

KUMUN U TAMEN (GREAT BEYOND): HEAVEN OR HELL IN THE TIV RELIGIOUS WORLD VIEW?

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Abstract. Over several decades, scholars of religion around the world, including both Africans and non-Africans, have been meaningfully engaged in the debate on matters relating to eschatology: death, judgement, heaven and hell, with a particular focus on its manifestation within the African religious worldview. The present paper is anchored on investigating and establishing the truth or otherwise of *Kumun u Tamen* (great beyond) as heaven or hell in the Tiv ethnic denomination of African religion. The paper offers a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon of *kumun u tamen* through a critical analysis of the existing literature. Two schools of thought have been identified regarding the issue of eschatology in African religion. The first school of thought affirms it, while the second denies it as non-existent in the African worldview. The study further found that, although the concept of heaven and hell is vague, it does exist in the Tiv religious worldview. Scholars who deny this are therefore wrong in their assumptions. In preparing this material, the author conducted field research, including organizing numerous interviews in different local government areas of Benue State, Nigeria. The paper calls on scholars, whether from Africa or elsewhere, to refrain from making categorical and sweeping statements denying the existence of eschatological ideas in the African religious worldview. The paper calls for further in-depth study on eschatology, especially with regard to the issues of heaven and hell, to establish the existence or otherwise of the phenomenon. The existing literature on eschatology is often tailored to death in the African worldview, with other aspects being inadequately explored.

Keywords: *Kumun u tamen* (great beyond), Tiv religious worldview, heaven, hell, eschatology

Conflict of interest: The author declared that there is no conflict of interest.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-84-98

For citation: Adega A.P. (2025). *Kumun u Tamen (Great Beyond): Heaven or Hell in the Tiv Religious World View?* *Journal of the Institute for African Studies*. Vol. 11. № 1. Pp. 84–98. <https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-84-98>

INTRODUCTION

The subject of the hereafter has been a source of profound contemplation for humanity since time immemorial. Man is not at rest when it comes to what happens to him/her at the terminal point of his/her tenancy on earth. The hereafter is most certainly uncertain. This lingering and unresolved question compels man to ponder eschatology: death, judgement, heaven and hell, the final destination of man after death. Thus, for a

long time, scholars in the sphere of religion, philosophy and theology have been engaged in a debate—fierce even—on the subject matter of eschatology, focusing on the existence or otherwise of the concept in the African religious worldview. Since death is a universal phenomenon, the attention is concentrated on the issues of judgement, heaven and hell in the African religion. The central question guiding this inquiry is whether Africans therefore have a belief in a judgement to come after death and their final destination as per heaven or hell.

Generally, two schools of thought are operational on the matter of eschatology in African religion. The first school of thought affirms this belief, while the second denies it completely. A notable challenge in this regard is the tendency of certain scholars to draw parallels between African religious eschatological concepts and those found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such comparisons often lead them to wrong conclusions about the existence or non-existence of eschatological ideas in the African religious worldview.

A number of factors explain why African eschatological ideas, and those of the Tiv in particular, seem hazy and unclear. First and foremost is the fact that the Tiv religion, like most African religions, has no theologians to put these ideas into proper perspective. The problem of recording the eschatological narrative also lies in the fact that during the colonial period, writing began to spread in colonial languages, and mass literacy came only in the postcolonial period. By the above, Africans, and the Tiv in particular, had a very limited opportunity of documenting their religious thoughts and/or ideas for future use.

Furthermore, it is probable that long periods of migration could have made these ideas lost in transit, with the remaining ideas being distorted as they were passed down from one generation to the next. Some of these ideas have to this day been preserved in myths because the Tiv religion is not a religion of books. For instance, a Tiv myth recounts how *Aôndo* (the Supreme Being) invited all the birds to a feast in heaven. While *Kulugh* (the tortoise) desired to attend, he had no wings. This made *Kulugh* devise a plan, requesting a feather from each bird so that he could fly to the feast in their company.

Cunningly, *Kulugh* advised the birds to choose names for themselves, and himself adopted the name “All-of-You.” At the feast, while entertaining the guests, the host said the food and drinks were for “all of you,” to which *Kulugh* responded and ate to his fill. Angered by this cunning behaviour, the birds demanded their feathers back, leaving the tortoise stranded in the heavenly abode. This myth clearly shows that heaven is conceived of as a place of great enjoyment. Similarly, heaven is portrayed as being above; hence the need to fly there, as it is not beneath or on earth. Furthermore, it is not every person who is to make heaven; the birds and no other species of animals could make it because they had wings. This implies that heaven exist but one has to have the qualifications to make his/her way to it.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Eschatology

The concept of eschatology has undoubtedly attracted the attention of religious scholars and theologians, especially those representing the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The interest in the subject is not unconnected with man’s anxiety about the afterlife and eternity. Gbenda argues that eschatology encompasses the ideas of death, afterlife, questions of immortality, human destiny, judgement, reward, and punishment [Gbenda 2005: vi].

Ekeke and Ekpenyong posit that eschatology is the theological concept used with reference to the doctrine relating to the last things [Ekeke, Ekpenyong 2024: 6]. The concept originates in Western culture and was initially employed to refer to ideas regarding to end-time events, existence after death, final judgement; the era of the Messiah and the theological predicament of reconciling God's justice. The authors further specify that in Christianity, this is a reference to the "four last things": resurrection, judgement, heaven, and hell [Ekeke, Ekpenyong 2024: 6]. It would probably be appropriate to add a fifth element, death, since man must die before the question of his resurrection and the other elements can be raised.

In their essays on the Orthodox Christian concept of hell, Agada and Ikuli observe that eschatology is employed in Christian theology with reference to the body of Orthodox Christian teachings concerning the ultimate destiny of humanity and the world [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 2]. They trace the etymological origin of the word to the Greek *eskhatos* (the last, the furthest). This makes the concept the doctrine of the last events, including death, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the body, the end of the world, personal judgement, the rewards in heaven for the righteous, and the damnation in hell for the evil-doers [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 2]. Kunhiyop explains that the Greek word *eschaton* refers to the coming end of the present world [Kunhiyop 2012: 210].

Ekeke and Ekpenyong argue that the conceptualisation and foundation of eschatology are situated within the framework of African traditions, culture and cosmological worldviews as observed in traditional religion and theology [Ekeke, Ekpenyong 2024: 11]. Such ideas, however, differ significantly from those of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Heaven

Conner asserts that heaven is an actual place (cf Gen 2:1, 4; Deut. 10:4); the heavens were created by God (1 Chron. 16:26, 31; Job 9:8) [Conner 1980: 301]. Heaven is the dwelling place of God and the elect angels; it is the everlasting home of the redeemed of all mankind. Conner similarly views that the Hebrew word *shamayim* means "heavens" or heights. The Greek word *ouranos* is translated as "the heavens, the skies" [Conner 1980: 301].

Brown stresses that, beyond its basic meaning as the dwelling place, the Christian theology of heaven as the ultimate or penultimate destiny of human beings is where most reflection has focused and where most problems have arisen [Brown 2022]. He posits that there is little doubt that heaven, as the place where God dwells, once had a specific literal designation, in the area beyond the vault of the sky. Heaven, in this perspective, was conceptualised as a solid firmament (Cf Gen.1:6–8; Isa. 45:12) resting on pillars (Job. 26:11) with windows (Gen.8:2) [Brown 2022].

The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* engages with the concept of heaven and hell within the context of Christian belief. It asserts that the fundamental premise underpinning diverse Christian conceptions of these states is the belief in the continuation of human existence beyond the physical realm. If human lives were not to extend beyond the grave, excluding a variety of ideas about reincarnation and *karma*, this would also have led to the preclusion of the future compensation of any kind for those who experienced horrendous evil during their earthly lives [Talbot 2022: 1]. Heaven and hell are essentially deserved compensations for the kind of earthly lives lived by humans on earth. People who embody virtue and righteousness go to heaven as a deserved reward for the virtuous lives they lived; bad people, on the other hand, go to hell as a just

punishment for immoral lives lived on earth. This is when the scales of justice are believed to be balanced [Talbot 2022: 1].

Conner alludes to the existence of three heavens: the third heaven, which is the immediate presence of God, called paradise. It is regarded as the most holy place or holiest of all; it represents the throne-room of the eternal Godhead, the place of the brightness of God's glory (cf. II Cor. 12:1–4, Lk 23:43; Rev.2:7). The second heaven is the central one, the planetary heaven. This corresponds to the holy place of the earthly sanctuary of Moses. The second heaven has several planets, galaxies and stars, sun, etc. (cf. Joel 2:10, 30; Haggai 2:6, Isa 50:3). The heavenly bodies mentioned above are those the prophets spoke of as being darkened in the last days in judgement prior to the coming of Christ. The first heaven is the heaven immediately above, surrounding the planet Earth. Man depends on this atmospheric heaven for sustenance: breath, earth productions, rain, wind, sun, etc. [Talbot 2022: 1].

Hell

This is the place or state of final punishment for the wicked, for all who die in their sins and unregenerate state (cf. Rev. 20:12–15). According to Conner [Conner 1980: 301–302], Hell is an actual place designated for the devil and his angels; while hell was not meant for humans initially, humans who chose to serve the devil in their lifetime are destined for it (Cf. Mtt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15).

Wyatt posits that the conception of hell in the late Christian sense of the term, with everlasting fire, is a comparatively recent development [Wyatt 2009: 162]. Agada and Ikuli [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 2–3] claim that the closest concept to the idea of hell in every Jewish religious thought is *sheol*, which indicates the underworld, a place where the dead go (Cf. Eccl. 9:10; Job 38:17; Isa. 38:10). Despite its roots in Jewish thought, it wasn't until around 200 BC and 200 AD that a coherent doctrine of hell had evolved in the Judeo-Christian tradition [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 18]. Subsequently, the idea of everlasting punishment in hell for wrongdoers became the capstone of orthodox Christian eschatology. Agada and Ikuli further observe [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 18] that the orthodox Christian notion of hell is closer to Islamic eschatology (Cf. Surah Al-A'laa 87:10–14; Surah Yunus 10:27; Surah Ta ha 20:74). In the Synoptic Gospel of Matthew 25:41, 46, Jesus alluded to the fact that wrongdoers will be punished.

Kunhiyop traces the concept of hell to the Hebrew *shoel* and the Greek *hades*, both of which can be translated as “grave” or “pit” [Kunhiyop 2012: 244]. He explains that in the Old Testament usage, hell is referred to as a grave. Hell is also used to refer to the place where both the wicked and righteous go immediately after death (Cf. Gen. 37:35, Num. 13:33; Job 14:13; Ps. 55:15 and Prov. 9:18) [Kunhiyop 2012: 244]. The current researcher reasons that the latter usage of the concept explains why, in the Apostles' Creed, Jesus Christ is said to have descended into hell before his ascension into heaven. It is acknowledged that there are other related terms used to describe hell, such as the *H Ἀβυσσος* (*abyss*) and *γέεννα* (*gehenna*) in Greek, *אבaddon* (*abaddon*) in Hebrew [Conner 1980: 305].

HEAVEN AND HELL IN AFRICAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS

The ideas of heaven and hell as avenues of reward and punishment for individuals as a result of the way they have lived their lives on earth are also found in African religious thought. While these concepts may appear remote, vague, and enigmatic to outsiders, they are nevertheless recognised and upheld by African communities. This discrepancy

can be attributed to the influence of divergent worldviews, environments, and experiences that characterise the African context in comparison to other religious and cultural traditions. Therefore, to deny Africans these ideas, when they exist, on the grounds that they are not explicitly and clearly stated as those of the revealed religions, merely serves to exacerbate an already complex situation and engenders further confusion in the pursuit of truth.

It is true that the categories of heaven and hell are absent from the belief systems of some African belief systems. However, the claim that all African peoples lack such concepts is deeply flawed. Even if the categories of heaven and hell are absent in some African belief systems, they are not denied in other faiths.

Building on the above premise, I make bold to counter the categorical assertion by Agada and Ikuli that African Traditional Religion (ATR) largely denies the existence of hell (heaven) [Agada, Ikuli 2024]. Their claim is based on the fact that violators of God's moral codes in African religious thought receive their punishment on earth, while those who have lived ethically laudable lives transit to a new phase of existence in the ancestral realm, the ideal home. I would like to clarify that the African understanding of heaven and hell must not be measured on the same scale as the Christian understanding in order to be said to exist or to be judged correct. This is a position of which Agada and Ikuli and most African scholars and their Western collaborators are guilty. What can be more heaven and hell than the above provision they allude to, the ancestral realm [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 1]?

However, writing in a definite tone about the existence of heaven and hell in African religious thought, Ikenga-Metuh specifically citing the Yoruba of Nigeria, asserts that: "...after death, the departed spirit who reaches the spirit land goes before *olodumare* (the Supreme Being) for final judgement based on the belief that men shall account for all they did on earth kneeling. If the deceased passes the litmus test having lived a good life on earth, his/her spirit is sent to *orun rere* (good heaven) where the person enjoys the company of his/her ancestors. The spirits which lived bad lives on earth are sent to *orun bukaru* (bad heaven-hell) characterised by broken pots and rubbish dumps, which clearly depict the shattered and hopeless condition of their existence [Ikenga-Metuh 1987: 261–262].

Several African scholars, such as Awolalu and Dopamu [Awolalu, Dopamu 1979], Opoku [Opoku 1975], Fatokun [Fatokun 2005], Onunwa [Onunwa 1990], and Gbenda [Gbenda 2005] as well as their Western counterparts Hawkins [Hawkins 1996] and Parrinder [Parrinder 1968] have, in various studies, affirmed that African religious thought has a well-founded eschatological perspective of death, judgement, heaven, and hell. These ideas, however, differ from those of the revealed religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The above position has reaffirmed my earlier view that Africa is a large continent, and as a result, not all the ethnic nationalities share a single worldview. This implies that some ideas may be found in some ethnic groups but may not be found in the others. This does not, however, negate the fact that such ideas exist in African religious thought.

Ghanian scholar Kwasi Wiredu's assertion that the concept of hell is absent from African religious thought is a claim that merits closer scrutiny, as it raises several issues. First, it is essential to acknowledge that Wiredu is primarily a scholar of African philosophy as opposed to African theology. His work focuses on conceptual analysis and the application of Western philosophical categories to African thought. In doing so, he tends to abstract and generalize concepts such as the afterlife in ways that may not fully capture the indigenous nuances found in diverse African religious systems [Wiredu 2010: 45].

Moreover, because Wiredu's expertise lies in philosophy, his framework is inherently shaped by Western epistemological assumptions. His analysis often employs dichotomies and categories—such as the clear separation of heaven and hell—that may not align with the fluid and context-specific understandings of eschatology present in many African traditions. For example, many African religious practices conceive of the afterlife in relational and communal terms rather than as strictly dualistic models of eternal reward or punishment [Mbiti 1969: 117].

Additionally, Wiredu's research has been predominantly focused on Akan philosophical discourse, within which the interpretive framework is aligned with the particular cultural and linguistic context of the Akan people. This narrow focus means that his categorical statements about the absence of a hell concept do not necessarily generalize to the broader spectrum of African religious thought. The Akan understanding of the afterlife is distinct from that of other African societies, where punitive or corrective afterlife realms—albeit different from the Western notion of hell—are present and play an integral role in social and moral regulation [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 6].

When Wiredu employs Western prisms to interpret African concepts, he risks overlooking indigenous interpretations that do include notions of punitive afterlife states. Ethnographic studies, for example, show that several African communities have eschatological ideas that include punishment for moral transgressions—albeit these ideas are often embedded in a broader framework of communal continuity and ancestral veneration rather than individual damnation [Downes 1971: 123].

Furthermore, the methodological approach adopted by Wiredu emphasizes abstraction over empirical engagement with local religious practices. As a result, his theoretical assertions may inadvertently dismiss the lived experiences and ritual expressions that do, in fact, embody concepts akin to hell in various African contexts. This is significant because many indigenous systems articulate a form of retributive justice that, while not identical to the eternal damnation described in some Western theologies, nonetheless functions as a mechanism for enforcing moral order [Mbiti 1969: 161].

In light of these critiques, it becomes clear that Wiredu's philosophical analysis, while valuable within its own scope, cannot serve as a definitive account of African eschatological thought. A more comprehensive study of African religion would benefit from integrating anthropological and theological perspectives that take into account the specificities of local practices and terminologies. Such interdisciplinary work reveals that concepts analogous to hell, including punitive afterlife realms or transitional states, are indeed present in some African religious systems [Agada, Ikuli 2024: 7].

Ultimately, while Wiredu's work provides an important philosophical perspective on African thought, his categorical rejection of the concept of hell overlooks the diversity and complexity inherent in indigenous religious beliefs. A more nuanced analysis would recognize that different African societies articulate the afterlife in varied ways, and that the absence of a direct equivalent to the Western notion of hell does not preclude the existence of concepts of moral retribution and posthumous judgement [Mbiti 1969: 117].

Conversely, Wiredu's claim is limited by his disciplinary focus and methodological approach. His use of Western philosophical categories to analyze African thought leads to generalizations that fail to account for the rich variety of indigenous religious experience. For a complete understanding, one must consider the specific cultural contexts, such as those observed among the Akan and other groups, in which ideas of punishment and moral retribution in the afterlife are articulated, even if they do not mirror the conventional Western model of hell.

Similarly, cultural practices in African religion, such as the cult of the ancestors, which is characterised by the belief that only men of impeccable character are admitted to the ancestorship, appear to be indicative of the ideas of heaven and hell. Those with questionable characters do not make it to the ancestral cult. Among the Idoma of Benue State, the *Alekwu* represents the ancestral cult—the spirits of departed members of the family. As Ekeke and Ekpenyong observe on the above matter: There is a belief among certain African communities that upon death, the soul departs from the physical body, which undergoes decomposition in the earth. As for the soul which survives bodily death embarks on a journey to the spirit realm, which is inhabited by entities referred to as spirits [Kunhiyop 2012: 5]. Also, the idea of reincarnation held by some African ethnic groups, further portrays the idea of punishment and reward heaven-hell – in which those who have lived morally good lives are rewarded with higher levels of existences while those that are found wanting assume a lower status in the hereafter, as they could reincarnate as lower animals or objects in their next life. All these attributes encourage Africans to live worthy lives and to maintain healthy relationships between themselves, with others and with the environment.

It is evident that eschatological ideas of death, judgement, heaven, and hell are firmly embedded in African worldviews as inherent to their traditional religion and theology. As a matter of fact, it is an undeniable fact that all religious traditions possess a distinct understanding of eschatological beliefs.

HEAVEN AND HELL IN THE TIV COSMOLOGY

Before discussing the concepts of heaven and hell in Tiv cosmology, it is pertinent to note that the Tiv have well-developed ideas about eschatology in general. Thus, Gbenda was right to say that the Tiv have a well-developed eschatology when compared to Christianity and Islam. He believes that this scenario was responsible for the acceptance of the two revealed religions by the Tiv. He notes that contrary to the wrong notions held by some scholars, the Tiv believe in the afterlife [Gbenda 2005: vii].

When it comes to death, for instance, the Tiv, like other humans, acknowledge death as a universal phenomenon. The Tiv refer to death as *ku*, while the dead is *or kpen*. Since all humans are bound to die, a fact admitted by the Tiv, they say *ku ka kyulen gbenda* (death is the ultimate end); they also say *ku ka kom gbenda u hanma or a kaa shami yo* (death is a highway that all human beings will cross). A Tiv song similarly says: *ku penda kasuwa yo ior mba yemen gudu gudu; hanma or aza; kasuwa la mba ze mba koon ga* (meaning: death has established a market and humans are attending in droves; those who attend the market never return home) [Adega 2018: 18].

Gbenda further elaborates on the Tiv belief system, asserting that upon death, he or she joins another world, the world of spirits and ancestors. They believe in immortality of the soul, judgement, and in the hereafter [Gbenda, 2005: vii]. Therefore, when a person dies, he/she appears before *Aôndo* (the Supreme Being), where his/her soul is judged. In this perspective, Adega reports that when the Tiv see a halo around the moon, they interpret it as *Aôndo* holding a judgement/court session for the newly departed soul [Adega 2015: 192].

The catch, however, is that the Tiv are unable to explain what happens next to the soul or where it goes after its judgement. This is in contrast to the Akamba, who, sharing a similar belief to the Tiv, hold that the righteous are rewarded with a stay on the moon; while the evil ones are sent to the sun, possibly to be scorched as in the case of biblical hellfire. The virtuous repose in the coolness of the moon—heaven-like abode [Mbiti

1969: 260]. Although the idea of punishment and reward is not properly spelt out, especially in the Tiv view, the eschatological ideas are very much present in both thoughts.

Therefore, the current author considers Downes' statement to be both true and false in equal measure when he states of the Tiv eschatology that "*there is little or no idea evident of a life beyond the grave to be discovered by the individual; there are quite definite allusions to a future life both in songs and in customs*" [Downes 1933]. It would seem Downes agrees and disagrees about Tiv eschatology. However, the aforementioned points serve to resolve this apparent ambiguity.

On the issue of heaven and hell, there is no one direct word which qualifies the two concepts. It is therefore easier to find words that describe these concepts. As a consequence, the contemporary Tiv words *tar tor* (heaven) and *gyam usu/zege usu* (mighty fire, hell) are associated with the advent of Christian missionary endeavours in Tivland and their translation of the Bible into the Tiv language. This does not, however, significantly affect the meanings of the concepts as places of peace and torment, as evidenced by the views expressed by several Tivs in oral interviews during data collection for this paper.

Speaking of heaven, Ahula Gugul in an oral interview opined that the Tiv refer to heaven as *kumun u tamen* (great beyond), a distance from the earth. He explained that heaven/*kumun u tamen* is the dwelling place of *Aôndo* (the Supreme Being) and that the souls of the departed transit to live with him. This view makes *kumun u tamen* a real place, but it cannot be seen with the physical eyes, but spiritual.¹ For Zaagee Abaki, *kumun u tamen* is a holy place where the ancestors live.²

In their contributions, Agber Ortsa and Emberga Atule Gaga advanced the argument that *kumun u tamen* (heaven) was the place of rest reserved for the children of *Takuruku*, the great ancestor of the Tiv. They observed that only the holy and the righteous are admitted to this place. This implies those who had lived morally good lives while on earth. They emphasised that the concepts of *tar tor* and *gyam usu* are borrowed from the white man.³ This explains why Kumaiin Ikpiayugh stated that it is a place where those who have lived morally good lives on earth are given peace by *Takuruku*.⁴

According to Samuel Asom, *kumun u tamen* is the bosom of God; it is a place that the Tiv believe is good, where there is no suffering but enjoyment.⁵ Chia Teryima Emmanuel, for his part, says *kumun u tamen* is the most high or heavenly abode, the throne of the most high God.⁶ From the above, it is clear that the Tiv see *kumun u tamen* as a heaven where the souls of the dead go; they see this place as being holy, and only those who have lived morally good lives are admitted to enjoy a state of peace as a reward for the good lives they have lived while on earth. Also, only the aged, not children, make it to this abode. The Tiv conceptualise death not as an end but as a transformative passage. It is believed that if one lives a morally upright life and undergoes proper funeral rites (a "good death" or *ku dedoo*), one is reintegrated into the ancestral realm (*kumun u tamen*) to sustain communal harmony and receive blessings, whereas a "bad death" (*ku ubo*) results in a restless spirit that disrupts the social balance.

¹ Author's interview with Ahula Gugul, Ikov, Ushongo LGA, Benue State, 23 April 2024.

² Author's interview with Zaagee Abaki, Mbagundu, Shangev-Tiev, Konshisha LGA, 15 March 2024.

³ Author's interview with Agber Ortsa, Uvii, Guma LGA, Benue State, 18 February 2024.

⁴ Author's interview with Kumaiin Kpaiyugh, Agan, Makurdi LGA, Benue State, 25 February 2024.

⁵ Author's interview with Samuel Asom, GRA, Gboko, Benue State, 24 February 2024.

⁶ Author's interview with Chia Teryima Emmanuel, Jao-Aka, Turan, Kwande LGA, 17 February 2024.

Atser Ikyotser remarks that the aged referenced above refers to men who have accomplished in their lifetime: married, begotten children, lived good lives, and had been initiated into the highest *akombo* (mystical forces/rituals) in their communities. Above all, these aged men must have died a good death.⁷ All the respondents were of the view that women also reach *kumun u tamen* if they have lived good lives on earth. From the above, *kumun u tamen* is important in Tiv cosmology because it encourages good deeds and behaviour during a person's sojourn on earth.

Furthermore, Takuruku, the great ancestor and father of the Tiv, the progenitor of the Tiv, is often called upon through the *indyer* (the hewn wooden talking drum) to welcome an elderly departed soul on the way to *kumun u tamen*. This was done before the burial of the deceased.

Tiv:

Takuruku Anyam Azenga we sha kumun
Tile jigh jigh, keghen wangou, wangou ngu koundoun
Sha kumun u tamen, vande tile jigh jigh
Keghen wangou ngu van...sha kumun u tamen [Downes 1971: 60].

English:

Takurukum Anyam Azenga in the world above (great abode),
Stand still and wait for your kin,
He is ascending to the great abode.
Vande, stand still anticipating your kin,
Your kin is coming to the great abode...

Downes stated that the idea portrayed above, clearly indicates the concept of a heaven for the great above where ancestors exist [Downes 1933: 54; Downes 1971: 61]. When asked why it was Takuruku who was called upon to welcome the souls of the departed to *kumun u tamen*, Ahula Gugul posited that no one was better suited for the role other than Takuruku Anyam Azenga, the progenitor of the Tiv, who had accomplished a lot during his lifetime. He was also a morally good man who hated evil deeds and when he passed on, transited to *kumun u tamen*, where he lives with other Tiv ancestors [Adega 2022].

On the one hand, the respondents were of the view that hell in Tiv cosmology was located on earth, characterised by suffering and discomfort. One of the respondents who shared this view is Utov Gbabo.⁸ This means that hell for the Tiv is a place of torment and torture (the world they live in). Speaking of hell in Tiv cosmology, Zaagee Abaki posits that while heaven exists above, hell is situated on earth. According to him, hell is characterised by evil and malevolent witches (*mbatsav*) who exhume the dead (*u dughun mbakpenev*) who had perpetrated evil in their lifetimes. He claimed that when the *mbatsav* exhume such evil people from the grave, they are tortured, "killed" and eaten by the witches.⁹ "Killed" again means that even though the individual is already dead, the *mbatsav* perform a ritualistic re-killing of the corpse spiritually—an act meant to symbolically and/or physically ensure that any residual malevolent force is completely eradicated before the body is consumed by the witches.

⁷ Author's interview with Atser Ikyotser, Ikov, Ushongo LGA, Benue State, 22 February 2024.

⁸ Author's interview with Utov Gbabo, Agan, Makurdi LGA, Benue State, 25 February 2024.

⁹ Author's interview with Zaagee Abaki, Mbagundu, Shangev-Tiev, Konshisha LGA, Benue State, 15 March 2024.

The tortures inflicted by the *mbastav* (witches) on the exhumed evil souls include physical beating and ridiculing. Shishima reports that the witches feed and fatten the resurrected dead with *Ishwa* (sesame seed/beniseed) before slaughtering [Shishima 1999: 58]. Adega reports that witches could tie their victims on *tihi u ihor* (refuse dumps) where the person had to feed on refuse [Adega 2019]. Furthermore, when the *mbastav* exhume the dead and buried, they could transform the soul of such a victim into any animal of their choice. Adega explains that in Tiv cosmology, the *mbastav* sell such animals to unsuspecting butchers, who buy and slaughter such “animals” and sell to equally unsuspecting members of the public [Adega 2022: 207–208].

The prospect of the above fate drives Tiv to seek Christian funerals at their passage as an escape avenue. Adega and Jando reaffirm this position where they state: “...the one reason that is most striking and which increases the anxiety and craving or need for Christian burial by Tiv traditionalists is the fear of being exhumed by the *mbatsav* after a deceased is buried. They maintain that in Tiv cosmology, one of the high points of witchcraft is the eating of human flesh, in which the *mbastav* revive selected buried corpses, which they again kill and eat” [Adega, Jando 2022: 38]. The secret behind Tiv traditionalists crave for Christian burials lies in the belief that the *mbastav* are unable to exhume bodies interred by Christian clergies, especially Reverend Fathers of the Catholic Church.

From the foregoing discussion of the Tiv version of heaven (*kumun u tamen*) and hell, which is located on earth, as opposed to the Abrahamic tradition of angels, saints, and Jesus welcoming the soul of the righteous departed to heaven. Takuruku Anyam Azenga, the father and the progenitor of the Tiv, welcomes all the departed souls to *kumun u tamen* and authenticates the righteous souls which are sent by him to *kumun u tamen* to enjoy peace and rest, while the souls of the evil ones are left to the *mbatsav* to be tortured. In Tiv cosmology, witches serve as the Satan, and all departed souls, whether evil or righteous, must first appear before Takuruku for authentication.

KUMUN U TAMEN (GREAT BEYOND) AS HEAVEN IN TIV RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW

There are several indications that *kumun u tamen* is heaven in the Tiv religious worldview. First and foremost, *kumun u tamen* is conceived of by the Tiv as being above, a great beyond, a distant place and dwelling place of *Aôndo* (the Supreme Being). This implies that *Aôndo* dwells up in the firmaments, his registered domicile. This explains why the Tiv refer to the firmament and the sky above as *Aôndo*.

Similarly, when Takuruku is asked to welcome the soul of a deceased elder Tiv to *kumun u tamen*, as indicated earlier in the beating of the *indyer* (hewn wooden talking drum), he (Takuruku) is told to be ready in anticipation of his kin who is ascending (*kondon sha*) *kumun u tamen*. This suggests that the soul of a departed Tiv ascends to *kumun u tamen* to reunite with the ancestor. In an oral interview, Ahula Gugul also confirmed that the word “*kondo*” signifies that *kumun u tamen* is upward, hence the need for an ascension of the departed soul.¹⁰

Kumun u tamen is a place free of pain, hardship, and suffering, which are abundant in the human stay on earth; therefore, it is a place of rest, peace. It is a holy place, a place to which all departed souls ascend at death. It is at *kumun u tamen* that the righteous souls of

¹⁰ Author’s interview with Ahula Gugul, Ikov, Ushongo LGA, Benue State, 23 April 2024.

those who lived morally good lives live with Takuruku and other Tiv ancestors in the service of *Aôndo*. *Kumun u tamen* is where all good things are found, just like the Christian heaven, where a good life is envisaged and where God, the saints, the band of angels, and Jesus Christ reside.

A catholic Christian funeral song similarly indicates that *kumun u tamen* is heaven. The song goes thus:

Chorus:

Yesu, Yesu, Yesu tile jigh jigh keghen Angyo (2x)

Angyo ngu kondon sha kumun u tamen (2x)

Mbatyomov cii ve kegh un gbenda, mbatyomov cica ve za kegh un gbenda

Refrain:

Ter Aondo wan wou gba kondo ve...

English:

Chorus:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, stand firm in anticipation of your brother (2x)

Your brother is ascending unto *kumun u tamen* (2x)

The band of angels should welcome him/her.

Refrain:

Almighty God, your child is ascending...

This funeral song is often sung when the casket/coffin bearing the remains of the deceased is being lowered into the grave and at the time of filling the grave. It is worth noting that Christianity, with its antagonism to Tiv religion and culture, would never have borrowed the Tiv ancestral song calling on Takuruku to receive the soul of the departed kin ascending to *kumun u tamen* (heaven) if it had no authenticity or credence. Ordinarily, such a song would be termed fetish, barbaric, juju, primitive, paganism diabolic and savage which are wrong concepts and nomenclatures used by Euro-American missionaries, anthropologists and colonial administrators to wrongly label much of African Religion and culture which they did not clearly understand.

Also, in the performance of rituals and the process of *akombo a soron* (healing/appeasement of mystical forces), the priests in Tiv religion and culture make pronouncements, which end with the call for justice or righteous to ascend and for guilt/sin to descend. Gbenda gives an example of such a healing and cleansing prayer/incantation as follows:

Tiv:

mnenge a nenge ashe ga,

Myam, mna...

A kor ikyegh a nam,

Oon yam un shamin cica cii cii

Ibo sen! Ibo sen! Ibo sen!

Ishô kôndo! Ishô kôndo! Ishô kôndo [Gbenda 2006: 68]!

English:

I have not (just) seen with my eyes,

I bought, I've given...

I am washing him (her) from all guilt,

Guilt float downwards (3x)
Innocence (justice) ascends (3x)

Thus, in the Tiv cosmological worldview, it is righteousness or innocence that ascends to God, where all is good, as opposed to guilt or evil, which naturally *sen* (descends) to the earth. The Tiv couldn't have been wrong in this assumption. Hence, even in Christian theology, God, the angels/saints and Jesus Christ, who represent the good, are up in heaven, as opposed to Satan, who has been cast down to the earth, where he perpetrates evil, always prowling on the lookout for a soul to devour (cf. 1 Peter 5:8). Hell, therefore, is beneath, *Shoel* and *Hades*, where there is total darkness, characterized by torture, sickness, misery, and death, where evil prevails.

It is noteworthy that in the call to Takuruku to welcome a departed kinsman to *kumun u tamen* (heaven), women and children are missing, as the *indyer* makes only an allusion to man. This prompts the following question: is the Tiv *kumun u tamen*/heaven only an abode for men of renown? In response to this question, all respondents to this study clearly indicated in their responses that women who die as morally good or righteous persons could also make it to *kumun utamen* in the sense that they are also daughters of *Takuruku* and could therefore not be denied the peace of the heavenly abode. The only challenge is that Tiv religious thought did not clearly articulate this principle, in contrast to the clear articulation found in Christianity and Islam.

It is imperative to acknowledge that Tiv society is characterised by a masculine/patriarchal structure, which engenders various forms of discrimination against women. Angya, commenting on the discrimination against women, asserts that: "...many cultures and societies, do not realize the crucial role of women in the good development of society. Rather, women have been relegated to the sidelines and subjected to discrimination and marginalization" [Angya 2024: 392].

Tiv culture, like Jewish and Arabic, saw more women, but their voices were muted and their numbers disregarded. The apostle Paul would even admonish women to be silent in the congregation. Tiv culture, in its discrimination of feminine gender, lumped women and children together. As far as the Tiv were concerned, even the views of a boy were considered more meaningful than those of an old woman. This explains why women have not been mentioned in the call from the *indyer* on Takuruku to welcome a departed soul to *kumun u tamen*. This finds relevance in the Jewish culture as recorded in the Gospel of John 6:1–15, where Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves of bread and two fish. Five thousand men are said to have eaten this miraculous meal and have had their fill, while the throng of women and children who were also present were excluded from the head count.

CONCLUSION

This study examined eschatological beliefs in African religion with specific reference to the Tiv. The emphasis was placed on the Tiv ideas of heaven and hell. The study established that eschatological beliefs exist in African societies such as the Tiv. The challenge is that some of these ideas are vague and therefore not clearly articulated as in the Christian and Islamic religions.

The study found that *kumun u tamen* is heaven in Tiv cosmology, as only the souls of those who were righteous and died as morally good people ascend to *kumun u tamen*, where they are welcomed home by Takuruku Anyam Azenga, the great forefather of the

Tiv. Evil Tiv people who die are exhumed by the *mbatsav* (witches), tortured and “killed,” and their meat eaten. This is a kind of second death reminiscent of hell, while the righteous enjoy peace in *kumun u tamen*.

The study calls on scholars, particularly those in African religion, to do more research into the issue of eschatology. Such research would debunk insinuations in certain quarters that deny the existence of eschatological ideas in African/Tiv religion. Such blanket denials do not contribute to the advancement of knowledge. Moreover, existing studies deal with isolated aspects of eschatology in African societies. Since Africa is such a large continent and African religion has several denominations, the study suggests that ethnic/ethnographic studies should be encouraged, where scholars of African religion would conduct a thorough study of eschatology in their ethnic denominations of African religion for authenticity, reliability, and balance.

Finally, the Tiv words *tar tor* (heaven) and *gyam usu/zege usu* (hell) are foreign concepts of heaven and hell associated with Christian theologians. In the Tiv belief system, heaven remains *kumun u tamen*; while the idea of hell indicates that hell is on earth, and thus, the souls of evil people who ascend to *kumun utamen* are authenticated by Takuruku Anyam Azenga and left to be exhumed and tortured by the *mbatsav*. There is also no second coming of a “Christ/Messiah” in Tiv eschatological beliefs. Tiv scholars must therefore be discouraged from comparing what exists in other religious worldviews, such as Christianity and Islam, with Tiv religion. A direct transfer of these dogmas to the Tiv beliefs appears unjustified. Since religion has to do with a set of beliefs, what someone else believes in will not necessarily be the same, available or applicable in another.

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Научная статья

KUMUN U TAMEN (ВЕЛИКИЙ ПОТУСТОРОННИЙ МИР): РАЙ ИЛИ АД В РЕЛИГИОЗНОМ МИРОВОЗЗРЕНИИ ТИВОВ?

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Аннотация. На протяжении нескольких десятилетий религиоведы всего мира, как африканцы, так и неафриканцы, активно изучают вопросы, связанные с эсхатологией: смертью, Судом, раем и адом, уделяя особое внимание их проявлению в африканском религиозном мировоззрении. Цель данной статьи – исследовать и установить истинность или ошибочность концепции *kumun u tamen* (великий потусторонний мир) как рая или ада в этнической деноминации африканской религии Тив. В статье предлагается комплексное объяснение феномена *kumun u tamen* на основе критического анализа существующей литературы. Выделяются две школы мысли по вопросу эсхатологии в африканской религии. Первая школа подтверждает ее существование, вторая отрицает ее как несуществующую в африканском мировоззрении. Исследование также показало, что, хотя понятие рая и ада расплывчато, оно существует в религиозном мировоззрении тивов. Поэтому ученые, которые отрицают его существование, по мнению автора статьи, ошибаются в своих предположениях. При подготовке данного материала автор провел

полевые исследования, в том числе организовал многочисленные интервью в различных районах штата Бенуэ (Нигерия). В статье содержится призыв к ученым, как из Африки, так и из других стран, воздержаться от категоричных и огульных заявлений, отрицающих существование эсхатологических идей в африканском религиозном мировоззрении. Автор призывает к дальнейшему углубленному изучению эсхатологии, особенно в отношении вопросов рая и ада, чтобы установить наличие или отсутствие этого явления. Существующая литература по эсхатологии часто фокусируется на смерти в африканском мировоззрении, при этом многие другие аспекты изучены недостаточно.

Ключевые слова: *Kumun u tamen* (великий потусторонний мир), религиозное мировоззрение тивов, рай, ад, эсхатология.

Конфликт интересов: автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-84-98

Для цитирования: Адега Э.Ф. *Kumun u tamen* (великий потусторонний мир): рай или ад в религиозном мировоззрении тивов? *Ученые записки Института Африки РАН*. 2025. Т. 11. № 1. С. 84–98. <https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-84-98>