the situations.

Concept of Sin in Christianity
Sin did not originate in man, but was already in the person of Satan and his kingdom to be presented in the same guise to man. Bragg (2020), adds that the real commencement of sin is to be found in the true freedom of man's will. Such used to be the freedom of will which God gave to Adam that he may desire to and did act in opposition to his own pure, holy nature. You cannot hit upon the foundation of sin someplace else. Ekundayo, (2003:44) affirms that in Old Testament thought, God through Moses specifically gave Ten Commandments as prohibitions to the Israelites in Exod. 20:1ff. This, he categorically explained as prohibition concerning the objects of worship; prohibitions concerning ordinance or the way God should be worshipped; prohibition to be all about the manner of worship.

In the New Testament the following concepts are used to describe; (i) "Sin is the transgression of the law," I John 3:4., "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," Romans 14:23. (ii) "To him that knows to do good and does it not to him it is sin," James 4:17. (iii) "All unrighteousness is sin," I John 5:17. (iv) "A high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked is sin," Proverbs 21:4. (v) "The thought of the foolish is sin" Proverbs 24:9. The thought means premeditation. See Genesis 6:5, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (vi) And when He comes, He will reprove the world of sin and of unrighteousness and the judgment of sin, because they believe not on me, John 16:8-9, the unbelief of man to Christ is sin. Sin is a deficiency of love to God and man." It takes the excellent command in the Scriptures, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your notions and with all your strength." Sin is estrangement from God. Or the Scripture graphically illustrates it as enmity in the direction of God. This independence and lack of devotion causes estrangement or enmity. Romans 8:7, says the carnal thought is enmity against God (Bragg, trinitycollege.edu.org.).

Sin is self-affirmation. This is the love "of the creature more than the creator," Romans 1:25, worshipped and served the creature greater than the Creator who is blessed forever. In self-affirmation, self is the central element from which all things, even God Himself is contemplated, "Lovers of their very personal selves alternatively than followers of God." Here is the coronary heart of the temptation of Satan to Eve, "you shall be as gods," self-sufficient, self- supreme, gods internal yourself. Thus, the language of sin is "I am, and I am, my own, and have consequently full proper to continue to be for myself and to do as I please." In its renunciation of dependence upon God; it is Unbelief in its exaltation to neighborhood itself equal with God; it is pleasure in its transference of the homage due unto God to another; it is idolatry. The taproot of sin is self. Even in a Christian, there is the regular warring towards the flesh (Bragg, trinitycollege.edu.org.).
Consequences of Sin in Biblical Teachings

Sin plagues even the human beings of God, as members of the covenant family manipulate, betray, lie to, and deceive one and another. Exodus displays that sin now no longer completely brings struggling and punishment, but whoever violates the law of God. Cover, (1992:39) affirms that sin ruptured the relationship between the creator and the creature, and set in action a series of penalties which if unchecked, would lead to dying of the sinner. Wayne (2000:509) asserts that the critical cause for God’s punishment of sin is His righteousness that demands it, so that He would possibly be glorified in the universe that he has created. He is Lord who practices “steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD” (Jer.9:24). The punishment of the wicked is grounded in two top-notch attributes or ideas in the Divine nature; love and justice, love and law. God is love, and God is righteous or holy. Any doctrine of punishment should take into consideration both of these limitless attributes of God, no longer from the human standpoint of leniency or harshness, however as they abide in God in limitless rectitude and love barring partiality. Under this heading, outcomes of sin should be considered. The Scriptures say, “The wages of sin is death,” Romans 6: 23.

Forgiveness of Sin in Christianity

The Bible provides explicit information on forgiveness of sin. Christians have forgiveness of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Daniel (2009:737) asserts that the sacrifices and rituals for cleaning listed in the Pentateuch remind us of the gravity of sin. Transgressions are extra than mistakes. The Bible in no way dismisses a sin absolutely because it used to be executed by means of someone younger or ignorant. Sin pollutes the sinner, and the regulation requires that the pollution be removed. One chief cause of the penal code is to put off evil from the land (Deut. 13:5). Sin additionally offends God, and the law requires atonement through sacrifices, in many of which a sufferer gives its lifestyles blood for atonement. Jesus earned the power and authority to forgive sin through the shedding of his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of sin. The crucifixion is the apex and the remedy of sin (Acts 2:22-23). After the resurrection, Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the victory and forgiveness of sins by way of his pick out (Luke 24:47; John 20:23).

Comparison of Sin in African Traditional Religious Belief and Christianity

Sin in African Traditional Religious beliefs and Christianity is violations of moral laws against God and man. The followings are the areas of convergence shared among ATR and Christianity as regarded their theology of sin; specifically (i) Both associated sin to Supreme God. Sin is a violation of moral law given by God and this is paramount to African Traditional Religion and Christianity. The biblical mandate and African Traditional Religion affirm the love of God and justice, which will not spare any sinner unpunished. (ii) The biblical mandate and African Traditional Religion have moral standard that prohibit sin against God and man. (iii) Both religions believe in penalties of sin for sinners. (iv) Both religions accept the forgiveness of sin. The followings are the areas of divergence shared among ATR and Christianity as regarded their theology; namely (i) In African Traditional Religious belief forgiveness of sin is through sacrifices, purification, and confession, while in biblical doctrine forgiveness of sin is through confession and belief in the atoning work of Jesus. (ii) In African Traditional Religious belief, man can commit sin against ancestors and divinities while in the biblical mandate, man can only sin against God and man. (iii) The Bible provides Ten Commandment for moral and ritual practices while African Traditional Religious belief provides oral traditions for ethical and societal uprightness. (iv) African Traditional Religious belief holds that man relates with God through divinities because of God’s supremacy. In the Bible, man is God’s representative and created in the image. God expects every man to run away from sin. (v) The adherents of ATR do not play with taboo because of consciousness of immediate punishment from ancestors, and divinities which may not be remediated. However, Christian view of sin has been bastardise due to wrong understanding of God’s grace and this makes some Christians to handle sin with levity.

CONCLUSION

The work has examined sin in African Traditional Religion and Christianity. Sin is any lack of conformity, either active or passive to the law of God. This may be a matter of act, thought, or inner disposition or state to moral issues of life. Sin is a failure to live up to what God expects of His children in the act, thought, and being. In African Traditional Religion sin attracts punishment from ancestors, divinities, God who is the...
Creator and Sustainer of the universe and its inhabitants. He expects His creatures to maintain a good relationship with one another. Christianity holds that sin destroys the relationship between God and man through Jesus Christ. Sin leads to eternal destruction but anyone who confesses Jesus Christ and believes in his atoned work on the cross will be forgiven and inherit the kingdom of God. Abuse of grace in Christianity among some individuals is the rationale for trivialization which must be jettisoned. Sin in both religions spoilt relationship between God and man and it has consequences upon individuals, generation and society. Running away from sin will promote moral uprightness for peaceful co-existence in the society.

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