



A Comparative Study of the concept of sin in Christianity and Efik Traditional Religion of South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract

Sin is a universal phenomenon which is common to every society whether primitive or civilized. Every society has a concept of sin and it is this concept that regulates their morality and human conduct. For the Efik people, sin is not seen as a separation, rebellion or transgression of God's law as in the case of the Bible. Neither is it just the breaking of the law or disobedience to God but disturbances to the cosmic order, a disruption or distortion of the divine order. Sin is seen as behaviour against the society, against the cosmic order and a breach of societal equilibrium. In contrast, Christianity teaches that human beings were created in the image of God to love, serve and worship Him but that it is sin of disobedience which separated human beings from God, bringing judgment and death to humanity; hence the need for a new kind of birth or salvation in Christ. However, the religious and social attitudes and practices which amount to sins, the categorization, dimensions and sanctions seem to have some bearing with Efik traditional religion. This work is aimed at surveying the concept of sin, the etymological meaning and the general usage of the word "sin" both in Christianity and the Efik traditional religion and compared same, pointed out the differences and the effects it has on the contemporary Efik Christians. The paper adopted the descriptive approach and used content analysis and empirical studies methods of collecting data for the research. The study revealed that even though Efik Traditional religion has a strong correlation with the Christian concept of sin, their meaning and perception are different.

Keywords: Sin, Christianity, Efik Traditional Religion, Behaviour, Morality, Transgression

Introduction

Sin is a universal phenomenon that is common in every society whether primitive or civilized. Every society has a concept of sin. It is this concept that regulates their morality and human conduct. Sin is about "wrongdoing, violation of a moral rule, ceremonial disruption, nonconformity to custom and broken relationships" (Turaki 2001:85). It is argued that without the concept of sin, religion would lose its central identity because at the heart of every religion is the fundamental question of sin. The concept of sin is therefore not a prerogative of Christian theology rather it is a concern of almost all religious traditions, even though, it may be defined differently. However, in all, sin is seen as any action or mind-set that goes against a constituted order – God or gods, natural or supernatural or anything that goes against the nature of the universe.

The perception of sin among the Efik people is different from Biblical perception. For the Efik people, sin is not seen as a separation, rebellion or transgression of God's law as it is the case of the Bible, neither is it just the breaking of the law or disobedient to God but disturbances to the cosmic order, a disruption or distortion of the divine order. This is what Adeyemo calls "upsetting of the equilibrium of the society" (1979:52). Sin is behaviour against the society, against the cosmic order and the obsession of the societal equilibrium. In contrast, the Bible teaches that human beings are created in the image of God to love, serve and worship Him but the sin of disobedience separated them from God and brought judgement and death to humanity; hence the need for new birth or salvation in Christianity.

Life is sacred rather than secular and surrounded by several religious forms and symbols. A community is much more than a social grouping, bound together by reasons of natural origin or deep common interests and values, rather it is a society united together by

the visible and invisible worlds, of the physically living, the yet unborn, the world of ancestors and divinities on the other hand. In a sense, Efik cosmology understands man as an integral part of a whole. This idea makes their worldview fundamentally holistic, sacred and highly integrated. For them, humans have their full meaning and significance only within the transcendental centre of ultimate reality and violation of the moral code is a disturbance to the cosmic order, a disruption or distortion of the divine order and these constitute sin in the divine and cosmic order especially viewed as taboos.

There is no need for new birth or salvation in Efik concept of sin because salvation is when one is accepted in the community of the living and the living dead through good behaviour. Salvation for Efik people is obtained through good living, good behaviour, prayers, offerings and sacrifices. It is through these, that a person gains favour and blessings from the ancestral spirit world and when he dies; he joins his ancestors in peace. Gehman (2001:205) writing about the concept of salvation in African Traditional belief, of which Efik is part of clearly states that "salvation has nothing to do with eternal life in heaven since sin is primarily an offence against one's neighbour and the punishment is in the present"

The Concept of Sin in Christian Theology

Christian theology draws its sources from scripture, church tradition and possibly experience, though depending on ecclesiastical persuasion. For work, the source of studying Christian theological understanding of sin will be based mainly on scripture using the science of scriptural interpretation called hermeneutics. Since the Christian scripture is divided into two segments – Old and New Testaments, for the proper understanding of the subject under discussion, the two Testaments will be studied separately and then a synergy drawn between both Testaments to establish the concept of sin in the Christian faith and by extension a comparison with that of Efik understanding of the concept of sin.

Sin in the Old Testament

Conceptual View

The creation myth as presented by the Yahwistic (J) Source presents the world as being good and human beings having all the trees in the garden for food. The only tree which they were not supposed to eat from was the tree of the knowledge of good *טוב* (tov) and evil *רע* (ra'). This instruction was explicit. Adam and Eve the first human parents who were created good and with a freewill decided to choose between good and evil (Palmer, 2013: 43). In this crucial choice made by them out of disobedience, the first human sin was recorded. By the choice of eating the forbidden fruit, Adam chose to rebel against God and broke fellowship with Him (Dyrness, 1977: 101). God had to look for Adam with the question, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9), because the point of fellowship was broken. It is on this note that a chasm exists between God and human beings, hence Isaiah said that:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear (Isa 59:1-2 RSV)

The second thing about sin in Old Testament is that, the image *צלם* (tselem) and likeness *דמות* (demuth) of Elohim in which Adam and Eve were created became stained and the fall affected their descendants. Speaking about the descendant of Adam "scripture points out that, Seth was in the likeness of his father [Adam]" (Eyo, 2020: 32). From these first parents, sin spread to all humanities. It is on this note that David confessed that, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps 51:5 RSV). From this point, Old Testament sees sin as being hereditary in every human being. Everyone (without exception) born into the world is born with sin. St. Augustine defined this as "original sin and considered that the fallen nature of Adam was transmitted biologically through sexual procreation" (Colwell, 1994: 642)

Thirdly, sin affects all faculties of human beings. His thought, will, action and even inaction are all affected negatively. It is on this note

that, the Old Testament postulates that every imagination of the thoughts of a human's heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Hence the action of Cain was evil (Gen. 4:3-15), the thought of Jerusalem was continually evil (Jer. 4:14) and even the thought of one who offers food without his whole heart is wicked (Prov. 23:6-7), and that the heart of human being is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt (Jer. 17:9). Sin therefore affects human will, emotions, idea and his totality. Hence, human inclination is continually that of sin.

Fourthly, sin is vertical and horizontal, outward and inward in its consequences. It affects human relationship with God and makes human hostile to each other. It affects human society as well as the person who has sinned. It is like a wound in the bone of the sinner. The ultimate result of sin in the conceptual view of Old Testament is death – "the day you eat of this fruit, you shall die" (Gen. 2:16; Ezek. 18:4). Sin is equally likened to disease in its consequence and therefore needs healing.

The only healing for this sickness is the Suffering Servant (Messiah) whom Isaiah said, by his stripes we are healed (Isa 53:5) and the act of atonement given by God. A vivid picture of proto-atonement is given in Gen. 3:21 when God had to use garments of animal skin to cover Adam and Eve. In this way, God set the plan for atonement in the Old Testament as a treatment of sin. For this reason, God gave the act of atonement to the people of Old Testament as an annual event to take away their sins (Exod. 30:10; Lev. 10:17, etc.). This act was to find fulfilment in the seed of the woman bruising the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15-16).

Terminologies of Sin

The complexity of sin in the Old Testament brings to the fore the different terminologies used in describing sin. It is also pertinent to note that some of these Hebrew words originated from the non-religious life of the people and were later adapted by the various religions to give them spiritual meaning and significance. Old Testament has not less than seven different words which are referred

to as sin or synonyms of sin. Some of their meanings often overlap with each other. The following are some of these terminologies

- i. פשע (psh') is one major root in Hebrew where the words pasha and pesha which are translated as offend, rebel, rebellion, revolt, transgress, transgression, etc. (Strong, 2006: 97). It is a refusal to submit to rightful authority. It always results in a breach of relationship between two parties; this is the word that Jacob used when he angrily demanded of his father-in-law asking, what crime he had committed against him (Genesis 31:36). The word is used repeatedly to refer to Israel's rebellion against God (Isaiah 58:1, 59:12, Micah 1:5-13, Amos 5:12) and Moab's rebellion against Israel after the death of Ahab (2Kings 1:1). This was basically Adam's sin against God
- ii. חטא (ḥtt') from where ḥatta or Chatta is the most common idea of sin. Its derivative connotes the idea of missing the mark or deviating from the goal (e.g. Judges 20:16) (Colwell, 1994: 1116). When applied to sin, it suggests that sin is missing the mark or failing to obey God's law. It connotes moral and religious deviation, whether in respect of man (Gen. 20:9) or God (Lam. 5:7). Timothy Palmer points out that in the noun form, it "indicates spiritual and moral failure [and that] the measure of such failure is the Torah" (Palmer, 2013: 44).
- iii. עוון ('wn) from where the word 'awon comes from. The word has to do with fault, mischief, iniquity, etc. The root idea of this word is perversion or distortion. It means that which is bent or twisted. In this sense, all sin a perversion of that which is not proper and legitimate. The sense of 'awon is expressed in Gen, 20:5; Lev. 20:40-41, etc.) where Yahweh is to visit the punishment of the iniquity of the fathers upon their children.
- iv. עקש ('qqsh) with its vowels it becomes 'iqqesh which means perverse or perversity. It also carries the sense of something that is distorted, crooked, forward, hence a thing that is false. The sense of 'iqqesh is expressed more

in the wisdom literature where the person who is perverse in his ways will fall (Prov. 28:18, 6, etc.). Worthy of note is the fact that these first four words for sin are always grouped under the sin of deviation from the right way. Such "deviations whether from kindness or from a specific law, it is the Holy God who is concerned and the end of such deviation is the dissolution of the soul" (1977: 106). Every departure, therefore, from the law of right is coming short of the purpose for which man was made, and a missing of the goal which ought to be reached". (Girdlestone, 1974: 77). Hence, David certainly missed the mark of God's intention for his sexual life when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Likewise, he missed God's intended use of the military when he murdered Uriah.

- v. תמא (tm') is the root for the word tame' which means defile or defilement in Hebrew language and is used in the Old Testament for the concept of sin which speaks of 'to defile', 'to pollute' or make oneself unclean or foul in a religious sense. This can be applied in the sense of defilement found in Lev 18:20, 23 which says: And you shall not lie carnally with your neighbour's wife, and defile yourself with her And you shall not lie with any beast and defile yourself with it, neither shall any woman give herself to a beast to lie with it: it is a perversion.
- vi. The sense of defilement also comes from the word גאל (g'l; ga'al) which carries the tone of defile, pollute or stain. It is on this note that Daniel decided not to defile himself with the king's meat (Dan. 1:8).
- vii. רע (r'; ra'). This means evil or bad and is opposite of that which is good, טב (tov) (cf. Gen 2:16). There are two types of evil in Old Testament – moral evil and natural evil. "Moral evil is a sinful act while natural evil is a disaster or calamity which is always translated as 'disaster' in NIV" (Palmer, 2013: 42). Repeatedly, it is said that Israel did evil in the sight of God, especially in the Book of Judges, their kings also frequently did evil (2Kings 15:9, 18, 24, 28,

- etc.), and the sin Joseph's brothers committed against him was evil (Gen 50:17). Moral evil comes from the heart (Jer. 4:14). It is in the same vein also that the word רשע (rsh'; rasha') is used to speak of ungodly act (Psa. 1:1, 4-6).
- viii. תועבה (tw'bh; tow'ebah) speaks of abomination or abominable act. Such acts like the wages of prostitution (23:18); a false balance (Prov. 11:1); those with a perverse mind (11:20); lying lips (12:22); the sacrifice of the wicked (15:8); an arrogant man (16:5); the prayer of a lawbreaker (28:9); incense offered without regard to ethical conduct (Isa 1:13); etc. In like manner practices associated with the pagan deity and conduct opposed to His standards repulse Him; e.g., the practice of witchcraft and kindred arts (Deut. 18:12); homosexuality and other sexual perversions (Lev 18:22; 20:13); remarriage after divorce (Deut. 24:4); and all the "abominations" of the Canaanites (Lev 18:26; often in Ezekiel).

Generally, sin in Old Testament is against Yahweh not necessarily against the community or an individual. William Dyrness notes that:

It is a personal and voluntary deviation from a norm, ultimately directed against God. Even when it is a matter of the transgression of the law, it is against God (because) the law is but a transcription of the perfection of God (1977: 107).

The idea of sin being against YAHWEH was because of the theocratic nature of the people of Old Testament. This affected their rules, being that the laws were all given by YAHWEH. Even when Israel became a monarchical nation, their government was still subject to the Torah. This makes sin also not go unpunished, except an atonement is made for it.

Sin in the New Testament

A Conceptual view:

The New Testament theology of sin flows from and compliments that of the Old Testament concept of sin. It gives a full meaning and

interpretation to it. It is in the light of New Testament theology that Christians have the fuller conceptual and theological meaning of sin. On this note, Peter Toon avers that "the New Testament strengthens the OT portrayal of sin by viewing it in the light of Jesus and his atonement which is a victory over sin" (1987: 947). The New Testament, therefore, affirms the position of the Old Testament in respect to the origin of sin, its universal nature affecting all faculties of human beings, i.e. the concept to total depravity. It is for this reason that, human beings need salvation from sin. Its consequence or punishment is eternal death. It affirms without controversy that, all human beings have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Sin is seen as a work in which the sinner is entitled to payment at the end. This is where the analogy of wages in respect of sin comes from in Rom 6:23 which states that "the wages of sin is death...."

The New Testament sees sin as "a state of human being that separates them from the holy God and that sin is ultimately against God" (Colwell, 1994: 641). The only atonement for sin can be found in Jesus Christ who is the propitiation $\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$ – hilasmous for sin. The word, $\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$ which is translated as propitiation is used by the Johannine corpus after the pattern of the Old Testament, It refers to the purpose which "God Himself has fulfilled by sending the Son. Hence, it rests on the fact that God is gracious, i.e., on His love, (cf. 1 John 4:10). The meaning, then, is the setting aside of sin as guilt against God" (Buchsel, 1999: E-Copy). Just like in the Old Testament, sin is against God not necessarily against the community or an individual, and it is only God who forgives sin, though later on, the disciples were given the power to forgive sin (John 20:23) and believers are expected to give each other their sins (cf. Matt 6:12-15; 18:21-22, etc.). The eventual forgiveness of sin rests in the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross, whereby in his death, God punished him on behalf of the world. The atoning work of Christ showed the love of God to humankind and the world. It was a substitutionary death and vicarious. He was a substitute in the place of sinful humanity. Hence, Jesus said that He came to give his life as a ransom for or in place of many – $\lambda\upsilon\tau\rho\acute{\nu}\ \alpha\nu\tau\iota\ \pi\omicron\lambda\omega\nu$, *lutron anti poloon* (Mk 10:45).

Worthy of note is the fact that in the New Testament, sin affects all spheres of life – the cosmos and human beings. The whole creation is held in subjection due to sin (Rom 8:19-23) and human beings are depraved – all faculties of life are affected negatively. New Testament sometimes views sickness, calamities, etc. as the result of sin either of the sufferer or that of his parents. Hence, the question by the disciples of Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2 RSV). Every evil in the world is caused by sin and so are the catastrophes which plague the world. Thus pandemics like the Hungarian virus, Ebola virus and Corona virus (Covid-19), etc. are all result of sin. A person sin's does not just affect that person but affects on society. In this way, Adam's sin affects all his seeds (human race) and cosmos. In the same vein, Jesus Christ's (who is the last Adam) atonement also benefits all his descendants (1Cor. 15:22)

Terminologies of Sin

The main terminology used for sin is where the study of sin derives its name, that is, hamartiology, which is coined from the Greek word ἁμαρτία, hamartia. The word in question is from the verb ἁμαρτάνω, amartanoo which means 'not to hit' or 'to miss' the mark or taking a wrong road. This is akin to the Old Testament concept of חַטָּה (ḥtt', ḥatta or Chatta). This was used in a secular sense but later came to be used in the religious sense, hence "beyond its basic meaning of "missing" and its metaphorical sense of "going astray" or "not finding," ἁμαρτία, hamartia had come to have the predominant religious sense of "aberration" or "sinning"" (Stählin, 1999: E-copy). Only by its use in the LXX (Septuagint) that it became a distinctively religious term. This is a general term of sin in the New Testament. It denotes concrete wrongdoing, the violation of God's law (John 8:46; James 1:14; 1 John 1:8). It is personified in Pauline Epistles as a ruling principle in human life (cf. Rom. 5:12; 6:12, 14; 7:17, 20:8:2).

1. The next word for sin in NT is παράβασις, parabasis. This means primarily a going aside, overstepping of bounds and denotes transgression which is a breach of law (Vine, Unger, & White, 1996:640). It also means going beyond the norm (e.g.

Rom 4:15, 1Tim 2:14; Rom. 5:20). It is also translated as trespass because of the concept of overstepping of bounds. Closely related to παράβασις, parabasis is παράπτωμα, paraptoma which means "a lapse or deviation from truth and uprightness; a sin, misdeed" (Clavis, 1999: E-Copy). The sense of παράπτωμα, paraptoma is conveyed more in the following New Testament texts, 2 Cor 5:19; Gal 6:1; Eph 1:7; 2:1-5; Col 2:13 and is closely akin to the Old Testament ideas of פשע (psh', pasha) and עון ('wn. 'awon),

2. In Rom 1:18, Paul brings to the fore two other terminologies of sin used in the New Testament. These are ἀσέβεια, asebeia and ἀδικία, adikia. Ἀσέβεια, asebeia often means active ungodliness or impiety (cf. 2 Tim. 2:16). Ἀδικία, adikia, on the other hand, speaks of one that is contrary or opposite of righteousness (δικιαον, dikiaon). In some instances, ἀδικία, adikia is translated as injustice (Rom. 9:14), 'wickedness' (Rom. 2:8), 'unrighteousness' (Luke 18:6), 'falsehood' (John 7:18), 'iniquity' (2Tim. 2:19) and also equated with ἁμαρτία, hamartia (1John 3:4; 5:17).
3. Another terminology used for sin is ἀνομία anomia, The negation prefix (ἀ) to the word νομός, nomos (meaning law) and the content of the word ἀνομία anomia give two shades of meaning to the word. The first speaks of the word as a fact of 'there is no law' or 'without a/the law.' This means one living without a/the law. The second meaning is 'against a/the law' and means someone living against the law. These two meanings cannot be sharply differentiated from one another in the majority of cases. The difference between these two meanings is merely that of emphasis. In a general sense, ἀνομία anomia is 'wrongdoing', or 'sin'
4. κακία, kakia. In the New Testament, this word is used once for 'trouble' or 'evil' as in Matt 6:34 and in Acts 8:22, it denotes a single iniquity like grasping desire of Simon Magus or evil that human commit against each other. On the other hand, it is a force that destroys fellowship among humans. According to Paul, κακία, kakia is a course and a punishment consequent upon original sin and godlessness. This brings the

disruption of fellowship with God and its attendant disruption of fellowship with human beings

5. πωνηρός *poneeros*. This carries the sense of bad, harmful, evil and sometimes carries the same sense as κακία, *kakia*. Matt. 13:19 uses it to mean an evil one, which invariably is Satan as in 1John 3:12. Hence, Vine opines that "it expresses especially the 'active form of evil,' and is practically the same in meaning as κακία, *kakia*" (Vine, Unger, & White, 1996: E-Copy). Worthy of note is the fact that "both are general terms expressing moral and spiritual depravity (Luke 11:39; Acts 8:22; Rom. 1:29; Eph. 6:12)" (Murray & Milne, 1993: 1117).
6. Ὀφείλημα *opheileema*. This seems to be the last term for sin in New Testament. It appears only twice (i.e. Matt. 6:12 and Rom.15:27) where both are translated debt. It is only in Matt. 6:12 in the Lord's Prayer that the word is used in the context of sin. The sin here is seen as a debt which mortals owe (i.e. whenever any mortal sins, s/he has owed God), but the sinner cannot repay, so s/he asks God to write off the debt.

The general concept of sin in biblical perspective (both Old and New Testaments) is that any thought, word, or act considered immoral, shameful harmful, or alienating might be termed "sinful". This may be thought unexpressed or expressed, action and inaction which is seen as an affront to God's law. The ultimate punishment is eternal death, but with the atoning death of Jesus Christ, He has gain propitiation for all who believe in Him. Their sins are forgiven and they have passed from eternal death to eternal life (John 5:24; Rom 8:1).

The Concept of Sin in Efik (Idiok-nkpo)

The etymological meaning of the word *Idiok-nkpo* in Efik when translated as a noun is badness, wickedness, evil or vice; while its adjective depicts anything bad, wicked, unpleasant or vicious. But more than that, just as there are many Hebrew and Greek words for sin to depict or distinguish major sins from minor sins, Efik vocabulary is also saturated with manifold forms of words that constitute sinful actions; ranging from behavioural sin to sins that constitute a taboo, distinct from human error, ignorance, folly or frailty. The generic term

for sin is "*idiok-nkpo*"; the word "*idiok*" refers to anything bad, wicked, evil and vicious as stated above. However, the term "*nkpo*" is a prefix that describes the sin, Sin varies depending on the magnitude and the pattern. For instance, *idiok-ido* will refer to a bad attitude, *idiok-inua* (bad mouth, perky mouth), *idiok-eyin* (bad gaze), *idiok-ukot* (bad luck). All these are behavioural or moral sins that are regarded as bad habits and fall under moral or behavioural sin. These are different forms of sin distinct from taboos and other heinous sins as will be stated below. So for Efik people sin is in categories just as is in the Bible.

In a more general term, sin for Efik people is viewed more as a breaking of the law than merely a disobedient to God as mostly implied in Christianity. Adeyemo captures it better when he describes sin as "upsetting of the equilibrium of the society" (1979:52). It is from this perspective that Efik people see sin as a disturbance of the cosmic order, a disruption or distortion of the divine order. There are "forbidden" acts, which violate local customs, traditions, or religious ideals. Forbidden acts are generally defined as harmful not only to the individual but to the community, family, belief system, or personal well-being.

Categories and Dimensions of Sin in Efik Worldview

In Efik worldview, there are three dimensions of sins:

1. *Idiok-nkpo*: Attitudinal, moral or behavioural sins
2. *Ibet*: Prohibited sins (Taboos)
3. *Obom*: Forbidden sins (Abominable Sins)

***Idiok-nkpo*: Attitudinal Sins**

Attitudinal sin among Efik people is seen from the attitudinal defect in a person, a defect for which the person may or may not be responsible. This corresponds with the English notion of ignominious, opprobrious and shameful acts that are notorious. Those often referred to as notorious thief, "stealing is in his blood". By this, they mean that the person has a natural inclination to stealing, that stealing is part of his character. This is what is regarded as Kleptomania in modern terms (Ukpong, 1995: 138). It relates to attitudes, character, conducts, behaviours that manifest itself in social

daily activities. Good upbringing begets good morals and good morals strengthen the society; so the concept of sin is strongly tied to morality in Efik worldview.

Morality deals with what is good or bad, right or wrong in human behaviour. When applied to society, morality becomes the norms, manners and the customs that regulate the lifestyle of a people in a given society. Good morals strengthen the life of the society while bad behaviour weakens it. For a society to run smoothly, therefore, a good standard of morality is expected of its members and violation of any of the set morals constitutes sin, which must be sanctioned to serve as a deterrent against continuity. Failure to do so attracts punishment and failure to appease the ancestors or divinities may attract a communal punishment which may include natural phenomena like famine, pestilence and drought. The outbreak of famine and drought is usually believed to be the consequence of breaking the law and in most cases, the punishment is not only to the person who breaks the law but to the entire community.

Efik people believe that it is in relationship with one other that solidarity is achieved and any behaviour or action that threatens this solidarity is termed as sin and dangerous to the corporate existence of all and must be dealt with without delay. This solidarity is believed to go beyond the living and links up with the ancestors who are superintendents of the moral codes. As founding fathers, they can reward and punish offenders and reveal any secret sin by causing chaos in the community to alert members of a hidden sin that is awaiting confession or reconciliation. The fear of the wrath of the ancestors, therefore, provides some level of check on individuals in the community against any kind of sin.

Among the Efik people, bodily gesticulation is very important in every social gathering and one's daily interaction with one another, especially before the seniors. In conversation, the eye, the mouth, the facial expression, body movement and reactions all have roles to play in the daily activity of the people and misappropriation of these constitute sin in Efik. It is on the bases of this that moral sin varies

depending on the magnitude and the particular gesticulation used. It is the gesticulation or the action that determines the severity of the sin. For instance, *idiok-ido*, describes sins that are related to bad character. *mbubiam-ido* describes sins with habitual dirty lifestyle, *Obom-obom ido*, refers to sins associated with high temper, extreme wrath or anger, while *ndisime-ido* refers to foolish behavioural sin. These are personal sins directly associated with individuals but constitute offence if it is extended to another person. For instance, if any of the above sins results in parental abuse, wife battery, an insult to elderly ones, failure to greet an elderly person, stealing, lying, gossip, it may take a different dimension.

Idiok-inua (bad mouth, perky mouth) refers to the use of filthy or foul language against another person, it also refers to any verbal sin deliberately or willfully used to sinuate, instigate or castigate another person. For instance, if in the cause of two women quarrelling, one calls a married woman a harlot or a prostitute, the case will go beyond the quarrel and both the plaintiff and the accused must appear before '*iban-isong*' (Women Supreme Court) to prove their innocence. Here, note that some sins cut across boundaries; some sins that were initially regarded as minor, may assume a greater force depending on how and when it was said. *Idiok-eyin* (bad gaze), refers to disdainful looks, despising looks, when a younger person looks at an elderly person despitefully, or disrespectfully, it is regarded as a moral sin. This could be reported to the head of the family for disciplinary measure.

Other terms related to the moral sins are *Ukwang-ido* deceptive, pretentious, and crooked lifestyle. *Obut-obut-ido* applies to sins that are shameful, disgraceful, and worthless. *Ibak-ibak ido* implies wickedness or mischief of any kind, an intentional act against any person. *Ubi* implies a malicious sin, conspiracy or using any means in trying to destroy your enemy. While *afai-ido* are sin or acts associated with violence and brutality.

In other words, "sin" in Efik worldview, has a wider meaning than the English term for "sin". It connotes evil whether physical, social or

moral. Conceptually however there is a differentiation within the word depending on the offence committed or involved. All these are behavioural or moral sins that are regarded as bad habits and falls under moral or behavioural sin. These are different from taboos and other heinous sins as will be treated below. So for Efik people sin is in categories and dimensions.

***Ibet*: Prohibited Sins (Taboos) in Efik Traditional Religion**

Ibet is Efik word for Taboos and refers to sin against sacred moral codes. They reflect violations against social, customary and religious practices and behaviours. Turaki (1995:175) opines that they "are seen as the moral tool for socio-cultural and religious conditioning, maintaining the social order and harmony and structures of meaning and worldviews. He defines taboo as a place where the spirit world meets with social and religious customs and enforces the will of the sacred. Taboo is a legal system that dictates how life should be lived to realize salvation and blessings from the community, and a violation of it goes with a serious consequence including death sentence in some cases.

Adultery violates the social order because marriage is regarded as a sacred institution. Through it, people are born into the lineage which is made up of both the living and the dead ancestors is kept alive is perpetuated. Besides, the adultery of women constitutes a serious sin because through her a "strange blood" could be introduced into the family lineage. This is regarded as a violation of the sacredness of the lineage and if reconciliation is not made the adulterous woman or the child is expected to die (Ukpong, 1995:138).

Mbiti clearly expresses the idea of sins among Efik people when he said:

There exist therefore many laws, customs, set forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, observations and taboos constituting the moral code and ethics of a given community or society. Some of these are held sacred and are believed to have been instituted by God or national leaders...giving sanctity to the customs and

regulations of the community. Any breach of this code of behaviour is considered evil, wrong or bad, for it is an injury or destruction to the accepted social order and peace. It must be punished by the corporate community of both the living and the departed and God may also inflict punishment and bring about justice (1969:205).

Obom: Forbidden Sins (Abominable sins)

Obom, translated to mean forbidden sins are concerned with human beings in relationship to the supernatural being or beings. Sacred or religious sins are those moral sins that defile the cosmic order and affect the relationship between human beings and spirits. Sins that violate the sacred order include incest, felony, murder, taboo breach, adultery and any direct offence against the spiritual beings. These sins are regarded as grievous because it interferes with the cosmic order linking humans and the divine.

According to Ukpong (1995:138), wanton destruction of life violates the sacred order because life at every level is held by [the Efik] people as sacred. Life is believed to come directly and continuously from God, and to wantonly destroy it means to thwart God's creative activity. To break a taboo is to go against the wishes of the ancestors who belong to the sacred order. He further alludes that if someone murders a fellow human being in a cool-blood, the sin is regarded as an abomination, he is, first of all, believed to have been possessed by "*ekpo afai* or *ekpo-ibak*" since such sins are not regarded as normal. One can only act that way if he is under the influence of a destructive spirit called *ekpo-afai* or *ekpo-ibak*. *Ekpo-afai* or *ekpo-ibak* is believed to be responsible for suicidal sin or sins that are regarded as cruel and violent viewed from the metaphysical dimension, even though the culprit will not be excused for his evil action.

Similarly, any direct offence against the gods or spirits violates the sacred to which these beings belong. All other sins are considered as violating the cosmic and social orders, but *obom* is the sins against the spirit world and harmful to the generality of society. Sins under this

Akpanika, Ekpenyong Nyong and Eyo, Ubong Ekpenyong

are patricide and matricide: intentional killing or murder of one's father or mother. Fratricide and sororicide: is intentional killing or murdering of a brother or sister. Another crime included under forbidden sin is killing or murdering of a pregnant woman. This sin leads to one being ostracized in Efik land. This is the worst punishment that can be meted on an individual or a family. Anyone ostracized lives in isolation and is denied the right to citizenship. He is not to interact, attend or even greet others. He is denied the right of buying in the same market with others, fetching water in the same well, stream or river with others. In one word such a person lives in total isolation until he dies. For this reason, no one ever desires to commit a crime or break a law that will lead to the person being ostracized.

These three levels of sin are very important in understanding the process and meaning of sin in Efik cosmology. Deliverance is emphasized among Efik people because of some inherent sin connected with the evil acts of their forbear. Sin as Ukpong has observed is not just seen as a disobedient or violation of the laws of God or gods but a defect in a person's character and when an evil action is attributed to a natural inclination which is seen as a defect in the person's character, deliverance becomes a necessary solution. If the sinful spirit is not cast out, then the sin will persist and the victim is vulnerable and cannot be blamed because it is not within him to deliver himself.

Thus, in the past, anyone who was notoriously wicked was considered an enemy of the community and so was ostracized from the village. For, the continued presence of such a person divine punishment meant acceptance of any participation in his/her crime and could result in divine punishment for the community. Today ostracizing is practiced in the mild form by the exclusion of wicked people from participation in community social functions until they have shown remorse and have been reconciled with the community.

Today, the above categorization of sin in Efik has been harmonized with Western Christian thinking. Sin is seen today purely from a western point of view rather than from Efik traditional point of view.

Punishment for Sin in Efik

Punishment could be meted in three levels at the individual, family and communal levels. At the individual level, it could start with a guilty conscience. This is what Ukpong calls the level of guilt. According to him,

One feels guilty after having sinned whether one is seen by people or not. This arises from the fact that God is seen as omniscient, knowing everything that is done even in the darkest corner. Besides, the gods whom God has placed in charge of every facet of human life are also thought to know every action of human beings no matter how secret (1995:139).

Guilt is a subjective condition, which sometimes manifests and sometimes does not, evidently not all the evil acts described above implies guilt. Early morning rain is regarded as evil because it stops people from going to the farm, sickness is evil. None of these, however, implies guilt except perhaps in the sense of being a punishment, in certain cases, for an offence committed. However, all evils that result from or involved the direct action of human beings imply guilt but they are all counted as "sin". Thus to trespass on another person's property is sinful just as adultery or stealing is.

At the family and community levels, the hidden sin of an individual can bring the anger of God upon the entire family or community while the sin of the community may equally result in the punishment of one member of the community. This could happen by an unusual epidemic in the family or community that could be interpreted as a punishment from the gods and usually believed to come because of an unconfessed hidden sin of one person. Underscoring this belief and the importance of community living among traditional Africans, John S Mbiti noted that in

Traditional Africa, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (1969:106).

This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African views of man.

Appraisal of Sin in the Two Cultures

From the study, Christianity and Efik concepts of sin are indeed similar in some ways but they are also some differences especially in their emphases. For instance, while Efik concept of sin is centred on human being and his relationship with the cosmic order; Christianity emphasizes the need for pleasing God and being right with God. Anything that offends God constitutes sin and is regarded as rebellion or transgression of God's law, separating man from God. On the other hand, among the Efik people sin is not just separation, rebellion or transgression of God's commandment, neither is it just the breaking of the law or disobedient to God but a disturbance to the cosmic order, a disruption or distortion of the divine order. Sin is behaviour against the society, against the cosmic order and the disruption of the societal equilibrium as against the Biblical concept of being disobedient to God's divine laws, and violating His commandment.

The main prayer of African Traditional Religion is "My will be done" According to Gehman "Africans do not seek God for His own sake, they seek Him in worship for what they can get out of Him" (2001:205). Mbiti also rightly describes African Traditional Religion as "being utilitarian (practical); as a means to exploit rather than veneration" (1969:106). The chief end of man in Christianity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever and so the Christian prayer at all times is 'Thy Will be Done'

Contrary to Western Christian thought, not all the "bad" actions are regarded as sin, since some bad behaviours fall under secular jurisdictions, for the Efik, there is no separation. For example,

trespassing on another person's property is a civil offence in Western Christian thought, punishable by civil law, whereas in Efik traditional thought it is regarded as "grievous sin". The underlining factor or basis being that among the Efik people there are no two sets of laws, as seen in the West: secular and religious. Rather there is only one law, one life and one society; governed by the same spirits and ancestors; it is not departmentalized, it is holistic. There is no demarcation between the spiritual and the secular, life is cyclical, there is no difference between the sacred and the profane, the religious, the secular, life in itself is holistic, and sin is viewed holistically. Sin in Efik context is a disruption of an order, for which there must be forgiveness and reconciliation to balance the upset order. This makes the categorization of sin in Christianity different from the categorization of sin among Efik people.

Again, for Efik people, since sin is behaviours that are unacceptable to society, it makes the Christian concept of salvation difficult for them to understand. All sins have the above two dimensions but also, the sin that violated the sacred order had a sacred dimension. They had the effect of cutting away the individual or community from friendship with the spiritual beings so that they are no longer protected by the gods or spirit and they cannot invoke the gods or the spirit for success. This is a serious sanction because it made the people vulnerable at all sides.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above that in structure, sin in Efik religious thought embraces a lot more than what is normally regarded as morally bad acts in the Christian setting. It includes even those bad actions that are considered in western Christian thought as being too light to have a moral value. This is to be understood from the fact that African conceives the universe as embodying a perfect order of relationship between human beings and the spirit world. This orderly relation is conceived as coming from god through God's creation, and should not be violated. Any violation of it means sin and required a restoration through a process of reconciliation. Thus, every sin is seen as an offence against God but all sins do not have equal weight. Within each

category and dimensions of sin there are differences in the seriousness attached to each though this may not be immediately evident. The Africans have taboos but as noted in this work, these belong to only a category of sin and are expression of the totality of sinfulness or morality in general.

About its effect, sin is supposed to create an imbalance in the culprit's personality and in his relationship with his environment, fellow human beings and God. As to meaning, sin is understood in terms of personal involvement in a network of evil relationships. It is not merely a matter of a bad action performed by an individual and which concerns only the individuals and God. Rather it is an action that touches the community's well-being and the relationships within the community. Fundamentally and ultimately, every sin means an offence against God, though in its manifestation it may involve wrong done to a neighbour or the violation of the wish of an ancestor. For, as long as God is seen as the ultimate author of the laws in human society, it is to him that all violations of laws are referred.

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