

Eulogistic Names of God among Igbo Christians

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Abstract

Previous studies on Igbo names mainly dwelt on the taxonomy, typologies and names of humans, with inadequate attention paid to names used in making reference to God. This paper examines praise names of God as devised and employed by Igbo Christians. The aim is to delineate the various names, the reasons behind them, and the relationship between such names and Igbo culture. The paper employs the theoretical framework of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and adopts descriptive methods for the analysis of purposively elicited data from twenty Igbo male and female respondents. Findings reveal a list of praise names such as Ukpakanagbanudummiri, Ugwunyrionyeoso, Aghaerii, etc., which express God's greatness, mighty power, kindness, and benevolence. It establishes that most of the names are sourced from Igbo culture that are related to the names of God in the Bible. The paper concludes that the praise names of God used by Igbo Christians present a holistic appraisal of divinity from the perspective of the user-respondents and Igbo worldview in general.

Keywords: Eulogistic Names, Christians, Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, Igbo Culture, Philosophy

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Introduction

Name is an instrument of identification used by humans. Everything in nature is identified with its name. Name therefore occupies a very sensitive position in the human society. The world without the instrument of name would have been full of confusion due to difficulties in identification of persons, places and things. The level of importance placed on name varies across cultures. In the African society, name is considered very important because it goes beyond mere identification to tracing the people's history, culture and life experiences. As such name in the African context is not just an identification label but rather, the expression of people's experiences, philosophy, culture and orientation. The place of name in the African society is shown in the words of Tsaaio (2009: 85) thus "... behind every name in traditional African societies stalks a history, a history that is shared by a group of society and becomes its veritable communal property. Oyeka (2017:104) also notes that 'the African society do not give a name in a vacuum'. By implication, before giving any name the African society puts a number of factors into consideration: sex of the child, period and circumstances of birth, family history, religion, market day, etc. For Ude (2010:23) "meaning" and "revelation of culture" represent the two perspectives to naming in the African context.

The Igbo society as part of the African society explores the world around them and expresses their experiences using the instrument of name. The Igbo name everything around them; their children, wives, husbands, servants, domestic animals among others. Sometimes they give names as personal names, pet names, praise names and spousal names. All the names are given based on the name giver's experience. Worthy of note at this juncture is the fact that the Igbo do not stop at giving names to people and entities around them, they also have several names with which they describe the person of GOD.

It is important to study the names of God because of the place of God in the Igbo life and culture. God can hardly be separated from the Igbo life and experience because of the Igbo religious nature. Every aspect of the Igbo life and culture has a religious undertone. Nwala (1985:113) explains the religious nature of the Igbo thus 'the secular

life of the Igbo, like all other traditional communities, has been inseparable from their religious life. Their world-view has a deep religious expression and their practical life and moral values are interwoven with their religion'. As the Igbo use the names they give to their children and everything around them to express their experiences in life, the same way they use the different names they refer to God to describe their experiences with him (God). The idea of calling God different names can be traced to the Bible patriarchs as well as GOD himself. In Genesis 14:22, Abraham described GOD as "the Lord", "the most high", and "the possessor of heaven and earth" when he was interacting with the king of Sodom after the battle with Chedorlaomer. He called God these names to demonstrate that his possessions and wealth are from God and not man. In another occasion Abraham referred to God as Jehovah-jireh (Genesis 22:14) meaning that God is his provider. Additionally, God revealed His identity to Moses by assuming the name I AM THAT I AM (Exodus 3:14) after Moses asked for His name.

In this study, attention will be paid to the praise names used by Igbo Christians to describe GOD, the reasons behind such names, and the relationship between such names and the Igbo culture.

An overview of names in the Igbo society

The Igbo society is unique in terms of naming. The Igbo have both given and inherited names. Usually, people do not influence the choice of their personal name(s) as they are given at birth. For other forms of names given later in life like the nick names, praise names, title names and spousal names one might have some levels of influence on these kinds of names. These brands of names are given based on peoples' achievement or attainment in life and society. The Igbo given names are not just given arbitrarily, but are given after serious thoughts and considerations; hence the observation of Nze (1984:48) that "names are connotative", and that 'among the Igbo, a proper name narrates or notes the attributes and at the same time connotes the individual or circumstances of the individual or obi or family that possesses these attributes or the narrated'. The above assertion sees name as a narrative that tells stories of the name bearer

and his/her family or society. The carefulness involved in the selection of names to reflect a family's history and circumstance influenced Nze's description of naming and names as exercise of 'art' – *okwubunka*. Nze (1984:48) further explains that

like every other piece of art work, names express the inner feeling of the Igbo. As Igbo feelings are rooted in religion, social and family upheavals, names in general are spun from these myriads of feelings which underlie every traditional Igbo activity. Thus names as history narrate and record accurately the unfolding of events in an obi or family.

Concerning the way names are perceived among the Igbo, Okafor et al (2005:25) submit that "the name an Igbo family gives its child is considered a serious matter. Deduced from the above is the fact that name among the Igbo is a viable instrument for the demonstration of peoples religious faith, joys, pains, aspirations among other things. Name is also used among the Igbo as a language instrument to communicate several meanings. The use of names as an exercise of art among the Igbo is not limited to human names alone; the art is extended to the names they call God. The Igbo have often expressed their deep rooted feelings through the names they call God as shall be seen later in this work. However, scholars who have written about names have not paid any particular attention to the names of God. That is why the interest of this study is to examine the names of God among Igbo Christians.

Review of related works

Across linguistic and cultural background, several works have been done on names in general and praise/nicknames in particular. Some of such works include Molefe (1999), Brummelan (2013), Anyachebelu (2015), Chauke (2016) and Oyeka (2016). Molefe (1999) examines the Zulu nicknames, the composers, origin and utilization. The findings of this work show that, contrary to other official name(s) nicknames are loose, friendly and informal. It has the power to

suppress the use of all official names. Nickname sticks to an individual in order to explain further his/her development in life apart from physical development. The work of Brummelman et al, (2013) focus entirely on praise in the life of individuals. The work identifies two varieties of praise, 'Person Praise' and 'Process Praise' as the two forms of praise given to children. The 'Person Praise' is described as praise directed at the child's ability while 'Process Praise' is the praise directed at a child's behaviour. The result reveals that praise is very effective to the development and psychological functioning of children with low self-esteem. However, the structure of the praise phrase is very important in determining its effectiveness. The conclusion of their study therefore is that 'Process Praise' is better than 'Person Praise'. This is because 'Person Praise' has been shown to have a negative effect on children with low self-esteem. Anyachebelu's (2015) study on names is specifically on 'Spousal Names'. She identifies spousal names as special names that husband and wife bestow upon each other. She notes that spouses exchange spousal names as a symbol of their endearment to each other and as tokens of their love for each other. She encourages the use of spousal names among the Igbo as a way of sustaining the Igbo culture and tradition. Chauke's (2016) study investigates nicknames and their significance among the Xitsonga speaking people. The researcher identifies nicknames among the Xitsonga as a form of address to either praise or show a disapproval of a person's behavior. The findings of this study reveal that nicknames serve an identificatory and classificatory function, especially in the work environment. Therefore, nicknames can serve to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction, to ridicule or warn against unacceptable behavior. Hence, nicknames include imposed and adopted ones. Oyeka's (2016) study focuses on sobriquets among the Igbo of Nigeria. She notes that sobriquets are synonymous with nicknames. The work observes that among the Igbo, a glaring difference exists between the nicknames (sobriquets) borne by men and those borne by women. It is noted in the work that female sobriquets mainly depict beauty, appendage to husbands, good character and to a lesser extent, leadership. Meanwhile, the nicknames of men depict their outstanding strength, bravery, physique, wealth

and doggedness among other features. The work therefore argues that the womenfolk should begin to change the kind of nicknames they bear since names influence their bearers. The argument is that if they continue to bear the beauty related names, they will be limited to beauty as if beauty is all that there is to a woman's life. Therefore, women are urged to utilize the opportunity of the freedom provided to them by nicknames to select names that will spur them to aim higher in order to achieve greater feat.

Theoretical Framework

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a linguistic theory named after two American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. This theory looks at the relationship that exists between language and thought. The central claim of the theory is that the structure of a language influences thought and perception. In other words, people think and view things in the light of their language. In essence, people's world view or perception of the world is enclosed in their language. Hence, as languages abound, so do perceptions. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is considered to have two versions, the strong and the weak versions. The strong version is termed Linguistic Determinism while the weak version is termed Linguistic Relativity.

Linguistic Determinism posits that a people's language and culture determines how the people perceive the world as well as how they express themselves. The support for this view came from the work that Whorf did in Hopi language. The work revealed that the Hopi perceive time differently from the way the Europeans do. For Littlejohn and Foss (2008:317) "whereas many cultures refer to points in time (such as seasons) as nouns, the Hopi conceive of time as a passage or process". This is because the Hopi language does not have defined tenses like the English language that uses tenses to define time. The Hopi language instead is more concerned with the statement of 'facts' and pays no attention to the time of occurrence. It does not see time as a point or location. It is because of the Hopi perception of time-giving without tenses that made Whorf to conclude that it is language that determines thought and perception. However, this stance of Whorf has been challenged by some linguists who feel that Whorf's

view is not right or else it should be difficult for someone to identify colours that his/her language does not have name for. But this is not always the case as people could still identify colours that are absent in their native language. Also, Fromkin et al (2007) note that if people truly cannot think in something their language has no specific word for, then translation would not be possible. Based on all these, many linguists disagree with the strong version.

Linguistic Relativism is the weaker version of the Whorfian hypothesis. It is of the view that different languages encode different categories and speakers of different languages therefore think about the world in different ways (Fromkin et.al 2007:26). What this implies is that perception of the world varies from language to language. Though some controversies still exist concerning speakers of different languages thinking differently, yet there is an understanding in support of the relationship between language and thought. Based on the understanding that supports the relationship between language and thought, this work therefore wishes to express that people's unique cultural and language features have some levels of influence on the way they perceive some general phenomenon like naming.

Methodology

The data for this study were purposively sourced from twenty male and female Igbo respondents who were orally interviewed. The respondents comprise of ten adult men and ten adult female. The number is limited to twenty respondents because of time and resources. The age range of the respondents ranges from 45-70. Most of the respondents lived in Lagos and were pooled from the same Christian organization (Anglican Communion) where they worshiped. The reason for this is for ease of accessibility of the respondents since the researcher belongs to the same communion. The others lived in the South Eastern (Igbo) states of Anambra, Enugu and Imo where the researcher was able to reach. The people interviewed from the South-Eastern states belonged to the Catholic and Methodist denominations. A total number of fifty (50) names were elicited used for this analysis. The descriptive method was adopted in the analysis of the elicited

data. The elicited names were translated into English and analysed under six sub-headings.

Data Presentation

Here, the data elicited for this study are presented without paying attention to any sequential order. From the overall pool of fifty (50) names listed below, the names to be used for analysis were drawn and analysed under relevant sections.

S/N	NAME	LITERAL	GLOSS
1.	Nshanshammirine deala	A drizzling rain which socks (softens) the ground	The Mighty One
2.	Ukpakanaagbanau dummiri	The ukpaka pod that breaks in the rainy season	One who performs unexpected wonders
3.	Jidinoøkumanaepu ome	A yam tuber which sprouts while in fire	He who does the impossible
4.	Ojijijidemma	He who holds both the knife and the yam	The Almighty
5.	Otumbajianaemeof flood	A yam tuber that is loaded	A yam tuber worth a load
6.	Ekwoachilaagbuya rayara	The <i>achi</i> leave that falls indiscriminately	The Generous One
7.	Ogbajiriigwekpọọ yanku	He/the one who broke iron and claimed it is mere wood	The Powerful One
8.	Gaaganogwu	The one who trades/steps on thorns	The Mighty One
9.	Ozọpiatapiatanelu ogwu	One/He who matches (steps) confidently (majestically) on thorns	The Mighty One
10.	Nkumemgbeebigh ebi	The rock which is everlasting	The Everlasting One
11.	Ugwunyerionyeoso	A hill which	The

		overwhelms a fast runner	insurmountable
12.	Osimiriataata	A river which does not dry	All Sufficient One
13.	Osimiriātunnu	A river that cannot be salted	The Unchangeable God
14.	Nnutūruosimiri	The salt that salted the river	The Powerful God
15.	Anyanwūūtūtū	The morning sun	The Symbol of Hope and Beauty
16.	Anyaeleūwa	An eye which look (watches upon/over the earth	The Omniscient God
17.	Uḷeḷuūmūogbenye	The storey building of the poor	Poor Man's Hope
18.	Okemmirinaebuogwe	A great flood which dislodges a bridge	All Powerful God
19.	Dikeanaakpaogwunanya	A hero from whose eye thorns are pulled off	One Who Defies Natural Laws
20.	Otuonyeanaasiūnū abīala	An individual who is addressed as a crowd	A Powerful Being
21.	Ozōwaraōla	He who splinters the ground and goes away	The invincible one
22.	Ūtagbawaraili	An arrow which broke (pierced) the tomb	The All Powerful One
23.	Ojiōbaraakpūnwa	One/He who manufactures (creates) child with blood (lets)	The Maker of Life
24.	Agūbatamgbadaawaraōso	The leopard which emerges to scare the deer.	The Strong and Mighty One
25.	Ohuruōkpōō	He who on one can challenge in wrestling	The invincible wrestler
26.	Azūakaekwemgbakō	A palm that cannot be folded backwards	The insurmountable

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27.	Aguneechemba	A leopard which protects(guards) a community	The Protector
28.	Aghaerii	One who is never consumed in wars	The War Lord
29.	Ogwonnuorja	Panacea/Healer of many ailments	The Healer
30.	Eriirijiobele	The rope that holds the calabash	The Holder of Humanity
31.	Nwanneotuonye	Relative to he who has no relatives/sibling to an only child	Life Companion
32.	Dinwaananyiisimkpe	The husband of widows	Life Companion
33.	Obatapuloadimma	He/The one who comes in and a home gets all right	The Home Maker
34.	Omakamsibiauwa	He/The one who knows how I got incarnated	The All Knowing God
35.	Osinwadirinne ya	He/The one who said that a child should live for the mother	Preserver of Life
36.	Echetaechezomkpa	One whose remembrance makes one to forget his problems	The Comforter
37.	Obiajulu	Solace or heart mender	The Comforter
38.	Apataneekunwa	The thigh that nurtures the child	The Sustainer
39.	Ohurunwaogbenye ficheyaimi	He/One who sees an orphan and clear phlegm his nose off	The Comforter

		(wipes their nose)	
40.	Onyesimulawanik peamaghim	The one who set me free from guilt	My Advocate
41.	Uchishinrifodu	The night that made food to remain	The Miraculous Worker/The Wonder Working God
42.	Ogbakwashirunya eobiaru	One/He who rescues the need/helpless	Helper of the Suffering
43.	Amaamaamasjama si	That which cannot be completely known	The one who is beyond comprehension
44.	Omakamsibiauwa	He/The one who knows how I got incarnated	The All Knowing God
45.	Onyemaebenaem em	The one who feels what I am feeling	The Empathic One
46.	Onyenaadighianw uanwu	One who cannot die	The Immortal God
47.	Ikenyirionwu	The power that supersedes death	The Immortal God
48.	Onyenwuruanwum adikwandu	The one who died and rose again	The Resurrected One
49.	Emebiemebe	He who never festers	The Durable
50.	Chichiriezechianw uanwu	A God which assumes an undying kingly disposition	The Immortal
51.	Okenyemgbeochie	Ancient of days/ages	Ancient of days/ages

Data Analysis

Data for our analysis are drawn from the list of names presented above. However, not all the names listed will be analysed for the reason of space and time. The data is analysed under the following sub-headings: agriculture, physical environment (ecology), strength, relationship, healing, wisdom and immortality.

Agro-based Names

Farming is a major occupation among the Igbo. From their farming experience, they draw some names to praise God. Such names as provided by the respondents include;

1.	Nshanshammirinedeala	A drizzling rain which socks (softens) the ground	The Mighty One
2.	Ukpakanaagbanaudummiri	The ukpaka pod that breaks in the rainy season	One who performs unexpected wonders
3.	Jidinọkụmanaepuome	A yam tuber which sprouts while in fire	He who does the impossible
4.	Ojijidemma	He who holds both the knife and the yam	The Almighty
5.	Otumbajianaemeoffload	A yam tuber that is loaded	A yam tuber worth a load
6.	Ekwoachiłagbųyarayara	The <i>achi</i> leave that falls indiscriminately	The Generous One
7.	Ogbajiriigwekpọoyanku	He/the one who broke iron and claimed it is mere wood	The Powerful One
8.	Gaaganogwu	The one who trades/steps on thorns	The Mighty One
9.	Ozọjatapjataneluogwu	One/He who matches (steps) confidently (majestically) on thorns	The Mighty One

The names in table (1) above are generated from the people's farming experiences. Name one on this list (Nshanshammirinaedeala) talks about rain. The importance of rain to the farmer and his crop is a general knowledge. Without the rain, it will be difficult for any farmer

to farm or his/her crops to do well; the only farmer that can do without rain is the irrigation farmer. The name therefore, describes God as the little drizzles that penetrate and soak the land thereby providing moisture for the plant/crop roots. Implying that as the farmer values the little drizzles, so does the person who calls God by this name value and esteem God high. Name two (Ukpakanaagbanaudummiri) describes a seasonal farm product/crop 'ukpaka'. Ukpaka grows in pods and the pods do not break/crack during the rainy season. As such, ukpaka is harvested only during the dry season. Here, God is depicted as ukpaka but with the unique feature of cracking in the rainy season. What this implies is that times and seasons do not limit God because God is the owner of the seasons. Names three, (Jidinookumanaepuome), four (Ojijjidemma) and five (Otumbajianaemeoffload) describe God in the light of 'yam' which is the king of all crops and is highly cherished by the Igbo. The prestigious place of yam among the Igbo explains why yam as the only crop/farm produce celebrated annually in all parts of the Igbo land and even in diaspora in recent times. Name three 'Jidinookumanaepuome' describes God as a yam tuber that sprouts on fire. It is strange for any crop that has gone through the fire to sprout. Therefore, calling God the yam that sprouts on fire demonstrates His mysterious and unfathomable nature. Name four 'Ojijjidemma' describes Him (God) as 'he that holds both the 'yam' and the 'knife'. What this implies is that God is the giver of all gifts. Hence, one can only have what God gives him/her. Yam is here used because it is a phenomenon that everyone understands and cherishes among the Igbo as the king of all crops. The yam is symbolic of the weight the gift that God can give. Also, as the dibuulo (the head of the family) is the custodian of the family heritage. He is the one entrusted with the right to keep and dispense the yam. Here God is seen as the keeper and dispenser of all gifts. Name five Otumbajianaemeoffload is a code-mixed name which likens God's greatness/size to one big yam tuber that is been offloaded from a truck. Normally when people say they are offloading something from a truck it creates the impression of quantity. That is to say the number of the material/item is more than one. However, God is here being described as a single item that needs

much hands in order for it to be offloaded. This is an indication that although God is one being, He has the capacity to fill time and space. Name six ‘Ekwoachilaagbuyarayara’ likens God’s benevolence to that of ‘achi leaves’. The *achi* tree is a big tree found in the forest that provides good shelter to passersby. The tree always sheds off leaves. There is no time one gets to *achi* tree that the person will not find the leaves dropped everywhere to provide cushioning effect to people who are tired and want to rest a little before they continue on their way. This name therefore, depicts the benevolence of God. Also, name seven ‘Ogbajiriigwekpoyanku’ compares the iron to dry wood. The dry wood is easy to break with bare hands but that is not the same with the iron. However, God is here described as he who breaks the iron as though it is fire wood; this name therefore depicts God as a strong or mighty one. Names eight ‘Gaaganogwu’ and nine ‘Ozopiatapjataneluogwu’ talk about thorns. Thorns are mainly found in the farm. In the researcher’s part of the Igbo land, (Eha-Amufu) there is a particular kind of thorn called ‘*iteasu*’ that grows in farm lands. No one who steps on this thorn forgets the pains it inflict on its victim in a hurry. The two names here, describe God as one who walk on thorns *iteasu* inclusive with ease and yet feels no pain. This implies that God is invisible and not susceptible to the natural effects of the external environment on man.

All the names above are generated from the people’s perception based on their language and farming experiences and they are employed to reveal God’s greatness and uncomprehending power.

Ecology-based Names

By the eco-system, the researcher refers to all the tangible things seen and felt in one’s environment.

10.	Nkumemgbeebighebi	The rock which is everlasting	The Everlasting One
11.	Ugwunyirionyeoso	A hill which overwhelms a fast runner	The insurmountable
12.	Osimiriataata	A river which	All Sufficient

		does not dry	One
13.	Osimiriātunnu	A river that cannot be salted	The Unchangeable God
14.	Nnutūrūosimiri	The salt that salted the river	The Powerful God
15.	Anyanwūūtūtū	The morning sun	The Symbol of Hope and Beauty
16.	Anyaeleūwa	An eye which look (watches upon/over the earth	The Omniscient God
17.	Uḷeḷuūmūogbenye	The storey building of the poor	Poor Man's Hope
18.	Okemmirinaebuogwe	A great flood which dislodges a bridge	All Powerful God

In this section, physical things which consist of mainly natural phenomena are used to describe God. Such things include: the 'rock', 'mountain', 'sun', 'sea', 'salt', 'house' and 'eye'. Name 10 refers to God as the rock of ages. The rock is not easily moved or removed from its God-given locations. Except for the quarry industries and road constructors, it is difficult if not impossible to move or remove the rock for whatever reason. Hence, calling God the rock of ages means that even the quarry or road constructors cannot move this particular rock. What this implies is that God is eternal. This implies that no one can surmount God's sovereignty or supremacy. Name 11, refers to God as a mountain that is unassailable. Likewise, no matter how well a sprinter/ athlete runs, he/she cannot run up a mountain. The mountain is not a good place for any kind of race. No one can leave the mountain base with speed and maintain the same momentum to the mountain top. The mountain here is God. Names 12, 13 and 14 talk about the 'sea' and the 'salt'. Name 12 likens God to the sea that

never dries. As the sea can never dry, that is how God can never cease being God. Name 13 also likens God to the sea but this time, to the sea that cannot be salted. As no amount of salt can get a fresh water sea salty, nothing can ever change the nature and person of God. In this name, the emphasis is on the 'sea'. Name 14 describes God using salt. It describes God as the salt that salted the sea. No one understands the quantity of salt that salted the sea. The same way no one ever understands the quantity of salt that salted the salt water sea; none can understand God in its totality. The name shows that God can change the natural feature of anything without being changed. Therefore, God is the unchanging changer. Name 15 likens God to the sun that rises every morning. No matter how dark the night might be, it will not stop the sun from rising the next morning. Therefore, God remains in charge of every situation, the storms notwithstanding. He is the sun (rays of hope and beauty) that awakens each day. Name 16 likens God to the physical 'eye' for sight. God is here described as the eye that watches over the whole universe. This implies that nothing can be hidden away from God. Name 17 calls God the storey building of the poor. By implication, God is the hope of the poor and the less privileged. The name is symbolic of the attainment that is the exclusive preserve of the rich. So a poor man who has God is consoled that he has attained the height of the rich man. Therefore, the name is an illusion of attainment and satisfaction. Name 18 describes God as the "flood". The strength of the flood is uncontroversial among the Igbo. Using the flood to describe God implies that God's power is insurmountable.

All these names reviewed in this section are conceived and perceived from the things that the Igbo see every day around them. The exact words with which the Igbo describe these features are what they used to describe God in the contexts of these names.

Strength-based Names

The following names describe God's strength and might among the Igbo.

19.	Dikeanaakpaogwunanya	A hero from whose eye thorns are pulled off	One Who Defies Natural Laws
20.	Otuonyeanaasiñunabiala	An individual who is addressed as a crowd	A Powerful Being
21.	Ozowaraola	He who splinters the ground and goes away	The invincible one
22.	Utagbawaraili	An arrow which broke (pierced) the tomb	The All Powerful One
23.	Ojiobaraakpunwa	One/He who manufactures (creates) child with blood (lets)	The Maker of Life
24.	Agubatambadaawaraoso	The leopard which emerges to scare the deer.	The Strong and Mighty One
25.	Ohuruokpoo	He who on one can challenge in wrestling	The invincible wrestler
26.	Azukaekwembako	A palm that cannot be folded backwards	The insurmountable
27.	Aguneechemba	A leopard which protects(guards) a community	The Protector
28.	Aghaerii	One who is never consumed in wars	The War Lord
29.	Ogwonnuorja	Panacea/Healer of	The Healer

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		many ailments	
30.	Eririjebele	The rope that holds the calabash	The Holder of Humanity

All the names here testify of God's great strength and might. The names denote the Igbo thought of God as the most powerful and absolute. Name 19 refers to God as the Hero from whose eyes thorns are pulled. Among the Igbo, the delicate nature of the eye is a common knowledge; hence the expression among them (the Igbo) that what is used to clean the ear cannot be used to clean the eye (e jighi ihe e ji agba na ntị agba n'anya). Therefore, describing God as one who thorns are pulled from his eyes means that He is not human that has delicate parts. So no physical object can hurt or have effect on him. It also implies that God is so brave that He can dare anything, any condition or any situation. Name 20 (Otuonyeanaasiunụabiala) addresses God in the plural. This plurality can be understood in the light of the Christian belief in the Trinity: God the Father; God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Name 21 depicts God as he who can enter anywhere any time and yet come out victorious. It means God is unstoppable. No power or force can stop him from doing or entering anywhere he wishes to enter. Name 22 compares God to the arrow. Though the arrow is a weapon of war, it is not a very sophisticated one. Calling God the arrow that shut open the grave (the fortified grave of Christ) buttresses the insurmountable power of God. Again, name 23 talks about how God uses blood to mould/create children. This also demonstrates God's power because only God understands and can explain in its totality how human beings are formed. Medical science can try but cannot claim full knowledge or understanding of it. Name 24 likens God to the 'leopard' which is one of the most dreaded cats in the forest whose appearance sends all other animals on flight. Because the leopard and the lion are the kings of the forest, no other lower animal dares to stay back in the forest whenever the presence of the leopard or lion is noticed in any forest. What this name implies is that the presence of God in any given situation sends every other power to flight. Name 25 is understood in the light of Goliath of the bible. Until David appeared at the battle scene, no one among the

Israeli soldiers could face or dare Goliath. It can also be understood in the light of Eha-Amufu wrestling contest. During wrestling contest which is done annually in Eha-Amufu, the wrestlers know their individual capabilities. Therefore, when a champion wrestler appears on the scene, no one dares to come out to challenge him by coming to wrestle with him. Instead all the other wrestlers on ground will draw back from the wrestling scene like the Israeli soldiers did in the presence of Goliath. God as '*Ohuruokpoo*' implies that He is a mighty warrior whom no one can dare or challenge any day, any time. The morpheme *kpoo* there depicts deflection as opposed to attraction. Name 26 describes God's great power with the palm *Azuaka*. As the palm can never be folded backwards, that is how God cannot be bent against his wish/desire. Name 28 says that God is *Aghaeri* meaning that God can never be consumed in any war/battle no matter how fierce the war/battle might be. Name 29 addresses God as the healer of all ailments. The name demonstrates God's capability to heal any form of disease. Name 30 *Erijiobele* depicts God as the rope that holds the calabash. This understanding comes from palm wine tapping as an occupation among the Igbo. Normally, palm wine tappers use the rope to hang the calabash when they position it to collect the wine being tapped. The rope stops the calabash from land crashing. The same way, God holds our lives from crashing in difficult and delicate times. God is the one that holds us (humanity). It is not humanity that holds God. All the concepts or features used to describe God represents well known features among the Igbo, hence the influence of the Igbo language and culture in the perception of these names.

Relationship-based Names

The human society is egalitarian in nature, as humans do not live in isolation but in the company of others. Human life is characterized with ups and downs, joy and pains. There is no trouble-free life anywhere anytime. Man as a religious being sees God in all his pains and joys. Hence the description of God with names that reflect relationship as seen below.

Eulogistic Names of God ...

31	Nwanneotuonye	Relative to he who has no relatives/sibling to an only child	Life Companion
32.	Dinwaanyịisimkpe	The husband of widows	Life Companion
33.	Ọbataụloadịmma	He/The one who comes in and a home gets all right	The Home Maker
34.	Ọmakamsibiaụwa	He/The one who knows how I got incarnated	The All Knowing God
35.	Ọşinwadiřinne ya	He/The one who said that a child should live for the mother	Preserver of Life
36.	Echetaechezọmkpa	One whose remembrance makes one to forget his problems	The Comforter
37.	Obiajulu	Solace or heart mender	The Comforter
38.	Apataneekunwa	The thigh that nurtures the child	The Sustainer
39.	Ọhurunwaogbenyef icheyaimi	He/One who sees an orphan and clear phlegm his nose off (wipes their nose)	The Comforter
40.	Onyesimulawanikp eamaghim	The one who set me free from guilt	My Advocate
41.	Uchishinrifodu	The night that	The Miraculous

		made food to remain	Worker/The Wonder Working God
42.	Ogbakwashirũonye oɓiarũ	One/He who rescues the need/helpless	Helper of the Suffering

Name 31 *Nwanneotuonye* depicts God as the relative to someone who has no relatives. Someone who feels lonely or in lack of human relatives can hold unto God as his/her relative. Such a person can also choose to identify with God as his relative hence calling God by this name. Name 32 calls God the husband of widows. A widow has no husband. As such she is vulnerable to all sorts of physical and emotional harm. But with God as a husband, she is protected and secured from any harm or attack from external influence. She is also free from loneliness as God is her companion. This shows He (God) is loving and caring. Name 33 means that God is he who enters and calms every tension in the house. He brings solution to all problems. The name depicts relationship because it is only a person that one knows and has relationship with that one allows into one's family in the sense of coming to stay. Name 34 says God knows everything about the persons form and frame. If God knows one's form and frame, then he knows what is good for the person. He understands what the person can bear or not bear and would not allow what the person cannot take to come to him/her. In like manner, name 35 depicts relationship. A woman whose child survived a severe sickness or accident can call God by this name. Names 36 and seven are almost synonymous. While name 36 literally means 'he whom when I remember, I forget my needs/problems', name 37 means my consolation. The two names are related because anything that gives one consolation is capable of making the person forget his/her problems and thereby giving hope to the person. Name 38 calls God the 'thigh or lap that rears/carries the child'. The name depicts the caring nature of God. Name 39 describes God as one who takes care of the needy particularly the orphan who has no one to take care of him/her. Name 40 depicts God as the vindicator to an accused person.

The accused in his/her accused state is helpless, but God justifies his own who are falsely accused. Name 41 literarily means ‘the night that made the food to remain’. That is the night that forbids one from exhausting the grain stock because of the next day. By implication, the name likens God to the ‘night’ that is, the only reason why a particular harm or disaster did not befall the person who called God this name. Therefore, the name implies that God in a preserver and a sustainer. Name 42 is almost the same with name 40. It sees God as the only rescue hope for the helpless/hopeless. The names discussed here are conceived from the concepts like (*nwanne* (relative), *di* (husband), *apata* (lap)) among others which are encountered in the everyday Igbo life.

Wisdom-based Names

The following names depict God as a wise God.

43.	Amaamaamasịamasị	That which cannot be completely known	The one who is beyond comprehension
44.	Ọmakamsibiaụwa	He/The one who knows how I got incarnated	The All Knowing God
45	Onyemaebeọnaemem	The one who feels what I am feeling	The Empathic One

Name 43 above can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, it can be seen from the angle that God is all knowing. Nothing is hidden away from him for he knows everything. Secondly, it can be perceived from the angle that no one can fully comprehend the nature and person of God. The following name *Ọmakamsibiaụwa* here posits that only God understands in totality how one comes into this world. Only He can explain man’s existence on earth. No other person or God can do it. Name 45 confesses that it is only God that understands

everything about mankind. He is the only one who understands the individual needs of every man even without the person voicing it.

Immortality-based Names

The following Igbo names depict God as immortal.

46	Onyenaadighianwu anwu	One who cannot die	The Immortal God
47.	Ikenyiriñonwu	The power that supersedes death	The Immortal God
48	Onyenwuruanwum adikwandu	The one who died and rose again	The Resurrected One
49	Emebiemebi	He who never festers	The Durable
50.	Chichiriezechianwu anwu	A God which assumes an undying kingly disposition	The Immortal
51.	Okenyemgbeochie	Ancient of days/ages	Ancient of days/ages

Name number 46 says that God is he who never dies. God is immortal and will never die no matter what happens. This means that God remains from one age to another age, one generation to generation another, from kingdom to kingdom. He is eternal. There is no generation that the world will get to and God will not be in existence. Name 47 sees God as the power that defies death. Death has power over man and inflicts serious pains on the bereaved. However, God has power over death and remains the only one who cannot die. Name 48 says that God died and lives again. This name is better perceived in the light of Christ who died and rose again as depicted in the book of Revelation 1:18 “I am he that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (KJV). The implication of this name is that God lives forever. Name 49 says God never festers. The fester here indicates death; therefore anything that has the characteristics of never festering in the context used here is immortal. Name 50 is almost synonymous with name 46.

It portrays God as an immortal king whose reign is eternal. He is not like a monarch who rules his territory throughout his life time but is succeeded by his son or relative at death. God never dies. Therefore He can never be succeeded by another person or being. Name 51 the ancient of days means that from the ancient times up until now, God has continued to reign over the earth and His reign will continue to the end of time.

Conclusion

This paper has examined praise names of God by Igbo Christians. It discovered from that Igbo culture and experience deeply influence the names they ascribe to God. Although these names are deeply rooted in Igbo culture, they are free of idolatry and fetish acts. However, the names are not totally separated from the general view or perception of God as upheld in the bible due to the influence of Christianity on the people. It established that the praise names of God as used by Igbo Christians, like everyday Igbo names, reveal individual/personal perceptions. The name that different individuals call God at any given time is dependent on the person's situation at the moment. Therefore, any name an Igbo person chooses to call God has some stories to tell or some revelations to make about the person's life and experience. It also tells stories of what God has done for the individual. Hence, the saying among Igbo Christians, *Ihe Chukwu na-eme bu ihe nyere ya aha, o chighi ya echi* "God's deeds reflect on HIS names and they are not just arbitrary titles". The paper therefore submitted that the Igbo Christian praise names of God is another important area where Igbo philosophy and world view can be observed because, just like Igbo personal and family names, they reveal the people's individual history and Igbo worldview in general

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