

THE DIMENSIONS OF AFRICAN COSMOLOGY

Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony (OSA)
Department of Philosophy
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
[*ikee_mario@yahoo.com*](mailto:ikee_mario@yahoo.com)

1. Introduction

In an attempt to understand the meaning of 'African Cosmology' and its constituent elements, it would be worthwhile to first explore the concept 'cosmology'. Etymologically, it is from the Greek words: *cosmos* and *Logos*, meaning 'universe' and 'science' respectively. Put together, it is the 'science of the universe'. Thus, in this paper, *cosmos* and universe will be used interchangeably, and by universe it is meant worldview. For a further and profound enquiry as to the meaning of worldview, there is a copious cache of literature available in this regard. One needs to glance at the works of eminent scholars like Wambutda (1986), Ejizu (1986), Achebe (1986), Onuoha (1987), Metuh (1987), Ubesie (2004), Madubuko (2004), Madu (2004), Ezenweke and Kanu (2012). Very significant to their analysis, is an underlining principle that speaks of cosmologies as basically religious, which gives a sense of purpose and direction to the lives of people and enables them to act purposefully and exercise a measure of control over their environment. It is in this regard that Metuh (1987) maintains that cosmology answers fundamental questions about the place and relationship of man with the universe. This cannot be done outside the ambience of supernatural power or powers and thus religion.

What then is African cosmology? It is simply the way Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations; it is the African's search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive

at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning often viewed as *terminus a quo* (origin), and as *terminus ad quem* (end). This cosmology is the underlining thought link that holds together the African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies.

The idea of African worldview must be understood in a general sense and in a restricted sense, because what we call African worldview is not one shared by all Africans in its totality but rather some characteristic features of the common elements among African worldviews. According to Madu (2004), an investigation into the nature of African cosmology would beg a couple of fundamental questions that determine its course:

- i. What is the nature of the African universe?
- ii. Who is the maker and sustainer of the African universe?
- iii. What is the nature of the beings in the African universe and the interactional network within the African cosmic order?

These questions shall guide our inquiry into African worldview.

2. The Structure of the African Universe

The African universe has the physical and the spiritual dimensions (Edeh 1983, Abanuka, 1994, Ijiomah 2005, Unah 2009, and Chimakonam 2012^a). At the spirit realm, God represents the Chief Being, and seats at the apex of power. In the physical world, man dominates, occupying the central position in the scheme of God's creation. In the contention of Onunwa (1994), the African cosmos is like an isosceles triangle, God (the Supreme Being) is at the apex. The ancestors are at the base of the triangle, with man at the centre. The primacy of the human being in the African universe is due to the central place he occupies within the universe. The triangular imagery suggests that human beings form a

“microcosm” on which converge the innumerable forces that inhabit the other arms of the universe.

Ijiomah (2005) avers that the African universe consists of three levels: they are the sky, the earth and the underworld: “the sky is where God *Chukwu* or *Chineke* and angels reside; the earth is where man, animals, natural resources, some devils and some physical observable realities abide; and the underworld where the ancestors and some bad spirit live” (p. 84). Ekwealor (1990), corroborated the above view when he described the African universe as consisting of three encircled levels, namely: *Elu-Igwe* or sky, *Alammadu* or the world of the living and *Alammuo* or the land of the spirits. Chimakonam (2012^b) in his paper “God and Man in Igbo Traditional Religion” produced graphical drawings of these views and demonstrated the equivalence of Onunwa, Ijiomah and Ekwealor’s conceptions of Igbo universe.

Thus, the African worldview consists of both spiritual and physical realms, which despite their separate existence interact. Thus Ekwealor (1990) avers that “It is important to note that although the Igbo universe is divided into these three broad structures, there is the possibility of certain elements to move from one structure to another to commune with other elements” (p. 30). In this interaction, man communes with God, the divinities, the ancestors and vice versa. The African world is thus an interactive universe.

3. God in the African Cosmos

God in the African universe, according to Quarcoopome (1987), from his names and attributes, is a reality and not an abstract concept. Idowu (1978) avers that he is a personal being with whom one can enter into communion and communication. He is approachable in all occasions of life. In societies where there is hierarchy of power, from the king to the chiefs and common people, the idea of God is also presented within the frame of a

hierarchy. This is evident in the Yoruba, Benin and Akan concepts of God. However, where such hierarchies are not well developed, the idea of God is presented in plain terms, as among the Nupe and Tiv. Among some cultures, he is conceived as masculine, as among the Yoruba, Mende and Akan; in some others as feminine, as among the Ewe; in some others, he is conceived as both male and female, as among the Gas.

The Igbo call him Chukwu or Osebuluwa (Great God or sustainer of the universe)

The Yoruba call him Olodumare or Edumare (The King of heaven)

The Edo call him Osanobua or Osanobwa (Creator and sustainer of the universe)

The Nupe call him Soko (The supreme deity that resides in heaven)

The Ijo call him Temearau (The creatress of all things –feminine term-)

The Tiv call him Aondo (The power above that creates and rules all things)

The Ibibio refer to him as Obasi Ibom (The God who lives above the earth)

The Akan call him Odomankoma and Nyame (full of mercy and the God of fullness respectively)

The Mende of Sierra Leone call him Ngewo (The eternal one who rules from above)

The Kono of Sierra Leone call him Meketa (The Immortal or eternal)

From the meanings of these names of God from different African cultural backgrounds, his attributes already begin to emerge.

4. The Attributes of God

Not minding the differences in the concept of God among Africans, which Oguejiofor (2010), argues is based on the epiphenomenal of the global condition of life of the people under

consideration, Idowu (1989), avers that there are unifying attributes of the African Ultimate Reality. These attributes according to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) are words or phrases that speak of the traits, properties, qualities or characteristics of God and what is believed to be his role in relation to the world and man. These attributes bring down the divine from the high mountain of the metaphysical and abstract to the level ground of the real and concrete.

- i. **God is Real and Active:** For instance among the Igbo, he is called: *Chineke* (the God who creates), *Chukwu* (the great God), *Osebuluwa* (the sustainer of the universe), *Ekekereuwa* (he who created the world), *Chioke* (God that apportions lots), *Nna-di-Ebube* (the awe-inspiring father), *Odogwu-nagha* (victorious warrior), *Ome Mgbeogharike* (actor in times of difficulty). From these names, God is real and not just real, but active. And if he fails to respond as expected, the Igbo would ask “*Chukwu I no nura*” (God are you asleep).
- ii. **God is Unique:** By unique, it is meant that he is different from other creatures. In his graphical representations of Ijiomah and Onunwa’s conception African universe, Chimakonam (2012^b) shows that God occupies a unique place, high and above all other creatures as the creator. He is transcendent, sovereign and possesses absolute power.
- iii. **God is the absolute controller of the universe:** The African God is not a withdrawn God; he has full control of the universe. The Igbo would refer to him as *Osebuluwa* (the sustainer of the universe). He did not just create the world but actively sustains it. All other

creatures are in being for the reason that he is also in existence. He is neither a Remote God (*Deus Remotus*) or a Withdrawn God (*Deus Otiosus*). He is both transcendent and immanent.

- iv. **God is One:** Among the Igbo, there is only one God called *Chukwu*, even though the nomenclature is contested, he is regarded as the God and creator of the whole universe. Thus, African Traditional Religion has come to be understood, though lately, as a monotheistic religion because it recognizes only one God.
- v. **God is Creator:** Africans have the belief that God either created the world or delegated some divinities to carry out some assignments as regards the creation of the world. According to Oduwale (2010), Yoruba scholars agree that the human person is made up of three basic elements: *Ara* (body), *Emi* (breath) and *Ori* (soul). Idowu (1962) avers that the body is the creation of *Orisha nla* (Arch-divinity). He was assigned by *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being) to mould the body of human beings. It is only the Supreme Being that puts the spirit into the body so as to give it life. Thus even when a divinity is delegated, it does not take the place of God.
- vi. **God is King:** Most African traditional societies speak of God as King. This attribute is related to that of God as the controller of the universe. Generally, the idea of God as king speaks of him as the sovereign controller of the universe. Among the Mende, he is “The Chief”; among the Yoruba, he is *Oba Orun* “The King in heaven”; among the Igbo he is *Eze Enuigwe* “The King of Heaven”.

- vii. **God is Omnipotent:** In recognizing that God creates and sustains all things, the African implicitly recognizes God's Omnipotence. Since there is no limit to the being of God, and every being acts according to its nature, it would imply that His power is without limit. He does everything possible, even the ones we sometimes consider impossible. A God without this attribute fails the first test of deity. Among the Akan of Ghana he is Otumfoo (The Mighty or Powerful One); The Yoruba concept of God as *Olodumare* and the Igbo concept of God as *Chukwu* also speak of the omnipotence of God.

- viii. **God is Eternal:** Eternity is the total simultaneous and perfect possession of life without limits. This implies that God has no beginning or end. He made us who abides forever and is always the self-same and His years do not fail. Indeed, the very substance of God is eternity. It is in this regard that the Yoruba refer to him as *Oyigiyi Ota Aiku* (The mighty immovable, hard, ancient, durable rock that never dies).

- ix. **God as Judge:** The African believes that all his actions will be judged, rewarded or punished. God is the impartial judge who will either reward or punish him for his actions, both private and public actions.

5. The Divinities in the African Universe

As already indicated, in the African world, there is only one God, who is high and is expected to be reached through intermediaries. These intermediaries are called divinities and share aspects of the divine status. Most Africans believe that they emanate from God; as such, it is incorrect to say that they were created by him, but more correct to speak of them as offspring of the Supreme Being; it is

therefore not surprising that the *Abosom* of Ghana, *Orisa-nla* of the Yoruba, *Olokun* of the Edo and *Ojukwu* of the Igbo are referred to as sons of the Supreme Being.

Divinities are responsible to God for whatever act they perform in their relationship with human beings. Their function is to ensure that God is not bordered by petty problems from the earth; they are not ends in themselves but means to an end, and everything they do is dependent upon God's approval; this does not in any way change the fact that they are a powerful set of spiritual beings. They are functionaries in the theocratic government of God, sometimes referred to as his messengers and at other times as his sons. Awolalu and Dopamu (1978) refer to them as the executive heads of various divine departments in the Supreme Being's monarchical government.

Each of these divinities has a name, usually describing its function: as we have *Ala* among the Igbo meaning earth, which speaks of the earth-goddess. Or *Olokun* in Yoruba, *okun* meaning ocean, and the god, the god of the sea. Arinze (1970), speaking on divinities from the Igbo perspective declares that:

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 spirits who are nearer to man and through whom man normally offers his worship to Him. (p. 10)

The difference between these divinities and the Supreme Being is very obvious. They are inferior spirits, while God is a superior

spirit. They vary in number from place to place, however with more among the Yoruba where one can get as many as 1700 of divinities. No matter their number, they are a group headed by the arch-divinity as we see in the case of *Orisa-nla* among the Yoruba. It is an arch-divinity and the head of all divinities among the Yoruba.

6. The Categorization of Divinities

Awolalu and Dopamu (1978) categorized divinities into three divisions. These include:

1. Primordial Divinities:

These are divinities that dwell in the heavens since they were with the Supreme Being during the creation of the universe. Like the creator of the universe, their origin is also not known. An example of this kind of divinity is *Orisha nla* (Arch-divinity), which Idowu (1962) avers was given the responsibility of creating the human body.

2. Deified Ancestors:

The deified ancestors are human beings that lived extraordinary or mysterious lives and as such were made divinities after their death. This is very common among the Egyptians and the Romans. Among the Yorubas, we have Sango who was a former powerful king of Oyo. With the deification of the ancestor, he ceases to be an ancestor and takes up the qualities of a divinity.

3. Personified Natural Forces and Phenomena:

The African universe is made up of myriad of spirits. And these spirits have their abode on mountains, hills, rivers, seas, oceans, trees, roads, markets, caves, brooks, lakes and forests. Their abode also determines the place where they are worshipped, and also the residence of the Priest of the

deity. It is a common story in Africa to hear of spirits causing accidents on bridges, these are spirits that dwell in water, often called mummy water. Some spirits dwell in trees and cause road accidents, often interpreted as sacrifice to the divinity in question. There are sociological factors that affect the positioning of these divinities, based on the principle that man is a social being who operates in the society. For instance, people in the riverine areas worship water spirits. People who live in places where there is forest worship the forest spirits. People in mountainous areas worship spirits that dwell on the mountain.

For the purpose of this study, we shall concentrate on divinities among the Yoruba of Nigeria.

Divinities among the Yoruba of Nigeria

1. Orisa-nla: It is also known as Obatala (which means king of whiteness or the Lord of white cloths), the creator divinity and arch-divinity. As already indicated, the body is the creation of *Orisha nla* (Arch-divinity). He was assigned by *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being) to mould the body of human beings. He also created solid earth and equipped it. While he creates the body, the Supreme Being puts the soul in the body. It lies within his department to make a human being beautiful or ugly. In its shrine must be clean, everything used is white in colour, and the water used at *Orisha nla's* shrine kept clean; water from its shrine is fetched very early in the morning and given to pregnant women so that the children they carry in their womb may be properly moulded; those who are physically challenged are also healed with this water. It is in fact regarded as the god of purity or the holiness of God and its worshippers are expected to be pure as well.

2. Orunmila or Ifa: It is the divinity of wisdom, prognostication and foreknowledge, and in fact the oracle divinity of Yoruba land. After God had made the human soul and sealed its destiny, it is believed that *Orunmila* was present and knows its secrets, that it why he is always consulted before undertaking an action, say marriage, war or a journey, to give information about the past, present or future of man. His priest is called *Babalawo*, which means 'the father who has the secret'.

3. Ogun: It refers to the god of iron and war. As the god of iron, he appropriately becomes the patron god of blacksmiths, hunters and warriors and is symbolized by Iron. Like the Igbo Amadioha, he is the messenger of God's wrath. Because of the fear it evokes, people go to him to seal their covenants, as fear of him brings about the fulfilment of your own part of the covenant. He is not just the messenger of God's wrath and judgement, he also grants success to warriors and hunters. Even in our time, travellers turn to him for protection from accidents.

4. Esu: As the Igbo Ekwensu was misunderstood by missionaries and new converts to Christianity as the biblical devil, Esu has also been misunderstood as the Christian devil. He is the god of mischief and could make things difficult for people. He is always present as an inspector in matters of rituals and conduct, among divinities and human beings. Having inspected a ritual, his recommendation determines if the Supreme Being will accept the sacrifice or not; he stands before the Supreme Being accusing both human beings and divinities, especially when he is not properly fed with sacrifices; however, when he is given his due, he can be benevolent in

terms of protection. He is feared by both men and divinities and could be unpredictable. Awolalu and Dopamu (1978) illustrated this thus, “Once Sango, the thunder divinity of Yorubaland, boasted that there was no divinity he could not subdue. But Esu asked him promptly whether he included him, and Sango immediately replied apologetically that he could not have been included” (p. 83).

5. Sango: Just as the Igbo Amadioha is the god of thunder and lightning, Sango is the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning, with his presence manifested in thunderbolts and lightning. He was one of the kings of Oyo kingdom, an Alafin of Oyo. And his reign was tyrannical and could spit out fire during feats of anger. When he was deposed as king, he committed suicide by hanging himself. He is highly dreaded, and punishes offenders through thunderbolts. Thus periods of lightening and thunderbolts are terrifying moments for offenders. When it strikes a human being, the person is not mourned; when he strikes a building, no body sleeps there until a special sacrifice is done.
6. Sopono: He is the god of the disease of small pox, which is seen as a manifestation of the wrath of God on offenders. Like Sango, he is also dreaded. When it attacked liars or other offenders and its leads to death, they are not to be mourned.
7. Osun: She is the wife of Sango and the goddess of the river of Osun. She is a benevolent divinity, evident in her name, the goddess of children. She specializes in restoring the fruitfulness of barren men and women. Water from Osun River or stream to drink. Since streams and rivers are her abode, gifts to her are thrown into the river or stream.

Although she specializes in child giving, she could also be approached to solve other problems.

8. Oya: Oya is a female divinity, referred to as the goddess of the River Niger. If Sango was an Alafin of Oyo, Oya is believed to be his first wife, who wept after his death, weeping so severely that her tears formed the River Niger. She could neutralize the anger of Sango. Whenever he spits fire during his feats of anger, Oya neutralizes his anger with rain. Like Osun, she is also worshipped in rivers and streams.
9. Buruku: according to the tradition of the Yoruba, Buruku is a god brought from Sabe, in Dahomey; brought as a Supreme Being but worshipped as divinity among the Yorubas. It is referred to as Buruku Omolu, meaning “the child of the Supreme Being”. It is believed that it is responsible for deaths, illnesses, catastrophes and other human miseries; however, he is also capable of blessing and protecting worshippers. Worshippers must placate its anger through sacrifices. During worship, small children, pregnant women and menstruating women are a taboo to Buruku
10. Ayelala: Like Sango, it is a deified ancestor. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1978), “She was originally a slave woman brought from Ekitiland to Kisoso in Okitipupa of Ondo State, and offered as a substitutionary sacrifice for peace between Ileja and Ijo who were at war with each other” (p. 90). Keko from Ileja slept with the wife of chief Temetan, and ran away to Ijo to avoid being killed. When the case was being settled, it was agreed that if Keko must live, a substitute is required to die for him; it was at this time that Ayelala, the slave woman was offered as a

substitutionary sacrifice. Through her death she brought peace between the peoples of Ileja and Ijo, and so was worshipped by both Ijo and Ileja.

Divinities among the Igbo of Nigeria

- i. *Anyanwu* (Sun): It is the son of *Chineke*, and sacrifices that are made to *Chukwu* are made through *Anyawu*, because of the special and close association of the sun with the Supreme Being.
- ii. *Amadioha* or *Igwe* (Sky): It is also the son of *Chineke*, and sometimes referred to as the husband of *Ala*. Just as a husband fertilizes his wife so does *Amadioha* fertilize his wife *Ala* through rainfall. It expresses its power in thunderbolts and lightening. He is an agent of *Chukwu* against undetected crimes. Through his intercession *Chukwu* nourishes the green vegetation of the earth, sees to the health of the living, lightens up the world and gathers evidences as well as bears witness for good deeds and against evil deeds of men. It ensures that the natural order as set by *Chukwu* is not upset. Its principle is simple, ‘eye goes for an eye and a tooth goes for a tooth’. Whatever one sows, he will reap”. The question that arises here is this: if *Amadioha* is the son of *Chukwu* and *Ala* the daughter of *Chukwu*, how come the two of them are married? Or does the Igbo world encourage incest? It is true that myths are not concerned with coherence but with conveying truths, but again the instrument for conveying this truth determines the value of the truth.
- iii. *Ahijoku* (god of agriculture): Farmers offer sacrifices to this deity for a bountiful harvest.
- vi. *Ala* (Earth goddess): It is the most important deity in Igbo public and private cults. She is the sole daughter of *Chukwu* and is believed to have made the ground

and the vegetable kingdom. The earth goddess has the function of exposing those who secretly commit evil and the evils they commit. It is in this regard that the Igbo say: *Ani tukwa gi* – may the earth expose you. *Ani bokwa gi ji n'aja* – which literally means “may the earth put yam and sand on your head”. This means, “may the earth goddess render you miserable and expose your shame”. *Ani jukwa gi* (may the earth reject your corpse). In Igbo land, the earth is holy plane from it God produces all living things including human beings. It is also through this earth that human beings rejoin their maker – *Chineke*. When a man therefore, commits a crime, he is said to have “*Meruo Ala*” (defiled the earth). If such a person dies without having “*Mejuo Ala*” (pacified the earth), the earth goddess whose function it is to expose people’s atrocities will reject the corpse of such a person. When the person is buried, the earth goddess throws up the corpse out of the belly of the earth. In this case, the bereaved are left with the option of cremation. The implication being that the soul of the person is destroyed and will never reincarnate. For such a soul, the Igbo would say: “enu erughi ya aka, ani erughi ya aka”, meaning (he has no share in the sky nor earth). They end up as wicked spirits.

- vii. *Chi-omumu* – (the goddess of children). It is her responsibility to ensure the continuity of human and animal life. Those who seek children pray to Chukwu through her.
- viii. *Nmuo Mmiri* or *Nne Mmiri* (sea goddess): she is the sustainer of sea life, the bringer of hope, provider of help and protection, the bringer of gifts and exotic things. Indeed, she is said to hold the key to the gate that leads to the world of solutions. Thus whenever the

-
- Igbo man prays he does not forget to add *ka ije anyi buru ije mmiri* which means, “may our journey follow the path of the seas”. It is she who guides people to exotic lands, and chooses to permit human beings to travel and reach their destinations on top of the sea.
- ix. *Ekwensu* (god of warriors): Missionaries have wrongly identified *Ekwensu* with the Christian concept of devil. According to Metuh (1991), *Ekwensu* is infact the spirit of violence and patron of warriors and not the Christian devil. Isichie (1969), records that among the Igbos of Asaba, there was a festival called *Ekwensu* festival, and it constituted their major annual feast, during which they displayed their military prowess.
- x. *Agwu* (the god of divination and healing): It is the chief messenger of the Almighty God. Nwankwo (1987) recollects and records his conversation with *Agwu* – when *Agwu* was asked about himself, he replied:
 I am the spark of Divine Essence charged with the responsibility of providing man with tools of existence ... I hold the key to those secretes of creation which man is expected to know and reveal such secretes as are necessary for the advancement of mankind ... in the study of science, philosophy, religion, occultism, mysticism, I am the first port of call. Intelligence, wisdom, knowledge and power is bestowed on those who have received the blessings of the agent of the Almighty God. These privileges are nevertheless without a price and it is that you shall be clean before God at all times of your life.
 (p. 69)
 One only needs so little a demonstration as close his eyes, stand barefooted on the earth, open wide his arms and solemnly echo: *Agwu gosi m ike gi!* (*Agwu* show me your power) to experience the awe of *Agwu's* divine aura.

- xi. Ibinokpabi: It is the divinity of Arochukwu; a female divinity. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1978), It has the power “to identify sorcerers, witches, poisoners. People also believe that she can make barren women fertile, and give success in trade, fertility of crops and victory in war” (p. 94).
- xii. Ojukwu: Like the Yoruba Sopono, Ojukwu is the god of smallpox. It afflicts sinners with smallpox; and its victims are not given normal burial, as they are buried in the evil forest.

7. Spirits in the African Cosmos

The African universe is made up of a myriad of spirits. Death is not understood as the final end of man. After death, the soul *nkpulobi* goes back to *Chukwu*. The after-life for the African is a life of continuing relationship with the living dead. Life in Africa is cyclic: birth, death and rebirth. Those who lived good lives and died at ripe old age, receiving the appropriate funeral rites, in relation to their status, go to the spirit-land (*Ala-mmuo*), where they continue to live until they reincarnate. On the other hand, those who lived bad lives and died bad death, like in accidents and before one reaches a ripe old age, are sent to an intermediate state, between the spirit-land and the land of the living where they live frustrated, as wandering and restless spirits in Igbo worldview, they are referred to as *Akalogeli* (bad spirits).

Apart from the *Akalogelis*, we have the ancestors. Metuh (1991), argues that they are under the presidency of the *Ala* deity. They are the guidance of morality and the owners of the soil. They occupy a very significant place in Igbo life and religion. Uchendu (1965) avers that ancestors are the invisible segment of the Igbo lineage. Their world and the human world are very similar, just like in the human world, they have their farms, their roads, their markets; the only difference is that while our world is visible, theirs is invisible.

They are honoured and not worshipped. The honour given to them is anchored on the principle of reciprocity and philosophy of reincarnation: having been honoured, they are expected to reincarnate and do for the living members what they did for them. Nyamiti (1984) distinguishes two elements that characterize the African concept of ancestorship: *natural relationship*, which usually exists between the ancestor and his relatives, either as parent or brother. It can also be founded on common membership of a clan, tribe, religious sect or society. It can therefore either be consanguinous or non-consanguinous. There is also the *sacred or supernatural* status of an ancestor, which is the consequence of his death. Following the African traditional moral standard, a good life is very significant here, since the ancestor is like a standard for the living.

8. Man in the African Cosmos

African religion and thought is anthropocentric. Man is at the centre of the universe, more central than God. According to Mbiti (1969), “Man is at the very centre of existence and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God exists for the sake of man” (p. 92). Corroborating with Mbiti, Metuh (1991), avers that “Everything else in African worldview seems to get its bearing and significance from the position, meaning and end of man” (p. 109). The idea of God, divinities, ancestors, rituals, sacrifices etc., are only useful to the extent that they serve the need of man.

The analysis of the Yoruba idea of a human person as *eniyán*, reveals the African concept of man as a being having its origin and finality in the Supreme Being. This implies that man in the African universe is best understood in his relationship with God his creator, to whom, from the Igbo perspective, he is ontologically linked with through his *chi*, the spark or emanation of God in each person. Man’s coming to the world cannot be understood within

the Western category which sees the human person in mechanistic terms. Man in African worldview has a purpose and mission to fulfil; he comes into the world as a force amidst forces and interacting with forces. Good status, good health and prosperity are signs of the wellbeing of a person's life-force, and man struggles to preserve it through an appropriate relationship with the spiritual forces around him.

The goal of every human person is to achieve his *akara chi*, the destiny imprinted on his palm by his *chi*. He is not just an individual person, but one born into a community whose survival and purpose is linked with that of others. Thus the human person is first a member of a clan, a kindred or a community. According to Oduwole (2010), Yoruba scholars agree that the human person is made up of three basic elements: *Ara* (body), *Emi* (breath) and *Ori* (soul). This is also true of the constituents of man in Igbo ontology: *Obi* heart or breath, *Chi* destiny, *Eke* or *Agu* ancestral guardian. Idowu (1962) describes the body as the concrete, tangible thing of flesh and bones which can be known through the senses. As regards the *Emi*, he describes it as spirit, and this is invisible. It is that which gives life to the whole body and thus could be described through its causal functions: Its presence in the body of a person determines if the person still lives or is dead. According to Ebunoluwa (2010), the body is the creation of *Orishanla* (Arch-divinity). He was assigned by *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being) to mould the body of human beings. It is only the Supreme Being that puts the spirit into the body so as to give it life. Yoruba philosophy on the human person does not end with the body and spirit, there is a third element called the soul. The soul affirms that the human person already has individuality in the spiritual world before birth. From this understanding, life does not begin with birth, it begins as soon as one acquires the soul which defines a person's individuality. The soul of the human person begins to live even before there is a body for its abode.

Although the human person comes from God, his birth is not a separation from God. He still relates with the divine in a community of ways: Through **libation**: which are prayers usually said in the morning time or during ceremonies, meetings and gatherings using *oji* (kola nut) and *mmanya-oku* (hot drink), the food and drink of the gods. Ijiomah (2005) avers that in prayer, “the Igbo man tries to normalize the relationship among the three worlds ... libation is made to God through the agency of the ancestors and other deities” (p. 87). **Through divination**: which involves a process of inquiry. People who wish to know why certain things happen, how to solve certain problems and so on, go to diviners.

9. Conclusion

The foregoing research reveals that the African worldview is a unified reality. There is a strong interaction between the spiritual or unseen and the physical or seen worlds. The interaction of the two worlds instils a greater sense of the sacred in the African because he sees and feels the presence of the Supreme Being, divinities and spirit beings (ancestors) always present. And since the sacred is permeating in everything, he gives a place to the divine in all he does: in politics, in his social life, in his business, in the laws he makes. It is such that when these laws are broken, it is not just settled between humans, the divine is also appeased. This further explains why J. S. Mbiti would argue that the African is notoriously religious. Furthermore, there is a sense of community in which all the inhabitants of the cosmic order exist for each other. Thus, no being exists for itself, but exists because others exist. However, at the centre of this universe is man, and the preservation and enhancement of his life is a prime value. The divine elements exist to preserve man; and man relate with them to preserve his life as well. The divine have relevance only to the extent that man's life is preserved.

References

- Arinze, F. (1970). *Sacrifice in Igbo religion* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Chimakonam, O. J. (2012^b). "God and Man in Igbo Traditional Religion". O. E. Ezenweke and I. A. Kanu (Ed). *Issues in African traditional religion and philosophy*. Jos: Fab Anieh.
- Edeh, E. (1983). *Towards Igbo metaphysics* Chicago: Loyola University Press.
- Ekwealor, C. C. (1990). The Igbo world-view: A general survey. E. Oguegbu (Ed.). *The Humanities and All of Us* (pp.29-33). Onisha: Watehword.
- Ijiomah, C. (2005). African philosophy's contribution to the dialogue on reality issues. *Sankofa: Journal of the Humanities*. 3. 1. 81 – 90.
- Nwankwo, N. (1987). *In defence of Igbo belief system – A dialectical approach*. Enugu: Life Paths.
- Onunwa, U. (1994). The individual and community in African Traditional Religion and society. *The Mankind Quarterly*. 34. 3. 249 – 260.
- Unah, J. (2009). Ontologico – epistemological background to authentic African socio-economic and political institutions. A F. Uduigwomen (Ed.). *From footmarks to landmarks on African philosophy* (264 – 278). Lagos: O. O. P.
- Wambutda, D. N. (1986). The interplay between cosmology and theology: A. matrix for African theologizing. In A. Oduyoye (Ed.). *The state of Christian theology in Nigeria, 1980-81*, (38-49). Ibadan: Day Star.
- Ejizu, C. I. O. (1986). *Igbo ritual symbols*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension.

-
- Kanu, I. A. (2012). A metaphysical epistemological study of African Medical practitioners. In O. E. Ezenweke and I. A. Kanu (2012). *Issues in African traditional religion and philosophy* (227-240). Jos: Fab Anieh.
- Onuoha, E. (1987). *Four contrasting world-views*. Enugu: Express.
- Metuh, E. I. (1987). *Comparative studies of African Traditional Religion*. Onitsha: Imico.
- Madu, E. (2004). *Symbolism in African cosmology: The Igbo perspective*. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. Lecture Note.
- Quarcoopome, T. N. (1987). *West African traditional religion*. Ibadan: African Universities Press.
- Oguejiofor, J. O. (2010). The resilient paradigm: Impact of African worldview on African Christianity. In U. U. Bede (Ed.). *God, Bible and African Traditional Religion* (99-112). Enugu: Snaap.
- Oduwole, E. (2010). Personhood and abortion: An Africa perspective. M. F. Asiegbu and I. C. Chukwuokolo (Ed.). *Personhood and Personal Identity: A Philosophical Study* (pp. 97-106). Enugu: Snaap.
- Idowu, B. (1962). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. London: Longman.
- Uchendu, V. C (1965), *The Igbos of South East Nigeria*. London: Rinehart and Winston.
- Nyamiti, C. (1984). *Christ as our ancestor: Christology from an African perspective*. Zimbabwe: Mambo.

Metuh, I. E. (1991). African religions in western conceptual schemes. Jos: Imico

Isichie, E. (1969). Igbo and Christian Beliefs: Some aspects of theological encounter. *In African Affairs*. 68. 124.

Marshall, I. H. (1988). Myth. In S. B Ferguson (Ed.). *New Dictionary of Theology* (pp. 449-451). England: Intervarsity.

Madu, J. E. (2004). *Honest to African cultural heritage*. Onitsha: Caskan.

Achebe, C. (2008). *The things fall apart*. England: Heinemann.