

## **IFA: An Epistle to the Indigenous Yoruba Worshippers in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Many critics of African Indigenous Religion (AIR) were of the opinion that AIR has no guide through which one can get information about it. This therefore led to their pronouncement of death sentence on the religion. This article aims at presenting *Ifa*, the principal divinatory system, as one of the sacred oral texts sent to the indigenous Yoruba worshippers. It also sets to disabuse the minds of critics about their wrong impression on this Religion. The article adopts historical and phenomenological approaches to achieve these aims. Findings reveal that messages from the *Ifa* sacred texts are coded in various *odu* (chapters) which can be decoded by the learned priests of Orunmila- the Yoruba god of wisdom. The message is all inclusive as it contains the existential needs of man. The article concludes on the note that *Ifa*, been a sacred oral text, is a message on how to tackle the challenges surrounding nations and individual life. It therefore recommends that *Ifa*, one of the African cultural heritage and common wealth should be jealously guarded and be appreciated as the solutions that Africans are seeking for to address their numerous challenges can be found in this Yoruba spiritual dimension.

**Key words:** Nigeria, *Ifa*, Epistle, Indigenous, Yoruba, Religion

### **Introduction**

The Yoruba people are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are mostly found in the south western Nigeria. They cover the whole of Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Lagos and substantial parts of Kwara and Kogi states (Owoeye 2005: 36). A fair percentage of the people of Yoruba ethnic group inhabit the south eastern part of the Republic on Benin (Dahomey) and Togo. Furthermore, the Yoruba people can be found spotted round the whole universe, for instance, there is a group of Yoruba known as *Aku* in Sierra Leone. Another group of Yoruba is found in Cuba by the name *Lucumi* (Falokun 1992: 194), while some can still be found in distant Brazil. This group of Yoruba is known as *Nago* (Olatunji 1996: 4).

Majority of the Yoruba speaking people claim descent from Oduduwa and origin from Ile-Ife. In fact, one Yoruba legend has it that Ile-Ife was the spot where God created man; either Black or White, and from where they dispersed all over the world. (*Oyo State of Nigeria*: 1977: 13). The Yoruba speaking groups defined themselves as belonging to a wider social group who have a similar social structure. The basic social unit is the patrilineal decent group. They speak the same language with dialectal variations. Among the dialectal groups are: Egba, Ekiti, Ibadan, Ife, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ikale, Ilaje, Ondo, Owo, Oyo, etc. Their Language is rich with an almost oversupply of proverbs, folklore, folktales and pithy sayings. The more one understands this, the more they lead one into the richness of reality that has served as the basis of Yoruba culture (Awolalu and Dopamu: 1979: 2).

The Yoruba people of Nigeria were predominantly traditional worshippers before the emergence of modern religions such as Islam and Christianity. 'The real keynote of their lives,' according to Bolaji Idowu (1982: 5), is 'their religion.' Prior to the arrival of foreign religions, Yoruba has been practicing their indigenous faith that was handed down from their

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forefathers. It is on this religion that their lives hinged. It is needless to attempt to define religion from the Yoruba's point of view because their social, political, commercial and economic activities are visible expressions of religion. In the word of Idowu, he said:

In all things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and all governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priest and diviners whom they believed to be the interpreters of the will of the Deity (Idowu 1982: 5).

From the above quotation, one can say without mincing words that the religion of the Yoruba permeates their lives so much that it expresses itself in multi-various ways. As a result of the Yoruba wider religious experience, they believed strongly in *Olodumare* (The Supreme Being) and in the existence of divinities known as *Orisa*. The pantheons of divinities consist of many gods and goddesses, which are categorized into major and minor.

It is interesting to note here that while the Yoruba as a nation believe in *Olodumare* (The Supreme Being), different groups still have a favourite *Orisa* that is worshipped without prejudice towards the worship of other *Orisa*. (Imasogie 2008: 1). Despite the religiosity of human kind, the universe as a whole is still full of religious mysteries and things that cannot be easily explained. This is why some people desperately go after fortune tellers and magicians who claimed to have a 'third eye' (Adeboye 2018: np). Many people are suffering from numerous problems that led to their uncomfortable situations of life. The intensity of problem in this complex world has therefore made Yoruba people to develop various ways of knowing the mind of *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being) and find out causes and possible solution to their problems. One of such ready means of getting information when in trouble is *Ifa*, the principal system of divination among the Yoruba (Ogunleye 2011: 44). People all over the world practise divination and devised various methods of doing it so as to get information about their situation. It is therefore the desire to comprehend the unknown and curiosity to know precisely what the future holds in stock for man that makes Yoruba people to go for *Ifa* divination.

### ***Ifa* in its Original Sense**

*Ifa* is one of the various ways of divination among the Yoruba. According to Salami, citing William Bascom, *Ifa* is a system of divination based on sixteen basics and two hundred and fifty six derivative figures (*Odu*) obtained either by the manipulation of sixteen palm nuts (*Ikin*) or by the toss of a chain (*Opele*) of eight half seed shells (Salami 2015:95). From the perspective of the indigenous Yoruba people in Nigeria, *Ifa* is believed to have the capacity to know from several perspectives at the same time. More so, it is not bound by the time or space constraints of human knowing (Taiwo 2004: 305). It is therefore *Ifa* that sheds light on the forgotten past and reveal the future that is beyond the 'ambivalence of the present scope of our senses' (Salami 2015: 96). *Ifa* is often used interchangeably with Orunmila- the Yoruba god of wisdom. This has generated series of controversy among the writers of *Ifa*. From the traditionalists' point of view, *Ifa* is seen as the metonym of Orunmila during divination (Adegbindin 2014: 50). Although, *Ifa* and Orunmila are used interchangeably in some *Odu* (*Ifa* chapters), yet, for clarity and academic purposes, a line of demarcation must be drawn between the two phenomena.

Orunmila is one of the primordial divinities among the Yoruba. He is identified as the Grand Priest as he was the one who introduced divinity and revealed prophecy to the world

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(UNESCO: 2005). Orunmila is the oracular divinity of Yoruba land and he was said to have accompanied Obatala (the arch divinity among the Yoruba) as a counsellor when the latter was sent to the earth after it had been created. Great wisdom and power were attributed to him. Also, Ifa geomantic form of divination is associated with his cult. Through this, he declares the will of *Olodumare* and that of divinities (Ogunleye 2008: 37). Apart from this, the Yoruba hold the belief that Orunmila was present when human destiny was sealed. For this reason, he is called *Elerii Ipin-* the witness or advocate of destiny. Being a witness, he is believed to be capable of giving pieces of advice to any event or situation, be it past, present or future (Ogunleye 2008: 38). The traditional Yoruba will not embark on any expensive or elaborate project without consulting him for guidance because they have confidence in his words.

*Ifa*, on the other hand, is the system of divination (Ogunleye 2008: 38) and it refers to the verses of literary corpus known as *Odu Ifa*. This *Odu* corpus has become the ‘leading documentation on the *Ifa* tradition to become a historical legacy’ (Wikipedia.org). Ifa divination system is practiced among Yoruba communities, both at home and in Diaspora. Its operation relies on the system of signs that are interpreted by a diviner known as *Babalawo*. It is applied when crucial decision needs to be made (UNESCO 2005). It is a system of divination that caters for both spiritual and practical needs of humanity (Wilfred 1989: iv). *Ifa*, from the Yoruba point of view, is the ultimate level of esoteric consciousness. This clarification between *Ifa* and Orunmila agrees to the submission of Akintola as cited by Adegbindin when he says *inter alia*:

What is universally known as Ifa is, simply put, the philosophy, or wisdom divinely revealed to Orunmila. In other words, it is the body of primordial or fundamental knowledge concerning life, and which originally derived from Orunmila (Adegbindin 2014: 51).

From the above quotation, *Ifa*, in its original sense refers to the system of divination that was attached to the cult of Orunmila - The Yoruba god of wisdom. It is often applied whenever any important decision; whether individually or collectively, is to be made. Orunmila is not *Ifa* just as Ogun is not iron. Orunmila is the harbinger and interpreter of Ifa – the divine message of *Olodumare*.

### **Ifa as an Epistle to the Indigenous Yoruba Worshippers**

An Epistle is a literary composition in the form of a letter. It involves communication either in writing or in letter (wiktionary.org, 2014). Epistles manifest mainly in Christian Scripture. However, one of the major criticisms against African (Yoruba) Indigenous Religion is the lack of scripture through which one can have adequate information about the religion. This criticism has made the indigenous religion of Africa to be declining over the years. Today, apart from various written texts on the religion, an ‘epistle’, that contained detail information about the religion and secret of this world, has been sent to Africans. The epistle was known by various names in different African localities. For instance, it is known as *Oguega* among the *Esan* people in Edo state of Nigeria, (Ebhomienlen 2007: 2), *Fa* among the Fon people of Benin Republic, *Afa* by the Ewe people of Togo and *Ifa* among the Yoruba people of Nigeria (Ogundayo 2009).

It is therefore important today to examine *Ifa* oral text which stores a compendium of information on the (African) Yoruba worldview (Olatunji, 2005: 115). *Ifa* represents a body of deep knowledge that deals with the past, present and future. The *Babalawo* (chief priest)

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memorise Ifa as a poetic oral text and recite them on appropriate occasions (Olupona 2011:177). *Ifa* consists of *Odu* which is the divinatory oral narratives. This *Odu*, from the Yoruba point of view, is a personified supernatural being transformed into the spoken words of *Ifa* (Olupona 2011:181). It is the verbal manifestation of divine power.

### **Composition of Ifa**

*Ifa* as an epistle comprises 16 principal and 256 derivative *Odu* (chapter). The principal ones are known as *Oju Odu* while the derivative ones are known as *omo Odu* or *amulu odu*. The sixteen principal *odu* are strictly arranged in hierarchical order. The first and most senior *odu* is *Ejiogbe* followed by *Oyeku Meji*, *Iwori meji*, *Odi meji*, *Irosun meji*, *owonrun meji*, *Obara meji*, *Okanran meji*, *Ogundameji*, *Osa meji*, *Ika meji*, *Otuurupon meji*, *Otua meji*, *Irete meji*, *Ose meji*, *Ofun meji* (Adegbindin 2014:77). Each of these *odu* has symbol or sign that is used to indicate it and its respective message that is coded in *Ifa* corpus. Each *Odu* is represented by a series of single vertical lines and double vertical lines. (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 71). *Ifa* is more than collection of verses or corpus; it is an epistle that contains ‘God’s sacred message to mankind; it is the embodiment of the totality of human existence’ (*Ifa* religion).

In addition to this, *Ifa* can tell the secret of individual life that was sealed in their destiny which has been forgotten by the owner. In the same vein, life is full of ups and down and everybody is occupied with how to find solution to his or her challenges in life. It is through *Ifa* which is the message of *Olodumare* that the solution to individual problem would be revealed. It is to be noted that regular visit to *Babalawo* (*Ifa* priest) will keep one abreast of his or her spiritual status. This priest, as a diviner, possesses exoteric knowledge through which he pries into the future and brings the message from the super sensible world for his client.

The commonest means of getting message through *Ifa* is *Opele* (The divining chain). It consists of eight halves of seed shells or pods joined together by short section of chain 3 to 4 inches long (Bascom 1969:29). The half pods, according to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979:23), are arranged in such a way that they are equidistance from one another. Whenever an occasion demand for divination, *Babalawo* will hold the divining cord in the middle, swing it to the right, left, forward and then backward. He then invoke the spirit of *Orunmila*, paying homage to his predecessors in office and cast the cord in such a way that the portion held by him is thrown away from himself and the two sides fall in parallel lines. The position of the eight half pods depict a particular *Odu* and message which only the *Babalawo* can put across (Ogunleye 2011:47).

It is believed that the fall of the cord during divination is always occasioned by the divine intervention of *Ifa* and that the *Babalawo* do not influence the position of *Opele* in any form. It is the position of the casted divining chain that will determine the message which *Ifa* wishes the client to receive. It is the responsibility of the *Babalawo* to decode and interpret the coded messages from the super sensible world to his client. Other elements involved in *Ifa* divination are: *Opon Ifa* (divinatory tray), *Ikin* (the sacred divination palm nuts), *Iyerosun* (the sacred divining powder), *Opele* (divination chain), *Iroke* (the carved stick-like object for invocation) and *Ibo* which are objects used to cast lots (Adegbindin 2014:62)

### **Ifa in Human (Yoruba) Affairs**

The relevance of *Ifa* divination to human affairs cannot be over-emphasised. Among the Yoruba, *Orunmila*, the oracular god of divination through which *Ifa* is known, is regarded as the witness of destiny (*Elerii Ipin*). Thus, oracular consultation and *Ifa* divination, throughout the history of Yoruba over the years has always been an essential part of their lives. When

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babies are born into this world, they immediately forget their destinies and lots in life. It is therefore the responsibility of their parents to consult the oracle through *Ifa* which will reveal the content of their destiny and what the future has in stock for them. Through *Ifa* divination, people are able to get first hand information about the future occurrence that is usually hidden from ordinary eyes. Yoruba people therefore display their reliance on the divine command disseminated to them through *Ifa* divination in every sphere of their lives (Ogunleye 2011: 48).

Second is the political matter. With reference to politics *Ifa* is very much relevant; both in the past and in the contemporary dispensations. Before the emergence of modern system of government, the prevalent system of government in Yoruba land is monarchical and each state was headed by an *Oba* (king), a highly respected traditional ruler. Although the king is powerful, he still relies on the support and advice of his traditional chiefs who form the Councils of State in each Yoruba town. Of all these chiefs, *Babalawo*, the chief priest in charge of *Ifa* divination plays prominent roles towards peaceful and smooth running of the government. In fact, most of the traditional rulers in Yoruba land have their own *Babalawo* at their disposal and who could be called upon at any point in time to consult *Ifa* for them (Ajayi 1993: 16). It is interesting to note that modernity and western civilization have not negatively affected *Ifa* divination as some towns and cities still consult *Ifa* oracle before an *Oba* (King) is enthroned or before a traditional chief is installed (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979: 80).

Also, *Ifa* is of great help to healing in the health care delivery system. Disease and sickness are universal phenomena of which all societies have developed various means of handling. In the western medication, the cause of any disease is often referred to as physio-pathological agents. In contrast to this, the Yoruba hold the fact that some diseases and sickness could be due to supernatural causes arising from the displeasure of gods, evil spirits, and effect of witchcraft or the intrusion of an object into the body. The Yoruba therefore placed a very strong emphasis on both the psychological and spiritual causes of a disease based on the belief in the existence of positive and negative forces that inhabit the cosmos. It is the ability of the *Babalawo* to reveal the cause and cure totally from this type of sickness through *Ifa* divination that makes them spectacular persons among the Yoruba.

Moreover, it is *Ifa* that sheds light on the major stages of life known as the rites of passage. This is because the essence of life, according to Yoruba people lies in *Ifa*. This is the main reason why *Ifa* is always consulted for proper guidance before betrothal, marriage and at the birth of a child. It is therefore the responsibility of the *Ifa* Priest to prescribe the necessary rites suitable for each stage of life.

In addition, the importance of *Ifa* in human affairs is not limited to personal matters, it also has national and universal relevance. *Ifa*, when consulted, can reveal information that will be of both national and international benefits. For example, the information may be warning on an impending crisis, disease or any other matters relating to an individual, community or the nation at large.

It is important to note at this juncture that every completed *Ifa* divination process is always accompanied by a prescribed *ebo* (sacrifice) which must be performed by inquirers. According to Akinyemi (2012:24), the client must perform one sacrifice or the other, no matter the outcome of the divination. If the pronouncement of *Ifa* is good, it is believed that the sacrifice will help further to make it come to reality. On the other hand, if the pronouncement is bad, the sacrifice will help the client to dispel and escape the evil occurrence. It is therefore the responsibility of the *Ifa* priest (*Babalawo*) to know which sacrifice will go with certain pronouncement of the divination. If properly done, the sacrifice

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borne out of Ifa pronouncement are believed to be very potent and powerful (Akinyemi 2012: 25). Thus, no client will take the pronouncement of Ifa for granted.

### ***Ifa in the Modern Yoruba Society***

As observed by Idowu (1982: 203) one of the two things often happens to man's religion through the ages. These are modification with adaptation or extinction. It is interesting to note that, *Ifa* survived the trend of modernity because it is regarded as the most reliable and popular means of divination among the various methods of divination employed by the Yoruba (Ajayi 1996 : 31). In spite of the fact that *Ifa* is based on oral traditions, some significant documentation are now available in recent time. (Olademo 2013:8). *Ifa* therefore constitutes the major source of instruction, information and guidance for the Yoruba people even in this modern Yoruba society.

Various factors have contributed to what makes *Ifa* to be relevant to the modern society. First among the factors is the human effort towards finding solution to their life problem. People in modern society are facing series of challenges as a result of modernity and its accompanied problems. These problems in some cases range from physical to spiritual ones. The Yoruba people therefore seek solution for their problems at the feet of *Babalawo* (the *Ifa* Priest) who, through oracular consultation, proffer solution to their problems.

Secondly, the scramble for materials well-being has led many to be involved in regular oracular consultations. In this modern world, people still consult *Ifa* priest for instant wealth or as a shortcut to wealth. Magical practices are still in vogue. People visit *Babalawo* who prepares it for protection and security. In a nutshell, people patronise *Ifa* priests for protection while on business trips, economic advantages and commercial gains.

Thirdly, in this modern age, people still rush towards attaining chieftaincy titles and various political appointments. These desires often involve the services of *Babalawo* who assist them in getting their heart desires as many people often vie and contest for one title/post or the other. Moreover, in the time of crises, which is gradually becoming the permanent feature of modern society, people seek for the assistance of *Babalawo* who they believed could give them the needed guidance and protection.

In addition, the relevance of *Ifa* has been popularized nowadays through the stage and film productions. In the various home videos and stage performances, *Ifa* consultations often feature prominently. This no doubt is a veritable means of reminding and informing Africans that *Ifa*, a major Yoruba cultural heritage, is still relevant to modern society. Finally, the ability of *Ifa* to reveal the secret behind mysterious illness and provision of appropriate remedy makes it relevant to this present dispensation. The basic concept of orthodox medicine centres around the results of experiment and the diseases is regarded as been caused by physiopathological agents.

However, the Yoruba hold the fact that some diseases and sickness could be due to supernatural causes such as: displeasure of gods, evil spirit, effects of witchcrafts or the intrusion of an object into the body. (Sofowora 1979: 31). The inability of the orthodox doctors to handle spiritually related matters and the ability of the *Ifa* priest to reveal the causes and remedy that will lead to total healing from this type of sickness makes *Ifa* to be still relevant in this modern society.

This section cannot be completed without adding a brief on a festival dedicated to *Ifa* among the Yoruba: both at home and in Diaspora. The famous *Ifa* festival always take place at the World Ifa Temple in Ile Ife, the ancestral home of the Yoruba people, where thousands of indigenous worshippers, priests and priestesses will converge to celebrate the festival. It is this festival that marks the beginning of the Yoruba New Year (Odeyemi 2006:3). This annual

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festival often commences with a long procession to the palace of Oduduwa (the first king of Ile- Ife) and the progenitor of the Yoruba race. At the palace, the *Araba Agbaye* (*Ifa* spiritual head worldwide) will lead people in attendance to perform *Esa*- a spiritual rebirth. After this, the faithful will return to the temple to continue the festival proper. During the festival, the annual *Ifa* divination is cast for people in the following order: all adherents of *Ifa*, Ile-Ife city and the Ooni (king), Yoruba Land, Nigeria and the world at large (Odeyemi 2006:3).

### **Future of *Ifa* among the Yoruba**

Until recent times, it has been argued, even among the educated Yoruba people, that the days of indigenous African (Yoruba) Religion and its accompanied practices such as *Ifa* divination, are numbered. This conclusion was based on the fact that African religion does not have official recognition like that of Islam and Christianity. For instance and as observed by Dopamu (1993: 245), both Islam and Christianity were duly represented during the meeting of the ‘Advisory Council on Religious Affairs in Nigeria’ while the indigenous religion was left out. Nevertheless, *Ifa* system will continue to be in existence alongside other practices from other religions because it has a lot to offer towards realisation of genuine and meaningful development among the Yoruba and Africans at large. Reasons abound why *Ifa* system of divination will exist alongside other practices from other religions or culture.

From the various available literatures, it is interesting to note that *Ifa* is gaining global attention as many Europeans and American universities have designated separate institutions for the study of African culture and religion. In Florida for instance, there is an Institute of African Studies and Journals on African studies where in-depth researches are being carried out regularly. Apart from this, *Ifa* is being practised in various African countries under different religious system and it is known by different names. For example, *Ifa* is known as *Fa* among the Fon people of Benin Republic and *Afa* by the *Ewe* people of Togo. In the same vein, *Ifa* is well recognised among the Ga people of Ghana (Ogundayo 2009:329).

Coupled with the above is the fact that majority of the Yoruba people that were taken as slaves by the then Colonial masters to various foreign lands did not abandon their religious practices, but continued the practices of their forefathers and their indigenous way of life among which is *Ifa* divinatory system. Through their efforts, *Ifa* system of divination was brought to the limelight in countries such as: Cuba, Brazil, etc.

Furthermore, African indigenous Religion and its accompanied practices have become one of the major academic fields of study in various institutions of higher learning both in Africa and overseas countries. While reacting to the questions posted to him on the importance of Indigenous African Religion, Professor Olupona, a prominent scholar of African Religion revealed that, ‘*Ifa* is an indispensable treasure of knowledge that can’t be duplicated elsewhere’. He added that ‘Africans cannot afford to lose it and its priests (*Babalawo*) as this will have negative effects on academic, researchers and general seekers of knowledge the world over’. (Harvard gazette, 2015).

Moreover, the pronouncement of the United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on the protection of the oral and intangible heritage also lends credence to brighter future of *Ifa*. The UNESCO has recognised *Ifa* divination system as one of the major heritage of African (Yoruba) people in Nigeria. This pronouncement has given *Ifa* divination system a global awareness that makes it to be relevant to this modern dispensation. Also, social network and media such as: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc., through which people display their God- given heritage will not allow *Ifa* system of divination to be submerged by Western modernity.

Last but not the least, some current issues, such as homosexuality, which is now a matter of global discussion has been addressed by *Ifa* in one of its *Odu*. It is interesting to note that, the

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bisexual option provided by *Ifa in Odu ofun irete* (verses of *Ifa*) is what is in operation in Nigeria up till today (Oyesanmi 2006: 5). The homosexual orientation, from the *Ifa* point of view, is seen as abnormal and deliberate attempt to reject cultural values and traditions of Yoruba people.

### **Conclusion**

This article has examined *Ifa* in the Yoruba traditional thought as the veritable source of information with reference to the physical and spiritual matters. The wrong impression, that African Traditional Religion (ATR) and its accompanied practices such as *Ifa* system of divination will soon enter into oblivion because of its lack of written scripture, can no longer hold water. ATR, been all-inclusive in nature does not leave its adherents in darkness. Through information given by *Ifa*, solutions to the numerous life problems have been provided for many people whose lives were at the verge of destruction. It is this invaluable role that makes *Ifa* to be relevant to human affairs in this modern society. It is therefore the opinion of this article that Africans in general and Nigeria in particular should tap the benefits of *Ifa* sacred text as the solutions that Africans are seeking for to tackle their numerous challenges can be found if this Yoruba spiritual dimension is taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, there are moral issues that must not be left behind in this work. One of them is the character of the priest in charge of the divination who is the intermediary between the *Ifa* and the inquirer. Being also a human being, the sincerity and honesty of an *Ifa* priest must be ascertained. Second, we must ascertain the adequacy of their knowledge in the *Ifa* divinatory system. These hints are very important as they will guide against possibility of fraud, abuse of office and mis-interpretation of *Ifa*'s message to the inquirer. Although there are cases of abuse of office, incompetence on the part of the *Ifa* priest and other moral issues yet, these do not invalidate the adequacy of *Ifa* divinatory system among the Yoruba people in Nigeria. Since anything can be abused, the case in point here only shows that this ancient practice had been put into wrong use. This article therefore recommends that all *Ifa* priests both at home and abroad should always maintain and protect their integrity while discharging their duties. At the same time, all prospective inquirers must be sure of the *Ifa* priest they want to consult. With this in mind, the Yoruba people will get rid of the unscrupulous priests in this sacred profession.



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