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THE CONCEPT OF REDEMPTION IN AFRICAN INDIGENOUS
RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY AND ITS APOLOGETIC
RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN WITNESS

By

OJO, ADEDAYO IDOWU

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ABSTRACT

This essay was written to research into the concept of redemption in African indigenous religion and Christianity and to communicate the central issues in Christ redemption plan in the perspective of African indigenous religion for Christian witness. The concept of redemption is a vital issue in all religion due to the fact that the ultimate desire of every human being is to be free from whatever that would hinder him from enjoying life in its fullness. In order to achieve salvation of their souls and their entire being from problems, Africans consulted various oracles and cults. The Christians likewise in the same manner strive to attain salvation because of their desire to reign eternally with Christ at eschaton.

Data for this essay were collected through interaction with relevant books, a mixture of personal interview, internet source, participant's observation and oral interview. This work examined what redemption meant to an African indigenous adherent before the advent of Christianity and the practice of redemption in Christian faith. The similarities and differences in the practice and application of redemption in African indigenous religion and Christianity served to debunk age long mistaken claim that there is other means of total salvation beside Jesus Christ and also as a medium for inter-religions dialogue in order to enhance tolerance among the adherents of both religions instead of crisis and conflict.

More importantly, this work has helped to alienate confusion from the young convert in African indigenous religion about what salvation is in the context of Christian faith and the benefits that the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ has brought to humanity. Therefore, the contemporary Christian should proclaim God as

the redeemer, Savior, rescuing Creator, God of all people who in Jesus Christ provided every tribe and nation the way to a blessed eternal life through Christ Jesus.

A paradigm was presented as a response from the findings. These included Inter-religions dialogue, teaching the eternal truth of Scripture, repentance, proclamation, Contextualization and perpetual evangelism. The contemporary Christian should communicate the gospel within the context of the cultural worldview of the African indigenous religion adherents. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers abundant hope to the World. It offers new birth and cleansing for Africans, and introduces them to the supreme God from whom the traditionalist has been alienated for a long time. It frees the Indigenous religionist from extreme spiritual bondage and the fear of wicked spirits and introduces him to the liberty and comfort in Jesus.

5.2 CONCLUSION

A Christian witness needs an objective understanding concept of redemption in African indigenous religion in order to effectively witness about the Christian faith. This is necessary because Christian witness should communicate the gospel within the context of the cultural worldview of the African indigenous religion adherents. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers abundant hope to the World. It offers new birth and cleansing for Africans, and introduces them to the supreme God from whom the traditionalist has been alienated for a long time. It frees the Indigenous religionist from extreme spiritual bondage and the fear of wicked spirits and introduces him to the liberty and comfort in Jesus. This gospel points to the sacrifice of Jesus as the only valid sacrifice to overcome all evil powers, even death. It introduces the African religionist to the gracious and merciful love of the Lord God, who cannot be manipulated but works all things together for good for those who love him in Jesus Christ (Romans 8.28). For the gospel provides an enabling environment for the recognition and response to the living God, he had previously known, not in His mercy, but in demands and power. Now this God is revealed within a new context, the context of Christianity and the gift of divine mercy and redemption. Thereby the African indigenous religion comes to share in the Abraham covenant, worshipping the one and only God together with a universal body of saints.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Repentance which demands a turning from worshipping idols to worshipping the only living God should be clearly proclaimed. Jesus Christ should be the focus and the centre of worship and the only solution to human problems. The only way that salvation can be obtained by humanity is through Jesus Christ and this must be

emphasised when proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Not only pastors, teachers, theologians, and evangelists need to be encouraged to proclaim the gospel locally the use of locally available people should also be encouraged in evangelism and should be supported prayerfully and financially.

Inter-religions dialogue is an important aspect of the church's mission of evangelisation. Authentic Inter-religions dialogue is necessary to support evangelisation and encourage respecting and listening to one another. Thus dialogue is not an alternative for proclamation or a substitute for it, one implies the other. Both are different aspects of the same mission of preaching the gospel and bearing witness to Christ. However, the value common to both religions unveiled through Inter-religions dialogue are indispensable for sharing of gospel of Christ. This helps African Christians to live an integrated life which is truly Christian and truly African. It is thus a path towards full evangelization among the African indigenous adherents.

In proclamation of good news, stories, parables, and analogies which readily appeal to Indigenous African audience can be used. A clear approach of introducing Christianity is by building from the known to the unknown. This may mean telling the Old Testament stories, and particularly those that are parallel to the local culture. Then the Christian messenger should work through those stories and compare the biblical concepts to the traditional stories showing how they are the same, or how they represent different values. It is only by consciously working through the parallels and conflicts that the distinctive of the Christian message can be distinguished with clarity from the strong parallels which are close, but still very different from the scriptural concepts.

Indigenisation of Christian religion is essential. Christianity must not be seen as a religion based on western world ideas, which does not recognize and accept the

African way of life. In order to do this, one has to compare religious elements in both religions and find out where they differ and where they agree and whether one can accommodate the other one due to corresponding elements, in order for Christianity to be meaningful to African people. "Cultural differences require that Christian ethics be conceptualized into a host culture" (Moyo, 12). The church should not despise African cultural elements that do contradict the bible when proclaiming the Gospel to African indigenous religion adherents.

Another practical suggestion emerges, based on the idea of God's revelation of himself. In witnessing to Indigenous religion adherents, one may ask them if they had ever talked to God or felt that he answered them. Some people replied that when they were very young it was so. If asked why they think it stopped, or why they may now feel far from God. They said it was because of sin. In these cases, it opens a very warm and sympathetic conversation about forgiveness and reaching God through Christ in an atmosphere free from a spirit of accusation or condemnation.

As in African indigenous religion there is no kingdom without a power attached to it to function, this is an opportunity for Christian witness for a proactive evangelism among Africans, the power of the Kingdom of Christ need to be demonstrated through the use of spiritual gift for healing and deliverance. The essence of the power of the Kingdom of Christ is to bring deliverance and salvation to them in this physical world and hope of eternity to reign with Christ in his Kingdom.