

THE NAMES FOR GOD

The Romans had a saying: *Nomen est omen*, 'a name is an omen.' The Igbo shares this conviction. Names are not just identification marks put on people. Every Igbo name has a meaning, and people are not given names in haste, for the name is supposed to represent the most cherished thought in the mind of the giver at the time the name is given. Much reflection and heart-searching take place before the naming ceremony – usually a very elaborate and festive occasion. The genius and the achievements of great men can sometimes be read in the names given to their children and grand-children. For example, my grand-father initially had great difficulty in getting a male child. After spending a great deal of money in marrying many wives, consulting oracles and *dibia*, fortune-tellers, and making remedies, he succeeded at long last with his third wife. Accordingly, he named his first son *Olisanumba*, 'God does not hear reproaches,' as if to say that one cannot force God's hand. My father, who was the fifth son, he named *Ikenga* after the deity who brings success, to indicate that his lineage was now firmly established. He acquired wealth and decided to take the *Ataka* title, the highest and costliest in our clan, so he called his seventh son-born at that time - *Ekwelumeze*, 'I have decided to take the kingly title.' The title cost him twenty cows, so he named his eighth son *Udefi*, 'amidst the cry of cows,' i.e. a son born when cows are plentiful.

It is necessary to delve more deeply into the significance of names in Igbo culture to fully appreciate the wealth of knowledge which can be drawn from the names they give to God. As we have said, the Igbo believes that there is a very close link between a person and his name, such that the Igbo believes that if you know a

person's name you can exert certain influences over him. Conversely, charms cannot harm anybody whose names are unknown no matter how near or otherwise well-known he might be to his enemy. Spirits whose names are not known cannot be invoked or placated; such spirits are regarded as evil and can only be driven away by the rites of *Ichu Aja*, exorcism. A name expresses a person's personality and the Igbo therefore tries to give names which represent as accurately as possible the essential nature of the person to whom the name is given. This is very well illustrated by the practice of *Igba Agu*, identifying the namesake. Most children are believed to be the reincarnation of an ancestor or a local deity. If the identity of the ancestor cannot be easily recognized through certain visible characteristics, it is necessary to hold the rite *Igba Agu* to identify the personality incarnate in the baby, for example, the name *Nne Nna* - paternal grandmother (come back).

A name may also commemorate a historical event e.g. *Nwogu*, a son born during war. It may express the parents state of mind, e.g. *Eyiuche*, 'the unexpected child.' It may express a religious sentiment or belief like *Chukwuemeka*, 'God is very kind.' It may affirm a moral, religious or philosophical truth like *Ndidi Amaka*, 'patience is very good., According to H.A. Wieschoff, 'names are records, living personal memories of persons and events. From the natural standpoint, there are more names, more passion, more tragedy and more comedy, more humanity and inhumanity than is possible for some civilised people to realise.'¹

Igbo names therefore constitute invaluable archives in which traditional Igbo wisdom and beliefs are enshrined. What then, do we learn from the Igbo personal names for God?

The Igbo has three personal names for God: *Chukwu*, the Great Chi;² *Chineke*, Chi the Creator; *Osebuluwa* or *Olisa* (shortened form), Carrier of the world. Although all three names are now used throughout Igboland, each one stems from a different area. Thus, according to Basden:

Several names are appropriated to the Supreme Being which, more or less, assimilated the underlying ideas of some particular attributes. In the southern parts of the country, He is known as *Chineke* (God, the Creator). In the northern parts, the term (*Chukwu - the great God*) is the more common title. In some districts He is spoken of as *Olisabulu-nwa* or, in one word, *Olisa*. This conveys the meaning of the 'god who fastions the world'.³

A detailed study of these three personal names and other title-names given to God throws a great deal of light on the Igbo concept of Him.

Igbo Names for God

The Definition of Chi

The first two names, *Chukwu* and *Chineke*, are both composed of two words. *Chukwu* is composed of *Chi* and *Ukwu*, while *Chineke* is composed of *Chi* and *Eke*. From this it appears that the important word in both cases is *Chi*. What does *Chi* means? *Chi*, in my view, is one of those archaic root words which are found in some languages and which defy all etymology. Different authors have suggested different meanings. Talbot, for example, thinks that *Chi* is the original name for the 'Supreme Being.' According to him: 'The old word seems to have been *Chi*, sometimes called *Chi-Ukwu*, the Great *Chi*, the attribute was applied by most Igbo, as the *Chukwu Oke Abioma*... to distinguish it from the personal *Chi*.⁴ *Chi* therefore, in his view, is the personal name for God and needs no translation. Many other authorities however, like Basden and Meek, disagree with him.

Basden thinks that *Chi* seems almost to be a generic word for 'god' (in small letters). With a qualifying attribute, it becomes or denotes a distinctive god, hence we have *Chi* used in conjunction with *Ukwu*, giving *Chi-Ukwu*, the Great God.⁵ Meek translates *Chi* as 'spirit.' He describes God as the over-soul analogous to *Chi* -the accompanying soul which he sends into each person. He writes: 'One of the most striking doctrines of the Igbo is that every human being has associated with his personality, a genius or

spiritual double known as *Chi*.⁶ He then goes on to compare this conception of a transcendent self to the Egyptian notion of *Ka*, which was the double or genius of a man, an ancestral emanation, apparently, which guided and protected him during his lifetime and to which he returned after death.

It is therefore no surprise that the word and concept of *Chi* has continued to intrigue many foreign writers because although it is a fundamental word in the Igbo religious system, it is at the same time too difficult to grasp. This is perhaps a case where only the Igbo, who has lived his religion, whose language, culture and modes of thought and expression are all permeated by it, can best explain the terminology and the meanings it implies. All the above writers are right up to a point; at the same time, none of them is exactly right. What each has seen and described of *Chi* is like the blind men who went to experience an elephant. Each described a part of the elephant, and even when all their descriptions were put together, we were not given any true idea of what an elephant was like.

The word *Chi* used in a religious context, evokes three related concepts namely: the 'Supreme Being,' the 'Guardian Spirit', and the idea of 'Destiny' or 'Fortune.' Only the context can show which of the three is uppermost in an Igbo's mind when he uses the word *Chi*. This is borne out by the fact that the word appears in many Igbo proverbs, sometimes referring to one concept, sometimes to another: the Supreme Being, one's personal spirit-guardian, or even one's destiny.

1. Chi as Supreme Being:

*Chi ma onye oga enye ma onye
oga enye amaghi*

God knows to whom he will give, but who will receive does not know.

*Okike kere onye bu Chi ya
Ehi n' enuweghi odu, Chi ya
n'achuru ya ijiji*

One's Creator is his God,
God drives away flies for a cow which has no tail.

*Chi adaghi amu ihe ozo soso atugh
na amughi.*

God does not hear any other thing except prayers to conceive and give birth.

2. Chi as personal spirit-guardian: Where a person falls, it is his personal spirit-guardian who pushed him down.

Oka madu ka Chi ya

If you are stronger than a person, you are also stronger than his personal spirit-guardian.

*Ofu nne na amu, ma ofu Chi
adaghi eke*

Two people can have the same mother, but they cannot have identical personal spirit-guardians.

3. Chi as Destiny:
Agbataghi Ajo Chi n' uzo olu

You cannot escape bad fortune by resourcefulness.

Chi jiere onye chi ojoo onaghi abo

When darkness falls for an unfortunate man, it is endless. A goat eats even the freewood of an unfortunate man.

Admittedly, it is not always easy to distinguish which of the three concept is intended. This apparent confusion stems from the Igbo belief that when God creates each person, He gives Him a *Chi* - a guardian spirit. God is believed to give the *Chi* a choice between two parcels of fortune, one better than the other. Whichever the *Chi* chooses contains the total luck in the destiny which the child entrusted to his care will have. This fortune in itself is also referred to as *chi*. Thus, a lucky man is called *onye*

chi oma, 'someone who has a good Chi,' and an unfortunate man is called *onye chi ojoo*, 'someone who has a bad chi.'

In effect, we have a highly confusing situation where the same word applies to God, to the spirit-guardian, and to the fortune of each person. Which of these has the greater claim? Which gives us the best clue to the meaning of this important word?

The idea of destiny so pervades Igbo life and thought that it is reasonable to assume that it is an ancient and basic concept in the Igbo system of belief. Every event in a man's life whether it be success or failure is *Onatara chi*, a gift of destiny. The goal of a man's life is to achieve his *akara aka* or *Akara chi* - the destiny imprinted on his palm. It would therefore seem that *chi* primarily suggests the idea of destiny in the mind of the Igbo. If one must talk of the transposition of words in this context, one would say that the word *chi* applies primarily to destiny and secondarily to the spirit-guardian. In fact, the spirit-guardian *Chi* is but the personification of individual destiny, *Chi*. So the suggestion of translating *Chi* merely as 'spirit' or as a generic word for 'god,' errs by defect. *Chi* is indeed a 'spirit' but a special kind of spirit, precisely the spirit associated with person's destiny and which directs its realization.

The Meaning of Chukwu

The simple, literal meaning of Chukwu is the 'Great Chi.' If the above interpretation of *Chi* is accepted, Chukwu would become the 'Great Controller of destiny of the universe (or the Divine Providence). One might almost draw the parallel that Chukwu is to the universe in the same way as *Chi* is to the controller of individual destiny. The best rendering of Chukwu, in my view, would therefore be the 'Great Providence.'⁷

The Meaning of Chineke

Now we come to *Chineke*. Traditionally, this name was more commonly used in the southern parts of Igboland: Owerri, Umuahia, Okigwe and the Delta areas, in preference to Chukwu.

Now it has spread throughout Igboland and has been further popularized by its use in translating ‘God’ in the Bible. This has led many to believe that it was introduced by the missionaries, but this is not so - as we shall see.

Chineke, like *Chukwu*, is composed of two words; *Chi* and *Eke*. *Chi* as we now understand it means ‘providence.’ What does *Eke* mean?

Eke, like *Chi*, is a victim of the paucity of Igbo vocabulary. It can be used to translate up to seven different things - snake, market-day, create, divine, tie, a spirit, and a share - depending on how it is pronounced and the context in which it is used.⁸

When used to denote the Supreme Being, it unmistakably refers to the verb *ike*, to create. According to Anozia ‘the verb “to create” in Igbo is never used of any other activity, not even metaphorically.’⁹

However, there is a creative emanation of God called *Eke*. Although *Eke* is intimately connected with creative action, he does not create. Igbo belief has it, that when *Chukwu* creates, *Chi* chooses the destiny of the creature, and *Eke* (or *Okike*) lets him out into the world. Igbo belief highly esteems the role of *Eke*, but an Igbo proverb assures us that *Eke, kelu onye bu Chi ya*, ‘you may talk of a person’s *Eke* but his creator is God.’ *Chineke* therefore means ‘Chi who creates,’ i.e Creator Providence or a Provident Creator. God’s creative act is a continuing one, for He continues to sustain and provide for his creatures.

The Meaning of Osebuluwa

God can also be called *Osebuluwa* or its abbreviation form, *Olisa*. The contracted form resembles the names for the Supreme Being used by the Benin and their related tribes: the Edo (*Osanowa*), the Sobo (*Orisha Neburuwa*), the Esa and Kukuruku (*Oselebua*). As these and the western Igbo were for a long time part of the Benin empire, one could reasonably conclude that the name could have derived from the same source as the Benin

*Osanowa*¹⁰ The Igbo abbreviated form *Olisa* sounds very like the Yoruba *Orisha*.

The interpretations Basden and Anozia gave to this name are in my view inexact. According to Basden, *Olisabuluwa* ‘conveys the meaning of the “god who fashions the world.”’¹¹ It must be said, however, that no idea of fashioning, time, or creating, *ike*, is contained in this name. While Basden’s translation does not bring out the idea of ‘carrying the world,’ *bulu uwa*, Dr. Anozia is convinced that *Orisa* “is not an original Igbo word,” but is borrowed from the Yoruba among whom it means ‘the source and sustainer of the world.’¹² There is no proof that the Igbo word *Olisa* was borrowed from the Yoruba any more than the Yoruba word was borrowed from the Igbo. *Olisa* or its dialectal version *Orisa* was in fact an Igbo word, very often used in the sense of ‘transcend’ or ‘permeate,’ ‘take complete possession of, ‘completely eat up.’ For example the Igbo says, *Oligo-ya aru*, ‘it has eaten up his body’ or *oligo ya mme*, ‘it has eaten up his blood;’, both mean that it has become a part of him. *Olisa* would therefore literally mean ‘He who is spread out everywhere.’ Or ‘He who permeates everything,’ i.e. the Transcendent One, the Immense. This interpretation of its meaning is confirmed by the meaning of the name in its full form, *Olisa N’obuluwa*, ‘he who is spread out everywhere and carrying the world’ i.e. the immense, and sustainer of the world. Fr. Emenceta’s view is somewhat different. According to him, *Olisa* means ‘container of the universe,’ and *buluwa* means ‘one who permeates the world.’¹³

The idea of carrying the world must not be understood in the literal and physical sense. God is not conceived like the god Atlas. He is carrying the world because His continuing power to sustain in it is necessary to keep the world going. He continues to provide for it. He is therefore the Great Providence that continues to keep and guide the world. An ancient and popular Igbo song celebrates this belief:

Oyoyo uwa di ya Beauty! The (world) is full of enjoyment
Oyoyo uwa di ya Beauty! There is joy in the world

*Chukwu sel'aka
Uwa agwu*

But should God remove his hand
The world would vanish.¹⁴

Other Title-names for God

Besides the three personal names already analysed, the Igbo gives God many other names. These are sometimes local variations on the personal names; more often, they are title-names or praise-names of God. Among the Igbo a man's social importance can often be gauged by his title names, or *Aha Otutu*. These also reflect a person's character or achievements, his rank, office or even philosophy of life.¹⁵ For example, in a parish where I once worked, my own *Aha Otutu* was *Eze olelu n'iru ya*, 'king during whose reign aspirations are realized.' This was because the parishioners' long-held hope of building a parish church was realized while I was there. An elder in the same community took for himself this highly philosophical title-name, *Okpa Kwuloto*: 'When a leg is standing it belongs to the community; when it falls, it belongs to its owners.' This means that the community demands your services when you are in good health; when you are sick, you look after yourself.

A very common and ancient title-name hails God as *Chukwu Abiama*, 'The Great Providence of the universe.'¹⁶ Chukwu is not a tribal deity. This is of great significance because most Igbo deities have no influence outside the village which 'owns' them. So, it is usual when naming a deity to name the group which owns it, like *Idemili Obosi*, *Uiasi* of Okija, *Omaliko of Abatete*, *Igwe-kala* of Umunnoha etc. *Chukwu's* sovereignty cuts across all tribal boundaries; He owns and rules the whole world.

Other names hail him as *Agbala-ji-igwe*, 'the great pillar holding up the heavens'; *Chi-di-n'enu*, 'the spirit that lives above'; *Chi Okike*, 'The Creator Providence.' He is *Ezechitoke* - King Providence, the Creator; *Olisa bi n'enu*, 'the Immense One living above'; *Igwe ka Ala*, 'Heaven greater than the earth.' This association of God with the sky or heaven is found in many other title-names: God is *Obasi di n'enu*, 'the Lord above.'¹⁸ More

often, He is simply called *Enu*, 'Heaven,' as in the question *Enu nurukwo*, 'Heaven, have you heard?' In some places he is called *Chinuwa*, 'the Lord, owner of the world.'

Still more interesting are the names which address God as *Otu aka oru mba*, 'He who can destroy twenty towns with a wave of the hand;' *Onye ana ekpere*, 'He whom all beseech;' *Onye okwu biri na onu ya*, 'final arbiter';¹⁹ *Eze bi n'igwe ogodo ya n'akpu* 'N'ala, 'the King who lives in the sky and his clothes touch and roll on the ground.' Some title-names attempt to convey the essence of God. God is often called *Ama-Ama-Amasi-Amasi*, 'One known but never comprehended.' He is often referred to as *Anya Ozighololo*, 'the all-seeing eye, the eye that penetrates all creation, and sees even the unspoken thought.' Another title-name which expresses the frustration of the Igbo at their failure to comprehend the incomprehensible, calls God *Ejeruo*, the *terminus ad quem*, beyond which one cannot proceed any further.²⁰

Other title-names curiously associated God with the sun, *Anyanwu*. In the Awka region, a common title-name for God is *Anyanwu na Agbala*. *Anyanwu* literally means the sun; *Agbala* means a powerful being, yet it would be inaccurate to translate this name as the Powerful Being living in the sun.' Some informants tell me that *Anyanwu na Agbala* is a composite being standing for God, and for his son, *Agbala*. This is borne out by the term *Agbala Chukwu Okike*, 'Agbala, Son of God the Creator,' which is often used to designate *Agbala* alone.²¹ Another such name which seems to identify God with the sun is *Anyanwu na Eze enu*; which literally mean 'the sun and king of the sky.' This name is very widely used in Igboland. One of the sacrifices which is offered directly to God is made under this name *Ilu Onu Anyanwu na Eze-enu* or *Ilu onu Anyanwu, na Agbala*, 'pitching the altar of God.'

The Imagery Contained in the African Names for God
'The Akan doctrine of God,' writes Danquah, 'is the doctrine of an Akan type of God.' He explains thus: The true God is not of several kinds, but he can be known under several guises or

colours, for each people has a name for God, and in the name is to be found (the) quality or colour in God which most appeals to their racial mind.²² The Igbo personal names and title-names for God recorded above provide us with a wealth of data as to how the Igbo think of Him. How do they compare with those of other African peoples?

Mgr. Le Roy and Professor E. Damman have each independently carried out extensive studies of the imagery and ideas woven into the African personal names for God. Le Roy noted that most of the Africans he studied employed terms which include imagery such as life, breath, heart, shadow, all of which are closely connected with the human person to designate man, or even the dead. To designate the non-human spirits, they draw their images from elements which are strange to man such as air and wind, but to give God a name they adopt a very curious procedure. Instead of trying to coin words to represent the incomprehensible nature of God, they prefer to name Him by epithet - an attribute, or quality - and add that this quality belongs to Him in a supreme degree.

Sometimes God is named through a symbol which indicates His habitat. His power or His greatness. Some names of God represent Him principally as the Maker, Organizer and Creator of the world, for example *Mumba* of the Swahili and their related tribes, *Katonda* of the Ganda, *Nyambi* of Lozi, *Nzambi* of the Luango and *Nzaine* of the Fan of Gabon all refer to God as Creator. Other creative roles emphasize His power and greatness: *Mwiny'ezi*, 'the powerful, similarly, '*Nkulu* of the Zulu means 'The Great Great', *Mulofo* of the Luba means the Chief or Lord. Still others call God the 'Great Spirit of the universe,' *Molimo*. Finally, certain names refer to God as 'He who is above,' *Mulungu*, or *Muango*, 'the One of the light or the sun,' thus naming God through his supposed habitat.²³

Damman tried to show that many African names for God refer to his supposed habitat - the sky, the sun, rain, rainbow, or the place of the dead. He concludes, 'Though only a small number of

African languages have been examined for their designation of their High God, two prevailing conceptions have been ascertained: on the one hand, the connection with the sky and its phenomena and with the celestial bodies and , on the other, with the realm of the dead and the ancestors.²⁴ He also suggests as characteristic an apotheosis whereby a god formerly located in the under-world is promoted to sky-God.

From the observations of Le Roy and Damman, it would seem that the images emphasized by African personal names for God can be put into four categories:

Images	Names	Tribe
A The Maker or Creator (of the world)	Mu'umba Mbumba Karunga Katonda Chineke	Swahili Loango Herero Ganda Igbo
B. The Most Powerful (Spirit), Olodumare the greatest, the perfect one	Nkulu-Nkulu Chukwu Leza Mulofo Leza	Yoruba Zulu Igbo Bemba Luba Tonga
C. The Spirit of the Universe (tube)	Mwinyezi Onyankupon Molimo Kwot Osebuluwa	Swahili Akan Bantu Nuer Igbo
D. God is named after his Habitat (Sky or Sun)	Onyame Chido Olorun Etonde	Akan Jukun Yoruba Chaga

Soko	Nupe
Ngewo	Mende
Nhialic	Dinka
Chiuta	Chewa
Aondo	Tiv

It would seem that the African names for God are fairly evenly distributed among the four classifications, but a greater proportion refer to the sky and its phenomena - sun, rain, rainbow.

In fact, it has been reported of many African tribes that the same names denote both the Supreme Being and the firmament itself, the sky, or even rain. So one may say indifferently 'It is raining or 'God is falling'; Dawn is breaking' or 'God is dawning.' The name for God among the Tiv of Nigeria is Aondo, but the Tiv may also say Aondokume, 'Aondo roars' when it thunders or Aondo nyir, 'Aondo is falling' when it is raining.²⁵

Whatever the explanation, a note for caution must be sounded about etymological and philological approaches to the study of African religious beliefs, especially for those who discuss languages which are not their mother tongue. As I have already mentioned, because of the paucity of vocabulary in some African languages, the same word sometimes carries several meanings.

It therefore might be wrong to conclude that because the same word is used for God and the sun that the group using it are Sun worshipers, or that the sun or the sky is the Supreme Being. This is well illustrated by the Igbo word *Chi*, the root word in two of the Igbo names for God: *Chukwu* and *Chineke*. But the Igbo also says *Chi ejeila*, 'it is dusk' and *chi efola*, 'it is dawn'. *Chi* in this case means daylight, but there is not the slightest connection in the mind of the Igbo between God and daylight.

Whether the two uses of the identically spelt word were ever connected in the remote misty past can only be a conjecture.²⁶

The meanings of some of the names show that our classification is not airtight. Some names combine two or more images. The name *Chauta*, 'the Great One of the Bow,' seems to combine the B

and D images - the idea of the Great Spirit and a sky phenomenon. *Chukwu* combines C. B, while *Chineke* combines A and C. The third name *Osebuluwa* if translated as 'the Immense Sustainer of the world,' could be said to combine categories A, B and C. Curiously, none of the three Igbo names makes any reference to the sun.

A variety of the imagery used in the Igbo names and title-names of God draws directly from Igbo experience. We can draw the conclusion that the prefix *Chi* evokes the Igbo belief that each person's *Chi* receives his destiny from God, who is *Chukwu* - the Great *Chi*. *Chineke* reminds us that creation is an essential attribute of God. Another essential - the continuing sustenance of the world by God - is well portrayed in the names *Osebuluwa* and *Agbala-ji-igwe*, 'the powerful and kindly being who is carrying the world.' From the interpretation of the imagery employed in these names, one is already in a position to draw up a list of His attributes.

Notes

1. Wieschoff, W.A. 'Social significance of names among the Igbos of Nigeria' in *American Anthropologist*, 43 (1941) pp. 212-22
2. This word, pronounced like 'chi' in 'children' has been variously written *Chi*, *Ci*, *Tsi*. In this book, we shall retain the more common forms *Chi* and *Chukwu*.
3. Basden, G.T. *Niger Ibos* (London, 1966) p. 37.
4. Talbot, P.A. *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (London, 1926)
5. Basden, G. T. Op. Cit, (1966) p. 37.
6. Meek, C.K. *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (London, 1937) p. 20.
7. Williams, J.J. *Africa's God* (1938) p. 209 quoting a reply to a questionnaire received from (the late) Rev. Fr. Paul Emecheta, the first Igbo priest.

8. Another typical example is the Igbo word 'Akwa' which could mean egg, tears, sew, bridge, cloth, funeral, push, pinching etc.
9. Anozia I. P. Unpublished thesis, 'The Religious Import of Igbo Names,' Urban University, Rome (1968) p. 39.
10. Talbo, P. A. *The People of Southern Nigeria* (London, 1926) vol. II. P.42.
11. Basden, G.T. op. cit. (1966) p. 37.
12. Anozia, I.P. op. cit. (1968) p. 39.
13. Williams, J.J. op cit, (1930) p. 210.
14. Anozia, I.P. op cit. (1968) p. 40 (the translation is mine).
15. Arinze, F. A. *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion* (Ibadan, 1970) p. 9.
16. This name features more in ancient ritual prayers. Crowther, S. And Taylor, J. *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger* (1968). P. 348.
17. Horton, W.R.C. 'God, man, and the land in a Northern Ibo village-Group,' *Africa*, 26 (Jan. 1968 ed.) p. 12.
18. Uchendu, V.C. *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (1965) p. 95.
19. Ekejiuba, F. 'Aro World view,' *West African Religion* (1970).
20. Obi, C. 'Igbo Marriage and Christianity,' unpublished thesis, Urban University, Rome (1970) p. 23.
21. Tape-recorded interview with the Ezeana of Awka (4th May, 1972).
22. Danquah, J.B. *Akan Doctrine of God* (London, 1944) p. 45.
23. Le Roy, Mgr. *Les Religious des primitifs* (Paris, 1906) p. 172.
24. Damman, E. 'A tentative philological Typology of some African High Deities,' *Journal of Religions in Africa*; II (1970) p. 6.
25. Downes, R. M. *Tiv Religion* (Ibadan, 1971) p. 17.
26. Basden, G. T. Op cit (1966) p. 47.

3

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

While analysing the ideas about God contained in myths and the names and title-names for God, we came across several of His attributes. These included His providence, His omnipotence, His transcendence, His immanence, His immensity, and so forth. More information can be gathered from a study of Igbo proverbs, sayings, songs and expressions used in everyday life. Of special interest are the hundreds of the theophoric names (i.e. names composed of God's attributes) which the Igbo give to their children.¹ From these names alone, one can construct a whole treatise on Igbo theodicy. These names are not the result of Christian influence. Pagans have used them from time immemorial.² A colleague of mine wrote a thesis entitled *The Religious Import of Igbo Names* in which he studied and analysed the doctrinal content of ninety-three such theophoric names under twelve headings representing the nature and attributes of God, and His relation to man.³ Here we shall look at a selection of those attributes which feature most often in Igbo expressions, daily life, and worship.

God is Creator

The creative role of God is abundantly illustrated in the cosmogonic myths analysed in chapter I. To summarize: Chukwu is a creator. Creating is his prerogative; no other being can create. In fact, every other being is created. This is very clear to the Igbo mind. Igbo myths presume that God pre-existed the world and everything else that is known to exist. Making this assumption then, the myths then go on to explain the existence of every other thing by means of special and

direct interventions by Chukwu, who is an uncaused cause, an uncreated creator.

The Igbo has many names for God which acclaim his role as creator of the universe. As well as Chineke, the Provident Creator, he is also called *Chi Okike*, 'the Creator;' *Eze Chito-Oke*, King, Providence, Creator; *Ihe Kere uwa* 'Creator of the world;; *Oke kere uwa*, 'Creator; maker of the world;; *Oke kere mmadu*, Creator who created mankind.' God's creation of mankind is not limited merely to bringing man into existence or giving him life. The Igbo believes that each and every faculty and talent of each and every person is given to him by God. Hence you find such expressions as *Chukwu kere ye, kegburu ya 'ekegbu*, 'The God who created him, very poorly endowed him,' or *Chukwu nyere ya ezigbo uche*, 'God gave him great common sense.'

Furthermore, God is still creating every minute of everyday, and the Igbo believes that every person's *Chi* is directly created by God at the very instant of his conception. Hence the Igbo proverbs: *Ofu nne na amu ma ofu chi adighi eke*, ' You may indeed come from the same mother, but you have different gifts from God,' or *okike kere onye bu chi ya* - One's creator is his God.'

Many of the Igbo theophoric names emphasize God's eminent role as Creator of the world and of each individual: **Chukwukere** God-created. This name recognizes the special intervention of God in the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. It re-asserts in a spirit of faith and with thanksgiving a fact which is evident to every Igbo, God is indeed the creator of this child.

Nwachukwu Nyere God-given child.

In the minds of parents who give this name is the thought: 'It could not be explained otherwise; this child is a gesture of the kindness and mercy of God towards us.'

Okechukwu God's gift.

Or God's creature.

Madueke Not created by man

Or simply, man does not create. This name may be given to children who have poor health or are deformed. By using this

name, the parents reaffirm their faith and confidence that God who made him can still make him survive, or help him overcome his disabilities by giving him other talents.

Onyenekere Who creates?

A fundamental question, but the answer is clear as daylight itself to every Igbo: God is the Creator.

The Unicity of God

For the Igbo, Chukwu is one and can only be one. *Chukwu abuo*, two Gods, or *Chukwu ga*, many Gods, cannot be imagined, it is an absurdity. The phrase 'Two Gods' is a contradiction in terms. Some writers perhaps do not appreciate how jarring it could be to the ear of an Igbo to refer to the deities or the *Arusi*, nature spirits, as gods. Understandably, the claim of God's unicity becomes very perplexing when one considers the large numbers of these *Arusi*, and that some of them have certain divine attributes and are worshipped. But this presents no difficulty to the Igbo. (Judeo-Christian traditions have developed a dialectic between monotheism and polytheism which is completely foreign to African traditional religion. The belief in one God and many deities is not contradictory but complementary). In fact, the unicity of God is enhanced rather than compromised by belief in deities who are not gods, nor are they equal to God. They differ from God not only in their power and excellence, but by their very nature. God is essentially the uncreated Creator of everything. There cannot be two such beings.

This is borne out by the fact that there are hardly any two Igbo communities which worship identical sets of deities and *Arusi*. The liturgical calendar of each village-group has a different set of divinities, yet every Igbo group worships Chukwu as Creator and Lord of the whole world. Even more interesting is the fact that although the deities of the other tribes are considered hostile and dangerous, the Igbo has recognized the Supreme Being of neighbouring tribes as identical with Chukwu and have adopted their names as alternative names for Him. From the neighbouring

Edo, they probably adopted the name *Osebuluwa*. The Edo name for God is *Osanobuwa*. From the Efiks to their south-east, the Igbo has adopted and freely use the term *Obassi*. Chukwu is sometimes greeted as *Obasi di n'elu*. Hence God is not supreme among the gods in the henotheistic sense. He is not just the Supreme God of the Igbo, he is the same as the *Osanobuwa* of the Bini, the *Obassi* of the Efik, the Tamuno of Kalabari, the *Olodumare* of the Yoruba, the *Suku* of the Jukun.

Some of the Igbo proverbs confirm the unicity of God, while many others make very cynical references to the divinities. One may sometimes question whether the cult of the divinities can really be called worship as it is based on the principle of strict reciprocity with very little affection or devotion. For example, an Igbo proverb says, *Aga Aghapuru umu mmo nri gbawara ha na nkita ogu*, 'Shall I offer food to the spirits and prevent dogs from eating them? Another says, *Aga na achu aja ka ikpe na ama ndi mmuo* ' We shall continue to fulfil our duty to offer sacrifices so that the fault will be that of the spirit.' But Chukwu is *Onye okwu biri na onu ya*, 'God is the final arbiter.' Yes, *dibia*, the diviner, can manipulate the deities, but he cannot manipulate God. Hence the Igbo name *Chukwuka-Dibia*, 'God is greater than any medicine man.'

The Igbo personal names for God emphasize the unicity of God. The name Chukwu - the great Providence - establishes the pre-eminence of God over the deities. God is called Chukwu Abiama, the Great Providence of the whole universe.' He is above all.

God is Omnipotent

Chukwu is omnipotent. His power is seen in His great work of creation. The wonders of the world tell of His greatness. The sun, the moon, the season, the immense sky - all are the work of His hands and are dependent on Him. Hence, His most common and most appropriate personal name among the Igbo is Chukwu, the Great Providence. The Earth-deity is great; in fact she is the most beloved, the most revered and certainly the most feared deity

among the Igbo. Still, Chukwu is sometimes addressed as *Igwe kala*, 'Heaven greater than the earth.' The immensity of the sky fascinates the Igbo. The sky itself, Igwe, is a powerful deity but Chukwu is the Agbala ji Igwe, 'the great pillar holding up the sky.' His other similar name *Osebuluwa* shows not only that God is greater than the world, but also that the world with all its power and wonders is dependent on God for its very existence. The Igbo song quoted in the previous chapter says, '*Chukwu sel'aka uwa agwu*', 'If God removes his hands, the world will end.' The ancient name Chukwu Abiama - Lord God of the universe - confirms this supremacy of God over the universe.

The Igbo does not see God's greatness and omnipotence only in relation to the material world; they also see it in His relation to the spirit world. Other spirits may sometimes be referred to as *Chi* - spirit protector. A village or a town may have its *Chi*, but only God is Chi-Ukwu, the great Chi, Lord of the Universe. Chukwu kere ihe nile, 'God created everything.' The subordination of the spirits to God is sometimes expressed in terms of a father/son relationship, or a master/servant relationship. The spirits are sometimes called sons of God, or His messengers.

God is greater than man. The Igbo say *Chukwu ji ndu*, 'Life is in the hand of God'; *Ihe nile di Chukwu na aka*, 'Everything is in the hand of God.'

Many Igbo personal names tell of God's omnipotence and His greatness; some state the simple fact that God is omnipotent, others compare His power to the power of other powerful beings and affirm that God's power far exceeds theirs. For example:

Chukwu-wu-Ike: God is Power

This name expresses God's omnipotence very forcefully, yet in an abstract way. The Igbo word wu (or bu) is a verb of identification. It is therefore stronger than its English rendering 'is.' Ike means power, energy, force, strength. A more exact translation may be 'God is power itself.'

Onyeka Chukwu: Who is greater than God?

This name puts the fact of God's omnipotence in a negative and interrogative form. The form is confident, however, in as much as it challenges whoever has a contrary view to say so. Needless to say, it is an axiom among the Igbo that Onwego onye ka Chukwu. 'Nobody is greater than God.'

Chukwu ebuka God is very great.

The Igbo language cannot stretch itself to a more superlative degree.

Chukwu ka God is the greatest

This may also be understood as 'God is transcendent.'

Chukwu nweike God is the owner of strength.

This name is a warning to men that their strength or power, whether based on wealth, authority or physical strength, is a gift from God.

Ifeanyi Chukwu Nothing is impossible for God.

This is a very picturesque name, and affirms God's omnipotence with typical Igbo imagery. *Inyi alo* means 'to be heavy,' specifically the type of weight one feels when one carries something on the head in the traditional Igbo way. A very heavy load would force one down. So an impossible task is *ife nyilu dike* - what has forced down a powerful i.e. what is beyond him. This name states that with God no such thing exists -there is nothing beyond God.

Chikwuka dibia God is more powerful than the medicine man

The Igbo consult the dibia, medicine-man, in all life's crises, but they know that when God decrees, the dibia's divination and herbs are of no avail. The Igbo proverb states this succinctly: *Chukwu biè okwu, ile dibia aburu eziokwu*, 'when God settles an issue, the dibia's tongue begins to tell the truth.'

God is Transcendent

Chukwu is not only omnipotent but also transcendent. He is not only distinct from the world or any other creature but infinitely excels over them in power and excellence. No limit can be put to his power and excellence by any human mind or imagination.

The transcendence of God in relation to the universe is already implied in some of his personal and title-names. Osebuluwa - Lord carrier of the world - is a metaphorical way of stating that God far surpasses the world. He is called Ezechitoke 'King, Lord, and Creator.' He is Eze Enu - King of the Heavens,' but he is also Eze bi n' igwe ogodo ya na-a kpu n' ala, 'King who lives in the sky and his clothes touch and roll over the ground.' His transcendence and his immanence, thus expressed, seem to be contradictory although they are really complementary. Though some writers on African traditional religion try to emphasize God's transcendence at the expense of his immanence by talking of a 'withdrawn God' or of the 'withdrawal of Africa's God,' this Igbo name demonstrates an admirable blend of these two essential but apparently paradoxical attributes. God is far above in the heavens in kingly majesty and exaltation, but yet he fills the whole earth with his presence - his enormous lion cloth falls and covers the earth.

Chukwu is *Anya -Ozighololo*, 'the eye that sees through and through.' This metaphorical expression is certainly drawn from the sun which is also called a 'big eye.' *Anya-Nwu*. The sun is an eye whose light reaches every part of the world, but more than the sun, God is described as an eye which pierces through and sees into everything. This is the force of the term *Ozighololo*, which is onomatopoeic, apparently reproducing the sound of water being poured into a deep hole, which indicates that it is open and very deep.

Chukwu also transcends the human mind. Hence He is called **Ama-Ama-Amasi-Amasi**, ' being which is known but cannot be fully known.' God is thus incomprehensible. Chukwu is also called

Ejelue, ‘that beyond which it is impossible to go.’ God’s transcendence is also celebrated in some theophoric names:

Olisanumba God does not hear reproaches

Nobody can be so naive as to scold God. Such a one would be kicking against the goad - God does not even hear it; we are so insignificant before Him.

Chukwubisi God is first, God is the head.

This is the Igbo way of saying that God is Alpha -beginning of all beginnings.

Onyedika Chukwu Who is like God? Who can be likened to God? The answer is, of course, nobody. He is infinitely above all men.

God is King

Another favourite image used to express the transcendence of God is the image of kingship. Kingship is not a characteristic institution in Igbo societies: *Igbo enwe eze*, ‘Igbo have no kings.’ But they certainly know how exalted kingly dignity is. Some Igbo societies along the banks of the Niger have adopted knigly systems through long contact with the ancient and famous Benin empire. The majesty, power and dignity of *Eze Idu na Oba*, Oba of Benin, are celebrated in many an ancient Igbo folktale. But the egalitarian Igbo have another traditional concept of kingship. They say, *Onye obula wu eze na obi be nna ya*, ‘Everybody is king in his father’s estate.’ The title Eze or king is given to anybody who has attained an extraordinary degree of success in any field. Thus an exceptionally successful yam farmer is called *Eze ji*, king of yam. A good orator is called *Ezeokwu*, king of speech - or master speaker.

For the Igbo, God is king both in the sense of ruler, and in the sense of possessor of infinitely excellent qualities. Igbo proverbs say *Chi bu.eze* ‘God is king.’ We have already noted that God is

called Eze Enu - king above. In fact, the only sacrifice known in Igbo religion to be offered directly to God is called *Ilu Anyanwu na Eze Enu*, 'Sacrifice to the king of the sky.' God is king of kings, hence the saying *Chukwu nwe eze* - 'God owns the king.'

God's Providence

The concept of divine providence is one which has great appeal for the Igbo mind. The Igbo primarily conceives of God as the great Lord Creator who continues to sustain, guard and cater for the needs of the world. God did not abandon the world after its creation. Even the material universe is in the hands of God and needs his continuous sustenance. Remember that the Igbo song say, *Chukwu selu aka uwa agwu*, 'If God removes his hands the world will end.' Another Igbo song asks, *Uwa budu nke onye*? 'To whom does the world belong? The answer is known to every Igbo: *Ihe nile di n'aka Chukwu*' Everything is in the hands of God.' *Chi nwe uwa*, 'God owns the world,' is a major article in the Igbo creed. Some Igbo even have *Chinuwa*, God-owner of the world, as one of God's personal names.

God's providential care for men and for the other creatures in the world is a characteristic feature of the Igbo world-view. God personally sustains and rules the universe, hence he is *Chi oke Abiamma*, 'creator, guide and ruler of the world.' He also directs the destinies of all other creatures through parts or emanations of himself called Chi, which he gives to each and every individual. Every plant, animal, or man has a personal Chi, which like a guardian angel, directs his affairs. God, however, is the great Chi who may at his discretion interfere directly and personally in the affairs of every single individual, or thing. He determines each person's birth and death, hence the Igbo proverb: *Chi adaghi anu ihe ozo na abughi atugh na amugh*, 'God is bored with petitions to conceive and to give birth.' *Chi onye adigh n'izu, onwu agaghi egbu ya*, 'Without God's consent, death cannot kill.'

God sometimes makes and unmakes kings. *Chi kpuru nwaeze ekwela nwaeze ruo ntu* 'May God who made the king, not let him

lose glory.' God helps and protects the helpless - *Ehi n'enweghi odu*, *Chi ya n'achuru ya ijiji*, 'God drives away flies for a cow which has no tail.'

The Igbo belief in divine providence sometimes seems to reach fatalistic proportions: *Onye Chi ya kwetara ofufu obagodu ubi be ya oga efuriri*, 'If your Chi has destined that you will get lost, you can even get lost in your garden.' *Aghataghi Ajo Chi n'uzo oru*, 'you cannot change your unfortunate lot by being industrious.' Yet 'you cannot change your unfortunate lot by being industrious.' Yet paradoxically far from being fatalistic in practical life, the Igbo are a very industrious and most resourceful people; they believe that *Onye kwe. Chi ya ekwe*, 'if a man is determined, his Chi will support him. This is the African version of the proverb, 'God helps those who help themselves.'

Most Igbo theophoric names are fruit of men's experience of Divine Providence. There are those which attribute particular effect or experience of life to God's direct intervention, while others show resignation to the will and plan of God.

Izuchukwu The plan of God. In fact, this is an abbreviation of a popular saying *Ife Chukwu zubelu ga eme*, 'Whatever God has planned must happen.' Another version of the names is **Chizube**, God has planned (wealth, prosperity, etc, for me.)

Uzochukwu The way of God.

The full expression should be *Uzo Chukwu ka mma* God's way (Plan) is the best.

Arinze Chukwu Thanks to God's intervention.

This name is very frequently used as an exclamation. It is the Igbo equivalent of Thanks be to God!.

Okechukwu This is the share allotted to me by God, my God-given lot.

Okwosa The verdict of providence.

Names such as these which praise God's providential concern for man can be counted in their hundreds. This confirms my

earlier statement that God is primarily and fundamentally conceived as the Great Providence, guiding the universe and especially men.

God is All-knowing

The Igbo are strong in their belief that God knows everything. Certain Igbo expressions indicate that God knows the most hidden secrets, understands the most incomprehensible facts and even thoughts in men's hearts. The Igbo says: *Onwere ihe gbara Chukwu ghari?* Is there anything which could come as a surprise to God? When a person suffers an injustice or is falsely accused, he may in despair exclaim, *Chukwu omuzikwori anya?* Is God no longer awake? Why should he let this happen to me? But he may draw some consolation by repeating, *Chukwu ga ekpe*, 'God will judge.' He sees everything, he will eventually give justice where it is due. This is borne out by many of the names Igbo give to their children:

Chukwuma God knows (what is in the heart)

Chukwumobi God knows what is in the heart or Chukwumoge - God knows the time.(when my desires will come true)

Chukwufuzulu God sees everything. Nothing is hidden from him.

Thus in a sense; the Igbo have some concept of God's ubiquity. This is conceived, not as all-pervading, but as an effective presence wherever and whenever his help is needed.

The Moral Attributes of God

Many of the Igbo proverbs and saying already referred to show that the Igbo do not conceive of God as a remote, impersonal power as some writers have said of the Supreme Being in African traditional religion. He is, rather, a personal being, a conscious being, who knows everything and can reason and decide-who guides and directs the universe according to His inscrutable

purpose. By His divine providence, He directs the destiny of every person, even down to the least creature in the world.

More than this however, the Igbo believe that goodness is one of God's essential attributes. Only things which are good, pure, and noble can be -and are - attributed to God. Similarly nothing which is considered bad, impure, or ignoble can be associated with Him. It is absurd, a contradiction, to predicate any evil of God. One cannot ever say that God is wicked, or that God is unjust, that God is deceptive, or that God is a liar. When the Igbo are in the grips of a crisis, they indeed wonder why God has permitted it, but they say resignedly, *Obu uche Chukwu, ana agbagha ya agbagha*, 'It is God's will, is it ever questioned? Sympathizers say to the bereaved: *Dibe oh! Oseburuwa emela uche ya*' Be comforted! God has done His will.' Death is the greatest evil in Igbo experience; but *ewuu Chi* - God's death (or natural death) is never questioned and sometimes is even seen as an occasion of great rejoicing.⁴

God's moral attributes - His goodness, kindness, mercy, love, justice and so forth, are acclaimed in many Igbo proverbs, expressions and personal names.

God's Love, Kindness and Mercy

Words and expressions which express gratitude for His love and kindness are in frequent use in everyday life. Those who have recently given birth are complimented with expressions such as these:

Chukwu aluka God has worked wonders. God has been very kind.'

Ariñe Chukwu 'Thanks be to God!'
But for God, this child would not have been born to you.

Ekene dili Chukwu 'Thanks be to God!'

Chukwu ebuka 'God is so good and kind (literally 'so great').

Children who are believed to be a special gift from God, especially when all hope of getting children seem to have faded, are given names such as these which express God's mercy and kindness.

Nwa Chukwunyere A son given by God.
As if to say, only by the mercy of God, could this child have come to me.

Chukwuemeka God has done well.
God has been very kind to me, *Chukwu emekalum*

Chukwudiogo God is generous.
Liberality in giving without expecting recompense is one of the virtues most esteemed by the Igbo. *Ime Ogo* means simply to give completely gratis.

Olisaeloka Providence has been very kind.
This name typically expresses one's intimate experience of God's mercy and kindness in a wholly unexpected fortune which comes exactly when one most needs it.

The Justice of God

The Igbo believe that God will judge every good and evil deed. One who is wronged and cannot obtain redress often repeats the phrase, *Chukwu ga ekpe* 'God will judge;' or *ka ina arafu mmadu iga arafu Chukwu*, 'If you succeed in deceiving men, you cannot deceive God.' A person who has been falsely accused may say- or name his child - *Chigolum* - 'May God plead my case.' Such a person may console himself with *Chukwumanjo* 'Only God knows what is really evil.'

Recently, after many years of childless marriage, a man in despair - got a child outside marriage. He paid the customary dowry, claimed the child and gave him the named Chukwu-ma-njo 'God knows what is sin.' His wife left him in anger and she too got

a child and named him *Chigolum* 'May God plead my case.' A famous Igbo proverb says: *Chukwu bie ikpe, okwu agwu* 'when God settles an issue it is final.' This proverb is now seen written in English on some lorries, as God's case, no appeal.'

Summary and Conclusions

The detailed analysis of myths, folk-tales names, proverbs and sayings in the previous pages have given us much information about the nature and attributes of God. Now, we shall put all this information together and try and draw certain conclusions to represent a synopsis of the Igbo beliefs about God. This will be the nearest we can get to evolving an Igbo theodicy. Devoid of a written language and trained theologian, Igbo traditional religion has not developed a systematic theodicy. God is rather conceived in terms of his activities and his relationship with the universe, the world of the living and the underworld.

The following conclusions may be drawn:

God existed from the beginning. By the beginning, the Igbo understand the time when nothing besides God was in existence. They do not talk of - nor could they conceive of - a time when God did exist. He is eternal. The Igbo mind however, does not stop to speculate how or when God came into existence. There is no concept of God as an *Ens a se*, 'a being existing of itself. But the Igbo belief that God pre-existed everything, warrants the conclusion that He is not dependent on other beings for His existence. Therefore, as an uncaused cause, God is distinct from the world. The Igbo are not pantheists. Igbo mythology, moreover, implies that God created the world from nothing. He is thus the First Cause.

God is omnipotent and transcendent. He is above the world and the deities and above men and the natural forces.

The creative activity of God did not end with creation. He is still very involved with the preservation of the world. God is the Great Providence - Chukwu.

God is also immanent. He is immanent through his Chi in each person. Human life, destiny, fortunes and misfortunes, and even death are under the control of Chukwu through his creative emanation, Chi. Every human soul is immediately created by God at conception.

The Chi which Chukwu gives each person at the moment of his birth directs him all through life and goes back to Chukwu at death. Although there is a whole troop of deities and forces which can terminate man's life prematurely, death after ripe old age is the end of man's life as ordained by God. It is therefore *onwu Chi*, God's death.

The charge by J.H. Driberg that what has been called a Supreme Being in the beliefs of African peoples is in fact the concept of a universal power or energy which informs and is the cause of all life^s is not applicable to Chukwu. From what we have said, it must be abundantly clear that the Igbo God is a living God, a person. His attributes include those which presuppose an intelligence and will. He is loving and kind. He sometimes decides, and at other times He is believed to judge wrongdoers and mete out punishments. His favours can sometimes be solicited with prayers and sacrifices. He is a moral God: on the one hand, nothing evil can be associated with him - He is upright, just, and faithful; on the other, He requires good conduct on the part of his worshippers.

This embryonic Igbo theodicy provides themes for many Igbo proverbs: *Ngu Chukwu gbunyere onye ka oji ekota ihe*, God gives each person a hook to pluck things with.⁷ A man might pray over kola,⁸ *Chukwu nyere aku-oyibo mmili ona ara, nye anyi ndu, nye anyi ihe anyi ga ejи akwado ya*, 'May God who gives the coconut the milk it drinks, give us life and the wherewithal to support it.'⁹ Another proverb expresses man's total dependence on God, *Chukwu ji ji, jide mma onye owanyere orie*, 'God has the yam and the knife; only those for whom he cuts a piece can eat.'

This basic Igbo theodicy is confirmed by the observations of many writers on Igbo religion. According to Basden, 'circumscribed belief in the Supreme Being and a future Life is

universal among the Igbo people. They maintain that He is all powerful and overlords all inferior spirits. His attributes include beneficence, and He grants favours to mankind in a general way. As a just God, too, He mets out punishments for wrong-doing.⁷ Arinze summarizes Igbo theodicy thus: 'God is the Supreme Spirit, the creator of everything. No one equals Him in power. He knows everything. He is altogether a good and merciful God and does harm to no one. He sends rain and especially children, and it is from him that each individual derives his personal Chi. But this Supreme Spirit has made many inferior spirit who are nearer to man and through whom man normally offers worship to Him.'⁸

Note

1. The term 'theophoric name' means a name composed with an attribute of God.
2. The name of the eleventh king of Nnewi, who reigned over a century before the first missionaries came to Nnewi in 1905, was *Eze-Chukwu* (God is King): cf. Alutu, J.O. *A groundwork of Nnewi History* (1963) p. 228. The king Aboh at the time of the second Niger Expedition in 1857 was called *Chukwuma* (God knows everything).
3. Anozia, I.P. '*The Religious Import of Igbo names*,' unpublished thesis, Urban University, Rome (1968) p. 105.
4. Like many African people, the Igbo have an ancestor cult. There is great rejoicing expressed in elaborate funeral rites when a person dies in good old age of *onwu chi*, God's death.
5. Driberg, J.H. 'The secular aspects of Ancestor Worship in Africa,' supplement to *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 35, no. 138 (Jan. 1936). Quoted by Smith, E. W. *African Ideas of God* (1961) p. 21.
6. Kola-nuts are nuts produced by the Kola tree common throughout West Africa. They are slightly smaller than pingpong balls, and either crimson or white in colour. Their degree of bitterness varies from species to species. Addicts chew them as excitants, and in company they are passed around from one person to another. Among the Igbo they have important social and ritual significance as we hope to show.
7. Basden, G.T. *Niger Ibos* (1966) p. 36.
8. Arinze, F.A. *sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (1970) p. 9.