

Traditional Rational Arguments for the Existence of God (Chukwu) in Igbo Traditional Philosophy

C.C. Mbaegbu

Abstract

The question on whether or not the Supreme Being is a stranger in Igbo traditional philosophy is a question on being and its being there. This paper adopts an analytico- deductive method to examine some clues on this existence -question of God among the pre- modern Igbo; and the implication is that due to hasty generalizations and false certainty some scholars even of philosophy still maintain that the Supreme Being is of Western importation. Both Christianity and Igbo traditional philosophy, the paper also argues, have something to contribute to the debate but the contribution of Christianity far outweighs that of the pre- modern Igbo since the former has the epistemological advantage of the Supernatural revelation and in possession of literacy before the latter. Nevertheless, prior to Christianity the raw materials for the philosophy of God were encapsulated in the Igbo man's oral tradition only to be highlighted by a culture that is highly literate and philosophical.

Introduction

The God question debate in philosophy has remained pervasive and inevitable in the history of human thought and tradition possibly because of its great importance in the question of God- man relationship. It seems that God is the reason behind the whole universe sensible and supra- sensible. No wonder also man has turned his attention to all sorts of problems revolving around God, ranging from whether or not he exists, to his essence or nature and other related issues not excluding the all – important issue of his relationship with other beings in the universe. In trying to solve all these problems, Western thinkers do not agree in almost all issues raised. Consequently they are divided.

Likewise, the God- question extends to African philosophy. However, our consideration here is with particular reference to Igbo traditional philosophy. Our interest in this paper is on the most controvertible question of them all which is the existence- question. On this issue two camps are outstanding. One camp is of the view that the Igbo through natural faith or reason have some knowledge of the Supreme Being. In the opposing camp is the negative view of some scholars of Igbo traditional philosophy. These scholars contend that the one Supreme God is a stranger to Igbo traditional thought and religious practices.

Scholars, mostly of African Traditional Religion and culture seem to take the idea of one Supreme Being among the Igbo for granted, a fact which needs no proofs, no examination, and no further argument whatsoever. Philosophers, rather philosophy on the contrary subjects every assumption to critical scrutiny or analysis until all doubts are removed and certainty assured. Hence the actual burden of this paper is a detailed analysis and deductions from some of the traditional modes of conservation and

preservation of ideas among the Igbo in order to show that the real existence of the Supreme Being in Igbo traditional world and world-view are encapsulated in them and not a borrowed concept as some have continued to advance. The concept of the Supreme Being is not a stranger in Igbo traditional philosophy.

Traditional Rational Clues

By this phrase, we mean that the conception in the Igbo mind, of the existence of the Supreme Being has nothing whatsoever to do with missionary influence or any cultural influences like Westernism. Rather the magnificent conceptions or knowledge of God among the pre-modern Igbo is native and original to them and such knowledge comes basically from natural light of reason, in the sense that his reason leads him to wonder about the mysteries in the world and to recognize the maker of all things. But because there are neither sacred writings, no formulated scientific, philosophic proofs or ways of demonstrating the existence of God as in Christianity and Western philosophy, knowledge of God is encapsulated in the indigenous or natural expressions of the people, popularly known as oral tradition which is easy to remember and pass on from generation to generation. We have to rely heavily on these traditional modes of conceiving God because it would be pointless to expect a people incapable of writing except very recently and a vast majority of them are still illiterate, to give us a systematic, highly philosophical, well documented Western type of theology or philosophy of God. This has been the great error of many Western ethnologists of African or Igbo philosophy. In the absence of Churches, Bibles, prayer books, even preachers they concluded that the pre-modern Igbo man has no notion of the Supreme God. We therefore set out to demonstrate the existence of God (CHI- UKWU) beginning from analysis of the existence of pre-Christian Igbo names,

Demonstration from Pre-Christian Igbo Names

We find *CHI- UKWU* which is the name of the Supreme Being in Igbo ontology used in myths, proverbs and folk-lore. The Igbo man invokes CHI consciously or unconsciously several times a day and one wonders if for a considerable number of times he is not referring to the Supreme Being. Indeed, this led Anyika (1988) to conclude that when *Chi* stands in juxtaposition with UKWU, that is, when a qualifying suffix *Ukwu* (Greatest) is attached to it, by that very fact, it becomes a centripetal force with all the properties of the Ultimate Reality. Thus care must be exercised to know from the context the actual meaning of *Chi* particularly when the suffix *Ukwu* (Greatest) is not attached. The same care must be taken never to misunderstand the universal or proper CHI- UKWU of the Igbo with *Ibini*

Ukpabi the local god of the *Aros* later styled *Chukwu*. With these observations we are set to examine some of the names coined with God's name prevalent in various Igbo localities to show that God is a real existent being among the pre- modern Igbo. First we have those names that depict absolute power and supremacy of God (*Chukwu*): *CHUKWUBUIKE* (God is power or to God belongs all strength); *IFEANYI CHUKWU* (Nothing is impossible with God). Then we have some names coined from God's name which express gratitude to God for his Divine providence like *CHUKWUEMEKA* (God is gracious) and *EBELE CHUKWU* (God has shown mercy). Some of these names express wonder and praise in the face of God's majesty and power: *CHUKWUEBUKA* (God is very great); *CHUKWUDIEGWU* (God is fearful); *UDECHUKWU* (God is glorious); *UGOCHUKWU* (God is honour or honourable). Other names express memories of one's pilgrimage to God: *ONUCHUKWU* (God's voice or shrine of the Supreme Being); *UZOCHI* (the road to God); *AJULUCHI* (was God consulted); *ILECHUKWU* (God's ability or power).

Here also one has to be careful of the phrase *ONUCHUKWU*, *UZOCHI* and *AJULUCHI*. This is in view of the equivocal nature of these terms in Igbo traditional world- view. Hence the timely warning of Nwoga (1984) anybody who has grown up in Igbo land would of course see this pattern of phrase as derived from the oracular practice: If a case becomes difficult, *ejere ya be Chukwu*. We agree with Nwoga in part that a phrase like *Ije Chukwu* (consulting God) in difficult cases means the oracle at *Aro CHUKWU*. But that is not the case in nearly many circumstances. The proper *CHI- UKWU* (God) the ultimate Being in Igbo ontology is also consulted in extreme circumstances when all media have failed. The petitioner or the persecuted is asked to go and appeal to God in his capacity as the only being that has final answer in all matters. In this case the person is advised to *Jee Koro CHI- UKWU* (petition or beg from God). *Aro* god is not meant here.

The essence of analyzing these names applied directly to God is because these names were not borrowed from any culture and they show that the Igbo man has an indigenous belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. They serve as traditional rational evidences for establishing belief in the real existence of the Supreme Being among the pre- modern Igbo. Apart from these names, there are many names in Igbo culture which the pre- modern Igbo give to their children and from these names their concept of God are easily deduced. Hence Arinze (1970) writes:

Besides these names which are applied to God, there are many names which Ibo pagan parents give to their children and these

names serve also as a key to the Ibo concept of God. God is Creator: Chukwuneke or Chukwukelu (God creates), Chukwunyelu, (God gave). Some names praise God's knowledge: Chukwuma (God knows), Chukwumaijem (God knows my steps or my journey) (p. 9).

These names express faith and confidence in God especially if we agree with Arinze (1970) that these are traditional Ibo names and have not been coined by Christians. The Christian Church came to Ibo land less than eighty years ago, and these are names of grand- parents who died long ago and of children of pagans still living. (p. 10) Thinking along the same line with Arinze, Obiego writes that the existence of these names implies belief in the existence of God. The implication is that one is in a position to argue from their existence to Igbo belief in the existence of God. And accordingly Obiego (1978) argues and with a corollary which is likely to throw more light on the existence of the Supreme Being basing his argument on the existence of such names:

Even if these [names applied directly to God] do not suffice there are also certain Igbo names which explicitly assert that God exists. Such names are *Chukwu di* (which means: God is). *Idi* is the very word, to exist. *Odi* is the third person singular meaning; he/she/it exists or is. In the above name, it is stated simply that *Chukwudi* (God) is and *Chukwudifu*- God still exists. This is a more emphatic form of the first name *Chukwudi*. *Fu* is added for emphasis as if to assure the doubting Thomas that the fact is beyond doubt. (p. 30).

These assertions though dogmatic in nature, are based on practical experience. The pre-modern Igbo man having observed the mysteries and wonders of creation must have drawn such conclusions, namely that *Chukwudi* (God really exists). The above names are traditional evidences establishing the existence of God in Igbo traditional ontology. But care should also be taken to know from the context where to draw the curtain, that is, more efforts should be made to limit ourselves to those names which are in existence before the coming of the missionaries and before the localization or enthronement of the *Ibini Ukpabi* of *Aro Chukwu* to the status of *CHI- UKWU*.

Analysis and Deduction from Igbo Proverbs

Proverbs for the Igbo are vegetables for eating words; they are feathery ornaments with which speeches are decorated. They enliven public speeches at meetings, social gatherings, religious and political rallies and various other occasions. For Chinua Achebe, proverbs are the oil with which words are eaten. (*inu bu mmanu eji eri okwu*). The Igbo do not

emphasize only the enlivening role of proverbs in any gathering. There is more to that. There is the indispensable function, namely, it codifies traditional beliefs or faith in God, man and the universe. Proverbs reveal religious faith, a world view, and the aspirations, hopes and fears of the people. Consequently the Igbo have a store of proverbs in which are enshrined the ancient wisdom, beliefs and the accumulated experiences of the pre- modern Igbo man. Let us analyze and deduce the real existence of God from some popular indigenous proverbs which express the absolute, supreme or ultimate nature of God.

Achokata Dibia Agaba Chukwu N'Iru (After consulting a native doctor for several times all to no avail it becomes necessary to go direct to God). On analysis, this proverb apart from emphasizing the fact of God's existence also acknowledges some of his essential attributes, namely, absoluteness, ultimate power, etc. *Chukwu Gbo Ogu Ile Dibia Abulu Eziokwu* (traditional medicine men admit the truth of any case that has been settled by God (*CHI-UKWU*)) This is a way of acknowledging the Monotheistic Ultimacy of *CHI- UKWU* in moral issues, namely, that God's decision is infallibly true and final. God is portrayed as the basis and guarantor of morality, probably because he knows not only the hidden activities of man but also hidden intentions; and would vindicate the falsely accused. Based on these assumptions the Igbo say: *Chukwu ma njo onye* (only God knows what is evil and can judge human intentions). *Chi bu obo onye ana emegbu emegbu* (God vindicates the course of a wrongly persecuted soul). He will judge the world and apportion justice. Here God is conceived as the existent, Supreme Being with absolute power and authority in both moral and socio-cultural issues. The regular approaches to him through mediator- gods, instead of emphasizing the fact of his non- existence strengthens the fact that he exists and there is none like him. He demands special reference and moral dignity that he is not approached the way the gods, his creatures are approached.

Some proverbs also emphasize God's providence. There are proverbs which express God's omniscience, omnipotence, kindness; his creative nature etc; which can also be deduced from the proverbs mentioned above. Though there are no proverbs in Igbo culture that expressly say that God's existence is a fact or self – evident truth almost known to all, these proverbs tell us more about God's nature and attributes and by implication his existence. It would tantamount to self contradiction to deny existence to a being considered or acknowledged by these people to be both the principles of absoluteness, creation and continued existence and dependence of all

creatures whose being is contingent upon the Necessary Being, God (*CHI-UKWU*).

The above proverbs are clearly indigenous, as old as the traditional Igbo who coined them. They were in existence before the arrival of Christianity. The proverbs which are coined with God's name are usually few in Igbo traditional culture and this is not unusual of a set up where the Supreme Being is considered a transcendent being, very great, majestic and awe-inspiring and holy, compared to the deities who are his creatures. The names of these deities definitely appear in greater frequency than God. Only in special occasions does an Igbo man use the name of *CHI-UKWU* in his proverbs. Before the advent of Christianity, the Igbo conceive God as a transcendent, majestic and fearful being but could not resist preserving his existence in proverbial forms even if it means doing that at the expense of their being punished by him.

In none of these proverbs can the *Aro* god be replaced with the proper God of Igbo ontology. Neither can the personal god or destiny be substituted for the proper *CHI-UKWU* of the Igbo. The meaning in each case is always *CHI-UKWU* especially where *CHI-UKWU* is used in an abbreviated form, namely, as *Chi*. It is therefore an erroneous conception to think or to suggest that these proverbs refer to the local god of the *Aro* or the personal gods of the Igbo or man's lot or destiny also called *Chi*. Undoubtedly, there are proverbs when taken in their proper context convey such ideas or notions. They contain certain ideas about God, man and the universe. Let us support our argument based on proverbs with some mythical stories especially myths about the origin of the universe.

Critical Analysis and Deduction from Myths

What is required here is the epistemological truth or awareness that these myths are materials for critical philosophy. They should be understood as quasi scientific postulations of knowledge and religion. They are uncoordinated, unscientific, uncritical containing and explaining some basic truths or assumptions of the traditional Igbo man. But care must be taken to avoid an illicit jump or inference from mythical to real order. Articulated in another way, these myths must be subjected to critical scrutiny to sift the truth from the false, the logical from the illogical and the credible from the incredible. Let us therefore apply the above method in examining myths in order to establish our thesis, namely, the existence of God (*CHI-UKWU*) in Igbo traditional thought and life.

The Myth of the Origin of Death

One famous myth of the Igbo of Nigeria, under circulation in various forms and which tells how death came into the world is narrated by Obiego (1978).

At the beginning of things when there was nothing, neither man nor animals nor plants nor heaven nor earth, nothing indeed, nothing was, only one very powerful person was and his name was *CHUKWU*. Then He came and created both the water below, animals and everything as we see it today. Afterwards, *Chineke* created man, man was the head of all things, but *CHINEKE* and *ALa* own man. After a long time, death entered the world and began killing men. Men sent a messenger to Him asking Him whether the dead could be restored to life and sent back to their homes. They chose a dog as their messenger. The dog however, did not go straight to Him, rather he dallied on the way. The toad had however, overheard the message and he wanted (wished) to punish mankind. He overtook the dog and reached *Chineke* first. He said that he had been sent by men to say that after death, they had no desire at all to return to the world. *Chineke* declared that He would respect men's wishes and when the dog arrived to *Chineke* with the true message, *Chineke* refused to alter His decision. Thus human being may be born again, he cannot return with the same body and the same personality (pp. 29-30).

Myth of Why the Supreme Being Withdrew from the World of Men

At Nnokwa in Idemili South Local Government Area of Anambra State, they have a myth of how *CHI- UKWU* (God) and man or earth was near to each other originally. The sky then, lay just above the earth. Men could reach *CHI- UKWU* (God) through a rope which hung down from the sky. There was no death at this time when God created the world and man. Men never lacked anything, God was interested in their affairs, associating and providing for them in all their needs. God was very, very near to man. The spirits and men were one. One day it happened that a woman spat out into the eyes of God. He was offended and withdrew with the sky to its present position and punished men by causing them to die. Since then things became difficult for men on earth. Evil, sin and suffering have spread all over the earth.

Critical Analysis and Deduction from the Myths

At first, though the aetiological tale, namely, why man must die is directly concerned with the explanation of origin of death in the universe; more importantly, it does raise serious questions and portrays the people's

belief that God created the world and everything in it. The term *Chineke*, (the spirit that creates shares and apportions); and this unique act is the exclusive nature of the ultimate being in Igbo ontology particularly among the Owerri dialect area of the Igbo. There is no doubt therefore that *Chineke* in this mythical tale is far from representing god in his duality, namely, each person's deity and his creator Chi. Other spirits such as *Ani* (the earth goddess), and ancestors can and do perform their assigned functions in various areas of operations. But as for creation, that is the prerogative of the ultimate being, *CHI- UKWU*. He is the Ultimate Being that creates.

On further analysis we know that only God (*CHI- UKWU*) or (*CHI- NA- EKE*) and only he can give life and can as well take away same. Hence, in these aetiological tales, the source of life and death has to be approached. The phrase to send a message to *Chineke* is very clear. This *Chineke* is one and unique. The problem facing man was a very difficult one beyond the jurisdiction of the gods and has to be referred to the last court of appeal, the being that has the ultimate power and authority who is also described as a very powerful person and such a being must necessarily exist.

The story portrays *Chineke* (the God that creates) in all his essential characteristics. And there was no being who shares these attributes with him. If there were such beings, they could have been approached in this story. But there was none like him. He has the last say in almost all issues particularly when life and death are involved. The conclusion from this analysis is that the creative principle must exist of necessity.

The myth of why God withdrew from men is concerned with existential rather than the metaphysical problem about evil in the world. The fact of the existence of God is primary in this myth. And this real being is the creator of the world. In this withdrawn myth the separation and the distance between God and the earth provide ready clue for the immediate deduction of God's transcendental and immanent attributes. At first God was immanent, very near and he cares and provides for his children. His ultimate nature is deduced from the punishment he meted out to man as a result of his immoral behaviour.

On further analysis, one observes that these myths though silent about the origin of the creative principle, such a principle was there at the beginning but no attempt was made to explain how he came to be there. This does not worry the pre- modern Igbo. The principle for them was wrapped in mystery. It has always been there and was there at creation time. As far as the temporal setting goes the mythical stories are always shown as taking place once upon a time, and a very long time ago when the world was young; before the leopard got its spots; when women used to wear

moustaches. Set as taking place at a vague time in the distant past in order to establish the antiquity as well as the anonymity of these tales. Before this distant past, the *Chineke*, God of creation was in existence. The term eternity of God is not within the category of Igbo traditional thoughts, though in a vague form it is understood. But from these stories it is explicitly clear that the creative principle is the first cause and Supreme principle from which all other realities known to man trace their origin. He has precedence over all other beings both in time and perfection. In the words of Metuh (1978) he depends on no other for his existence but all other beings derive their existence from him.

Such a being exists in Igbo traditional world- view and is real, too. Indeed, in Igbo traditional life there are no atheists. Even children know that God exists without being taught. To find out how old these myths are, is to ask how old is Igbo tradition and culture. Certainly, the tradition and culture of the pre- modern Igbo is pre- Christian at least in Igbo land. Consequently the concepts of God's existence encapsulated in these myths are prior to Christianity and in them are couched the Igbo man's concepts and faith in God particularly the belief that he exists and is real. If myths were wholly true stories and if it were easy to make an easy and legal jump or inference from mythical order to real order, the concept of the existence of the Ultimate Being in Igbo traditional ontology could have been easily established through the Igbo mythologies. Notwithstanding, myths should not be taken as wholly false providing no useful guide to the concept of the existence of the Supreme Being. In as much as myths are not false, they exist as guides to explain things. Their place in Igbo world view should not be over exaggerated.

Argument Based On the Existence of Art- Forms

By art- forms we mean, different categories of works of art, namely, objects recovered from archaeological excavations or contemporary works of art; temples, altars and priests dedicated to the Supreme Being; feast days for the worship of CHI- UKWU from time immemorial. These are inevitable sources of religious beliefs and they provide a wealth of information on a people's past as well as contemporary religious beliefs. Indeed this traditional rational indications for the real existence of God based on the existence of art- forms, is the most cherished argument for the existence of God in Igbo traditional philosophy. It really demonstrates the practical impossibility of the non- existence of God in Igbo traditional philosophy. The discovery of these religious art- forms dedicated to *CHI- UKWU* the Igbo Supreme Being definitely punctures the erroneous statements that the Igbo Supreme Being was not worshipped or appeased

and therefore does not exist or exists but is not recognized because he is passive. The wrong belief in the allegedly non – existence of these religious art- forms coupled with the myths about the withdrawn God of the Igbo had heightened beliefs in the non- existence of God in the traditional life of the Igbo. And if it is accepted that a single exception disapproves a sweeping statement in logic, in what follows, we shall point to the existence of shrines or altars, feasts days, where and when organized worship of *CHI- UKWU* (God) is respectively practised from time immemorial, either for appeasement or for restitution of man’s vital force, and the ontological order disturbed by man’s act of being- in – the – Igbo – world. The aim is to provide sure clue for God’s existence from them and more importantly to disapprove of the statement made to the contrary by Nze (1981) that:

There is no single instance where the Igbos perform sacrifices to or worship a single being of the Christian concept. Because the Igbos perform sacrifices as acts of appeasement and or worship and because there exists no occasion when a Supreme Being of the Christian description is appeased or worshipped, it can be said that this being does not exist at all or exists but is not recognized because he is passive. Our fathers worshipped gods not a God. (p. 23).

Earlier than Nze, O’Connell (1962) was credited with saying that the Igbo assign various attributes to their Supreme Being *CHI- UKWU* and he regrets that in spite of these attributes the [Igbo] High God is not directly worshipped; He has no priests and no shrines are dedicated to him. (p. 69). Such derogatory statements like that of Nze, O’ Connell, etc; are due to casual observation in the face of painstaking research. Let us show that *CHI- UKWU* (the Greatest Chi) has altars, priests and feast days when he is accorded direct worship in various parts of Igbo land.

Ilogu (1974) after a painstaking investigation among the Ihiala people in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State insists that *CHI- UKWU* has altars and priests and even feast days and definitely receives or is paid practical worship both public and private. He records his research findings and my investigations yield the same results, namely, that:

At Ihiala I have discovered a public shrine called *Egbo Chukwu* (the Square of the Supreme God). The annual public sacrifice performed at this shrine and offered to the Supreme God, includes the offering of cocks by mothers who have given birth to male children, within the period between one annual celebration and another. Because it is believed that life comes from *Chukwu* or *Chineke* this annual celebration before the *Chukwu* shrine is an acknowledgement of such life given to the newly born children in the village and the dedication of

the life of all the inhabitants to *Chukwu*. Prayers are also offered to the *Chukwu* on behalf of newly married women who are presented to the shrine with the ceremony of *Ihibe Akwukwa* (the setting up of the hearth, the earthen tripod on which a wife cooks her meals). This is to symbolize that the newly married wife is now established in her new home into which *Chineke* will be pleased to send children to be fed with the food cooked on this hearth. All *Ozo* (titled men) at Ihiala erect household shrines to *chukwu*, commonly called *Ihu- Chukwu*. Sacrifices are offered at these shrines annually during religious festivals like *Iro Muo* and *Ite Otite*. (p. 40).

Arazu has made a similar painstaking research in Ihemboisi also in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State and in the end he discovers that *Chukwu* (God) is definitely paid practical cult in that town Ihemboisi, his home town. And to clear the ambiguity and the disharmony that might arise from the *Chukwu* (God) worship connected with the Aro Oracle, Ibini Ukpabi, Arazu made it clear that his people refer to the god of that oracle as *Chukwu Abiamayi* to differentiate it from *Chukwu* proper worshipped in the town. Thus from Arazu's scholarly research, *Chukwu* has His shrine known as *Okwu Chukwu* (the shrine of *Chukwu*). He has a whole native week for his worship at His ancient shrine. This annual celebration at this shrine is presided over by a man from the oldest and therefore first of the eight villages. The priesthood for this feast belongs to this village, Umuabu.

In his detailed research work, Arinze (1970) observes that in the central and Southern parts of Igbo land, there exists *Aja Eze Enu* (sacrifice to God) sacrifices given to the Supreme Being in Ogidi, Achina and Maku.

At Enugu Ezike, *Obukpa Asadu* there exist individual altars for *Chukwu*, precisely at Obukpa Asadu, and each one personal altar is called *Onu Chukwu* which is in the form of a cone- shaped earthen altar, a live tree called *Ogbu* or *Ajulu Osisi*. On top of the earthen mound are a stone and an earth disc facing the rising sun. This is a common familiar altar. Apart from these personal altars there are commonly owned altars by the village or clan and these abound in Nsukka area. They are located in the public squares (village squares). At Umune- Gwa village square they have one communal shrine called *Onu Anyanwu Ezechitoke*. Also at the village square of *Amube*, Enugu Ezike in Igbo – Eze North Local government Area of Enugu State there is a type of communal shrine or altar. With the proliferation of altars and priests and feast days dedicated to the Supreme Being in Nsukka areas; there is the cult of the Supreme Being under two main divisions, namely, direct and indirect and the end of these cultic practices is man's humble approach to the Omnipotent God to ask him for favours and to thank him for

those received. Direct sacrifices to God are performed by the *Onyishi* (the eldest man in the village) through the *Arua* ceremony; which is preceded by the daily worship before the family *Ezechitoke* altar called *Onu Anyanwu* (mouth of God, in the individual compound). Items used for this ceremony consist of kola nut, water, or palm wine, tobacco snuff and small food (roasted or boiled yam) but in most cases the most important items are kola nut and a small quantity of water in a small round wooden bowl. In the prayers offered during this *Arua* ceremony *CHI- UKWU* (God) is called right from the beginning to come and have kola nut, while in others he is called at the end of the prayer but God was the first to be called to have kola nut before even the *Arua* itself. Thus in the university town of Nsukka North of Igbo land Anyika (1989) observes that:

There is an elaborate and tremendous amount of direct worship to Ezechitoke... as the Supreme Being is properly called here. The worship assumes four different forms- daily worship conducted at the village square by the eldest man in the village; individual worship conducted by *pater familias* [the head of the family] at the domestic shrine; annual worship marking the highlight of the yearly festival in honour of Ezechitoke and fourthly sacrifices offered spasmodically either by individuals at their domestic Shrines or by the eldest man in the village at the village communal Shrine. In all this worship, offerings consist mostly of kola nut and palm oil. (p. 14).

Describing the Aja Eze Enu altar at Ossomare where the people have an altar or shrine for the worship of the Supreme Being prior to Christianity, Talbot (1926) writes: His [Chukwu] most common symbol is an *Ogbu* cotton, or *Awha* or (*Chi*) tree some four to six inches high, usually accompanied by round or flat stones, and a pot or pots, containing water and sometimes yellow wood, eggs, phallic chalk- cones, round stones and palm wine. (p. 41). One observes with interest that this type of tree altar abound in various parts of Igbo land, particularly in the Southern Area Group of the Igbo.

From the fore- going, the practical impossibility of the non- existence of the belief in God in Igbo traditional thought is completely supported with the existence of altars or shrines, priests, feast days and practical worship of God (*CHI- UKWU*). These are in abundance throughout Igbo land from time immemorial. It is therefore a complete aberration of Igbo traditional thought and practice to hold either that there are no single instances where the Igbo perform sacrifices to or worship a single Being of the Christian concept or that the Igbo High God is not directly worshipped; He has no priests and no shrines are dedicated to his service and that he gets no direct

sacrifices from the living. These are erroneous assertions. And indeed, the Igbo God, (CHI- UKWU) is the Ultimate object of Igbo traditional Religion, and such a God exists as a real being to his worshippers.

Contribution of Igbo Traditional Conception of God

The concepts of God in Igbo world view have meaning and should be appreciated as such and correctly, too. They form the basis of our individual and communal behaviours. Christianity indeed capitalized on them early as formidable basis for gospel proclamation. Christianity therefore proceeded conveniently from the known elements of traditional religion of the Igbo to the facts of the Christian faith. No wonder Christianity as a religion witnessed a sharp rise in converts over the years in Igbo land; but it is another thing to argue as to whether or not they are really converted? This does not mean that Christianity has very little new to add. Christianity has much to add. From practical experience of the Igbo Christian it has been observed that the traditional God and gods of the Igbo are still in opposition to the Christian God and the former is still in opposition to the latter. The Igbo God (God and gods) is more of a hindrance to the Christian God.

Okolo (1995) in highlighting this negative contribution of African traditional religion to Christianity observes and correctly, too, that experience fully bears out that the Igbo gods have not been completely routed by Christianity; neither do they appear to be fast in retreat. But what has been very much overlooked by modern scholars is, first of all, that as far as the practice of genuine Christianity by the Igbo is concerned, African Traditional Religion constitutes a great obstacle and to call a spade a spade, African Traditional Religion is more of an *obex evangelio* or great hindrance to gospel reception or proclamation than a *preparatio evangelio*, a preparation for the gospel. (p. 5). Okolo (1995) concludes that the real stumbling block to Christianity as far as the Igbo are concerned is African Traditional Religion in its essential materialistic world view and all this life- affirming values almost absolutized. This is the essential problem of African Christianity. It is the neglected dimension by African Traditional Religion scholars as they relate it to Christianity. (p. 20)

What actually is the contribution of Christianity to Igbo Traditional Religion and vice versa? Before the advent of Christianity our fore- fathers were in possession of the concepts of God and gods, which are deducible from all the various cultural expressions or oral tradition of the Igbo man. But these concepts were not yet, scientific but uncoordinated. What we think Christianity contributed to Igbo traditional notions of God is better summarized in the phrase, logical conclusion and fulfillment. Areas brought

to their logical conclusions include documentation, true nature of God, creation out of nothing, relationship of God with other mediators, the vertical dimension of auto transcendence and the Theo- centric world view. Apart from turning out skin- deep Christians, Christianity did one thing for the Igbo man. It brought God, *CHI- UKWU* very near to him. What the early missionaries did with the help of our Igbo catechists was to translate the Hebrew Christian names into personal names and gave them to the children of early converts. Hence the rapidity with which such names are gradually replacing names of saints. They are easy alternatives to the Igbo original personal names. Perhaps what might be considered as the most essential contribution of Christianity to Igbo traditional religion is in the area of morality. Some taboos in Igbo traditional world view, namely, killing of twins, etc; are reconsidered or giving theological explanations. Instead of conceiving them as metaphysical evils; they are reconsidered as a blessing and are also cherished. Thus there exists a relationship of mutual complementarity between the conceptions of the pre-modern Igbo man about God and the Christian.

Conclusion

The concept of the real existence of the Supreme God among the pre- modern Igbo is indigenous to them. What they think was foreign to them is the idea of a Christian God as opposed to the Igbo God and gods. What the Christian missionaries taught the pre- modern Igbo is the concepts of God at the epistemological level, that is to say, the precise nature of God which is one and not one and many as the Igbo believe; this phenomenal God of the Igbo is in many ways opposed to the phenomenal God of Christians. But at the ontological level, that is, God or the Ultimate Being in Himself, and of Himself, the Noumenal God is the same for a traditional Igbo as well as for a Christian believer. Therefore the Noumenal God of the pre- modern Igbo man, the Ultimate Chi or being (*CHI- UKWU*) really exists among the traditional Igbo from time immemorial. It is Christianity who really helped the Igbo man to come to a logical conclusion about the precise nature and existence of this phenomenal God. This is possible for Christianity because it has or enjoys a monopoly of Supernatural revelation in Jesus Christ which no traditional religion enjoys. It was not the Christian missionaries and Igbo Christian theologians who imported the idea of the Supreme Being and there are hints of him in their traditional outlook.

Igbo God is God as apprehended and as functional in the consciousness of the traditional Igbo. It is a God which resulted from the sustaining natural faith held by the forebears of the present Igbo. It has come to be regarded as the generic name for the Supreme Being and other

spirits that are worshipped in Igbo Land before the arrival of Christianity. This Igbo God is not only a heritage from the past; it also forms the link with the past with the present, and even the future depicting the Igbo traditional religionists as capable of conceiving Deity: God and gods. This is in contradistinction to the Christian God, the one essentially revealed in Jesus Christ in the sacred books. There can be no question at all about the reality of the gods. They appear Supreme in their own spheres of influence and authority. But theirs is that of relative Supremacy and are assigned duties by God.

The summary of it all is that the pre- modern Igbo man addressed almost all the issues of the God- question but vaguely. They remained engrained or enshrined in oral tradition in a crude form only to be clearly expressed by Christianity because it enjoys the advantage of literal tradition and supernatural revelation in Jesus Christ who is revelation *par excellence*. It would therefore seem surprising and indeed untenable or even is tantamount to false certainty to think or even to suggest that the Igbo do not have a basic concept of God before the arrival of Christianity or any other foreign influences.

References

- Anyika Francis, (1988). *The Chi Concept in Igbo Religious Thought*. Africana Marabugensia.
- Anyika Francis, (1989). *The Supreme God in Igbo Traditional Religious Thought and Worship, Communio Viatorum, A Theological Quarterly Jungmannova 9, 111 21 Praha 1 CSSR*.
- Arinze Francis A. (1970). *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan; Ibadan University Press.
- ‘Connel J. O. (1962). *The Withdrawal of the High God in West African Religion, An Essay in Interpretation of Man, No. 109*.
- Ilogu Edmund, (1974). *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, New York: Nok Publishers, Ltd.
- Metuh Emefie Ikenga. (1987). *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, Onitsha: IMICO Publishers.
- Nwoga Donatus Ibe (1984). *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought*, Ekwerazu: Hawk Press.
- Nze C. (1981). *Pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Concept of God in African Culture, Uche, Journal of the Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Vol. 5*.
- Obiego C. O. (1978). *The Idea of God: Assertions of God’s Existence*, Lucerna, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, No. 1, Vol. 1.
- Okolo C. B. (1995). *African Traditional Religion and Christianity: The Neglected Dimension*, Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Company.
- Talbot P. A. (1926). *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, London: Frank Cass Co. Ltd.