EKWENSU DEITY AND THE PARADOX OF THE CHRISTIAN DEVIL

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Abstract
The advent of Christian religion and western civilization no doubt had a great impact on the socio-economic life of people living in the geographical area called Igbo land. Despite the much talked about positive impact of Christianity and activities of the European Christian missionaries on the socio-cultural wellbeing of the Igbo, the coming of Christianity arguably led to an unprecedented steady decline of Igbo Traditional Religion. Many beliefs and practices in Igbo religion were condemned with all manner of derogatory terminologies. The belief and the cult of many Igbo deities were termed idolatrous and evil. The identity and character of *Ekwensu* were demonized and distorted; a deity which was found to be a heroic Igbo deity of war and patron spirit of ancient Igbo warriors was mistranslated as the conceptual and ontological equivalent of the Christian Devil. The existence of shrines dedicated to *Ekwensu*, the ritual or cultic activities alive in these shrines, the honour and celebration of *Ekwensu* in cultural festivals and naming of natural objects and phenomenon after *Ekwensu*, are all proofs that the ancient Igbo never conceived *Ekwensu* as an evil deity. The study further observes that in Igbo trado-religious thought, contrary to what is obtainable in Christian worldview, the presence of evil in the world is attributed to man and not to any evil spirit whose mission, vision and activities are antithetical to God.
Keywords: *Ekwensu* Deity, Duality, Christian Devil

Introduction

In adapting the Christian religion to Igbo world view, philosophy and culture, the white missionaries needed most the medium of communicating the principal elements and ideas of that religion. This need can only be served by the Igbo language. Like these missionaries did in other regions of the world, they searched within the scope of Igbo lexicon for equivalents of these elements and ideas; the ones they could not find, they left in the foreign language of the missionaries. Within this scheme, Pawliková–Vilhanová (2007) elaborated on the missionary strategies of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (the founder of Society of Missionaries of Africa also known as White

Fathers), who prioritized the achievement of this said goal which he summarized as 'Transforming Africa by the Africans". To achieve the stated missionary objective, education was paramount and it was important to introduce literatures in African languages. So they began to commit African languages to writing and translating concepts and ideas to enable them disseminate the Christian message. Already, the Christian Neo-Platonism of the second to fourth centuries had seen to the dual Christian world view by which the Devil became the opponent of God and the enemy of Christians. On the contrary, among the Igbo, and so for many African cultures, it was difficult to analyze the relationship between gods, spirits or deities in terms of friendship and enmity since each has its own relevance and role among the people and does not stand in opposition of any like could easily be found in Mount Olympus, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Also unlike the Judeo-Christian God, the Supreme Being of Igbo Traditional Religion, whatever it is called, is not jealous, does not exist in isolation and does not forbid worship or sacrifice to any other spirit being. In negligence of these or unaware of them, a number of translations and transliterations were made from foreign languages to African languages that did not conform to native world view and sense. Even the translation of God as *Chukwu* in Igbo language is problematic. Alozie (2021) gave a credible account of the appropriation of *Ibritam* deity from the Ibibio by the Arochukwu people and the subsequent names associated with the deity *Ibini Ukpabi* or *Ovia Chukwu*. The Igbo-wide influence and popularity of this deity for the wrong or right reasons made its shrine the most influential religious center in the land. After the British Arochukwu expedition (1901 – 1902), the shrine was destroyed, but that same turn of events offered the *Ovia Chukwu* the opportunity of becoming the Igbo version of the Christian God. It took anthropologists, historians and experts of religion to subsequently offer the sense in which that translation became justified. Whether or not *Chukwu* can fit into the nature of the Christian God or *Chukwu* was the nature of that God fitted to be adopted by Christianity remains controversial. If *Chukwu* in spite of its acceptance as the proper name for God among Igbo Christians could at the same time be controverted, its *Ekwensu* counterpart is considered to suffer the same fate as undertaken by this work.

This work builds on the hypothesis that *Ekwensu* does not fit into the nature of the Christian Devil and does not fit to be adopted by Christianity as its Igbo version of the Devil. Like every other deity/god in Igbo Traditional Religion, *Ekwensu* is a component part of the integral Igbo Cosmo-religious universe, it does not oppose any deity; neither *Chukwu*, nor *Ezechitoke* nor *Obinigwe*. There is no hell fire known to the Igbo before the Christian era, therefore there was none for *Ekwensu* to operate. If God allowed for these deities to be essential parts of administering the world as many African scholars aver, then

Ekwensu is just one of them like are *Ogwugwu, Ofufe, Aro, Ngene, Aro bi n'agu, Udo, Agwu* and so on. These deities/gods, forces/energies, like *Ekwensu*, were made for the enhancement of human life. Their primary essence is to see to it that human beings live the best life can afford within territories where they are born and live. The work fosters the opinion that the Christian Devil has no equivalent in the Igbo lexicon of deities/gods. *Ekwensu* is therefore one of those mistranslations perpetrated by Christianity by which its true nature and character has almost been lost.

The work deployed a multi-dimension approach to accomplish this task. It is a phenomenological analysis in a sense that it isolated *Ekwensu* from the character it has assumed among the Igbo Christians for more than a century to study it. It sourced information from persons and places where the cult of *Ekwensu*, its shrine, persons/places dedicated to it still exist to the present day. The researchers had a good number of primary data to interact with in what may properly be classified as participant observation or ethnographic method. There are also existing literatures which had fostered this opinion about *Ekwensu* which this current work took advantage of with critical text analysis. The work concluded that the Christian Devil is entirely new to the Igbo religious and ontological sense and that essential privation of good is not a possibility in Igbo morality. Humans by nature are oriented towards good, have capacity to do evil and can only bear consequences of their action which are always provided for in the Igbo traditional moral code.

Method of Research

In a multi-dimension approach, couple of methods is deployed to achieve the objective of the research. The multi-dimensional approach has proven to be very effective in conducting research in African Traditional Religion because the more popular religions of Christianity and Islam have dominated African religious consciousness so much so that it is difficult to access the suppressed data of the religion. A multi-dimensional approach offers the researcher access to a wider range of data and variety of tools for interpretation. In the first place, this work employed the phenomenological method. According to Nelson (2011):

> The phenomenological approach is a form of qualitative enquiry that emphasizes *experiential, lived* aspects of a particular construct – that is, how the phenomenon is experienced *at the time that it occurs*, rather than what is thought about this experience or the meaning ascribed to it subsequently.

Nelson's cast of the phenomenological method fitted well into the present inquiry in as much as the understanding of *Ekwensu* was found to be contradistinguished from its true nature in the pre-Christian times. It is the process of bracketing recommended by Edmund Husserl which could offer the

means of isolating *Ekwensu* as a data of study and subject it to objective inquiry. Pathak (2017) classified the proper phenomenological method used in this research as *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*. Agreeing with Christina Lafont (2015), he averred:

> …hermeneutic phenomenology is indeed a variety of transcendental philosophy: it aims to show that the hermeneutic conditions of understanding anything as meaningful are the ultimate transcendental conditions of any human experience whatsoever. However, once these hermeneutic conditions are finally revealed, they turn out to be very different from traditional transcendental conditions, since they disclose the radical facticity and situatedness of all human experience (p. 1720).

Secondly, participant observation is an effective method in such a study in as much as to access primary information from persons and places which retained the pristine nature of *Ekwensu* in Igbo indigenous religion is necessary. The present research work agrees with the idea of Crossman (2019) who stated the goal of participant observation thus:

> The goal of participant observation is to gain a deep understanding and familiarity with a certain group of individuals, their values, beliefs, and way of life. Often the group in focus is a subculture of a greater society, like a religious, occupational, or particular community group.

Finally, textual analysis is a method that availed the researchers the opportunity to adhere strictly to the coherence and correspondences of textual entries to observed data without the prejudices of their own individual religious sentiments about the phenomenon under study.

The Nature of Deities in Igbo Traditional Religion

The belief in the existence and the cult of the deities are one of the most important elements or characteristics of African Traditional Religion in general and Igbo Traditional Religion particular. In other words, the belief in the deities or divinities is one of the major character or feature of the traditional religion of the Igbo indigenous peoples. In his explanation of what deities are and the origin of the deities in the context of African trado-religious worldview, Awolalu and Dapomu (1979) see the deities as divinities or gods, which are believed to have emanated from a divine source that is the Supreme Being. Kanu (2018) sees the divinities in Igbo traditional religion as belonging to what he called *Muo* (Spirits); the Supreme Being referred to as God in most popular religions also belongs to the same category of being. He went further to describe the divinities in Igbo religion as spiritual forces that derived their existence from the greatest force which he also called God. He

further argued that the deities or the divinities are considered lesser spiritual or supernatural forces when compared with the Supreme Being, (p.243).

However, deities or divinities in African trado-religious worldview are preternatural entities believed to be part of the creation of or emanation from a Supreme Being. Awolalu and Dapomu (1979) represents the conviction that divinities and deities in African Traditional Religion as emanations from a Supreme Being (p.72). Islam and Islam (2015) aver that the Supreme Being itself is both transcendent and immanent.

> Many religions see God as transcendent or immanent dimension, but in African traditional concept, 'He is both transcendent and immanent'. He dwells inside human souls and He is also beyond any reach. People cannot even appreciate Him fully in their imagination (p. 3).

The immanence referred to are more naturalistic than they are creations of human beings. Islam and Islam referred to the sky as is seen in the Tiv culture which refer to God as *Aondo* (sky), Turkana culture which refer to God as *Akuj* (up/above), Nyadenga culture which referred to God as *Shona* (the great one in the sky) and so on or thunder, rivers, rocks and even trees. It is not clear the relationship of deities and divinities in the category of *Ekwensu* with the Supreme Being or that their origins and nature are understood differently. Yet from the dynamics of the religion, the Supreme Being, the deities and divinities operate independently, convivially, inter-connectedly and counter-connected all at the same time. Gehman (2005) sees these deities as divinities or gods that function as ministers in the universal divine rule of the Supreme Being. He illustrates the relationship that exists between the deities and the Supreme Being as that of a father and children, he observed that in many African trado-religious societies and cultures, deities are conceived as children, messengers and agents of the Supreme Being (p. 186.). This position has far reaching implication as to the generally accepted benevolence of the Supreme Being in contrast with the perceived malevolence of any deity and raises what could be referred to as the African version of the Problem of Evil.

For Awolalu and Dapomu (1979), the deities are "offsprings of the God" (p.72.). Kanu (2015) placed the deities or divinities directly below the Supreme Being in an ontological hierarchy of the beings in Igbo Traditional Religion, hence the divinities "function as intermediaries between men and the Supreme Being, and share aspects of the divine status" (p. 243). Deities in Igbo traditional religion are categorized according to their gender, some are considered male, while others are categorized as female. Kanu (2018) further categorized Igbo deities into what he called local deities, meaning deities whose cult and influence are localized or limited to a particular community, and trans-national deities. These are deities whose cult, influence and

prominence are not limited to a particular community Furthermore, Awolalu and Dapomu (1979) categorized divinities into what he called primordial divinities and deified ancestors. He went on to describe primordial divinities as divinities of heaven, which have been living with the Supreme Being since the time of creation, while deified ancestors were men who lived a good life when they were alive and got deified after their death. The deities in spite of the enormous powers, whether perceived or real, are said to be semi-autonomous and dependent beings with no absolute existence. In most indigenous African trado-religious societies, the deities are believed that have derived their powers from the Supreme Being who brought them into existence. In Igbo traditional religion, the relationship between the deities and the people is symbiotic in nature.

To Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004) it is the desire of man to maintain good and cordial relationship with deities in order to avoid disaster and misfortune through offering of sacrifices and prayers. In Igbo trado-religious society, the existence of shrines strategically located in communities and dedicated to cult of deities; show their importance in the socio-religious life of the people. In time past, Igbo people especially the poor and the less-privileged throng to these shrines to consult and plead to these deities to help them get justice. Childless women visit these shrines to get the fruit of the womb and those experiencing one misfortune or the order, consult these deities for solutions to their problems. The deities or divinities in Igbo traditional religion according to Kanu (2015) include the *Ala***,** *Ani* or *Aja-ani*. (Earth goddess) This deity is arguably the arch deity in Igbo religion. It is a female deity and regarded as the daughter of *Igwe* the Igbo Supreme Being. *Ala* is the goddess of morality and fertility. *Ala* is against any form of evil and wastes no time to punish any evildoer. *Amadioha*, *Ofufe* or *Kamalu***,** this is a male deity, son of *Chukwu*, spiritual partner of *Ala*, god of justice, protector of divine order or principles. *Anyanwu*, this is the Igbo sun deity and also regarded as the son of *Chukwu*. *Ahiajioku*, *Ifejioku* is the deity in charge of agriculture and plant fertility especially yam. Other Igbo deities are *Udo*, *Ogwugwu*, *Ngene*, *Akwali Omumu* or *Chi Omumu*, *Ekwensu* the Igbo deity of war and victory.

Exploring the Identity and Character of *Ekwensu* Deity in Igbo Traditional Religion

There is no doubt that mere mention of the name of this ancient Igbo deity now evokes great fear and connotes evil especially to the average Igbo living in this present epoch. It is worthy of note that this situation has persisted since the coming of the early European Christian missionaries into Igbo land. Arguably the present identity and character of *Ekwensu* as the ontological and conceptual equivalent of the Christian devil, appears to be a recent thought, alien to the trado-religious worldview of the ancient indigenous Igbo, and a

direct consequence of the coming of the early Christian missionaries into Igboland. The view expressed above to a great extent aligned with Nwosu (2018), when he attributed the mistranslation, misrepresentation and demonization of the identity and character of *Ekwensu* deity, to the coming of early Christian missionaries into Igboland. However, this historical event no doubt, succeeded in stripping off the positive qualities of *Ekwensu* and replacing same with the absolute evil identity and character of the Christian devil. Agboanike (2019) avers that the identity and character of *Ekwensu* in Igbo trado-religious worldview, does not support the existence of an absolute good God and an absolute evil spirit devil, in eternal contest for the control of man and the entire universe. Therefore, if the Christian missionaries succeeded in demonizing the identity and character of *Ekwensu* deity as the ontological or the conceptual equivalent of the Christian devil, what then is the original identity of *Ekwensu* deity as conceived within the context of ancient Igbo trado-religious worldview?

In answering the above question Kanu (2015) sees *Ekwensu* deity as the ancient Igbo patron spirit or force of war, rarely consulted or invoked by the ancient Igbo warriors when there is a great threat to lives, properties, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of a community. Metuh (1991) in agreeing with the position of Kanu (2018) on the identity of *Ekwensu*, succinctly describes *Ekwensu* deity as a spiritual force or an invincible spiritual war phenomenon of ancient Igbo warriors, whose identity and character are different from the Christian devil. Abba and Onunkwo (2016) further reveal the ancient Igbo identity of *Ekwensu*, as the foremost indigenous war deity, whose divine responsibility is to aid ancient Igbo warriors to achieve war victory against a vicious enemy. In the same vein, Ekwunife (1995) captures the ancient Igbo identity of *Ekwensu* as an ancient spiritual protective or defensive force which the ancient Igbo harness to combat unjustified or unjustifiable aggression (pp.117). In other words, it appears that the identity of *Ekwensu* according ancient Igbo trado-religious worldview, is the high ranking Igbo war deity, spiritual force or an ultra-metaphysical defensive energy, harnessed and deployed by the indigenous ancient Igbo to resist and defeat a vicious enemy.

Furthermore, this Igbo heroic deity of war, *Ekwensu*, is also not known for war alone, but its ontological responsibilities transcends beyond war. In addition to its major character as the Igbo deity of war, Echo (2021) also says that *Ekwensu* deity is known for his mastery of tricks, craftiness, and god of negotiation, marketing and industries. The indomitability and the invincibility character of the ancient Igbo warriors against their enemies, both far and near, especially the invading British army were attributed to *Ekwensu* deity. It is a historic fact that the ancient Igbo warriors were the last indigenous Nigerian

tribal army to be defeated by the British. It took the British army even with their superior fire power, war experience and scientific and technological advancement, nearly three decades to eventually defeat the ancient Igbo warriors. The reason for this defeat is not farfetched, as the missionaries observed that *Ekwensu* was the spiritual force behind the invincibility of the ancient Igbo warrior fighting against British imperialism and colonialism, they demonized it as evil and as the equivalent of the Christian devil, as result of this the ancient Igbo abandoned the cult of *Ekwensu*. (Echo, 2021)

For Opata (2009), the deliberate destruction of identity and character of *Ekwensu* deity, was part of the evangelical strategies designed by the early Christian missionaries in order to demonize the ancient Igbo religion. In other words, the European Christian missionaries and colonialists, as a result of their religio-cultural influence on Igbo trado-religious environment, seem to have perpetually damaged the identity and character of *Ekwensu* and this had led to the decline in the cult of *Ekwensu* throughout Igboland. Despite this diminutive turn, the decline in the cult of *Ekwensu* in Igboland was not total. For instance, communities like Anaku in Ayamelum Local Government Area still maintains a thriving cult of *Ekwensu* with an existing shrine dedicated to *Ekwensu* and the annual trado-religious festival called *Uta-Ekwensu*. Nnabugwu (2021) observes that *Ekwensu* Anaku deity is still respected and honoured by the community as their major community deity and a protector of their community against invaders.

Duality of Spiritual Forces and the Personification of Good and Evil in Christianity

There is no doubt whatsoever that the world and by extension the universe with all that are therein, its structure, its age, origin, source, substance and constitution and so on, have continued to perplex men from time immemorial. Man as a meaning seeking animal, has engaged his psyche and mind in deep and continuous reflection with the aim of understanding himself, his environment with its inherent powers and energies, the purpose of life and the hereafter. Man as a result of his spiritual, physical and mental constitution, cannot afford not to ponder deeply about himself, his physical and spiritual environment. Therefore one of the principles or ideas which has been discovered and deployed by man that has helped him to understand himself and his environment is the principle, the idea, or the concept of duality or dualism.

Etymologically, the origin of word duality or dualism could be traced to the word dual which in a layman's view means that which consists of two parts, features, functions or roles. Therefore, the word duality or dualism entails a

form of classification or categorization of things, forms, beings, and states and so on, into two opposing or contending parts, wholes or beings. In philosophy, the principle of dualism is an idea in metaphysics which emphasizes the belief in the existence of two categories or forms of realities, substances, spheres, realms or dimensions, namely material or physical reality and immaterial or spiritual reality. The principle of dualism philosophical nay metaphysical concept is traceable to Plato, who in his teaching states that the eternal world of forms or ideas stands behind the material or the physical world (Sandlin, 2016). It was the Neo-Platonism of Dionysius which influenced the Church fathers of the first four centuries of Christianity and sustained the dualist pattern of arranging the world and things. However, the principle or the idea of dualism in religious nay theological studies entails the belief, teaching or the doctrine that there exist two beings, which are completely independent of each other, both in existence and sustenance, perpetually or eternally in opposition against each other with no possibility of reconciliation. One believed to be extremely and absolutely good, while the other is believed to be absolutely evil. Sandlin (2016) in identifying dualism as one of the greatest enemies of Christian culture, describes this Christian theological teaching as the division of powers into two overreaching spheres or principles which are antithetical to each other. He further traced the history of dualism to the heretical teaching of Gnosticism, which teaches the existence of two gods, that is the good of the mind and spirit and the evil god of nature and materialism.

Houdmann (2015) avers that the idea of dualism in theology is centred on the belief that there exist two separate powerful entities good and evil. He further argued that in Christian theology, God represents the good entity and Satan representing the evil entity. In Christian theological concept of dualism, Satan or the devil though generally acknowledged as being powerful, but its powers are said to be limited and inarguably cannot be compared or equated with the Supreme Sovereign powers and authority of God. In other words, the ontological identity and character of the devil, as far as Christian worldview is concerned, is belief in the existence of Satan the devil, an extreme and an absolute evil being, believed to have some level of powers, which is limited and inferior when compared with the Christian God whose powers are said to be limitless and unquantifiable. Houdman (2015) though having acknowledged that there is an element of the belief in dualism in Christian theology, maintains that the scripture does not support dualism, on the basis that the belief in the existence of two opposing forces of equal powers, is heretical and at variance with Christian doctrine, theology and ontology. Therefore, what Christian theology and ontology teach is the existence of a Supreme Being God, who is Almighty and the greatest force which cannot be equated with the powers of Satan, whose powers are inferior and lesser to the

power of God. Yet he did not negate the existence of that opposing force. He was only bothered by the quantum of power each wielded.

Rene (2018) argued that the personification of phenomena, forces and unknown things could be traced to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who are known to have personified phenomena, human qualities or tasks such as love, fertility, war, evil and so on. In Christian theology, doctrine and ontology of Satan the devil is a creation of God Almighty, a fallen archangel, who was able to convince some other heavenly beings to join forces with him in rebelling against God. Christian doctrine teaches that the failure of the rebellion led by Satan signifies the inferiority of the powers of the devil and gave great credence to the Superior powers of God Almighty. There is no doubt that failure of Satan's rebellion against God, demonstrated the superiority of God's power over that of the devil, but the fact that the devil has the power to even contemplate rebellion, went ahead to rebel against God and continues to function as the antithesis of the good God, seem to contradict the relationship between *Chukwu* the Supreme Being and the deities in Igbo religion. In Igbo Traditional Religion, deities are manifestations of God and have no powers whatsoever to rebel or engage in activities capable of challenging the authority, supremacy and sovereignty of God. Although there is an element of the belief in a power that challenges the supreme power of God in some religions such as Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism, but in Christianity the identity and character of the devil is more projected and objectified. Arguably the purpose or the justification for the story of Satan the devil as contained in the Christian sacred book Bible, as taught in Christian theology and conceived in Christian worldview, not only proves the existence of Satan the devil to Christians, but also explains the idea of evil and its origin. The identity and character of the Christian devil no doubt, is a personification of evil, as the devil is seen in Christian worldview an absolute evil being whose vision, mission and intentions are antithetical to God's will.

The introduction of evil to the world created "good" by a good God is attributed to the devil in the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the war in heaven which was as a result of the Lucifer's rebellion against the authority and sovereignty of God. The personification of evil and the belief in the existence of an evil being responsible for all the evils in the world, as taught in many world religions especially Christianity, were questioned by Rene (2018) who sees this belief as man's effort to free himself from guilt and responsibility for orchestration of evil actions or inactions. He further argued that man should strive not to personify evil in other forms or figures, but take responsibility for his actions and inactions. There is no doubt that the problem of evil known in Christian theology as theodicy opens a loophole for the questioning of the existence of an all-powerful God who is absolutely good, omnipotent and Almighty, but allows the existence of

another less powerful evil being to challenge Him and orchestrate evil in the world. Therefore if God is absolutely good, almighty, all powerful, omnipotent, omniscience and could not be said to have created evil, why did He allow an external force, a creation of His to challenge Him, continues to challenge Him and have perpetually remained His arch enemy and His antithesis? The answers to these burning questions have remained quite elusive and unconvincing to many especially the irreligious. Umezurike (2018) avers that in Igbo Traditional Religion, the origin or the problem of evil is not directly traceable to any external force, spiritual being or principality, but rather evil is conceived generally by the majority of the Igbo as a product man's actions and inactions in the society. Therefore, the popular view among the Igbo Christian that *Ekwensu*, the ancient Igbo deity of war, is the ontological equivalent of the Christian devil, whose identity and character is perceived as the personification of evil, is at variance with the notion of *Ekwensu* in Igbo trado-religious worldview.

The Incongruity of *Ekwensu* as an Ontological Equivalent of the Christian Devil

There is no doubt whatsoever that the belief in *Ekwensu* as the conceptual and the ontological equivalent of the devil have been a popular notion among the Igbo, since the introduction of Christianity into Igboland by the early European Christian missionaries. In other words, the demonization, the destruction and the misrepresentation of the identity and character of *Ekwensu*, could be attributed to the activities of the early Christian missionaries in Igbo land. This very notion that *Ekwensu* is the Igbo equivalent of the Christian devil, is so popular among the Igbo, to extent that the very insignificant number of indigenous people of Igbo ethnic group is aware that the original identity and character of *Ekwensu* as reflected in the ancient Igbo trado-religious worldview, contradicts the Igbo Christian identity and character of *Ekwensu*. The demonization of the identity and character of *Ekwensu* is clearly evident in the Igbo translation of the Bible, in various Igbo translation of Christian songs, hymns, prayers. Ndubuisi (2019) observes that "even in the ordinary day to day conversation among the Igbo, all types of temptations and evil acts are attributed to the machinations of the *Ekwensu*" (p.7). In other words, just like the Christian devil, *Ekwensu* is said to be behind all the evils people harbour even in their hearts and those committed through their actions and inactions, whether premeditated or unpremeditated, Aguwa (1987) did not mince words when he identified *Ekwensu*, as the devil and the most wicked evil spirit that always cause unquantifiable harm to man even when unprovoked. He went further to describe *Ekwensu* as the "eternal enemy of *Chukwu* (God). He and his group are able to manipulate man's will and emotions and induce him to do evil. *Ekwensu* is considered so dangerous

to handle, so uncompromising and unappealing that shrines for him do not exist (p.40).

However, the above view credited to Aguwa, aptly captures the common or the popular notion of *Ekwensu* as the conceptual and ontological equivalent of the Christian devil and the extent of the inherent demonization of ancient identity and character of *Ekwensu* deity. Therefore, the question that begs for immediate answer is, why did the early Christian missionaries demonize many Igbo divinities especially *Ekwensu*? The answer is not farfetched, the misrepresentation and the demonization of the identity of *Ekwensu* by the early Christian missionaries appear to have been motivated by their quest to market the Christian religion as a potent replacement of the ancient religion of the indigenous Igbo. Ndunesokwu (2016), one of the critics of missionary activities in Igbo land, in his effort to explain the reason behind this missionary misinterpretation, referred to the demonization of the identity of *Ekwensu* deity. He averred that the early Christian missionaries resort to demonizing *Ekwensu*, upon discovering that the ancient religion of the Igbo did not make provision for the existence of the devil or Satan, in the absence of whom the positioning of the Christian God within a Christian ideology will be problematic. They, therefore, recreated *Ekwensu* in the Devil's identity.

Furthermore, the early missionaries upon discovering the nonexistence of an equivalent of the devil in Igbo trado-religious worldview and the fact that such situation could jeopardize their missionary effort in Igbo land decided to corrupt the original identity and character of *Ekwensu*. It is worthy of note that the identity of *Ekwensu* as the Igbo equivalent of the Christian devil, remains the most popular narrative on *Ekwensu* among the Igbo Christians and non-Christian alike. Therefore, it necessary to question the authenticity of this popular single and probably misleading narrative, by providing credible information that supports argument that the indigenous religion of the ancient Igbo did not recognize the existence of any deity, divinity, force or power that ontologically stands as the arch enemy or the antithesis of God, who opposes the sovereignty, divine will, supremacy and authority of God in Igbo worldview. Opata (2005) observes that the character of violence or bloodshed inherent in the ancient Igbo identity and character of Ekensu, does not present the justification for the demonization of the deity to the extent of ontologically equating it with the Christian devil. For Metuh (1991) the conceptualization of *Ekwensu* as an ontological and the conceptual equivalent the Christian devil is at variance with the ontology of *Ekwensu* in Igbo religion, he further observes that *Ekwensu* enjoys a special relationship with the Igbo Supreme Being *Chukwu* and not an arch enemy whose activities are antithetical to divine will of the Supreme Being.

Both Opata (2005) and Isichei (1969), strongly agree that *Ekwensu* divinity is not the Devil, Satan, or the Lucifer. They anchored their position on the existence of some indigenous Igbo communities where there exist shrines, cultural practices and festivals confirming the existence of *Ekwensu* phenomenon, its identity and character. Contrary to Aguwa's (1987) denial of the existence of shrines dedicated to the cult of *Ekwensu* in any community in Igboland, Opata (2005) identifies the existence of many shrines dedicated to the cult of *Ekwensu* in many Igbo communities. Some notable examples are the *Onu-Ekwensu* shrines at Umundu community in Udenu Local Government Area, Iheaka in Igbo-Eze South, *Iwhu Ekwensu* at Nkalagu, Nimbo, Uvuru, Abi, Ugbene and Anuka all in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area Enugu State, (pp 40-45). In the same vein, ritual or cult activities and practices that were performed at these shrines in the ancient times, proved beyond every reasonable doubt that there exist a great difference between the identity and character of *Ekwensu* and identity and character of the devil. Consequently,

Opata (2005) observes that the venue for the final ritual ceremony before one is conferred with the traditional title of Ozioko in some Igbo Nsukka communities, was usually at the *Onu-Ekwensu* shrine in Umundu community, he further observes that *Ekwensu* shrine in Iheaka, functioned as a prayer centre where members of the community come to make prayer requests to *Ekwensu*. In these prayer requests, people ask for the deity's protection, favour and benevolence. Nimbo, a community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area, Enugu State, according to Opata (2005), has a shrine dedicated to the worship of *Ekwensu*, this shrine was very active before the coming of the missionaries. Here corpses of those who were assumed to be qualified to be ancestors based on the good life they lived, were laid in state in this shrine amidst praises centered on their heroic deeds, integrity, honesty, diligence, and hard work and so on. Furthermore, there are community shrine instituted for the worship of *Ekwensu* located at Amalla in Udenu Local Government Area Enugu State. According to Opata (2005) the annual *Akatakpa* cultural festival takes place in this shrine, in honour of *Ekwensu* deity. During this religio-cultural festival, people of questionable character are strictly forbidden from participating in this festival or coming close to this shrine. Therefore, from the foregoing, it is unthinkable to equate *Ekwensu* deity with the Christian devil. *Ekwensu* as ontologically conceived in Igbo Nsukka, is a deity that confronts and forbids evil and neither a source of all evil nor an antithesis of the Supreme Being.

In Anaku a prominent community in Ayamelum Local Government Area in Anambra State, the researchers observed that there is presently a community shrine instituted and solely dedicated to the cult of *Ekwensu* deity. The cultic activities and the location of this shrine clearly illuminate the identity and character of *Ekwensu* as conceived in ancient Igbo religion. It is clearly

observable that *Ekwensu* Anaku shrine is strategically located at the heart of the community, precisely at Isiokwe Umuezeagu village in Anaku. This is unlike some deities whose shrines are located inside thick forest far away from the neighborhoods. As one approaches this shrine, one striking thing that is easily observable, is the fact that the shrine is located very close to people's compounds, this is an indication that the people do not see the shrine or the deity as evil, but rather as a significant part of their lives. The tolerant nature of the deity and its love for children were inherently evident in the information retrieved from E. Onuorah (personal communication, 7th February, 2021), who reveals that the premises of the shrine is accessible to all, even children. He asserts that it is forbidden in Anaku to beat children at the premises of the shrine. E. Agummadu (personal communication, 1st May 2021) describes *Ekwensu* Anaku as an ancient Igbo deity whose ontological area of specialization is war and victory, especially in defense of the weak, an anti-evil and anti-injustice deity. Therefore, *Ekwensu* Anaku deity does not represent evil, does not condone evil, and does not indulge in evil; *Ekwensu* Anaku is known throughout Omambala sub-cultural zone as a deity that delivers people from all manner of problems. Specifically speaking, those who practice witchcraft, indulge in sorcery or charms used in destroying innocent lives, causing all manner of suffering and misfortune on their fellow humans and so on, fear coming close to the shrine of *Ekwensu* Anaku deity (E. Agummadu, personal communication, 1st May, 2021)

For Isichei (1969), the annual *Ine* or *Ika-Ekwensu* trado-religious festival in Asaba is a good example of an ancient Igbo trado-religious festivals instituted to celebrate, appreciate and honour the divinity *Ekwensu* for his role in protecting the lives of the people against their enemies. It is incomprehensive to agree with the notion that *Ekwensu* is the Igbo ontological equivalent of the Christian devil, when there is the existence of natural objects like mountains, lands, forests, and so on, dedicated in honour of *Ekwensu.* Some of these places dedicated and named in honour of *Ekwensu* are *Ugwu-Ekwensu* in Ukpor, Ani-*Ekwensu* in Achi, and *Ohia Ngene Ekwensu* in Ufuma, *Ohia Ekwensu* in Uga, and so on. The fact that these places are not regarded as evil by the various communities where they exist, seems to be a clear testament that the ancient Igbo never conceived *Ekwensu* as an evil deity, whose identity and character are congruent with the Christian devil**.**

From the fore going, the identity and character of *Ekwensu* in Igbo worldview has no epistemological or ontological relationship with the arch-evil spirit of Christianity, which rebelled against God, challenged God's supremacy and was eventually banished and imprisoned in a fiery furnace called hellfire. In the same vein, the idea of the existence of a Supreme God, who is absolutely good and an arch evil spirit, which is in eternal opposition against each other, is consciously absent in Igbo trado-religious worldview and in Igbo

pantheons. Igbo gods, deities or divinities as conceived in Igbo religious worldview, are neither good nor evil, but act within their divinely assigned ontological jurisdiction. In Igbo trado-religious thought, when deities seem to act in a way that might be interpreted as evil in a layman man's view, most often than not, they are said to be enforcing divine judgment on the victims. Also the powers of deities in Igbo religious worldview are not absolute, their actions and inactions in the absence of any divine indictment or declaration of guilt, the deities are expected to promote individual and communal wellbeing. When they failed in this regard, abandonment, rejection and destruction will inevitably be their fate. This belief is aptly captured in Igbo proverbial or wise saying "*Arụsị wakarịa anya egosi ya osisi eji were tụọ ya*," and "*Ikenga m adịghị ire a waa m ya nkụ*," ("if a deity becomes unruly the tree from whose wood its effigy was carved will be revealed to it" and "if my *Ikenga* (deity) proves ineffective or inefficacious, I will break and use it as firewood").

Therefore, the apparent decline of the cult of *Ekwensu* throughout Igbo land may not be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the deity to promote societal wellbeing but could be understood as a product of the mistranslation and the demonization of the deity as the ontological equivalent of the Christian devil. The incongruity of the identity and character of *Ekwensu*, in Igbo trado-religious worldview with the Christian devil, and the relationship between *Chukwu* the Supreme Being, is excellently captured by Umeh (1999) thus:

> *Ekwensu* is the beautiful one in Igboland and in ancient Egypt. It is a war deity with countless victories as *Oha Obala/ Ora Obala*, in Igbo Afa , it is saluted as *Ugo Tagbulu* Agwo , that is the Eagle that pecked the evil serpent to death , *Ekwensu* the Eagle spirit of war and victory glides down the earth with countless victories. *Ekwensu* is also confirmed to be one of the benevolent lunar deities. The Igbo *Afa* terminology *Ora Obala/ Oha Obala* literally means the child of the God of light or child of the sun, which means the moon, the Eagle and *Ekwensu*…It is indeed a ridiculous absurdity from any Igbo person to talk of *Ekwensu* as a devil or an evil spirit as the Eagle and the moon and the child of light have never been associated with evils or evil ones, but have always been associated with achievement, good victory, success and the beautiful ones (pp.196-197)

The Paradox of the Christian Devil

The idea or the belief in the existence of a deity or a powerful evil spirit, being in a constant tussle with an equally powerful good deity for the control of man and the universe, is a dominant character or element of many religions of world. Geggel (2016) traced the origin of the belief the idea of the devil to the ancient Persian traditional religion Zoroastrianism, from which the idea

diffused into many major world religions. The idea or identity and character of the devil features more prominently in Christian worldview, where the ontology of the devil is conceived as purely a personification of the evil, embodiment of evil and the source of evil in the world. The belief in the existence of the devil or the entire idea of the devil in Christianity is quite a paradox. It is contradictory to conceive a creation of God, the Supreme Being who is Almighty, Omnipotent, Omniscience and Omnipresent, having the audacity and powers to oppose the authority, the supremacy and sovereignty of the Supreme Being. No matter how one sees it or no matter the explanation given by many Christian scholars, the identity and character of Satan the devil in Christian worldview remains, a paradox which no matter the explanation already given by many theologians and Christian apologists seems to a great extent, question the ontology of the supremacy of God in Judeo-Christian worldview.

However, in the Christian sacred book, the devil is described as a personification of evil, an enemy of God and God's children, destroyer, killer, liar, accuser of the faithful, tempter, prince of darkness, Satan and Lucifer. Ndubuisi (2019) avers that Christians believe that all that the Holy Scripture said about Satan the devil is an absolute truth and never superstition, myth or legend. The belief in the existence of the devil is arguably one of the most important themes in the Christian message. The devil is created an archangel, first among equals, among the heavenly hosts and ontologically under the trinity in hierarchy. The scriptures gave a vivid account of the war between God/his Angels and Satan/his demons, the fall of man in the Garden of Eden caused by the devil taking the form of a serpent and deceiving man to disobey God, the damnation of man, Christ's victory over Satan the devil, sin and death through the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary and the His resurrection.

Consequently, Almond (2021) observes that the idea of the devil is a paradox, in the sense that despite the obvious victory of Christ over Satan the devil, and his defeat by the heavenly host, it is still a common belief among Christians that Satan the devil is the cause all the evil in the world. He further avers that in Christian worldview, the devil is conceived as an eternal arch-enemy and antithesis of God, yet that same devil is portrayed as a servant of God. This is clearly demonstrated in the account of Job, whom in spite of his faithfulness to God suffered greatly because God allowed the devil, the freedom to test Job's faith in Him. Therefore if Christ who possesses the character God, had defeated the devil the source of all evil, through his death and resurrection, why then do we still have much evil now in the world, which are still attributed to the devil? Does the Bible's view of the devil as the prince of this world and God's permission to the devil to test Job's faithfulness in Him not

cast doubt over His Omnipotence and Omniscience character? These and more are the paradoxes emanating from the identity and character of the devil in Christian worldview and clearly absent in Igbo religion as it concerns the identity and character of *Ekwensu*.

Conclusion

The principles or ideas of dualism and personification of good and evil are among the major elements of many influential religions of world. In Christianity, these ideas are more developed and explained in details. In Igbo traditional religion, the idea of dualism and personification of evil are conspicuously absent. The Supreme Being in Igbo trado-religious worldview enjoys absolute Supremacy, Sovereignty and truly Almighty. No deity whether good or evil, dares to challenge His authority or mislead His creation. All beings in Igbo ontology including *Ekwensu*, are working according to the divine will of the Igbo Supreme Being The Igbo just like every other indigenous people in Africa, are very religious and believe in the absolute omnipotence of the Supreme Being and would never have established, instituted or developed the cult of *Ekwensu*, if they had conceived this deity as absolute evil and an arch-enemy of the Supreme Being. The existence of community shrines in some Igbo communities strictly established or instituted for the cult of *Ekwensu*, and the existence of elaborate ritual sacrifice to the deity *Ekwensu* for favours or as a show of gratitude, no doubt gave a clear indication that the ancient Igbo never conceived *Ekwensu* as an absolute evil being, nor ascribed to *Ekwensu* the same qualities or character Christianity ascribed to the Christian devil.

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