

TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES: AN EXPLORATION OF OCCULTISM, MYSTICISM, AND INITIATION IN THE PURSUIT OF TRANSCENDENCE

Rev Fr. Dr. R. C. Arazu and Dr. Takuso Orah M. (PhD).

Abstract

This study undertakes a comprehensive examination of occultism, mysticism, a profound human aspiration for intimate union with the divine or ultimate reality, investigating its complex relationship with religion, spirituality, and human experience. Through a critical analysis of mystical practices, experiences, and accounts, this research sheds light on the nature of transcendent states, including visions, dreams, and ecstatic trance states. The study explores the various means by which mystics pursue their goal, including prayer, meditation, fasting, and ritual, initiation as well as the use of mind-altering substances and ecstatic practices in certain cultural and traditional contexts. By interrogating the intersections between mysticism, religion, and culture, this work contributes to a deeper understanding of the human quest for transcendence and union.

Introduction

Mysticism is a religious tendency and desire of the human soul towards an intimate union with the Divinity. The practice of those who are initiated into the mysteries of putting oneself into and remaining in direct relation with God, the Absolute, or any unifying principle of life. Mysticism is inseparably linked with religion. Because of the nature of mysticism, firsthand objective studies of it are virtually impossible, the researchers confine themselves to the accounts of mystics, or, as the mystics themselves say, they must experience it for themselves. The terms mystic and mysticism are used very broadly and being extended to mean magic, occultism, or the esoteric which implies a *person who seeks or attains a direct, personal experience of the divine, or the absolute, through intuition or insight.*

Mystics claim to reach a transcendent state in which they see, hear or feel things which are beyond conventional perception; visions, dreams, revelations, prophecies, the hearing of supernatural voices and ecstatic trance states have been described by religious and non-religious mystics alike. The primary means by which mystics pursue their goal are the disciplines of prayer, meditation or contemplation, along with fasting, abstinence and self-denial. However, mystics of some cultures and traditions, such as Native Africa and American mystics, may also use mind-altering, psychotropic substances as catalysts to facilitate the transcendent experience, as well as spirit journeying, trance dancing, chanting, hypnotism and ritual. As James (1985) notes, "Mysticism is the pursuit of a direct connection with the divine, a union with something greater than ourselves. Mystical states are more like states of feeling than states of intellect (pp. 56ff). For many, mysticism offers a sense of purpose and meaning, a way to transcend the mundane and connect with the mysterious."

OCCULTISM

There is a body of knowledge and of practice that for lack of a better terminology has come to be called occultism. The root of the word is from the latin, *occultus* meaning 'hidden', 'covered' or 'veiled'. The knowledge in question is hidden from the reach of the profane or the uninitiated. It is unfortunate that a highly developed and systematized science which involves both theory and practice is given such a negative name. The insiders call it 'esoteric science' to distinguish it from the 'exoteric' that is taught openly in institutions of learning. A major occult adage is from the mouth of the Great Master Jesus the Christ, who counseled his followers not to cast their pearls at swine and who insisted so much on secrecy in the gospel according to Mark (Arazu, 2010). Jesus understood very well the importance of secrecy. Even among his twelve apostles there was an inner circle of three. As theoretical knowledge, occultism is called 'esoteric philosophy'. While as practical knowledge it is called 'ritual magic'. According to Fortune (1972), "occult science begins where natural ends." (p.59). Practically, occultism refuses to relegate God to mere subject of philosophic or theological inquiry or into the background of life as most people do. It discovers God in Man's inner being and sees man and the universe as thoughts in god's mind, as it were. The individual human being is thus sustained by God's mind and derives his essence and his being or existence from that 'faculty' in god known as creative power. All this is analogy. Thus, man is an emanation that is essentially attached to its source. He is light from light. He is a spark of divinity. To some extent, what is said of man in esoteric philosophy is also true of the universe. In the words of fortune (1966), "a universe is a concept in the mind of a Great Entity. It is created by the self-contemplation of Great Entity." (p.45). The accusation of 'pantheism' does not bother the occultist. The universe is divinity but Divinity is not the universe. The occultist wants you to puzzle this out yourself.. the key to the riddle is this: the necklace is gold, but gold is not necklace.

Occultism is like a secret world hidden in plain sight, where symbols and codes unlock mysteries of the universe (Partridge, 2014). For many scholars, it's a journey of self-discovery and spiritual exploration, but for others, it's a path shrouded in mystery and controversy. According to Crowley (1988), 'the word occultism connotes secrecy, mystery, unseen forces' (p.12).

OCCULTISM IN RELIGION

Occultism in the context of religion refers to the practice and belief that seek to understand using hidden knowledge often involving the supernatural forces. It often exists alongside most religions and often seen as a form of alternative spirituality. It emphasizes the pursuit of knowledge that is not accessible through conventional means such as scientific or religious study. Many occult practices involve attempt to access or manipulate supernatural forces for personal or spiritual purposes. Occultism include a variety of rituals, ceremonies and techniques aimed at achieving specific results or gaining insights into the spiritual realm. It has to do with mystical or hidden teachings within religious or philosophical traditions. Established religions often have differing views on occultism with some condemning it as harmful or heretical out of ignorance or religious zealotry while others may acknowledge its potential growth. Some examples of occult practices include, Alchemy, Astrology, Divination, Magic, Spiritism, Witchcraft and Necromancy. Mysticism has always featured in Catholicism. St Theresa of Avila, St John of the Cross, St Catherine of Sienna, to mention but a few, were able to arrive at extraordinary mental states through the practices of meditation. Monasteries of men and women, foundations of which are beginning to appear in some society.

Christian asceticism presented to priests, religious and the laity (e.g. during retreats) is geared to the same end – conscious union of a more or less intense nature with God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. The sacramental system, very little understood and appreciated among Christians, are aimed at the same mystical goal. Baptism and confirmation are graded initiation rites leading to the union symbolized and effected in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Penance as a sacrament is the second plant thrown across to the soul that has lost or is losing the foothold given by baptism on the shore of salvation. Ordination and Matrimony constitute Christians in states of service in the community. Anointing with oil is spiritual medicine for those about to pass on to a higher state on the other side of existence.

The whole catholic tradition is a mystery and a system of initiation to be followed with mind and body. Lack of appreciation and understanding of what is conferred under ritual has kept many a christian empty, dissatisfied and liable to run after any system that claims to give him something more.

It would pay us to consider what occultism in its theory (esoteric philosophy) and practice (magic) has to offer to the initiates of what they call the mysteries. This would give us a term of reference which is necessary for seeing our own system in good perspective in this inquiry we shall take as guides two well known adepts of Eastern and Western esotericism respectively, H.P Blavatsky and Dione Fortune. Dione Fortune alone has written over 20 books on occultism. Each of the above mentioned authors, was both an adept in occultism and a founder of at least an occult fraternity.

The average christian today should have a good grasp of what occultism has to offer. According to fortune (1972), "Occult science begins where natural science ends" which assertion is also true of that branch of philosophy we call meta-physics. Occultism must have a metaphysics at the time in question. He holds that the subject matter is the same but the mode of studying it differs. Occult science uses the senses and faculties in man to arrive at a gradual opening of the spirit of man to apprehend that which is beyond sensation and in a way manipulate it. Fortune puts it this way:

...esoteric science holds that matter is built up on a framework of spirit; that spirit emanates matter, not matter spirit; working upon this hypothesis, it seeks to discover what spiritual factor has emanated the particular material object under consideration... (p.71).

Applied to man himself, esoteric science discovers two aspects of the human soul, the higher aspect which it calls the individuality, and the lower aspect which it calls the personality. The first share in the divine nature as it is spirituality pure and simple. It is the divine spark, the light from light, the ray from the ETERNAL SUN in man the mortal, immortal, other-worldly. These elements of the individuality in the soul of man are called noetic. Blavatsky in his *Studies in Occultism* explains: "From the first proceeds all the noetic element, from the second, the psychic, i.e. 'terrestrial wisdom' at best, as it is influenced by all the chaotic stimuli of the human or rather animal passions of the living body". (Theosophical University Press, California, p.88).

The two aspects of the soul are also referred to as the higher ego and the lower self. They are not two entities but two aspects of the same soul. Using christian terminology apparently, the occultist speaks of the Christ or Logos

in everybody. By this is meant the divine spark in the soul of everybody – the noetic element. The higher ego (the individuality) operates through the brain and heart. The lower self (the personality) uses mainly the glands as Kapp (1973) of A.M.O.R.C. explains in his treatise, *Glands - Our Invisible Guardians*.

Science has taught us positively that man's physical form and mental attainments are controlled by his other glands of the body... the endocrines are the directors in the corporation of organs and tissues and consciousness of the being called man. There are subcommittees that control certain organs... (p.47)
The lower self using the endocrines is further subdivided into the conscious and subconscious minds:

We have two minds in our being: one is the reasoning mind and is called the conscious mind; the other is the sub-conscious mind. It functions when the reasoning mind is at rest and is the building force of the body and mind. This subconscious consciousness is the positive impelling force of man and is expressed in the endocrine system. It is called by scientists the vegetative system, and is supposed to be a lower form of action. The vegetative or endocrine system is the consciousness of the ages of involution and evolution of man. The impelling forces within man come from these endocrine expressions. Our emotions are the actions of the endocrines. The reasoning mind has no emotions. Infact, it is a question if man's mind is as yet capable of any great reasoning, for all his reasoning is so tinged by the impulses from the endocrines that they overshadow the supposed reasoning. Most of man's reasoning is but seeking proofs to go on thinking as he has in the past... He loves and hates not by any reasoning power of the mind consciousness but by the deep impulses of the endocrines. We unconsciously absorb the arguments that come in our everyday contacts. That is environment (Kapp. pp. 48-49).

Homoepathic medicine exploits this psycho-biology. We have also esoteric psycho-therapeutics practiced by experts or adepts. According to Fortune (1972), "The occultists make no distinction between the soul and the body, regarding them as too impenetrably interwoven for any such distinction to be possible, but studies them both under the generic title of esoteric psychology" (p.70). The soul manifests its presence through the body. This is incidentally, the biblical view of man as *nephesh* – a spiritual body or bodily spirit.

RE-INCARNATION IN OCCULTISM

It is mainly in its belief in re-incarnation that occult science clashes with catholic doctrine. The higher ego (the individuality) is said to survive physical death, in the soul of man. The personality or the lower self is conscious or un-conscious but only for a life period and it takes many incarnations, they say, before one could become an adept and ready to live the life of complete union with the SOURCE of life. According to Fortune (1972),

It will be noted that mysticism does not does not teach re-incarnation, whereas occultism does, and for this reason: that the mystic aims at escaping from the bondage of the flesh, never to return to matter, bearing with him the fruits of his labours... The mystic, who goes on to take the freedom, does not cease to be an influence in the world; by his achievement he works out a portion of the world's karma.... (p.38).

We shall consider what occultism calls karma very soon. Christianity is regarded in occultism as a mystic religion which as such cannot teach re-incarnation. In esoteric philosophy, mysticism and occultism are regarded as twin sisters aiming at the same goal but by different methods. The occultist does not, therefore see any contradiction in the christian denial of re-incarnation. He polishes the Igbo traditional beliefs in *Ogbanje* and *ilo-uwa*, and gives them philosophical backing. The doctrine fascinates converts from Igbo natural religion. The mortification practiced by the occultist are mainly "to bring it (the flesh) into subjection and teach it to obey the sovereign without murmuring. This design is to build himself such a personality that his Higher Self can function through it without let or hindrance. It must be a power and spirit horse that answers instantly to the heel and rein, needing neither spur nor curb..." (pp. 38-39). Fortune continues: "The mystic works in the Higher Self exclusively; the occultist brings the higher Self into manifestation on the planes of form".

That is why occultism aspires to come back after death until adepthood is achieved and the final death renders the adept one of the Masters of the inner temple. It is not possible to reconcile reincarnation with catholic doctrine, from the catholic point of view. The only kind of reincarnation (in the metaphoric sense) Catholicism would accept is the *type* idea. John the Baptist was a type of the great prophet Elijah and that was why Christ saw the Jewish belief that Elijah would come back to the earth at a future date as fulfilled in John the Baptist: "... and he (John the Baptist), if you will believe me, is the Elijah who was to return... Jesus said (Mt. 11:14)".

A personality can so fit into the type of character and function of a predecessor or ancestor that the similarity approaches identity. This explanation is very much like what the Igbo see in *ilo-uwa*.

We find reincarnation logically un-acceptable. Has the creative power gone so bankrupt that the same souls will have to get into every new conception and be born again? The increase in population demands that new human

beings are all the time coming into existence. Why should there be exception to this rule? Reincarnation is a hypothesis brought up to explain the mystery of evil. This will be evident in our consideration of the esoteric concept of karma.

THE ESOTERIC DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND REINCARNATION.

Basic to esoteric philosophy is the concept of karma. According to Blavatsky: Karma is a heavy stone splashed in the quiet waters of life; and it must produce every widening circles of ripples, carried wider and wider, almost ad infinitum. Such causes produced have to call forth effects, and these are evidenced in the just laws of retribution (cit. p.23).

This concept of karma is as elusive as it is all embracing. Nature has laws and these laws are immutable. Fire burns. Water wets. There is no smoke without fire. Every manifestation has a cause. There is a microcosm in the macrocosm. As above, so below. Upsetting of nature's laws on the physical and moral planes have representations on the spiritual and vice-versa. A popular Jewish way of seeing evil comes near to the concept of karma in esoteric thinking: As he (Jesus) went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him. 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to be born blind?' (Jn. 9:1-2).

The idea of the son suffering for the sins of the parents was ruled out in the book of Ezekiel:

The word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows, 'why do you keep repeating this proverb in the land of Israel: The fathers have eaten unripe grapes; and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks – there will no longer be any reason to repeat this proverb in Israel. See now: all life belongs to me; the father's life and the son's life, both belong to me. The man who has sinned, he is the one who shall die,' (Ez. 18:1-4).

With this dictum, God annulled his Exodus Declaration: "For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons, and great-grandsons of those who hate me..." (Ex. 20:5). But all this did not obliterate the popular Jewish belief that suffering is a result of sin, is merited. This is also the doctrine of karma.

In *The Tarot*, a treatise on Hermetic Occultism by Sadhu (1962) where Hebrew symbols are employed to teach a comprehensible and comprehensive cosmogony based on the four sacred letters (tetragrammaton) of the divine name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, we find an account of karma in the third mystery called *ARCANUM III*:

Providence has a representative in the individual human being. It is called conscience. It is absolutely neutral, and neither attacks nor acts as a brake, but only enlightens the path, showing how one has to neutralise, at a particular moment, the important binary; Good and Evil. Man's will may determine future happenings, but is limited in their choice by karma. This karma is like a general record of all previous incarnations of a man's soul. The first time he may be born in good condition for acquiring wisdom, or as we may say, with a clean karma; but he commits sins, and therefore in the next incarnation he still has to purify his karma, apart from the primary problem of learning the wisdom of life, which cannot be devoid of struggles and sufferings... (p.59).

The doctrine of karma thrives on the proviso that punishment in an eternal hell is ruled out and that happiness in an eternal heaven should be a goal at the apex of universal evolution. It is unfortunate that many an occult student having been taught to sneer at religious dogmas, ends up in accepting the dogmas of occultism without question and without the application of the critical methods he was instructed to use on the tenets of his first faith, on those of the new fraternity. Karma is not fate for fate can be unmerited, while karma is regarded as merited. The one truth we can learn from the concept of karma which infant humanity has used to express a very deep mystery, is the fact that whatever we do of good or evil has effects on ourselves first and foremost. The esoteric doctrine of reincarnation and karma are attempts at explaining the problem of evil, especially moral evil (sin) and its expiation. Why does the just man suffer and the unjust man prosper? This has been a problem as old as humanity. The Book of Job in the Bible dramatised it by putting God on the stage and showing him permitting the just man to be afflicted as a test, an initiation - to use occult terminology - that will reveal the type of just man he is. Suffering drove the just Job to agonising seeking of God's audience in contemplative outbursts:

How dare I plead my cause, then or choose arguments against him (God)? Suppose I am in the right, what use is my defence? For he whom I must sue is judge as well. If he deigned to answer my citation, could I be sure that he will listen to my voice?... shall I try force? Look how strong he is! Or go to court? But who will summon him? Though I think myself right, his mouth may condemn me; though I count myself innocent, it may declare me a hypocrite... (Job 9:14-20).

The answer to the problem of evil, of suffering and injustice is discovered in face to face encounter with God in the depths of the soul. God gives the answer to individual who has been made ready by trials or initiations. And the answer is usually like the one the book of Job records: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations?...” (Job 38:4). If you cannot answer that simple but profound questions, your attitude before God, before the mystery (*ARCANUM* of The *Tarot*) Good and evil should be profound silence.

INITIATION:

Initiation is a rite of passage, a threshold between two worlds, where one embarks on a spiritual journey of transformation and growth (Eliade, 1963). It's a moment of symbolic death and rebirth, where the individual sheds the old self and emerges anew. Eliade also notes, 'Initiation is a transformation of the individual's mode of being' (p.112). For many, initiation offers a sense of belonging and identity, a connection to a community or tradition.

THE ESOTERIC CONCEPT OF INITIATION:

In tracing the sources of the esoteric christian tradition, Fortune (1972) mentions among others “the Knights Templars who, while fighting the infidel in the holy Land, came in touch with the last survivors of the secret tradition of Israel and from received initiation. They brought back to Europe the secrets thus gained, giving them a christian expression, until their suppression in A.D. 1307” (p.91).

The worthy President of the Knights of St John, Brother Kevin N. O. Ejiogu (personal communication, 12 September 1986) of the Holy Spirit Commandery, Holy Ghost Cathedral Enugu had been kind enough to explain to one of the researcher: that the Knights of St. John dates back to 1048 A.D. when Christians in central Europe organized crusades composed of valiant men in Amalphi to protect the Holy Places in Jerusalem against the invading infidel Turks; that the founders placed this society under the protection of St. John the Baptist. It would seem, then that the suppression of 1307 mentioned by Fortune (1972), did not effect the knights of St. John, or that if it did, the fraternity was revived at a later date. What interest us immediately is the reference to John the Baptist who in esoteric philosophy, becomes the master in the mystery of this school of knighthood.

There was an ancient esoteric school – The ESSENES Fraternity – of which scholars are unanimous that John the Baptist was either a member or a product. In this book, *The Dead Sea Scroll*, Wilson (1969) says:

John the Baptist is supposed to have been born – perhaps in Hebron – not very far away from the monastery... He not only had the practice of baptism in common with the members of the sect, but he seems to be following their principles (Lk. 3:11) when he preaches... Like the sect, he expects the Messiah... But the sect lived together in this wilderness, whereas John in the gospels and in Josephus, always appears as a lonely ascetic... (pp.92-93).

The Essenes used to accept and adopt other people’s children and train them according to their ways. Luke (1:80) says of the child John the Baptist: “Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit matured. And he lived in the wilderness until the day he appeared openly to Israel.” Coincidentally, it takes a member of a particular esoteric school or group to recognize a fellow member either by their manner of reasoning, speech, spirituality, behavioural pattern etc, hence the saying, by their fruits we shall know them. John the Baptist was able to identify Jesus within the period of operation using the above analytical approach. The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him he exclaimed, behold the lamb of God. And looking at Jesus as he walked, John said, Behold the lamb of God (Jn. 1:29; 1:36)

The monastery was there at that time, out in the same wilderness. John’s preaching, his eating habits and general appearance resemble what we have come to learn of the Essene community from the startling discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Are the Knights of St John founded in the days of the crusades dating back to John the Baptist, the strange prophet who pointed the messiah out to his contemporaries? The answer to this may be far fetched. Esotericism can be made to conform to christian principles and ideals, as we are already indicating in this work. The key concept in the PATH of Occultism is INITIATION, a concept that the Knights of St John are not unaware of. In catholic practice, an initiation over and above those of Baptism and confirmation, is coming into daily use in the laying on of hands practiced in the catholic Pentecostal Movement, a laying on of hands that accompanies what has become known as the “Baptism of the Spirit” which is supposed to effect charismatic manifestations of gifts of tongues, of healing, of prophecy etc.

Fortune (1972) underlines the dual aspect of esoteric initiation:

The physical initiation admits to the study of the esoteric wisdom acquired by generations of men who sought beneath the surface of existence, who sought the inner meaning of things rather than their outer

form; it admits the student to the fellowship and confidence of these men, and disposes them to share their knowledge and to accept the initiate as a co-worker or pupil.

The second form of initiation is declared to be a spiritual experience, wherein the soul established contact with the higher powers and is admitted to the fellowship of great souls of the inner Planes (cit. p.27).

Initiation is not something entirely new in Igboland. We have rites of initiation into the title societies and ordeals of initiation into various types of masquerades. One of the researcher investigated a title-taking (*Ozo*) initiation in the town of Ihembosi in Ekwusigo Local government Area in January 1966. The particular event was the highest grade of *ozo* initiation in the particular village in question – Otukwe Ihembosi. The candidate was a polygamist of some 48 years of age, a staunch adherent of traditional religion. For seven native weeks (six in the long run) – 24 days – he had to live a secluded life out in a booth. Only a little boy below the age of puberty was to see to all his needs. This attests to the austeries attendant to this grade of *ozo* initiation. No other human being is to approach the booth or talk to the initiate for the 24 days. He ate only what the boy could cook and robbed his body regularly with *nzu* (white chalk) in the ramshackle house set up only for the initiation. He sat on a mat spread out on the rough ground and on it he slept with a piece of wood or a stone for a pillow.

In this austere solitude his mind was gradually released from pre-occupation with mundane pursuits; he learns that his family could do without him as it one day must – the day he could die; he counts the moments of the day as no one was allowed to visit him except the little boy whose sole business with him was to bring him the food his in-experience in the art could prepare; time begins to acquire a new dimension, to take a new meaning in his psychology, to be charged with spiritual significance. The time he was spending in seclusion would mark a transition period in his life. After this period, people who knew him before would greet him by any of the eight new names he would take, and every name marks a new reality that has come to be in his soul.

During the 24 days of initiation retreat, the world around him takes on a new significance. Before then he saw the palm tree as a mere economic object, the yam as a mere item of food and the cassava as meant for the stomach. From his solitude area, he learns the mystery of nature and her manifestations, a knowledge that would later appear in his employment of so many proverbs when he makes utterance. After the great initiation, he would be forbidden to climb the palm tree. His new state of life would be in-compatible with such labour which involves mortal risks. He would become the palm tree of a man, a mortal giant. On no account would he fight in single or communal combat for the rest of his life. Reason, not brute force has become his guiding principle. In inter-tribal wars and in town or village squables, his red hat seen from a distance imposes a cease-fire with immediate effect.

On the last night in the period of seclusion, the actual initiation takes place. At dead of the night he leaves his temporary confinement escorted by eight strong men. They make for the awe-inspiring grove where the shrine of the *Ulas*i River Spirit had been erected by our forefathers, there the ceremony begins. A new path-way had been erected by the villagers during the 24 days, leading from the *Ulas*i grove (some two miles away from the river) to the *Ulas*i river. As the procession moves from the grove to the river, the prescriptions of the fortune-teller must be followed to the letter. The wine-tapper sprinkles pure palm-wine along the new path-way “*ka muo na anu*” (for the spirit to drink). The snuff addict does the same with well-ground tobacco. The initiate explained that this second is done “*maka ndi obodo*” (for the towns people – i.e., living and dead). In the *ogbu-ehi* (the grade of *ozo* in question) ritual of initiation, even wine and tobacco are removed from the realm of the profane and given symbolic value in the ritual at the mid-night procession.

The procession arrives at the *Ulas*i river at mid-night “the very watching time of night, when churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to the world” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 2). The procession started off from the first point of contact with the spirit world, the grove, where *Ulas*i River Spirit dwells, and move to the second point where matter tapers into spirit in the river, the transparency of whose waters mirrors the unseen and reminds man that the senses alone do not give us all reality.

The neophyte had followed the young men in silent meditation and observation. His mind was attuned to the mystic and esoteric import of the ritual he was undergoing. At the river, the procession stopped. The clothing and utensils he had used during the period of seclusion were brought to the river by his companions. The neophyte removed his loin-cloth, and stark naked leaped into the river. This is the ritual of *ima ahu* (ritual bath) which is quite different from *ighu ahu* (ordinary bath). *Ima ahu* involves a ritual cleansing of the whole body at a stream or river prescribed by an oracle or a fortune-teller. The *Ogbu-ehi* candidate had not taken his bath for over three weeks. He has been purifying and anointing his whole body with *nzu*. He now washes not just his body but his very personality. The old things have passed away. The spirit of the river bestows on him new powers. He is a new man as he comes out naked – as in his first birth – from the womb, as it were, of the water spirit. At the same

instant, his companions cast into the river all the articles of clothing and utensils that he had used during the retreat period. He comes out dripping with the cleansing waters. He is given a white linen which from then on would be his official garment.

Because the earth is considered a force that stabilizes and is worshiped at a shrine in the vicinity, the new man is led straight to the shrine of the earth spirit. He sits down before the shrine and the chief initiator who happened to be his elder brother who is the oldest of all the people titled *alo* (oldest by initiation), comes forward with the white feather of a mature eagle (*Ugo*). He sticks the feather into the hair of the candidate crying: “*Nkwu buk’ibu, o wulu n’ana! Mmadu ebuka ibu, o wulu n’ana! Ana ebuka!*” (Howsoever tall the palm tree grows, it has its roots in the ground! Howsoever great a man becomes, he has his feet on the ground! The ground is great!)

The initiate rises and is led home in triumph. We are not passing any moral judgments on the ritual we have selected as an example of initiation from Igbo culture. We just want to demonstrate that esotericism or occultism does exist in Igbo land, that it is a universal phenomenon. Under the blanket appellation of paganism, the christian missionaries banned so much esoteric theory and practice in this part of the country. Our interest lies in the mystical and esoteric nature of the initiation. Man has always felt the urge to develop the psychic and spiritual parts of his nature by getting into contact with the great beyond. The best dialogue between man - the symbol making animal - and spirit is carried out in ritual. Through the symbolism of rituals, man calls up the spirit world and sustains the necessary mental and psychological concentration required in the transaction. This is the function of rituals. The symbols used in rituals should convey the necessary meaning to the minds of the participants and through the meditative application of the signs, spiritual realities are summoned to attend to man who is partly spirit and partly matter (*muo na madu*).

Initiation is not limited to traditional *ozo* title alone, religious Christians initiate their members into their Order or congregation with vows. They have this seclusion period of 365 days in a secluded area known as Novitiate or pastoral year for those from the diocese. The traditionalists equally have their various other initiations rites like masquerade initiation, initiation into womanhood (*iru-mgbede*)

Conclusion

More and more people are resorting to the practice of creating a sanctum in their houses, a prayer corner where they invoke the unseen world with candles, incense, *nzu* and sacred stick, or any other visible help for the imagination. The practice is going to gain ground in this country and people are going to discard a lot of what has been imported if it does not link them up with ancient traditions of white magic (benevolent ritual heritage) left on the noosphere by their ancestors.

Mysticism, Occultism and Initiation are human heritage common to all races and to all epochs. They bear witness to the dual aspect of the human being - body-spirit - and the wise man, the enlightened one, keeps an open mind and learns wisdom from every human achievement. Led by an inner light which he seeks all the time to keep alive, he travels through life initiated gradually by life’s experiences, happy and sad, into the mystical union, through the higher powers of the soul, with the ARCHITECT OF THE UNIVERSE by whatever name he is invoked.

This work is a kind of initiation, in which, through the symbolism of words - which are only symbols in the long run - we have attempted to grasp the significance of man’s efforts to use his higher powers of mind to attain the invisible through rites and doctrines.

The process is never a closed chapter. It is an on-going one for every generation.

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