

THE NOTION OF SATAN/EKWENSU: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WESTERN AND AFRICAN (IGBO) THOUGHTS

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ABSTRACT

The notion of Satan/Ekwensu is an existential phenomenon which comes often as a drab and dreary topic both in African and Western Systems of thought. But the way and manner the notion of Satan/Ekwensu is perceived in the religious sphere has been a source of concern to the rational mind of the researcher. The pertinent question that bother the mind of the researcher is: Is there any essential difference between African and Western notions of Satan/Ekwensu? Therefore, employing the philosophical method of critical analysis, this study observes that it was through the influence of the Europeans who came with their religion and saw that the African particularly the Igbo people had no place for the devil in their beliefs and so they somehow convinced them that Satan is synonymous to Ekwensu which was the god of war and Bargain. They knew that the Igbo would be hard to colonize if they didn't give them a religion and something to fear. So, after years of resistance from the ancient Igbo, the European missionaries succeeded in inducing a lie that Ekwensu is satan into their belief. The study further observes that there is no substantial converging point in the two systems of thoughts. Hence, this study calls for a modest attempt to re-direct the way the post-colonial subject engages a distorted past, the colonizer may have done more epistemological harm to the colonized through "translation" than through other forms of colonial subjugation. The translation of the Christian Satan as the conceptual equivalent of Ekwensu, a heroic deity of the Igbo, is one of the instances in which translation can become lethal.

Keywords: Satan, Ekwensu, Igbo, African thought, Western thought,

Introduction

Many western Anthropologists and even non-anthropologists have often been puzzled by the virtual ubiquity of reference to gods and all sorts of spirits in traditional African explanations of things. One western anthropologist, Robin Horton, observed that the failure of understanding is partly attributable to the fact that many western anthropologists "have been unfamiliar with the theoretical thinking of their culture."¹ Perhaps, the traditional African is inclined to the metaphysical explanation of reality and therefore finds matter not as interesting as the spirit. Africans make effort to explain reality in spiritualistic terms, rather than in the materialistic way. This is an indicator that for the traditional African, there exist two worlds: the spiritual world and the material world. The spiritual world is considered to be inhabited by God, highest being or the pure spirit, the ancestors and spirits while the material world houses the human beings,

animals, plants and inanimate beings. However, the African does not consider every being as equal but considers being in a hierarchical order from lower to higher depending on their power and the role they play in the ontological order in nature. This is apparently seen in the case of the notion of Satan/Ekwensu in the core African System of thought though there were other views which were vastly influenced by the advent of Christianity, whereas, in the Western System of thought there exists diverse views on the notion of Satan/Ekwensu. This is vividly clear in the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam which constitute the focus of this study.

The Notion of Satan in Western System of Thought

The notion of Satan in Western system is vividly represented in the western religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Satan in Judaism

The whole conception of Satan or devil was a later development in Judaism which could be termed a post exilic development. Before the exile, the Jews, in all likelihood, never had the idea of Satan, devil or demon. They ascribed evil to God. God was, to them, the source of both good and evil and God sent evil to guilty people as punishment. This could be overtly seen in the book of Job where we find Satan roaming about the world, tempting people and doing havoc. This notion of Satan ultimately developed into that of a powerful evil spirit, almost a contender of God. Satan became the source of evil while God remained the source of good. As God had his angels so did Satan have his demons. At the time of Jesus, this idea of Satan or devil had developed to an advanced stage. It was now a battle, a perpetual war, between God (with his angels) and Satan (with his demons). This idea of conflict or war between the forces of Good and Evil forces (between God and Satan with his demons) was inherited from Judaism by Christianity, with the additional conviction that Satan and his forces (demons) will in the final analysis be vanquished by God.

More still, this whole idea of two forces- the Good forces and the Evil forces (God and his Angels, and Satan with his demons)- in conflict with each other apparently came into Judaism from Zoroastrianism through Persian influence. Zoroastrianism on the other hand, was the religion of the Persians who ruled the Israelites from about 340B.C. to the Maccabean Revolt in 165 B.C. During this period certain elements of Zoroastrianism passed into Judaism. "History teaches us abundantly that when one nation conquers another and rules it for some time the conquered people usually imbibe at least some elements of the religion of the conquerors. In many cases the conquerors impose their religion on the conquered people who submit both to their rule as well as to their religion"². In the cases of the Persians and Israel, Zoroastrianism was not imposed on Israel but some elements of it subverted into Judaism through close interaction. These elements include the story of the fall of man (the story of Adam and Eve and the first sin), the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and the concept of Satan and his demons in conflict with God and his angels. These doctrines were not in Judaism before the exile. They developed during the period of the exiles through the influence of the Persians in whose religion, Zoroastrianism, these doctrines feature prominently.

Furthermore, Zoroastrianism was a religion instituted by Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) who was said to have been born around 660 B.C. in Persia. One of the cardinal doctrines of this religion is: besides God (Ahura Mazda the Good Lord) there is also an evil Lord (Angra Mainyu) who is the source of evil, darkness and lies. There is a perpetual struggle between the Good Lord and the Evil Lord. This struggle is reflected in the opposition between good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsehood. Zoroaster claimed to have received a revelation from the Good Lord (Ahura Mazda) to the effect that he (the Good Lord alone is to be served, that the Evil Lord (Angra Mainyu) should be rejected. The Evil Lord tries to deceive men and to lead them astray. Men should reject him and his forces and fight against them. The struggle between the Good Lord and the Evil Lord will end with the Evil Lord being vanquished. The Good Lord will conquer the Evil Lord, and good will triumph over evil. Light will triumph over darkness and truth will prevail over falsehood; evil forces will be vanquished.³

Succinctly put, this doctrine of Zoroastrianism was obviously the source of the doctrine of Satan and demons in opposition to God, found in later Judaism and inherited by Christianity. It is worthwhile to note that early Judaism knew nothing about Satan or any evil force in opposition to God. The choice before man in early Judaism was not between God and Satan (the devil) but Yahweh and other gods.

Satan in Christianity

The view of Satan as the Evil One was developed in the New testament in Christian theology. It was largely based on an earlier extracanonical and apocalyptic literature of the second and first centuries B.C., which in turn appears to have been heavily influenced by Babylonian, Chaldean, and Persian sources.⁴ The bible, which forms the Christian belief of Satan, ascribes the following names to Satan: Accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), Adversary of mankind (1 Peter 5:8), Belial which means "worthless or wicked" (2 Corinthians 6:15), Deceiver (2 Corinthians 11:3), Devil which means "slander" (Mathew 4: 1), Enemy (Mathew 13:39), Great red dragon (Revelation 12:3,9), Lucifer (Isaiah 14, 12, but in KJV), Wicked one (Mathew 13:19; 1 John 5:18), Spirit that works in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2) et cetera.

The Christian Holy book is full of Satan from Genesis, where he takes the form of a snake to slide Eve unto her fall, to the Apocalypse, where he is bound by a chain for a thousand years and cast into the bottomless pit. The Christian notion of Satan therefore is strongly based on the scriptures and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. The Christians believe that Satan was created by God as an angel, endowed with his grace, and invited to love and enjoy the happiness of His Home forever. But motivated by pride, ambition, envy, or some other sort of angelic temptation the Satan rebelled; and hell was created as its place. Satan continues in his rebellion today, since he hates God and his plans. He wants people to worship him and follow his evil ways. He opposes Jesus Christ. Satan's influence over men is great. St Paul in the scripture refers to this influence of the "wicked one". He advises Christians to put on the armour of God (truth and the gospel of peace, the breast plate of justice, and the shield of faith) that they may "be able to stand against the wiles of the devil". And Jesus recognized the power of Satan

in the affairs of man so much that He called him "the prince of the world". The Christians are familiar with the many cases in which the devil was driven out of afflicted souls by Jesus and by His apostles whom He sent out explicitly for this purpose. So, this forms the strong foundation of Christian belief that men can be and have been possessed by the devil and that the devil can be driven away by exorcism. Christians believe what the scriptures said about Satan is true and cannot be treated as mere superstition, legend, or rumour. "And we cannot believe that Christ would expressly encourage popular superstitions by pretending to drive out devils when he was really only curing poor epileptics or neurotics."⁵

Furthermore, it appears that the meaning of colours are permanently and universally determined in western system of thought. For them, the colour "white" is regarded as depicting something good, pure, and innocent while the colour "black" also is used to represent negation. For instance, during the election of a Pope; black smoke issuing from the Sistine Chapel sends out a message to the world that the college of Cardinals has not succeeded in electing a new Pope. However, when a new Pope has been elected, white smoke is used to convey the good news. Given the dominant meanings of "black" and "white", it is not surprising then that the West classified angels as white and devils as black.

Satan in Islam

In Islam, Satan is called *Shaitan* or *Iblis* in Arabic. According to the Qur'an, Satan is an angel whom God created out of fire; he was similar to the *jinn* - a class of fiery creatures - but encompasses both heavenly Jinn (fiery angels) and earthly (ordinary) Jinn. According to traditions, earthly jinn wandered in the earth and spread vice upon it. God sent an army of angels under the leadership of Satan to fight them. Satan was filled with pride after his victory over the earthly jinn and thus esteemed himself above any other creature, regarding himself as God's favourite. After God had created man, He ordered the angels to venerate man, all the angels succumbed to God's command except Satan saying haughtily (Quran38:76): "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay"⁶ Consequently God banished Satan from heaven. Satan on the other hand, promised to lure the whole of mankind into disbelief and evil as an act of revenge from their father, Adam.

It was after Satan's disobedience of God that the title of *Shaitan* was given to him, which can be roughly translated as Enemy, Rebel, Evil, or Devil. According to the Qur'an 18:50 "...he has no power other than the power to cast evil suggestions into the hearts of men and women..." However, an Islamic sect, the Sufi, holds that Satan's act of excessive pride and rebellion against God, is an act of self-denial for God's love. He refused to bow down to Adam out of his unbending monotheism and devotion; he refused to venerate anything or anyone but God. Al- Ghazali, a well-known medieval Sufi Muslim theologian, narrates: "Encountering Eblis on the slopes of Sinai, Moses hailed him and asked, "O Eblis, why did you not prostrate before Adam?" Eblis replied, "Heaven forbid that anyone worship anything but the One ... This command was a test"⁷.

Abdul Karim Jili, a Muslim Sufi saint, believes that after the Day of Judgment, Satan will be back to the service of God as one of his cherished angels. Besides the personified notion of Satan, the Islam views Satan as temptations in the mind described as whisperings and desire to do evil. *Iblis* is accordingly also a cosmic force, leading humans (and jinn) astray from good.

The Notion of Satan/ Ekwensu in African System of Thought

Religion permeates the ideal African from the cradle to the grave. It is difficult to separate African culture from African Traditional Religion because religion is embedded in African culture. No religion has been misconceived, misrepresented and misunderstood more than African Traditional Religion yet it is primary in the shaping of the African's future owing to the fact that ignoring its traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices may lead to a lack of understanding of African behaviour and problems. It is in this sense that Uchenna Onuzulike states:

*African Traditional Religion is intertwined with African culture. It may be difficult for some Christians to maintain some African traditional culture because of their Christian faith, which is contrary to African Traditional Religion. This has created confusion among many African Christians who want to maintain some of their traditions.*⁸

One of the accomplishments of Christianity and Western Civilization in Africa after more than one hundred and fifty years is the emergence of a people who are not truly Christian and not truly African. The average African Christians have adopted ambivalent lifestyles. Colonialists and Christian missionaries came to Africa carrying with them racist biases and Negrophobic approach. It was such an attitude that led Christian missionaries to demonize African traditional belief systems and projected the foreign rival as obligatory and desirable. But the missionaries had the enormous challenge of reconciling the basic tenets of their faith with the principles underpinning African religions. To achieve this, they resorted to questionable changes and mistranslations. They were in the dark not to have realized that many cultures have different ways of explaining existence. And so, they reacted with crass dishonesty in many cases, namely, imposition of categories and mistranslation. Let us take a brief look at them below:

a. Imposition of Categories: Categories explain the way we think about things. Categories represent the ways in which realities exist or are realized. The way things are is the way we think of them. No culture has a name for a thing that does not exist in that given culture. Religion is embedded or is the product of the culture. The Igbo pantheon has no names for cross, hell, heaven, demons, angels and Satan. These Judeo-Christian categories are simply unknown in the Igbo autochthonous thoughts. They were introduced and imposed on the Igbo traditional religion by the Christian missionaries who, confronted with a culture that lacked one spiritual reality, personage or entity to credit with the Christian message presented such categories to improvise. The word for the Christian cross, *obe* is actually the Igbo word for ladder. However, some may argue that certain words are polysemous but the fact is that the Igbo could not have had a word for cross since such form of execution was unknown in the culture. These Judeo-Christian

categories are simply unknown in the Igbo autochthonous thoughts.

b. Mistranslation: Some indigenous words were mistranslated thus resulting to the distortion of their true meaning. It can be said that the imposition of Categories informed to a very large extent the errors of mistranslation. Take for instance, there was no notion that was comparable with what the Jews and Christians call demons and angels. Angels in the Judeo-Christian beliefs were so created ab initio. Demons are believed to be fallen angels and inferior personage. In the Igbo worldview, no spirit being is so created ab initio. Each originates from a human being that has previously died. And they all are generally grouped into two: the bad and the good. The bad spirits are referred to as ajo mmuo and cannot be translated as demons. The good spirits are referred to as ezi mmoo and cannot be translated as angels. An honest and more practical method of transliteration, instead of translation, could have been more appropriate. Muo ozi which the Protestants use for angel but not muo oma that the Catholics prefer is a better choice of words, since the Greek word for angel literally means messenger. Thus, for a proper transliteration, one's knowledge of both the source and the target languages has to be adequate.

The Notion of Evil in Traditional African System

It is obvious from the foregoing that in the indigenous African society, the figure and concept of Satan was fraudulently imposed on the African people. The fundamental question raised here is: Prior to the influence of the Western religions, how did the African people account for evil in their society since the notion of Satan which in the Western system is regarded as the progenitor of evil is foreign to the African people? Evil can be said to mean any experience that is injurious, painful, hurtful, regretful or calamitous which impedes or obstructs the achievement of goals, ideas, happiness or general well-being. The concept of evil in traditional African thoughts has everything to do with man. Placid Tempels, with regard to the Bantu notion of evil asserts that "the performance of evil act or its avoidance is chiefly derived not from the world beyond or from gods"⁹ This implies that the Bantu idea of evil or good is based on man's reasoning and not on a power over and above man, but it rather depends entirely on man. In the Igbo and Yoruba cosmology, evil is conceived as the product of man's actions - still revolving around man. In cases of natural disaster like earthquake, flooding, draught, it can be said that most natural disasters happen as a result of man's earlier actions. For the traditional African it is people who are evil, even when it is claimed that invisible forces cause humans to do evil, it is because such people actually entertain bad intentions, utter bad words or engage in wrong deeds. Evil is always attached to a wrong-doer. Take for instance; some humans engage in Witchcraft which is a form of evil recognized by the Africans. It has to do with "the employment of mystical forces to harm one's neighbour."¹⁰ It is in this sense that J.S Mbiti asserts that:

Mystical power is neither good nor evil in itself: but when used maliciously by some individuals, it is experienced as evil. This view makes evil an independent and external object which, however, cannot act on its own but must be employed by human or spiritual agents. People

here become incarnations of evil power.¹¹

Man is therefore responsible for every evil that happens in this world because of his action. For better comprehension of the notion of Ekwensu/Satan in African Cosmology, it is worthwhile to limit the scope of our study to Igbo conceptualization of Ekwensu.

The Notion of Satan/Ekwensu in Igbo Cosmology

In contemporary Igbo society, there exists about three major perspectives as regards the proper understanding of the concept Ekwensu in relation to Christianity. They include the following:

- I. Ekwensu understood as the conceptual equivalent of the Christian Devil
- II. Ekwensu as having no relationship with the Christian Devil, and
- III. Ekwensu as combining the elements of good and evil

Glancing at it critically one can rightly deduce that the first and last viewpoints are cripplingly influenced by the sway of Christianity, whereas the second perspective challenges the other standpoints of implanting outlandish notions on the traditional Igbo conceptualization of Ekwensu.

Ekwensu as the Conceptual Equivalent of the Christian Devil

A vast majority of people in Igbo society are drilled and tutored to believe that Ekwensu is the conceptual equivalent of the Christian Devil; among them include majority of the Christian clergy, bishops, reverend fathers, reverend sisters, pastors, et cetera. This is overtly evident in most of the translations of Christian songs, hymns, prayers and chants and in most of the discourses on traditional Igbo religion and ethics. Even in ordinary day-to-day conversations among the Igbo, all types of temptations and evil acts are attributed to the machinations of Ekwensu. There is a significant strand of scholarship, which claims Ekwensu as the conceptual equivalent of the Christian devil. Relying on evidence from Jude Aguwa who affirmed that "Ekwensu (the devil) is the most wicked spirit and he does extensive harm even without provocation. He is eternal enemy of Chukwu (God). He and his group are able to manipulate a man's will and emotions and induce him to do evil. Ekwensu is considered so dangerous to handle, so uncompromising and so unappealing that shrines for him do not exist".¹²

With reference to the above, one could find out that the epistemological and theological frames that inform Aguwa's position are evident in his text. Such expressions as "the most wicked of wicked spirits" and "the eternal enemy of Chukwu (God) obviously refer to Satan. Moreover, Michael Echeruo explicitly assert that "Ekwensu is a tricker spirit of confusion," adding that "figures of the spirit are displayed in many Ngwa festivals" It is however fascinating to pen down the reasons figures of Ekwensu should be displayed during some festivals. One could ask whether for the purpose of spreading confusion among the celebrants? Or for the mission of hoaxing the celebrants? Or on the other way round whether such festivals celebrate treachery? Michael went on to say that "the Ngwa people, when they decided to cross the Imo River took with them both Ekwensu and Ala. At a place Ala Umu-okike, they set up a shrine or okpu for Ala. Today the place is called

Okpu Ala Ngwa."¹³ Towing in this line of thought the crossing of the Imo River must have been a herculean task. The choice of two deities - Ekwensu and Ala - for use in crossing the Imo River is then critical for the people. They needed Ekwensu probably for protection and guidance whereas Ala as is well known is the most important deity throughout Igbo land. A mere trickster spirit cannot be the choice of a people faced with the arduous task as crossing the Imo River. Here, one remembers the figure of Moses and his staff during the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites.

Ekwensu as not the Conceptual Equivalent Of The Christian Devil

Whereas some Igbo people are of the view that Ekwensu could be equated with the Christian Devil others on the other hand are of the opinion that Ekwensu cannot be regarded as the conceptual equivalent of the Christian devil. The most notable among these scholars is J.A. Umeh who argued:

Ekwensu is the beautiful one in Igboland and in ancient Egypt. It is a war god with countless victories as Oha Obala/ Ora Obala. In Igbo Afa, it is saluted as Ekwensu Ugo tugbulu agwo, i.e Eagle that pecked the evil spirit of war and victory glides down the earth with its countless victories...Ekwensu is also confirmed to be one of the benevolent lunar deities. The Igbo Afa terminology Ora Obala/Oha Obala literally means child of the sun, which means the moon, the Eagle, and Ekwensu,...It is indeed a ridiculous absurdity for 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.¹⁴

Ekwensu as Combining Good and Evil

Here, two facets could come into play: Ekwensu as a member of demons or evil spirits, but not as an embodiment of supreme evil and arch-enemy of God, and Ekwensu as a being capable of doing good or bad, depending on context and circumstances. Even though, Arinze calls 'Umu Ekwensu' devils, the use of devils here is conceptually equivalent to evil spirits or demons. Indeed, Arinze is very cautious when he first introduces this idea, by affirming that:

The Ibos are concerned only with those spirits that come into contact with mankind Those whose names are known and who have shrines and priests are generally regarded as benevolent, neutral, or as severe to those who disobey their laws. But there is a host of unknown non-human spirits who are regarded as malevolent. The name Ekwensu did not come with Christianity. Ekwensu have no images (nkwu) and receive no sacrifice¹⁵

The statement "Ekwensu have no images (nkwu) and receive no sacrifice" already designates that Arinze thinks of Ekwensu as plural, as the collective name for bad spirits. We may infer that he is right in stating that "The name Ekwensu did not come with

Christianity." There is no place, however, where he says that Ekwensu is the author of all misfortunes or the enemy of God. Moreover, Anthony N.O. Ekwunife is of the opinion that Ekwensu is not the equivalent of the Christian devil, but believes that when provoked, Ekwensu could become violent. He asserts:

What then is the African/ Igbo conception of Ekwensu in Igbo traditional thought is that ontological mysterious Violent force which when aggravated or invoked could be effectively used either for good or destruction. Every divinity or deity, disembodied dead human beings, ordinary living human beings have this element of mysterious violent force within them. When this violent force is used for redressing wrongs or punishing a malicious offender or false oath swearer, the Ekwensu in the particular agent becomes a good force. But when it is arbitrarily used for destroying people indiscriminately or damaging their property and even affecting their health, the Ekwensu becomes a destructive violent force.¹⁶

From the foregoing, it would appear then that what Ekwunife sees as bad or evil in Ekwensu is its abuse, suggesting, therefore, that Ekwensu is inherently good, even if violent. By extension therefore, an erudite African/Igbo philosopher J.O. Oguejiofor reasons that Ekwensu while not being the Christian equivalent of the devil is, nevertheless, associated with evil. According to him:

Apart from the numerous alusi and the living dead, there is another category of supernatural beings that Igbo traditional religion takes account of. These can be broadly described as evil spirits. They are far more numerous, more dangerous and fearful than any other group of supernatural beings. The most widely used known among them is Ekwensu. The spread of his influence owes much to a fundamental misunderstanding of the name by the early missionaries to Igbo land. The misunderstanding is the identification of Ekwensu with the devil. The traditional Igbo do not think of Ekwensu as the force that stands in opposition to other supernatural beings. Certainly, evil deeds, especially unexpected and unintentional ones are attributed to his influence. But moral evil is not attributed to him. His malevolence is attributed to bring misfortune. Ekwensu has no nkwa (statue) and is in some areas invoked and extolled during warfares and within three days set apart among the western Igbo as festivals of Ekwensu (Igba oso Ekwensu).¹⁷

Succinctly put, it is worthwhile to note that it is not Christianity and its sway that led to the spread of Ekwensu among the Igbo and beyond. Oguejiofor rightly affirms that "moral evil is not attributed to him." He however misses the point when he goes on to add that Ekwensu "has no nkwa (statue). In any case, if Ekwensu has no statue, what is it that the Ngwa, as we have earlier pointed out took with them when they wanted to cross the Imo River?

From the above three perspectives from which Ekwensu has been understood among the Igbo, it is now evident that it is not the equivalent of the Christian devil. Those who regard it as evil dominantly base their belief/opinion on the alleged fact that among the Igbo, Ekwensu has no shrines, no statue, and is not worshipped. We shall now provide anthropological evidence to prove that these claims are all false.

Proofs for Worship of Ekwensu Among the Igbo

There existed many controversies among the scholars as regards whether one could trace any indication for the worship of Ekwensu among the Igbo people. It is a known fact in several parts of Igbo land that Ekwensu had shrines and was worshipped before the advent of Christianity. First and foremost, it is proposed that Ekwensu was the alleged ancestor/founding father of many Igbo Communities. This follows from the way many Igbo communities can trace their genealogical history and connections through their naming. There are some Igbo groups who had changed their names on account of the fact that it associates them with the devil. For example, in the community of "Isiala Ngwa in Isiala Ngwa North local Government, Abia State, changed its name from obi Ekwensu to Obi Chukwu".¹⁸ Besides these kindred groups that changed their names, there are some that still retain theirs. These include Nru N'ato Ezike Ekwensu, Nsukka L.G.A. and Imilike Ogo Ekwensu, Udeni L.G.A. From the foregoing, one could infer that the word Ekwensu as it appears in these names has many implications and connotations and it may be said that he is an ancestor of the communities. More still, Ekwensu may have been a powerful and towering warlord such that his name became a license against attack by other communities. Towering in this line of thought, if Ekwensu is an ancestral name, then it cannot in any sense be an evil spirit since those who become ancestors are those who had lived well, died well, and therefore were accorded full funeral rites. If Ekwensu is the name of a warlord whose influence spread throughout Igboland, then the name would not necessarily be associated with evil, especially in the moral and ontological manner in which the Christian devil is represented. Furthermore, traditional Igbo society loathes crime, evil and abomination very strongly. It cannot then be imagined that many communities will, knowing that Ekwensu is evil decide to answer to that name.

Moreover, B. Abanuka in trying to prove the existence of shrines dedicated to Ekwensu in many parts of Igbo land inferred:

In the Igbo world; the contrary of reality on the level of ancestry is Ekwensu. In this regard, Ekwensu is the name given to the chief of all evil or wicked spirits and to all the other spirits in so far as their wickedness has ruined their innermost reality and reduced it to unfulfilment. That is, in the case of an evil spirit, wickedness has actually nullified the ontological significance of a finite particular thing. The chief interest of these evil spirits is to hinder any effort to harmonize the contraries, without which goodness and beauty do not appear. It is for this reason that in some places Ekwensu has a shrine and sacrifice is sometimes offered to placate him. For similar reasons in some places a yearly festival is celebrated to appease him and prevent him from disturbing the harmony of nature.¹⁹

For instance, "at Iheaka, Igbo Eze South Local Government Area, Enugu State, there is an Onu Ekwensu, the shrine dedicated to Ekwensu. At the end of the sacrifice by the officiating priest, there was a communion, a sharing and eating of the eatable items of the sacrifice. According to Francis Anyika, when a sacrifice is accompanied by a communion, the deity whom such a sacrifice has been made is regarded as a benevolent deity, not as an evil spirit or deity".²⁰ If Ekwensu is an evil deity, how can it be asked to negate its own essence?

From the submissions above, it gears towards not to demonstrate that shrines dedicated to Ekwensu exist throughout the length and breadth of Igboland, but to prove wrong those who argue that Ekwensu is evil, and/or is the conceptual equivalent of the Christian devil because it has no shrines dedicated to it.

A Comparative Study of Satan/Ekwensu in Western and African (Igbo) Thoughts

So far, we have tried to critically analyze the reality of Satan/Ekwensu in both African and Western systems of thought. One thing to note is that both systems of thought believe in the monotheistic view of God. The African does not believe in many gods. There is no African word for Supreme Beings. The African can only talk of divinities. The Western also shares the same belief as the African. But the problem comes when the Western begins to tell the African that his (African) belief is irrational, unrealistic and fetish. It is evident from what we have mentioned earlier that there is really a dichotomy between the notion of Satan/Ekwensu in Western System of thought and the view of Satan/Ekwensu in the core African System of Thought.

Taking the issue of intermediary, can we deduce that Satan/Ekwensu in the Western and African Systems of thought could be called an intermediary, that is, a person or sacred object that help to bridge the gap between the material world and the spiritual world? Although Satan (before his fall as an angel) and Ekwensu could be referred to as intermediaries, in the sense that they are called divinities and share aspects of divine status. Towering in this line of thought, it is apparent that Satan after his fall as an angel could no longer be equated as an intermediary because the Western believes that angels are spiritual beings that act as intermediaries between God and man. Instead of the above assertions being fulfilled, the contrary is the case, the notion of Satan/Ekwensu in the western thought apart from Judaism who originally had no concept about Satan as a progenitor of evil and in constant opposition to God in their religion but were influenced by the religion of Zoroastrianism were that of adversary, accuser, rebellion, an enemy, a liar, a deceiver et cetera. On the other hand, Satan/ Ekwensu as an intermediary exists in the African System of thought in the sense that Ekwensu is one of the divinities that are always in communion with God and as such, mediate between the Supreme Being and the human person. He serves as channels through which prayers, sacrifices and offerings are presented to the Supreme Being and also the means through which the African gets easy access to the Supreme Being.

More so, in as much as Satan/Ekwensu is mainly seen in Western system of thought (except Judaism) as devilish and arch-enemy of God who stand in opposition between God and man, there exists some worshippers of Satan who call upon him for the realization of their ambitions. In the case of the African especially in ancient Igbo, Satan/Ekwensu is usually invoked when the Igbo people want to go to war or when they needed a cunning initiative to outsmart other people in bargains or business. Ekwensu was a very aggressive and violent god just like Kratos the Greek god of war. It was after the advent of Christianity that the Europeans made Ekwensu an equivalent of the Devil.

More still, the Western concept of 'Satan' as the arch-enemy of God and the supreme author of evil, 'whose one purpose is to frustrate the goodness of God and to disseminate evil,'²¹ who takes delight in inciting men to moral evil so as to alienate them from Him, does not exist in Igbo religion. Moreover, Akalogeli, Ogbonuke, Ogbanje, and the nameless evil spirits are neither conceived as enemies of God nor do they incite people to moral evil. When Ekwensu, which like every other Arusi is generally regarded as a good spirit, incites somebody to acts of violence resulting in bloodshed in his own community, it is regarded as a moral evil. Only Ekwensu, therefore, is believed to incite people to moral evil and only in some restricted area; thus, the notion of inciting people to moral evil enters into the conception of Ekwensu and one can understand why the idea of Ekwensu as the 'tempter' or the 'devil' caught on easily with the Igbo. Today, among Igbo Christians and non-Christians alike, every evil deed is said to be Oru Ekwensu, the work of the Devil.

Whereas, Satan/Ekwensu in Western system of thought could be regarded as one who contest the power of God, Satan/Ekwensu in the African System of thought on the other hand does not contest the power of the Supreme God (Chukwu), but rather work in concert with humans "for realization of individual and communal destiny."²² While the westerners believe in the existence of Satan, devil and Hell, the African on the other hand especially the traditional Igbo only believed in Chukwu Abiama, who was the supreme creator and that he had children, who were also gods and dwelt with him in the heavens of which Ekwensu was among them.

Concluding Reflection

The devils, led by Satan are said to have been angels of God who rebelled against God, thereby becoming bad angels. For the devils are not different species of beings different from the angels. On the contrary, they are angels, but bad angels or, in other words, fallen angels. The question now is: How can an infinitely good and all-powerful God allow some of his own servants to rebel against him, become wicked, and go about doing havoc, possessing some people, tormenting them, and leading others astray? This is the same as the question of evil, that is, the question as to why an infinitely good and almighty God allows evil in his own creation. To this question, Christian theologians reply that God allows evil because he is in the long run going to turn it into good, that he has the power to turn evil into good, and that he has demonstrated this power in the way he turned the suffering and death of Jesus into his glorification. Satan, we are told, will

eventually be vanquished, and good will triumph over evil. This is hardly a satisfactory reply, but theologians themselves tell us that the existence of evil is a mystery, and that means that it cannot be fully understood or explained.

More so, many have suggested that Ekwensu might have been the name of a powerful Juju used in a variety of evil ways by the ancient Igbo. If this is true, it would be contrary to the general principle to which the traditional Igbo answered to names. No sane person or community would claim a notorious and evil name of the dimension of the Christian devil and make it the badge of its lineage. Those who may want to disbelieve this should cite the number of communities and gods whose names end with Satan, Lucifer, or Devil among the people to whom these are native. Or is this another colonial nonsense in which Africans answered to the name of the Devil, besides having tails and living on tree tops?

Finally, having seen the comparative study of the notion of Satan/Ekwensu in Western and African Systems of thought, it is clearly evident that the major thrust of this research has been to press home the point that the use of Ekwensu to translate the Christian Devil is an error of great magnitude. It is an error that has traumatized the Africans particularly some Igbo communities, leading to their change of name. Indeed, it would appear that much of the conflictual relationship between the western system of thought and African system of thought particularly the traditional Igbo culture concerning the notion of Satan/Ekwensu is translational in nature. We are in a situation in which we are dealing with two systems of thought. More worrisomely, we are dealing with two systems of thought in which one is assigned an inferior position. The notion of Satan/Ekwensu need to be re-examined within the cosmological understanding of the Igbo, for as Serge Donbrovsky has said: "you reach the heart of a text at the very moment you pass beyond it to its social context."²³ Therefore, this study recommends proper reorientation and understanding of the notion of Ekwensu among the Igbo people to avoid the misplacement of categories and negating the ontological meaning of Satan/Ekwensu.

Endnotes

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² J. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion* (Lagos: Joja Educational, Research and Publishers Ltd, 1999) p,43.

³ Ibid p.43.

⁴ E. Bourguignon, "Devil" in M.C, Graw (Gen. Ed.), *Encyclopedia Americana*. (New York; Grolier incorporation ltd, 2001), p36

⁵ J.D. Conway, *What the Church teaches* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1962) p. 322

- ⁶ Quran 7:10-18, 15:26-39, 17:61-63, 18:50, 20:115-123
- ⁷ R. Hoyt, *The Disobedience of Iblis in Sufism* (September 1st, 2008)
- ⁸ U. Onuzulike "African Crossroads: Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity", *International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 6, No.2. 2008, p. 12.
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- ¹⁰ Ibid p.27
- ¹¹ Ibid
- ¹² J.C. Aguwa, *The Anthropological Challenge of Christian Charity in the Changing African Culture: The Nigerian Case* (Rome: Remo Ambrosini, 1987), p.40
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- ¹⁹ B. Abanuka, *Philosophy and the Igbo World*, (Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 2004), p.45
- ²⁰ D.U. Opata, *Ekwensu In The Igbo Imagination ... Op. Cit.* Pp. 41 - 42
- ²¹ L. Correia, *Alves 'L' Animisme Ibo et Les Divinites de la Nigeria* (France: Anthropos, 1992), p.365.
- ²² E, Uzukwu, *Interface Between Igbo and Christianity* (Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd., 2001), p.87
- ²³ S. Donbrovsky, *The Ideologies of Theory*, Vol.I (London: Routledge, 1988) p.121