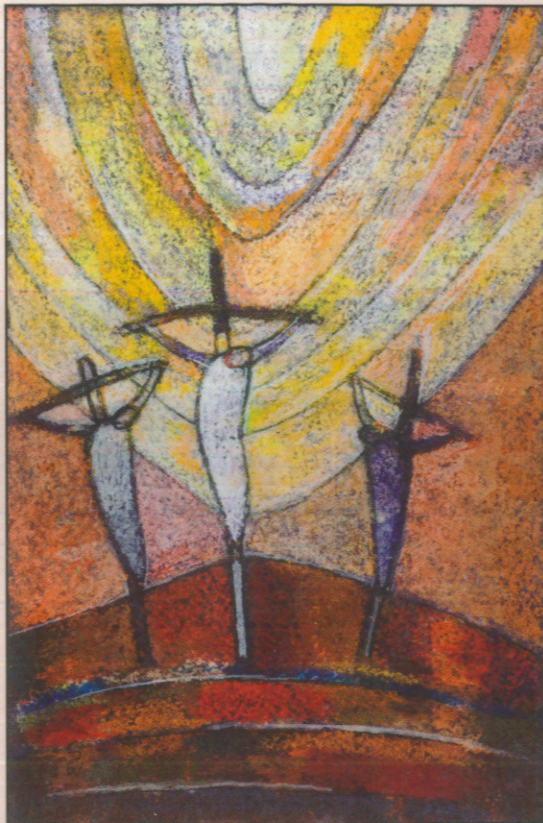


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Article



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Scramble for Souls: Scrutinizing the Nature, Growth, and Competing Claims of Ori-Oke in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines the evolution of Ori-Oke (Yoruba term for prayer mountain) as a religious phenomenon in Ilorin, Nigeria. Based on the participatory spirituality theory of J. N. Ferrer, the article discusses the impact of Ori-Oke on people's daily life and how its spirituality strives to provide satisfying answers to the deepest questions of human existence. It highlights the characteristics of Ori-Oke spirituality and prayer formats. The article concludes with reflections on the reasons Ori-Oke is trending and the future it holds for peaceful coexistence and dialogue among religions in Nigeria.

Keywords

Ori-Oke, Prayer Mountain, African spirituality, Yoruba spirituality, participatory spirituality theory, mountain prophets, Orisha, spiritual oppression, religious outsiders

The focus of our research is on Ori-Oke (prayer mountain[s]), especially in Ilorin, Nigeria. Kierkegaard (1813–55) once said, “There is truth that matters and truth that doesn't matter.” The Ilorin Ori-Oke are examples of the truth of a people's spirituality that matters. This religious phenomenon is of great importance throughout the city,

having a great impact on people's daily lives and economic development. Ori-Oke strive to provide satisfying answers to people's deepest and most fundamental questions and therefore deserve more research.

In Ilorin, like most places in Africa, factors and situations abound that provoke basic questions. People harassed by ancestral forces, denied freedom, deprived of their just rights, and humiliated in their personal and corporate dignity do not rest until a proper balance of justice is received from God. Put differently, as long as human beings have limited knowledge to fight sickness and disease, death and evil spirits, including various types of misfortune and other challenges of life, the craving and longing for God will certainly continue. Hence, the competing claims to Ori-Oke in Ilorin have continued unabated. I. N. Ndiokwere offers a good description of the human longing for God in a typical African society that enhances claims to places of prayers: “While it is obvious to an average African that man's life in society is not always secure, some keep their faith and trust in God and entertain no fear. Others use certain mixed religious means to support what they gain from Christianity. There are other groups who believe that security will come from one religious movement or the other.”¹ In other words, in places of prayer, including the prayer mountains, human beings look for, among other things, protection and freedom from danger or anything that might threaten their human existence. In these places people also look for divine favor and fulfillment of their destiny on earth.

In African Christianity, prayer involves the whole personality of the supplicant as he or she expresses emotions and indeed the whole heart through different postures such as kneeling, standing, stooping, or bending down. In Ilorin, Ori-Oke accommodate all these, including economic activities, such as the sale of olive oil, white mantles, Bibles, and spiritual books, to aid spiritual concentration and adjust to social change. Ori-Oke are secluded places, purposely meant for personal and community prayers. What makes this religious phenomenon unique is that the place is considered to be sacred ground, a place where prayer can easily be answered. The religious activities that take place on the mountains call for review and appraisal, especially for understanding within the context of mission and for probing deeper into this means through which the majority of natives seek answers to the basic challenges in their lives.

This research investigates the nature of Ori-Oke and the spiritual hunger they seek to satisfy, which has sustained their growth. Our investigation shows how people's longings and hopes are realized after an encounter with God on these prayer mountains. The present work is a theology of mission and interior prayer; it surveys the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people involved in a struggle—one of having Jesus in my heart but grandpa in my bones. The struggle is economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual. Scholars have focused primarily on the cultural aspects of the struggle, the social aspects, and sometimes also the economic. But the spiritual aspects are clearly significant, for Africans have at heart a spiritual interpretation of the realities of life. In this regard, an insightful question by Zablon Nthambun is very central to the Ori-Oke phenomenon: “What does it mean to tell an African that God was

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made flesh and dwelt among Africans in the midst of hunger, oppression, loss of dignity, suffering and pain?"²

Yet, many religious leaders and teachers are slow to recognize and incorporate Ori-Oke spirituality in their ethical teachings. Much harm has been inflicted on Ori-Oke spirituality by hasty generalizations and superficial theorizing, and therefore this study concentrates upon analysis of possibilities and clarifications of the term "Ori-Oke spirituality," using participatory spirituality theory. This research is based on three hypotheses:

1. Contemporary researchers and conservative Christian missionaries have ignored Ori-Oke in the study of African spirituality.
2. Ori-Oke spirituality highlights the vision of the Yoruba indigenous tradition.
3. Ori-Oke influence the daily lives of the majority of the people in Ilorin, Nigeria.

The research team desires that the present article contribute to a proper appreciation of Ori-Oke spirituality.

Clemens Sedmak alludes to the necessity of recognizing and appreciating the reality of indigenous spirituality like Ori-Oke within contextual theology and mission studies: "We all have our cross to carry. We do theology because people suffer. Doing theology is a way to attend to the wounds of ignorance, and stupidity, the wounds of broken promises and unrealized dreams, the wounds of innocent suffering and of guilt, the wounds of open questions and burning concerns."³ Sedmak adds further that there is an incredible power in wounds. While the adherents of Ori-Oke are the majority of those who battle with various kinds of wounds, the phenomenon itself remains in the middle of the storm. Nonetheless, since Ori-Oke is so firmly rooted in Yoruba culture, we are warranted in spending every effort to clarify the term.

Theoretical framework

The findings and discussion of this article are based on the framework of the participatory spirituality theory of Jorge Ferrer. The theory builds on the foundations of Richard Tarnas's participatory epistemology and Jürgen Kremer's participatory approach to indigenous spirituality.⁴ Tarnas and Kremer use the method of participatory inquiry as a relational form of spiritual practice and argue that conceptualized spirituality in terms of replicable inner experiences are amenable within ontological schemes. Transpersonal phenomena as pluralistic participatory events can occur in multiple loci (e.g., an individual, a relationship, or a collective), and its epistemic value emerges for those who participated in the events and saw answers to their prayers, with transformative power on self, community, and world.⁵

Ferrer explores the implications of a participatory perspective in such areas as embodied spirituality, integral transformative practice, religious studies, and the future of religion, among others. The main aim in this article is to assess the impact of the participatory approach to spiritual phenomena that include Ori-Oke in Yoruba

Christianity. We are aware of other scholars who have written about the participatory spirituality theory as a conceptual revolution. They include Jeffrey Kripal, Karen Jaenke, and Chris Clarke.⁶

Survey methodology

Before outlining the findings and making a thorough analysis of Ori-Oke spirituality, we first highlight the process we followed in data collection and interpretation, which was intended to sharpen the conversation and our understanding of the findings. The social and religious studies that focus on Ori-Oke spirituality typically distinguish the following classes of people: conservative Christians, including their leaders; indigenous religious specialists, which we could call mountain prophets or leaders; and the grassroots Christians otherwise described here as Ori-Oke adherents.

Conservative Christians and their leaders function as the hierarchical upper class of Christian religion in Ilorin. They perceive Ori-Oke spirituality as barbaric and retrogressive, describing the so-called mountain prophets as false and the adherents as charlatans. This harsh assessment derives from the fact that the majority of Ori-Oke members are grassroots Christians. Despite the unfriendly evaluation, however, we find on the ground, where Ori-Oke spirituality is most vibrant, that about 70 percent of the upper class of society send prayer requests to the mountains by proxy. There has been a tendency to pay undue attention to the stated misgivings about Ori-Oke and to draw hasty conclusions. We tried to overcome these unhelpful conclusions, since we are seeking to gain a realistic focus on actual challenges and benefits.

The indigenous religious specialists, mountain prophets, and Ori-Oke adherents operate with the same content of grassroots beliefs and the same process of integrating those beliefs into Christian categories. Many people at the grassroots live from day to day with significant life challenges, as subsequent discussion will show. We spent almost nine months, between April and December 2016, interacting with the different classes of people. During the time of this fieldwork, we participated in as many Ori-Oke prayer sessions as we could, and we interviewed many leaders and prophets and Ori-Oke adherents.

We therefore tried to apply an integrative interpretation of opinions in the collection and interpretation of data. We have done so because Ori-Oke spirituality is more about grassroots Christian beliefs of the people involved in the daily struggle of life. For the integrative approach, Todd Berg writes that it "refers to ordinary church members' efforts to integrate the two separate yet intertwined circumstance of being African and being Christian. Such efforts are not dependent on church officials but rather are predicated within a specific cultural context."⁷

Ori-Oke phenomena and spirituality are at the grounded level, where the spirit blows wherever it wills. Our fieldwork coincided with the time when most parts of the country witnessed the outbreak of attack by Fulani herdsmen on farmers and vulnerable communities. Ilorin was not spared; the city had its own share of the attacks, and

the mountains were especially prone to attacks. To overcome the challenge and complete this project, we engaged the services of local vigilante and security officials. They assisted us immensely in guaranteeing our security. However, the menace of herdsmen still continues in Nigeria as it did at the time of this study. Some Nigerian Christians consider that death from such attacks while carrying out a religious ritual on Ori-Oke would be considered a modern-day martyrdom.

Findings and discussion

The term "Ori-Oke"

It will be helpful to look more carefully at the term "Ori-Oke" and the way in which it applies to Christian mission and spirituality in Ilorin. At one level, the term has had an arbitrary, often simply denunciatory, meaning. We seek here to provide a fuller understanding.

The word "Ori" in Yoruba thought and culture expresses the absolute dependence of a person's inner being upon a Deity. It conveys the idea that the sustenance of a person's inner realm is the prerogative of the Deity. The founder of Ori-Oke Aseyori (Mountain of Success), Prophet Theophilus O. Oluwasanu, replying to questions concerning the origin and nature of Ori-Oke spirituality in Ilorin, offered the following comments during an interview: "The absolute dependence of the essential man upon Deity is expressed by the fact that, in certain localities, the names by which the inner man is called derive directly from the name of Deity. We have examples of this among Yoruba where Deity is called Orisha, and the essential person is called Ori."⁸ Put another way, "Ori" comes from the root "Orisha," meaning the source from which beings spring up or happen—the source of being. Furthermore, "Ori" is related to the concept of destiny, which a person obtains from the Deity. The Yoruba believe that an account of how one's destiny has been handled must be rendered before the Deity. With this background, we can understand why most prayers on the mountains are aimed at neutralizing negative verdicts on one's destiny, a conclusion our findings later confirmed.

Ori reflects the physical head. For the Yoruba, the physical, visible Ori symbolizes the inner person. This is the very essence of personality. In the mind of the Yoruba, it is the Ori that rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of a person on earth. E. B. Idowu provides a clearly articulated anthropological framework of Ori and offers the lens to identify its theological content:

The end for which a person is made is inextricably bound up with his destiny. Man's doings on earth have been predestined by Olodumare. A person obtains his destiny in one of three ways: he kneels down and chooses his destiny; or he kneels down and receives his destiny; or his destiny is affixed to him. Thus, we have a trimorphic conception of destiny, the sustaining motif of which is that the person who is coming into the world must kneel before the High Authority who is Olodumare for its conferment. Whatever is thus conferred is unalterable and becomes one's portion throughout life. That is what the person goes into the world to fulfill.⁹

In other words, the Yoruba is aware that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Within the context of this investigation, the mystery of God, destiny, and the concomitant limits of human knowledge find expression in Ori-Oke spirituality. To this end, Idowu further notes that "Ori in its totality is an object of worship. There are two reasons for this. First, as it is the essence of personality, it must be kept in good condition so that it may be well with the person. Secondly, one must be on good terms with it, so that it may favour one. In support of the first reason, the Yoruba speak as if the Ori is all that is necessary to worship."¹⁰

Within the context of the above, Ori-Oke becomes a principal place of worship of God the Most High. Literally, "Ori-Oke" means the shrine of the Most High. In discussing the spiritual importance of mountains in Ilorin, Stephen Ajayi, resident on Sobi Mountain, said in an interview, "Rocks and hills are symbols of the great God and in fact, they are the residence of the great Deity. These hills and mountains are considered to be symbol of strength and durability; thus they remind man of his smallness and transitoriness. Usually stories are told of how such hills offered protection to the towns' people in days of the intertribal wars. In consequence of this idea, many religious ceremonies are associated with large rocks, and worship takes place there in Ilorin."¹¹

In other words, Ori-Oke is a place of sacred encounter with God. It functions to present visible and tangible evidence of the invisible, intangible, and spiritual divine entity. Through its functioning, the adherents find it necessary and adequate to imagine realities that are supersensible. Wes Howard-Brook strengthens the foregoing when he speaks of the relevance of places of sacred encounter and the features of an experience with the true God: "We can understand one of the Bible's religions to be grounded in the *experience of and ongoing relationship with the Creator God*, leading to a covenantal bond between that God and God's people for the blessing and abundance of *all* people and *all* creation."¹² The Ori-Oke spirituality offers adherents a covenant relationship with God, leading to blessings and abundant life. Spirituality is never authentic if it is divorced from life, from one's own life and that of others.¹³

Ori-Oke and indigenous spirituality

Having clarified the term "Ori-Oke," we next consider Ori-Oke as foundation for indigenous spirituality and how it is incorporated into a Christianized view of reality. As noted in the previous subsection, in order to aid spiritual exercises, find solution to human problems, and keep one's inner being in good condition, Ilorin people have a definite preference for using Ori-Oke. At all times, the general atmosphere on Ori-Oke gives adherents psychological and emotional relief, presaging deliverance and encounter with God. In this context, we need to consider the Yoruba creation myth.

To the Yoruba, Olodumare is supreme and controls the destiny of all human beings. He gave humans the breath of life. In a group interview, Prophet Theophilus Oluwasanu recounts the oral tradition of Yoruba creation story:

The high god, Olodumare, asked Orishala to descend from the sky to create the first earth. Orishala delayed, and his younger brother, Oduduwa, carried out the assignment. Afterward, sixteen other Orisha came down from heaven to create human beings and live on earth with them. The descendants of each of these deities are said to have spread Yoruba religious principles throughout the land. Hence, Yoruba religion is centered on a pantheon of ancestral deities called Orisha. Since Ori-Oke is related to Orisha, one's spiritual consciousness in the physical realm must grow in order to consummate union with the divine, and the choicest location for this to happen in one's life is on the mountain.¹⁴

In other words, Yoruba spirituality considers divine power to be present on the mountain, and through this power humans can link directly with the divine source of all life. In this regard, D. I. Aiyegboyan states that prayers offered on the Ori-Oke are always efficacious. Given this belief, people use Ori-Oke as a sort of prayer closet. These Ori-Oke are very numerous throughout Yorubaland.¹⁵

Three types of Ori-Oke

From our findings, the numerous Ori-Oke around Yorubaland, including Ilorin, are classified into three types: church-based, community-based, and multireligious-based. This classification points to differences in perception rather than on theology, for the adherents of all the Ori-Oke profess to worship the same God. According to our research findings, in the church-based Ori-Oke there are specific guidelines that every adherent is expected to observe. The guidelines focus on the figure of Jesus Christ and express the depth of sanctity of the Ori-Oke. The guidelines include the following rules and conditions:

- Remove your shoes, sandals, and slippers before climbing the mountain.
- No burning of colored candles and incense on this mountain.
- Perfume is not accepted.
- Do not eat anything with pepper and oil on this rock.
- Do not litter, defecate, or wash anything on this rock.
- Do not disturb others while praying.
- Only water and olive oil can be brought to the mountain for blessing.
- Prayer should be offered only in the name of Jesus Christ.

Aiyegboyan adds that "occasionally, especially during their festivals, some of these churches perform ceremonious *gigun Ori-Oke* (ascending of sacred hills and mountains) where they spend three, seven, twenty-one to forty days, alone in spiritual exercises."¹⁶ A good example of a church-based Ori-Oke is Ori-Oke Atunse (Mountain of Restoration), owned by the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement. This Ori-Oke is located at the Basin Area in Ilorin, with Apostle T. A. Abioye as the chairman at the time of this research.¹⁷

For the community- and multireligious-based Ori-Oke, restrictions and guidelines are minimal. There are no authorities in charge of the prayer ground, and any individual

with spiritual gifts who wishes to use the Ori-Oke is free to go without receiving permission from anyone. Community-based Ori-Oke are named after the communities in which they are located. It was discovered that many people who ordinarily have no business being at the mountain find their way there because there are no restrictions. However, adherents of community-based Ori-Oke frown at the use of anything that hints of diabolical powers, such as magic or charms.

In a multireligious Ori-Oke, adherents of various religions are found going about their respective religious practices on the mountain. In an interview with Sherifat Yinka, a Muslim who visits the mountain regularly, she maintained that "mountains are famous for their quietness and absence of disturbance, which gives room for meditation, inspiration, and an uninterrupted channel of revelation."¹⁸

A multireligious-based Ori-Oke allows Christians, Muslims and also Afrelists (i.e., traditional believers) a place to express their spirituality freely. Adherents use visible objects for prayer, which include candles of different colors, red cloths, white linen, palm oil, and black soap. These items are believed to have natural-cum-spiritual powers to attract divine favor and ward off negative forces. It is noteworthy that there are authorities in charge of multireligious-based Ori-Oke. The appointment of these authorities includes all the religions. The purpose of this practice is not to restrict anyone from using the mountain but to ensure coexistence among adherents of the various religions as they all have representatives on the committee. This arrangement guarantees peace and harmony on the mountain. It was also observed that Christians on multireligious-based mountains seek counsel from Muslim Alfas, those believed to possess a higher knowledge of certain mysteries. In turn, some Muslims give money to Christian prophets on the mountain in exchange for prayer. Babalawos (indigenous religious specialists) who come to the mountain to perform their own rituals are not castigated in any way. There is simply a clear absence of conflict on the mountain; we could say that the God of such places is not jealous, unlike his portrayal in the Hebrew Bible. The lack of conflict built into God's dynamic hierarchy precludes war and violence from being deployed in the name of God,¹⁹ for God loves variety and hates monotony. He accommodates differences. The practice of activities on the multireligious-based Ori-Oke is a profound one, carrying a positive message of hope for peaceful coexistence and dialogue among religions in Nigeria. This positive message of hope exists in the midst of a Nigerian society that is religiously volatile and prone to incessant conflicts. Hence, the words of Donal Dorr become instructive. For him, those who engage in interreligious activities are submitting themselves and their own religious traditions to the judgment of God. "The Spirit works partly by enriching those who engage in this dialogue; they grow in wonder and insight when they are allowed to share something of the religious experience of people from a different tradition."²⁰

The preference for Ori-Oke as a place of encounter and worship of God carries implications in Christianity in the areas of religious, social, and cultural transformation. In Yoruba Christianity, associating Ori-Oke with the worship of the God of Jesus Christ echoes the scene found in Luke 9:28–36, Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. There Jesus Christ was revealed in his true glory, and he spoke with Moses and Elijah.

It is significant that this event occurred not long before Jesus went up to Jerusalem to face his death. In other words, it was through the suffering of the cross that Jesus entered his glory. The transfiguration on the mountain reveals that the Suffering Servant is also the glorious Son of God. The appearance of Moses and Elijah is said to stand for the Law and the Prophets, confirming that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything promised in the Old Testament.²¹ The voice of God from heaven, within the context of the mountain, also affirms that Jesus Christ is the one he has sent, who will save people who listen to him and follow his example.

Ori-Oke spirituality addresses concrete life situations and the realities faced by adherents. In essence, when one is face to face with life challenges at an Ori-Oke, the imagination constructs images of this encounter with realities at hand, making God conceptually present. The spirituality is rooted in the conviction that people suffer consequences of sins, hence at the mountains they pray aggressively. In the words of M. H. Kukah, "Christians must understand that being able to call God our father, being able to speak to him face to face as Moses did, is a distinct part of Christianity. No other religion can make this claim. There is no religion whose founder offered his followers this distinctive privilege. Our problems, our feelings are different, and so, while community prayer or family prayers are important, they are no substitute for private prayers. It is in private prayer that we tell God what we personally feel."²²

Kukah's perspective is true of Ori-Oke spirituality. It is one of the ways through which the average Yoruba unravels the interrelationship between the spirit world and the material realm and how what happens in one realm has an impact on the other. The aggressive private prayer and severe penance that take place on the mountain are not so much about the removal of sins of the ancestors but about the application of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ to the supplicant in order to remove the consequences of sins. The understanding here, as Samson Oyeniyi, a prophet leader of Ori-Oke, teaches, is that "the consequences of the sins of the grandpas or the temporary punishment due to sins of our forefathers are so strong that they can obstruct spiritual blessings in heaven. This is an indisputable African indigenous belief."²³

Ori-Oke counsel and prayers

The prayer format on Ori-Oke Baba Abiye (Mountain of Safe Delivery), a mountain owned by the Christ Apostolic Church in the Fate area of Ilorin, adds valuable insight to the foregoing. The theme of this Ori-Oke is "Immunity against Spiritual Oppressors." The mountain prophet counsels the adherents, for example, on certain things about the power of oppressors. He or she notes:

- Their aim is to keep people away from serving the true God.
- They need an opening to enter into your life.
- The oppressors vary in power.
- Oppressors like unhappy people.
- The carrying of sacrifices to the crossroads is an invitation to the oppressors.²⁴

Before adherents go into personal aggressive prayers, the prophet highlights how to be immunized against the spiritual oppressors, typically mentioning:

- Live a holy life.
- Walk in the spirit.
- Be humble.
- Read and meditate on the Word of God.
- Keep the right company.
- Put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:12–18).

Thereafter, aggressive personal prayer-points follow, based on individual needs on the mountain:

- "Every spirit monitoring any area of my life, I bind you, in Jesus' name."
- "I withdraw my leg and my life from any monitoring spirit, in Jesus' name."
- "Holy Spirit, incubate me with your fire, in Jesus' name."
- "You foul spirits, tormenting and harassing my life, lose your hold, in Jesus' name."

There is also a prayer format for breaking the yoke of satanic delay. This prayer is done with fasting on the mountain when one observes any of the following:

- unexplainable delay when one is expecting a breakthrough;
- when one begins to have dreams of blockages and delays;
- when one has already received a promise but after a long time it still is not coming to pass;
- when one is tired of stagnancy;
- when one is convinced that the delay is not from God but from attacks of the enemy.²⁵

In this case there would be praise worship by the adherent, Scripture reading like 1 Samuel 1–2, also confessions, with a basis in Psalm 27:14. Then personal intercession would follow thus:

- "Every arrow of evil delay shot into my star, die in Jesus name."
- "Every arrow of backwardness shot into my star, die in the name of Jesus."
- "Chains of stagnation, break in the name of Jesus."
- "Clouds of darkness around my breakthroughs, scatter in the name of Jesus."

—and the prayer points continue as long as the adherent's energy holds out.

The fundamental truth about the human-spiritual condition of an African, expressed in Yoruba Christianity, is borne out of Africans having a spiritual interpretation of the realities of life. Against this backdrop, S. U. Njoku argues that "consequences of sin can obstruct not only spiritual blessings in the heaven, but also

material blessings on earth, guaranteed by the first covenant, beginning with Abraham."²⁶ Njoku's understanding is premised on the fact that, if the work of grace is applied to take away obstructions to heavenly blessings, so also aggressive personal mountain prayers can remove obstructions to blessings on earth. Hence, other themes and prayer points on various Ori-Oke in Ilorin include the following:

- prayer to kill Goliath in one's destiny;
- bewitchment must die;
- killing the witchcraft in one's destiny;
- destroying the destroyer;
- neutralizing a satanic verdict;
- arresting any dark cloud over one's destiny.

Adherents of Ori-Oke believe that frequenting the mountain is in line with doing their own part in Jesus' work of liberation.

Quoting Hosea 14:4, an adherent notes, "What is left is the barrier on your own side, which no one else can remove except you. What you choose to do is up to you. Ori-Oke ministries can help you remove them: enmity of every degree, hate, demons, unbelief, bias, witchcraft, generational problems, curses and their effects."²⁷

An examination of other relevant prayer points and formats on the mountains in Ilorin would overburden the conversation without adding much further illumination of Ori-Oke spirituality. Suffice it to note that adherents in Ilorin are silencing "demons that demanded worship and paralysed deeply-rooted, anti-gospel activities. Sometimes, beginning from the highest places, they openly disgraced satanic agents, emptied hospitals by the healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and rendered witchdoctors jobless."²⁸

Ori-Oke adherents as religious outsiders

Another aspect of human experience in Ilorin that has continued to enhance the growth of Ori-Oke spirituality is what Dairmuid O'Murchu describes as the outsider status.²⁹ Many Christians in Nigeria, particularly in Ilorin, are no longer attracted to the visions and praxis of their religious leaders. They are discouraged by the power games in many churches, by the leadership and succession crises engulfing many Christian communities, most such cases ending in courtrooms and civil litigation. Adding to the disenchantment is the pomp and prestigious lifestyle of the clergy. Tola Adeniyi laments the negative impact of the lifestyles of most religious leaders in Nigeria:

Thieves of various shades and sizes seized our common patrimony and we applauded them in mosques and churches even as they non-chalantly rape all of us with unprecedented impunity.

The culture of silence found mother and father in . . . a doctrine that teaches people not to worry about making success of their lives on earth but [they] should be content with imaginary mansion[s] in a place called heaven! Paradoxically, the owners and preachers of the doctrines are busy amassing wealth here on earth and robbing their flock silly."³⁰

Put differently, by their activities and lifestyle, such church leaders have accentuated a new sense of inequality, deprivation, and injustice. In this regard, individuals are chained by religion, and the larger society is held captive as well. Spirituality is community-relative and community-specific; in spirituality, there is nothing that is not the business of God.³¹ To this end, Tokunboh Adeyemo submits that "true spirituality does not isolate us from people. On the contrary, it brings us in touch with the fatherless and widows in their afflictions; takes us to the prisons, hospitals and refugee camps to minister Christ's compassion and power to the needy; and compels us to do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God and proclaim good news to the poor. Jesus was a man for the other."³²

Realizing that there has been no correlation between Nigerian religiosity and social development, Ori-Oke phenomena now serve as an alternative platform of search for the real God in Ilorin. It offers people the quiet Gospel attitude of discernment, which allows human beings to still see that the divine-human element of Jesus Christ is with us in Christianity, despite many challenges.

Beyond the church leaders' grandstanding and the social challenges in Nigeria, Prophet Joseph Ambali of Ori-Oke Egbala (Mountain of Power) affirms that "Ori-Oke adherents feel that they do not fit in as a result of their social standing and minority status. Seeing their leaders and their lifestyles as betrayal of Christian values, the Ori-Oke adherents (the outsiders) have lost no time in launching a counter-culture of Christian spirituality on the mountains."³³

O'Murchu defends the legitimacy of launching a counterculture in the face of a breach by referring to a similar trend during the time of Constantine, when Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire: "The early monastics fled to the desert places, declaring unambiguously their allegiance to the outsider status. Many such groups would honour the prophetic vision through the subsequent decade of Christian history."³⁴

The heart of Ori-Oke spirituality

In other words, Ori-Oke spirituality is more about the vision and praxis of Jesus Christ than about the flashy clerical class of Nigerian society. It is more about integration of faith, fellowship, and interaction as people that "seek discipleship with an adult Jesus in the service of an adult God."³⁵ The Ori-Oke adherents as the outsiders in today's Nigerian religious space are increasingly those who seek a new engagement with Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). "It is based on a worldview that is all-embracing in cosmic and planetary terms; it forthrightly condemns and revises all posturing at patriarchal domination; it turns imperial kingship on its head, replacing it with an empowering kingship; it invokes a radical incarnational anthropology inclusive of peoples of every race, creed, and colour, and it counters all resemblance of violence in favour of nonviolent liberation."³⁶

In Ori-Oke practices, there are no special treatments, no special people or tribe. All are equally accepted; all have a choice place in the presence of God, who is rightly seen as the source of all life. Against this background, the following comment by Leonardo Boff fits Ori-Oke practices: "Its center is not the Church but the historical Jesus, and its principal

mission is not to teach doctrines but to promote the following of the historical Jesus, who calls us to love, solidarity, compassion, and to the unlimited acceptance of all types of people, without questioning their moral, ideological, or religious condition."³⁷ The spirituality falls within Edward Blyden's prophetic words at the dawn of the twentieth-century, expressing the potential of the African continent to "serve as the spiritual conservatory of the world."³⁸ In this light, Ori-Oke is trending in Ilorin in an astounding way.

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17. At the entrance to the Michael Imodu Mountain, overseen by the Christian Association of Nigeria Ilorin South Local Government, a sign lists eleven guidelines, including the following, which convey the tone and behavior expected on this mountain:
 - Holy is He that dwells on this mountain. Use it very decently.
 - This mountain disallow[s] the use of candles, felicities and Spiritual Mountain climbs. This mountain is not a church or residential apartments. Therefore pray and go down from mountain to your houses.
 - No convention or night vigil of any group on the mountain without strong permission and approval of mountain excos.
 - No drumming or any act of disturbing others with series of method of praying (except on joint prayer of Friday and individuals services on Sunday).
 - You are not allow[ed] to use more than three days on this mountain before you get down, or contact the excos for further briefing.
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From top left: Lemuel E. Odeh, Patrick U. Nwosu, A. G. Alamu, and A. Y. Mohammed.

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