

## THE WESTERN AND JEWISH ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTIAN DEVIL AND THE CONNECTION TO IGBO TRADITIONAL *EKWENSU*

**Chika JB Gabriel Okpalike**

Department of Religion and Human Relations  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

### **Abstract**

The Devil, thought of as Ekwensu among Igbo Christians is both a new-comer and old-resident in Igbo religious consciousness. The Igbo Christians have made such an enemy out of Ekwensu that it has become the cause of everything negative among them. They blame him for their failures, natural occurrences, witchcraft, accidents, sicknesses, even the malfunction of electrical appliances and internet network instability. The current profile of Ekwensu can be traced to the advent of Christianity; before then, Ekwensu was known differently. The present work traced the origin of the Devil in western and Jewish culture, elicited how the Devil became the enemy of God and the various representations of the Devil in those cultures and how Christianity borrowed that trend and finally imposed it on Igbo religious consciousness. The work is a textual analysis and an abstraction from concrete religious practices. The analysis was done using phenomenological method. Results shows that Ekwensu only acquired the status of the Judeo-Christian Devil/Satan as a result of the Christian borrowing of the western presentation of Devil in the Jewish and Western cultures.

**Keywords:** Ekwensu, Devil, Ancient, Igbo, African Traditional Religion, Satan

### **Introduction**

In the beginning of the Christian Bible, the Devil was portrayed as a serpent (Gen. 3). The Christian bible, again, in the visions of John, represented in graphic terms, a battle in heaven involving the Ancient Dragon/Serpent/Satan/Devil, in which Michael and his army emerged victorious on behalf of God and Jesus Christ with the Ancient Dragon defeated (Rev. 12:7-12). Notably, the image of the dragon and serpent which represented Satan and the Devil is launched. The socio-religious consequence of this is that the image of the serpent and dragon became demonized. Meanwhile these images are seen in a good number of ancient preChristian cultures, but had different significance in accord with cultures which used it. For instance, Katrina Sisowath traced the origins of the serpent cult thus:

In mythology, the serpent symbolises fertility and procreation, wisdom, death, and resurrection (due to the shedding of its skin, which is not akin to rebirth), and in the earliest schools of mysticism, the symbol of ‘The Word’ was the serpent. The ‘light’ that appeared was metaphorically defined as a serpent called ‘Kundalini’, coiled at the base of the spine to remain dormant in an unawakened person. Divinity or awakening one’s Godhood and latent abilities came with the rituals and teachings brought by the serpent people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Katrina Sisowath. “Tracing the Origins of the Serpent cult”. *Ancient Origins: Reconstructing the Story of Humanity’s Past*, December 3, 2014, from <https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/tracing-originsserpent-cult-002393>. Accessed March 27, 2019

In China, Fu Xi and Nu Wa are male and female human heads with serpental trunk. In their myth, they were responsible for the creation of humans. Among the Hindu, the serpent signifies infinite, endless and eternal, represented in the symbol of Ananta. According to Jayaram V.

In Hinduism, Ananta refers to Adishesha or Ananta-shesha, the celestial serpent with a thousand heads and endless coils. which floats in the infinite ocean of primeval waters (existence) upon which Lord Vishnu rests and keeps a watch on the worlds and beings.<sup>2</sup>

Most ancient cultures worshipped the serpent, from Sumeria to Akkadia, from Egypt to Greece, from Tibet to Africa. For none of them was the serpent an enemy of God.

On the other hand, Daniel 7:7, 20; Revelation 12 :3; 13:1; and 17:3 presented the beast with ten horns while Daniel 8 :3, 6, 7 and Revelation 13:11 presented two horns like that of a ram. The animals with horns were adversaries of God and Anti-Christ. Meanwhile, in ancient Sumeria, Annunaki Nin-Khursag and her husband Enki created humans to be workers on the earth. According to Joshua J. Mark:

Enki (also known as Ea, Enkig, Nudimmud, Ninsiku, Nissiku) was the Sumerian god of wisdom, fresh water, intelligence, trickery and mischief, crafts, magic, exorcism, healing, creation, virility, fertility, and art. Iconography depicts him as a bearded man wearing a horned cap and long robes as he ascends the Mountain of the Sunrise.<sup>3</sup>

In Igbo religious culture, *Ekwensu* is represented as a primeval Eagle which killed the primeval serpent<sup>4</sup> while *Ikenga* is a two-ram-horned deity. *Ekwensu* is protector, wisdom (especially in battle strategies and transactional processes), justice (sometimes ruthless) and victory. Igbo religious culture went even beyond the serpent in its symbolization of wisdom, protection, victory, etc. *Ikenga* is fullness of manhood strength,<sup>5</sup> stability and valour.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of these significances of the serpent and horned deities in ancient cultures, the demonization of the Christian bible redefined their being and essence, decorating them with an entirely strange and new identity. This work traced the origin of the evil personality (the Devil/Satan), who is the enemy of God and Christians, to Jewish religious culture and Greek mythology. It asserted the absence of this personality in most ancient cultures, especially Igbo religious culture and finally averred that *Ekwensu* in Igbo religious culture was one of the deities in ancient cultures which suffered a fate imposed by Christianity on them in spite of what they stood for in their individual cultures. The work is a phenomenological hermeneutics of texts and extant practices in Igbo religious culture and Christianity. The work found out that the evil deity known as the Devil is not universal, but certain characteristics of his can be found in the gods of every religion. Some of these are iconographic similarities, others relate to the god's function within the myths.

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<sup>2</sup> Jayaram, V. "The Meaning and Concept of Ananta or Infinity in Hinduism". Hinduwebsite.com, No Date, from <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/concepts/ananta.asp#:~:text=In%20Hinduism%2C%20Ananta%20refers%20to%20Adishesha%20or%20Ananta-shesha%2C,keeps%20a%20watch%20on%20the%20worlds%20and%20beings>. Accessed March 27, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Joshua J. Mark. "Enki". World History Encyclopedia, 2017, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Enki/>. Accessed March 27, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> John A. Umeh. After God is Dibia: *Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria*, Vol.2. London: Karnak House, 1999, pp. 196-7.

<sup>5</sup> K.N.T. Ogbuagu. Traditional Igbo Beliefs and Practices. Owerri: Novelty Industrial Enterprises, 1997, p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel I. Ifesieh. Religion at the Grassroots: Studies in Igbo Religion. Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1989, p. 135.

### **Greek Mythology of the Origins of the Underworld and the Fate of Hades**

To understand the emergence of the Devil as the personification of evil, it is necessary to consider the divine personages in world religions who prefigured him. In Greek mythology, *Kronos* castrated and deposed *Ouranos* (The Sky), his father. He became the god of time and the ages and king of the Titans but was plagued by a prophecy that he was going to be overthrown by his own son. He got married to *Rhea* but resorted to swallowing all the children born to him by *Rhea* to evade the prophecy.

*Rhea* tricked him at the birth of her youngest son, *Zeus*, whom she hid away and presented *Kronos* with stone wrapped in swaddling cloth. *Zeus* grew and forced his father to disgorge all his siblings – *Hera*, *Hestia*, *Demeter*, *Hades* and *Poseidon*. Having done that, he led them to a ten-year war against the Titans, killed *Kronos* and established his own kingdom on Mount Olympus. Thus *Zeus* became the king of the Greek gods. Together with his brothers – *Hades* and *Poseidon* - they cast lots and apportioned the different realms of the universe to themselves and Hades got the worst portion – the underworld, while *Zeus* got the Sky and the Seas fell to *Poseidon*.

Being the first son of *Kronos*, *Hades* was not satisfied with his lot but he had to bear his fate forever. As the king of the underworld, he rules the dead (note that Hades is different from the Greek god of death – *Thanatos*). The symbol associated with Hades is *The Helm of darkness*. It is a helmet that makes the wearer invisible also worn by *Athena*, *Hermes* and *Perseus*. In older Greek mythology, the realm of Hades is the misty gloomy abode of the dead. Later Greek philosophy was to inject the idea that the dead were judged and either punished or rewarded. Furthermore, those who were rewarded leave the realm of *Hades* and very few made it.

Hades together with Cerberus – the guardian hound and a faithful servant of Hades were the gods who ruled that gloomy realm. Cerberus was represented as a grotesque dog who had three heads, all of which snarled at those foolish enough to attempt to leave the Underworld; the hound was also said to sport the tail of a snake. Worthy of note is the fact that even as the King of the underworld Hades was not a scary and frightful image that the Devil of Christianity has become. The underworld was the necessary destiny of mortals where they at the same time naturally dread; it is not characterized by an untold suffering like the Christian hell.

Hades presided over funeral rites and defended the right of the dead to due burial. He was also the god of the hidden wealth of the earth, from the fertile soil which nourished the seed-grain, to the mined wealth of gold, silver and other metals. Hades was depicted as a dark-bearded, regal god. He was depicted as either *Aidoneus*, enthroned in the underworld, holding a birdtipped sceptre, or as *Plouton*, the giver of wealth, pouring fertility from a cornucopia. The Romans named him *Dis*, or *Pluto*, the Latin form of his Greek title *Plouton*, "the Lord of Riches."

## Hades



In Greek mythology, understood as the god of the underworld. He is always depicted as a dog with three heads known also as Cerberus. Cerberus is a guard hound used by Hades to make sure all the captives of the underworld never escaped his grip. Hades was the first son of Kronos, His other brothers were Zeus and Poseidon; while Zeus reigned on Mount Olympus, Poseidon reigned in the seas. His realm fell to him by fate. Though the underworld was a place of suffering and torture for the Greeks, its purpose was purification through chastisement and all mortals were destined to pass into it. Unlike the Christian Hell, it was not a place for condemned souls. All Greek gods were subject to fate. They did not exercise control of their destiny and their lives are always characterized by rivalries, jealousies and struggles. Most times, it is mortals who suffer the battles among the gods, credence to a quote often credited to Alan Wilson Watts: “Man suffers only because he takes seriously what the gods made for fun.” So it was for the gods of the Greeks; living their lives and having fun while mortals suffer the consequences and backlashes of their fun.

## Jewish-Christian Foundations of Hell and the Devil

In Jewish parlance the word *She'ol* translates also as the underworld. It is the place of darkness where the dead go irrespective of the moral choices one made during earth's sojourn. The good and the bad alike go there. The Inhabitants of this realm are characteristically cut-off from God, though Ps. 139:8 creates the impression that even there, the influence of God could be felt. The Bible also refers to *She'ol* as the pit of destruction (Ps. 55:23), bottomless pit (Rev. 20) and pit of fire (Rev. 9). *She'ol*, pit and hell are used in the Bible to denote one reality – a place of the dead, damnation and suffering; the underworld. *She'ol* translates in Greek as Hades, but it is this Greek version which has within it the implication of a personage who reigns in that realm. It is at the same time this translation which injected the idea of suffering and torture in Hades. The origin of the Devil as is represented today can be found in Judaism; the brand represented in the Old Testament (OT). Stanley Edgar Rickard refers to Is. 14:12-15 addressed to the King of Babylon and Ezek. 28:12-19 addressed to the King of Tyre as properly addressing the Devil.<sup>7</sup>

These passages gave a brief biography of the Devil in the perspective of Judaism. The impression is that the Devil was created by God with the most wisdom, beauty and power; God loved him the most of all the angels. His name was Lucifer – The Angel of Light. He was the next in the hierarchy of heaven, next only to God. He was God's most valued emissary, sometimes addressed as the son of God. According to Maximilian Rudwix:

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Edgar Rickard. *The devil: His origins, attributes and empire*. Bible Studies at the Moorings, 2011, from [https://www.themoorings.org/Bible\\_doctrine/powers\\_of\\_darkness/devil.html](https://www.themoorings.org/Bible_doctrine/powers_of_darkness/devil.html). Accessed March 30, 2019.

The legend of the rebellion and expulsion of Lucifer, as formulated by Jewish and Christian writers, is as follows: Lucifer was the chief in the hierarchy of heaven. He was pre-eminent among all created beings in beauty, power and wisdom. What better description can be given of him than the following portrait penned, according to patristic exegesis, by the prophet.<sup>8</sup>

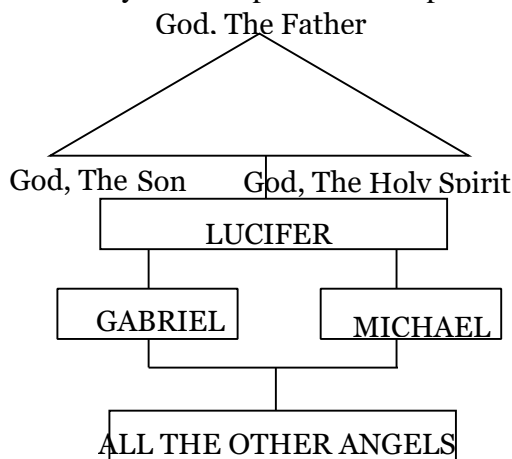
He is also of the opinion that this profile of the Devil was not originally Jewish, his origin could be traced to India while his terminus was in Christianity which ultimately gifted him to the world as much as it gifted the world with Christ.

As far as the Devil of the Christian religion is concerned, his ancestry reaches back into the history of religions. He seems to hail from India where he tempted the Buddha, and whence he migrated to Persia in the person of Ahriman. The Jews learned to know him during their Babylonian captivity under Zoroastrian kings, blended him with their own Satan, who, as has already been stated, originally had no sulphurous odor whatever. After having thus turned Satan into a regular Devil, the Jews handed him over to the Christians, who, sad to say, show themselves no more grateful for Satan than for the Savior, whom they likewise owe to the sons of Israel.<sup>9</sup>

From her all the former deities of many ancient religions, including Ekwensu in Igbo religious culture derived their new identity, not minding the fact that their former benevolent characteristics were completely jettisoned.

### Judeo-Christian Hierarchy of Beings in Primordial Creation

Jonathan Philip Timmons<sup>10</sup> made this graphic representation of the hierarchy of beings in Christianity which represented the primordial arrangement in the initial creation. It is important



to observe that Man was not part of this hierarchical formulation. As at this moment, the realm of humans has not interacted with the realm of pure spirits. According to the Judeo-Christian scriptures this interaction was initiated by the Devil who may be straying as a consequence of the battle which he waged against the spirits which remained loyal to God. He strayed because of the epic defeat he suffered from those spirits, led by Michael, a rival angel and the general commander of God's army. The Devil by

<sup>8</sup> Maximilian Rudwix. "The Legend of Lucifer". *The Open Court*, April, 1929, Volume XLIII ( Xo.4 ), No 875, p. 196, from <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4130&context=ocj>. Accessed April 5, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Maximilian Rudwix. "The Legend of Lucifer". *The Open Court*, April, 1929, Volume XLIII ( Xo.4 ), No 875, p. 194, from <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4130&context=ocj>. Accessed April 5, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Philip Timmons. *Mysterious secrets of the dark kingdom: The battle of planet earth*. Texas: CCI, 1991, p. 73.

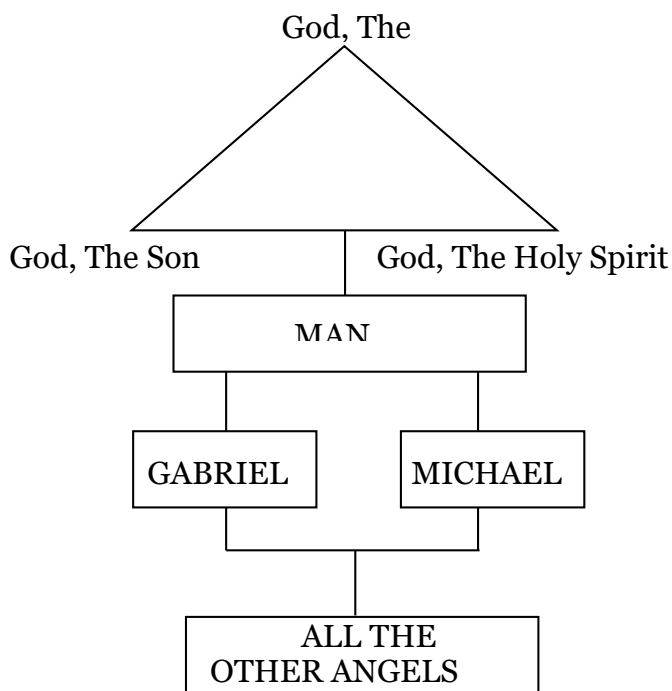
<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Philip Timmons. *Mysterious secrets of the dark kingdom: The battle of planet earth*. Texas: CCI, 1991, p. 73.

interacting with humans in their realm was in search of a by interacting with humans in their realm was in search of a portion of God's creation which will revert to him as the area of his reign. Timmons accounted for the predicament and deposition of Lucifer thus:

After the original god of this world (Satan) rebelled against God, he was cast into hell. Then God created man in his image to reassert God's dominion over the earth. But Satan returned to the earth with his spirits. He deceived man into disobeying God through rebellion and sin – he changed us from being in the image of God in his image as a rebel. Thus he was able to gain total authority over the earth. But this time the god of this world returned not as the once glorious cherubim, but as a rebellious spirit and a sworn enemy of God!<sup>11</sup>

### Judeo-Christian Hierarchy of Being after Redemption

The illustration of the hierarchy of being immediately after the creation of man with man taking the place of Satan; above the angels. Though this entry by J. P. Timmons<sup>12</sup> was designed to



serve his purpose of constructing a Christianity whose singular mission is spiritual warfare, he represented the basic Christian position on the Devil. It was Rev. 12: 7-18 which gave a vivid account of the events that led to the expulsion of Satan from heaven and its consequences for human beings. Nevertheless, it was Christianity which pieced these strands of myths and stories together in one piece to make out a theology of the Devil. The Devil thus became the Adversary, Torturer, Punisher, Enemy, Accuser and so forth. He was also referred to as Apollyon (Rev. 9:11), Abaddon (Rev. 9:11), Belial (2Cor. 6:15) and the Beast (Rev. 20:4).

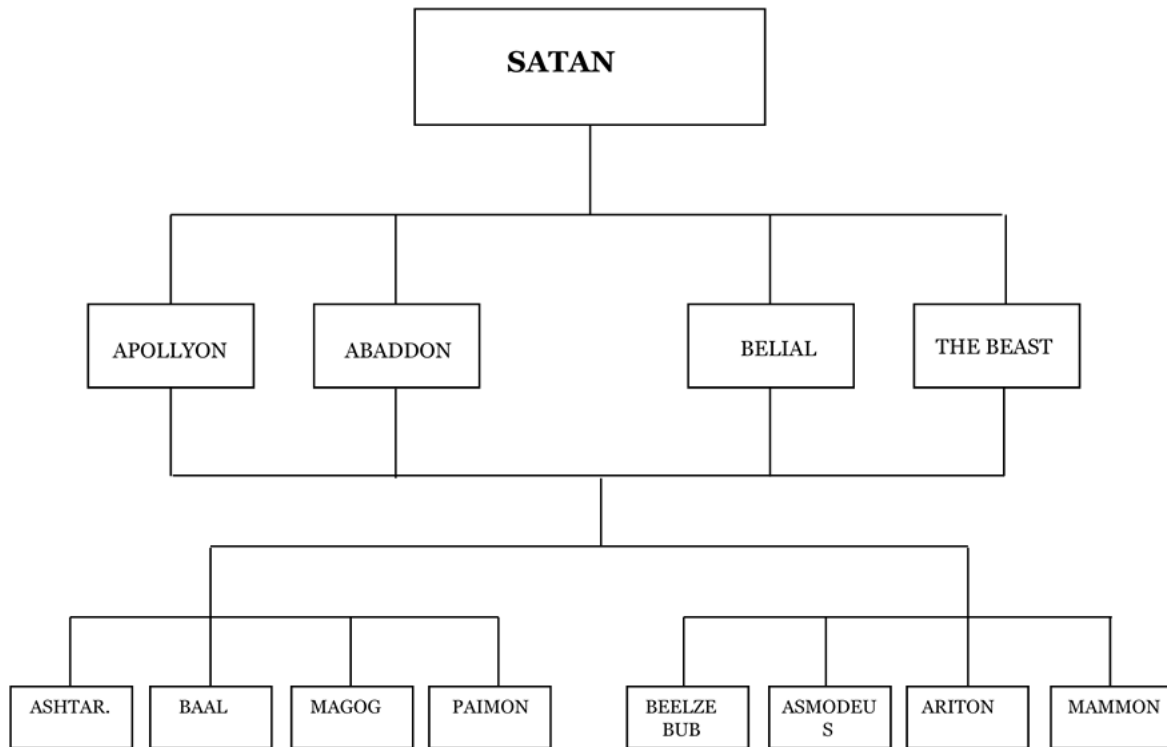
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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Philip Timmons. *Mysterious secrets of the dark kingdom: The battle of planet earth*. Texas: CCI, 1991, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Philip Timmons. *Mysterious secrets of the dark kingdom: The battle of planet earth*. Texas: CCI, 1991, p. 83.

### Ruling Hierarchy of the Dark Kingdom<sup>13</sup>

Below is the illustration of the images of the Devil from the point of view of many Christians. It should be noted, however that Belial in the OT translated as ‘wicked’, and ‘scoundrel’ except in the King James Version where Beast instead were used (1Sam. 25:25, 2Sam. 20:1, 1Kings 21:13, 2Chron. 13:17 and so forth). Again, it is only the Book of Revelation which used the title of The Beast to refer to the Devil. Moreover, he has a great deal of power as J. P. Timmons averred: “The devil is highly organized and he has great power”<sup>14</sup> and is inexorably orientated to evil especially disrupting Christian programs He is the mortal enemy of Christianity.



According to Jon Nielson, Demons are spiritual beings created by God, fallen, evil and in the service of Satan, under the judgment of God and bent on destruction.<sup>15</sup> Christian demonology includes a wide range of mystical activities that are not normative among Christians. The unacceptability of such practices alone makes them demonic. Wikipedia Contributors itemized these powers thus:

Demonic supernatural powers are believed to include Fabrication, Psychokinesis, Pyrokinesis, Levitation, Cryokinesis, Biokinesis, Divination, Demonic possession, seducing spirits, ESP, telepathy, mind probing, witchcraft, curses and hexes, as well as binding,

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Philip Timmons. *Mysterious secrets of the dark kingdom: The battle of planet earth*. Texas: CCI, 1991, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Philip Timmons. *Mysterious secrets of the dark kingdom: The battle of planet earth*. Texas: CCI, 1991, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Jon Nielson. “What Are Demons, and How Should Christians Think about Them?” *Crossway*, January 30, 2024, from <https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-are-demons-and-how-should-christians-think-about-them/>. Accessed April 5, 2024.

magnification, and making contracts, weather control, animal control, and provocation. Demons use variants and combinations of these powers to harass, demoralize, confuse, and disorient the victim, or the willing subject of demonic interest. Many of these attacks can be limited by God for duration, effect or scope of these Demonic attacks. A fictional example of the above is featured in the movie *The Exorcist*. Demons are believed to have the power to physically or mentally hurt people, but only within the boundaries of what God will allow. Demons can destroy anything material on the earth; these supernatural powers are always inferior to the power of God. God may use His will to cancel or destroy any effect the demon chooses to invoke. Demons, however, are granted permission to test, bring about trials, and to tempt people through the use of their destructive powers, to make people prove their faith, sometimes as a means to carry out the will of the Lord. Often Demons are said to creating negative emotions, wreaking havoc, ensuing chaos, and disrupting peace.<sup>16</sup>

The Devil referred to in this work then is the mortal enemy of Christians whose sole aim is to disrupt the activity of Christians. Most times, it is not the ability of this Devil to move Christians to do wrong things that is the issue for which he is hated, but his potentials to stop or disrupt Christian programs and domination as was observed by Dianne Vera.<sup>17</sup> This suggests why in daily life experiences, many Christians do not bother more about their moral life than they bother about how this Devil affect their wellbeing.

### **The Images of the Devil**

It is the image of this creature which will give us the clue to how the Devil came to be identified both as the enemy of God and as deities once benevolent and serviceable to other peoples in their religious cultures. The Bible presents the Devil both as a beautiful angel (Ezk. 28:12) and the serpent (dragon) (Gen. 3:1, Rev. 20:2). The picture painted by John in Rev. 17 shows a woman referred to as ‘the great whore (prostitute) seated on many waters riding on the sevenheaded beast with ten horns.

Clearly the horn was not an identity of the Devil in the OT. Ps. 132:17 referred to ‘the horn of David’ which could also be translated ‘the descendant of David’. But ‘Horns’ as a physical feature of the Beast featured very prominently in the New Testament (NT) especially in the Book of Revelation referring to the Devil. The combination of serpent and horn gives a clear picture of what the devil looks like in the understanding of Christianity. This Devil is what Christians look out for as their mortal enemy and whatever that is associated with it is condemned and condemnable. In line with this, for instance, Baphomet, Cernunnos, Baal, Asheroth, Beelzebub and Mammon are few names among the gods of witchcraft represented by the effigies shown below.

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<sup>16</sup> Wikipedia Contributors. “Christian Demonology”. Monstropedia, April 15 2008, from <http://theisticsatanism.com/Muse/XianSatanEvil.html>. Accessed April 5, 2024.  
[https://www.monstropedia.org/index.php?title=Christian\\_demonology](https://www.monstropedia.org/index.php?title=Christian_demonology). Accessed April 5, 2024.



**Baphomet:** The 19th century image of a Sabbatic Goat, created by Eliphas Lévi. Baphomet serves as a historical model for Murray's concept. Margaret Alice Murray was a prominent British Anthropologist and Egyptologist whose work inspired the twentieth Century revitalization of the Wiccan religion it is true that she has been severally discredited by some Wiccans and Neo-pagans her Bestsellers of the 1940's resurrected the idea of a pre-Christian pagan religion which she built around the Horned-God.



**Cernunnos:** Detail of antlered figure on the Gundestrup Cauldron. Cernunnos is a horned god found in Celtic mythology. He is connected with male animals, particularly the stag in rut, and this has led him to be associated with fertility and vegetation. Depictions of Cernunnos are found in many parts of the British Isles and Western Europe. He is often portrayed with a beard and wild, shaggy hair -- he is, after all, the lord of the forest.



**Baal:** This illustration of Baal was made in the work *Dictionnaire Infernal* written by Jacques Auguste Simon Collin de Plancy and first published in 1818. It is a god worshiped in many ancient Middle Eastern communities, especially among the Canaanites, who apparently considered him a fertility deity and one of the most important gods in the pantheon. As a Semitic common noun baal (Hebrew ba'al) meant "owner" or "lord," although it could be used more generally.



**Astaroth:** This illustration is also from the *Dictionnaire Infernal*. Astaroth is also known by the name Asherah, Asheroth, Asteroth and so forth. The name Astaroth or Morquise, was ultimately derived from that of 2nd millennium BC Phoenician goddess Astarte, an equivalent of the Babylonian Ishtar, and the earlier Sumerian Inanna. She is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in the forms Ashtoreth (singular) and Ashtaroth (plural, in reference to multiple statues of her). This latter form was directly transliterated in the early Greek and Latin versions of the Bible, where it was less apparent that it had been a plural feminine in Hebrew.



**Beelzebub:** The name Ba'al-zebub is associated with the Philistine city of Ekron. In 2 Kings, after Moab rebelled against Israel, Ahaziah had fallen and injured himself. To find out if he'd recover from the injury he sent out messengers, telling them "Go and inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury." – 2 Kings 1:2. The Lord, however sent Elijah to intercept the messengers on their way to Ekron, asking them if they seek Baalzebub's advice because there is no God of Israel and instructing them to return home and inform their master that he shall not recover.



**Mammon:** Mammon is somewhat similar to the Greek god Plutus, and the Roman Dis Pater, in his description, and it is likely that he was at some point based on them; especially since Plutus appears in The Divine Comedy as a wolf-like demon of wealth, wolves being associated with greed in the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages, Mammon was commonly personified as the demon of gluttony, richness and injustice.



### The Predicament of *Ekwensu* and the Demonization of Other Igbo Deities

The effigies used to represent the spirits in Igbo religious culture are varied. Each is represented in a mythical story. Such stories represent the nature of the spirit and its significance among the people. For instance, *Ogwugwu* is carved as the image of a benevolent widow whose only child was brutally murdered and his dead body handed over to her as she agonized for her son. *Ngene* is carved in the image of a young man who was unjustifiably amputated (with or without horns). *Ikenga* is carved in the image of an affluent full-fledged man with *Ofo* on one hand and a machete on another.



**Ikenga:** (Igbo literal meaning "place of strength") is a two-horned *Arusi* (deity) found among the Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria. *Ikenga* is a personal god of human endeavour, achievement, success, and victory. It is grounded in the belief that the power for a man to accomplish things is in his right hand. It also governs over industry, farming, and blacksmithing, and is celebrated every year with an annual *Ikenga* festival. It is believed by its owners to bring wealth and fortune as well as protection. Astrologically, *Ikenga's* governing planet is Mars and its sacred number is 3. *Ikenga* is mostly maintained, kept or owned by men and occasionally by women of high reputation and integrity in the society. It

bears the *Ofo* on its right and a machete on the left. *Ofo* is a symbol of moral integrity which is the primal cause of wealth while the efficient cause is the machete borne on its left. Like other horned gods in other religious cultures, *Ikenga* has also been demonized.

However, it was *Ekwensu* which suffered the most grievous strike of Christian hunt for the Devil among the gods of ancient religions

**Ekwensu:** *Ekwensu* was a Trickster-God (*Arusi*) of the Igbo people who served as the *Arusi* or



God of Bargains and the tortoise. Crafty at trade and negotiations, he was often invoked for guidance in difficult mercantile situations. Like most Trickster Gods, the deity was a force of Chaos and Change, thus in his more violent aspects, *Ekwensu* was also revered as a God of War and Victory who ruled over the warrior and ruthless spirits and the chaotic forces of nature. His companion was Death. He was the testing force of *Chukwu*, and along with *Ala*, the Earth goddess, and *Igwe*, the Sky God, make up the three highest *Arusi* of the ancient Igbo people. *Ekwensu* is also the Igbo word for the Tester. The Igbo transcended the serpent wisdom of ancient Sumerian, Akkadian, Canaanite or European culture. *Ekwensu* is reckoned as Eagle which preys and feeds on the serpent. The wisdom and strength of *Ekwensu* was unsurpassed; its reputation for victory,

conquest and protection is spread throughout Igbo land. However, with the advent of Christianity, the more beneficent aspects of the deity were supplanted by missionaries who came to misrepresent *Ekwensu* as Satan.

Having seen the deities of different peoples which had served them in some aspects of their lives incorporated into the gallery of devils, it is not difficult to see the origin and orientation of the idea of the Devil in Christianity. Witches who still sustain the worship of those deities are by that logic devil worshippers. Evidently, they correspond with the picture of the Devil painted by the Bible. It is then easy for Christians to conclude that the gods of witchcraft are the same as the Devil of the Bible and Christianity. Whether or not even in their Biblical usage these features of the Devil was not either referring to those particular gods or employing their image for convenience remains to be said by experts of Scripture. Meanwhile the veracity and conformity of the idea of the Devil with the goodness of the God that created him is another big question. Rose (1989) argues about the illogicality of the existence of an evil Devil this way:

... There can be no absolute evil at all; or certainly no consistent will to absolute evil. Evil, simply as such, cannot be pursued as an end; if Satan wants to encourage some particular sin, he will have to make a truce with some particular virtue. Satan himself cannot be absolutely evil, and remain effective. To suppose him formidable is to suppose him strong, intelligent, and determined; and that is better than to be weak, foolish, and inconstant. What is better is

relatively good, and without the assistance of relative good, Satan would be powerless....That which is good in itself does not cease to be good in itself because it is used for evil purposes; beauty is still beauty, though a snare; skill remains skill though the handmaid of crime; knowledge is still knowledge though twisted to support a lie; and they remain, in themselves, better than ugliness, ineptitude, or ignorance. Even moral goodness so perverted remains intrinsically good. Courage is still admirable though a burglar needs to possess it; and the patience required to pick a lock is a virtue though in the man who so misuses it it is found in conjunction with avarice, which is a sin. The commendable qualities of Satan, if any, are to be commended; and if he has none, he is not to be feared.

On the whole, whether or not witchcraft is demonic possession, it is very important that we know the idea and picture of these devils that could possess them. It should not be forgotten, however, that there are millions of demons who with the Devil undertake the purported war against Christians.

### **Conclusion**

The Christian biblical authors who painted the image of the devil, like Daniel and John, did so knowing full well the existence of such deities in other cultures. Both were exiles, Daniel of Babylonian ancient religious culture, John of the Syriac tradition of the Akkadian religious culture. Jews, especially of their times, held strictly the demand of their God who from the onset showed his unwillingness to accommodate the gods of other people and religions (Ex. 20:2-6). This character was peculiar to the Jewish God. The gods of other religious cultures seemed to be well aware of the need to co-exist with others of their kind even if it be in the manner of the Olympian gods whose characteristic rivalry was phenomenal.

In other words, having experienced the gods of other people, these Jewish writers found it easy to identify them as the enemies of a God that detests their company in sharing his worship and prohibits his chosen ones from meddling with them. The mental constructs of their religious consciousness precipitates into the subconscious and nebulous territories of the mind where symbols are the codes with which the active mental constructs are expressed. The effigies of the gods of their exilic landlords were visible the traumatizing enough for them to understand them as evil forces.

Christianity derived its aversive attitude towards the gods and spirits of more ancient religious cultures from Judaism having inherited the Jewish God. The universal acceptability of Christianity in the early days of its spread also empowered it to presume that it had within its grip the superior Knowledge of God; his relevance and activity in the world. Even in the wanton denigration of the religious consciousness and practices of the ancient peoples, Christianity, for a very long time, did not reconsider its stand.

In the document *Nostra Aetate - Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* – the council Fathers, more than their characteristic theology, did an exhortation in five paragraphs, addressing the various levels of relationship among peoples: Catholic to Catholic, Catholic to other Christians, Christians to Moslems, Christians to Jews and Christians to other religions of the world. In all, they underlined that God is the Father and creator of all, advocating for respect for the faith of all peoples. In the closing remarks of that document, the Council Fathers exhorts:

Therefore, the Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to “conduct themselves well among the Gentiles” (1 Pet 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rom 12:18) and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:45).

With this intervention, studies like this become important to help the Church understand parts of some religious cultures which had embraced Christianity, but still have some challenges in absorbing its truth. This is the case of the Igbo ethnic group where return to the traditional religious culture is gaining momentum and the younger generation are touting ends like the revival of Ekwensu cult. Studies like this helps Christianity to appropriate the truth found by this work and redress some pressing issues to avoid being misunderstood as having the primary agenda of destroying the religious stronghold of the people.

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