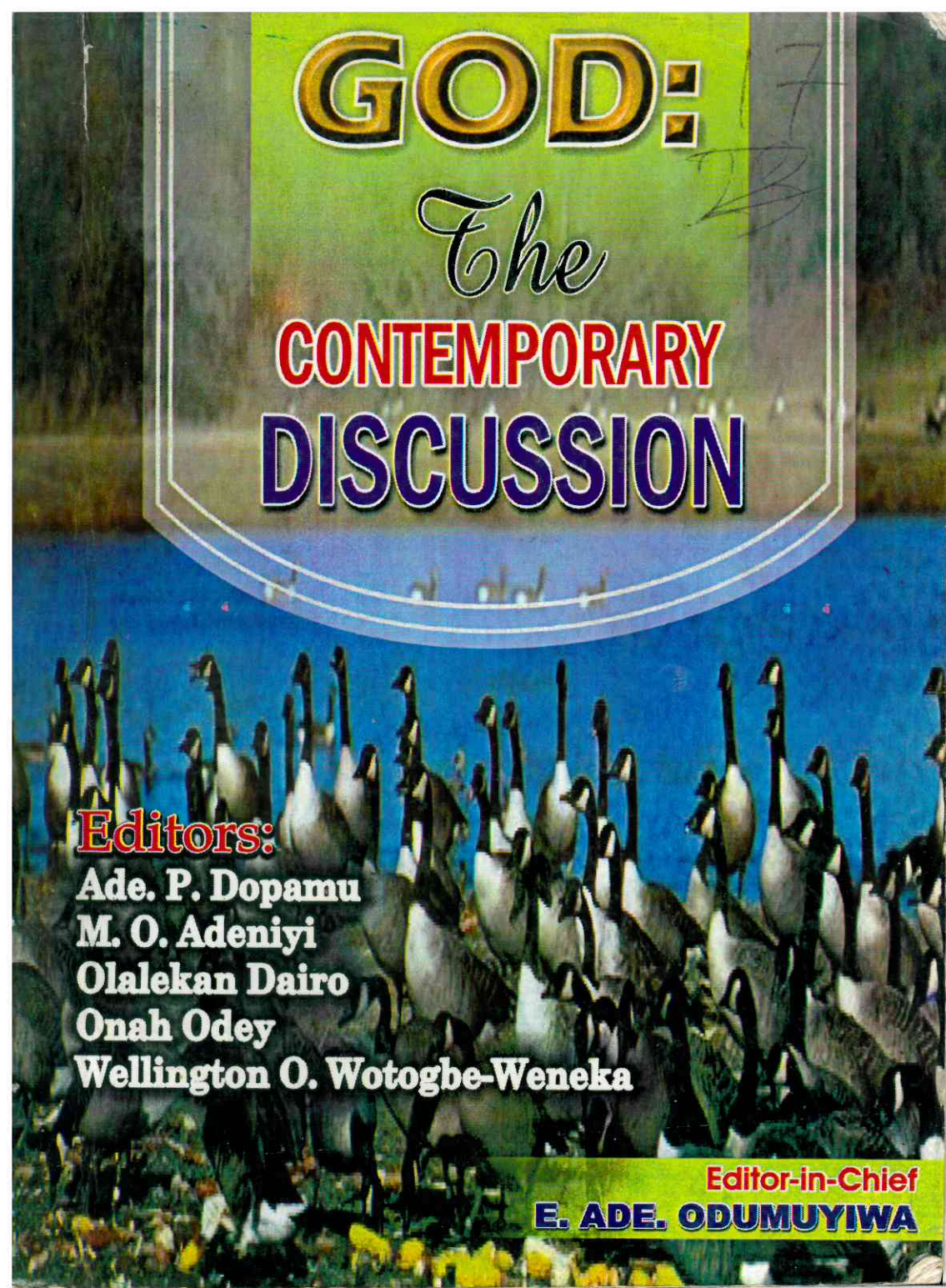




GOD:

The

CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION

Editors:

Ade. P. Dopamu

M. O. Adeniyi

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Onah Odey

Wellington O. Wotogbe-Weneka

Editor-in-Chief

E. ADE. ODUMUYIWA

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E. Ade Odumuyiwa

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FOREWORD

Religions cannot but discuss God. Many years ago man had been talking about God, and in the contemporary time, discussions continue about God. *God: The Contemporary Discussion*, is a very suitable title for this book, which contains philosophical, religious, social, theoretical, moral and ethical discussions about God in the twenty first century.

This book contributes a lot to the on-going modern debate about God. The intrinsic nature of God, together with the metaphysical concept that people have about God calls for discussion about Him. The attributes of God within the limitations in human language vis-à-vis the problem of evil in our society, prompt philosophers, scientists, theologians, humanists and sociologists to contribute to the on-going debate about God.

More light has been shed on how best God could be discussed and understood in the twenty first century as presented by contributors to this book. The book is published by the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR) to promote better understanding of the discussions of God among scholars. It is a book that enhances the knowledge of students, researchers and teachers of religions concerning God. Since discussion about God is ad-infinitem, this book forms the basic foundation for further research to enable humanity to understand God the more. This is very necessary today in view of scientific discoveries that are challenging religious views and beliefs.

However, it is not for academics alone. The book will also water the appetite of people that have anything to do with God. It is, therefore, specially recommended for reading by the public, particularly the priests, adherents of the three major religions practised in Nigeria and scholars in other disciplines. No doubt, the book will enrich their understanding of God.

It is clear that human beings cannot fully comprehend and apprehend God. We will continue to learn and know Him as He reveals Himself to us from time to time. Future researchers are,

therefore, challenged by the contents of this book to carry out more researches about God who is the anchor of all theistic religions. When this is done, more revelations about God would be explored. This will, indeed, help us to meet the challenge of atheism, agnosticism, scientific discoveries and dwindling interests in religion.

Professor E. Ade Odumuyiwa
Editor-in-Chief

THE KINGSHIP OF GOD IN ISAIAH AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

C.O. Ogunkunle

Introduction

There appears to be a difference between the concept of God held by King Uzziah of Judah and that held by Prophet Isaiah. On the one hand, even though King Uzziah reigned for 52 years (2 Chro. 26:1-15), yet he disobeyed God towards the end of his reign as he was not sensitive to sin. He entered the temple and thus was struck with leprosy, which made him ceremonially unclean (2 Chro. 26:20). Unfortunately, as a result of his acts and concept of God, many people in the nation were led away from Yahweh and thus involved in sin (2 Kings 15:1-4). On the other hand, Prophet Isaiah had a profound knowledge of God particularly from the time of his call in chapter 6 of the book that bears his name. The prophet was called and commissioned "in the year that King Uzziah died" (Isa. 6:1). Isaiah's concept of the kingship of God made him to be sensitive to sin for he stated that he and his people were spiritually unclean (Isa. 6:5).

Incidentally, a careful study of our contemporary prophets shows that several of them have a comprehensive knowledge of the kingship of God. The focus of this paper, therefore, is to pry into the life of Isaiah and to have an insight into his understanding of the kingship of God. The paper examines specifically the Prophet Isaiah, the authorship of the book that bears his name; the message of the book with emphasis on his kingship of God; and the kingship of God among the prophets in the contemporary church. There is no doubt that Prophet Isaiah surpasses any other prophets in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel. Therefore, his understanding of God as the king will throw light on the prophetic concept of God in Ancient Israel.

The Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah, whose name means "Yahweh is Salvation" was the son of Amoz.³ His ministry extended over more than forty years during the reigns of four kings of Judah namely, Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah.⁴ Isaiah was called to be a prophet "in the year that king Uzziah died" (Isa. 6:1). This call took place during a service in the temple. The last appearance of Isaiah which can be dated on the occasion of Sennacherib's threat to Jerusalem, when he was appealed to by Hezekiah (Isa. 36:37).

Prophet Isaiah, who was happily married to a prophetess (Isa. 8:3), had two sons, both of whom bore symbolic names: Shear-Jashub "remnant will return" (Isa. 7:3) and Maher-Shalad hash-baz, "hasten booty, speed spoil". (Isa. 8:1-4). He had access to the royal court, as can be seen in his interaction with the kings of Judah, especially Ahaz and Hezekiah. Levi Dawon notes that:

Unlike the earlier prophets he was a man of the city. He may have been of the blood royal and was certainly a courtier and a member of the privileged circles in Jerusalem. He did not look back to the wilderness and the early covenant days like Amos and Hosea. He was concerned more to speak of the relationship between the dynasty of David and Jahveh.⁵

Prophet Isaiah had a ministry to the nation of Judah which was faced with serious crisis as from the late eight century BC. These years in Judah's history were a time of struggle both politically and spiritually. On the one hand was the external aggression upon the land which threatened her national character. On the other hand was the internal spiritual emergency in the nation that threatened the national religion to its foundation.⁶ The Northern Kingdom of Israel, at that time, was deteriorating politically, spiritually and militarily and finally fell to the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom of Judah looked as though it too would collapse and fall to the Assyrians, but it withstood the attack. But then, there was internal sickness in the land. There were "socio-economic ills for which the official religion had no effective rebuke and which were only aggravated by Assyria

exactions".⁷ In this political struggle and spiritual decline, Isaiah rose to deliver a message to the people of Judah. His message was that they should trust in the God who had promised them a glorious kingdom through Moses and David. Prophet Isaiah urged the nation through her leaders, especially Ahaz and Hezekiah not to rely on Egypt or any other foreign power to protect them for the LORD was the only protection they would need.⁸

Isaiah was a poet-seer and a highly educated man, with an expert mastery of the skills of rhetoric and persuasion. It was said of him that:

No other figure of Old Testament literature shows so commanding a control of the use of irony and subtle word play. Equally he shows himself to have been a master of hyperbole, and to have possessed great skill in presenting circumlocutions, which give to his sayings an air of mystery whilst robbing them of none of their clarity and sharpness.⁹

The Authorship of Isaiah

Biblical scholars, as from the 18th century, began to raise objection as to the unity of the Book of Isaiah. The first hypothesis on Deutero-Isaiah came from J.C. Doederlein. He argued that there was another prophet Isaiah who wrote Isaiah 40-66. In other words, the first half of the book, Isaiah 1-39 presumes a setting in Jerusalem in the 8th century when the Assyrians were in control. However, the second half of the book, Isaiah 40-66 seems to address the audience in the Babylonian captivity. Also, the hypothesis for Trito Isaiah was championed by B. Duhm who argued that there were three individuals who wrote the Book: the Isaiah of the eighth century (Isaiah 1-39), Isaiah of the captivity (Isaiah 40-55); and Isaiah of post captivity (Isaiah 56-66).¹⁰

Theologically, it was argued that Isaiah 1-39 gives emphasis to God's majesty whereas Isaiah 40-66 emphasizes the universal dominion of God. Also, it was argued that the nation of Israel was led by a king who descended from David in Isaiah 1-39 (cf. Isaiah 11:1) while in Isaiah 40-66, the leadership of the nation belongs to Priests, Levites and Princes (Isaiah 61-6; 66:21). Furthermore, it was noted that the messianic king of the first (Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-11) is replaced in the

second half by the servant of the Lord.¹¹ But in spite of these observations, I tend to look at the whole book as a single prophecy of Isaiah of the eighth century. My argument is hinged on two points among others:

The first point is the superscription. The book bears the name Isaiah in its superscription (Isaiah 1:1) which is similar to that of all other writing prophets.¹² Also, apart from the superscription in Isaiah 1:1, several other passages, especially in the first part of the book attribute the authorship of the book to Isaiah (2:1; 7:3; 20:2; 37:2; 5-6; 38:1,4; 39:5).¹³

The second point deals with the themes and vocabularies used in the book. There are several words and phrases that occur in the two major sections of the book.¹⁴ A good example is God, who is called the "Holy one of Israel" twelve times in the first half and thirteen times in the second half. Also, the Israelites are referred to as the "ransomed of the LORD" who will return to Zion (Isaiah 35:10; 51:11) in both halves. Furthermore, the phrase "a voice calls" is found both in Isaiah 6:4 and 40:33 while the phrase "the mouth of the LORD has spoken" is found in Isaiah 1:20; 40:5; and 58:14.¹⁵

I believe that understanding the whole book as a single work of Isaiah of the eighth century will throw light in one's understanding of the concept of God by the prophet. It should be noted that the Jews and Christians upheld this approach prior to the age of Enlightenment. Furthermore, B.S. Childs, in his canonical approach to scriptures has argued strongly that the book of Isaiah should be read and understood as a unit and not as fragmentary.¹⁶

The Kingship of God in Isaiah

The message of Isaiah is centred on several themes such as humanity and the world, sin, judgement and redemption.¹⁷ However, Isaiah's concept of God is discussed extensively throughout his book. The prophet in particular, has so much about the kingship of God whom he called 'the king' (Isa. 6:5) whose kingship is not limited by space.¹⁸ Isaiah 66:1 says:

Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool, Where is the house you will build for me?, Where will my resting place be?

The LORD whom Isaiah saw on the throne is presented as "I am" before whom all idols are reduced to nothing (Isa. 2:6-22; 43:8-13). He is the mighty creator (Isa. 40:21-22; 43:13) who will make streams up in the desert (Isa. 32:2). The nations of the earth are but small in His hand (Isa. 14:22-23; 40:15, 21-23). He is the King who is in full control of the whole world and from his sovereign position in heaven, he watches over his created universe. God, unlike pagan idols is eternal (Isa. 40:28) and gives strength to those who are weary and weak (Isa. 40:29-31). God, who is the king and the creator, is self-existent and His existence is not dependent upon anything outside of himself. His self-existence is implied in his affirmation "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14 cf. Isa 41:4). Furthermore, this king is the judge and Lawgiver (Isaiah 33:22). God is the king who reigns in righteousness (Isa. 9:7; 11:4; 16:5; 32:1). He is the king of justice (Isa. 30:18). Oswalt, while commenting on the vision of Isaiah states that:

The vision which Isaiah 6:1-8 report was clearly fundamental to the entire course of Isaiah's ministry and to the shape his book. The glory, the holiness, and the righteousness of God became the ruling concepts of his ministry. Furthermore, it is this experience which explains Isaiah's contempt for, and horror of any kind of national or individual life which did not pay adequate attention to the one God.¹⁹

Isaiah claimed to have seen the LORD Almighty (6:1). The Hebrews normally believed that to see God was to die (Gen. 13:22; Exod. 19:21; 20:19; 33:29; Deut. 18:16; Judges 13:22). This means that Isaiah did not see the very essence of God for no man can see Him (Exod. 33:18; John 1:18; I Tim. 6:16; I John 4:12). He is invisible God (I Tim 1:17). What Isaiah saw was far beyond his comprehension and

that is why he was longer describing the very essence of God but simply the majestic nature of God and His throne. The prophet was struck that God was seated on a throne; He was high and exalted and the train of His robe filled the temple.²⁰

The prophet saw the holiness of this heavenly king who was seated on the throne. Invariably, holiness occupies the foremost rank among the attributes of God as reflected in several passages of the Old Testament Lev. 11:44-45; Ezek. 39:7; and Hab. 1:12. The phrase "the holy one of Israel" has become the favourite appellation for God throughout the book of Isaiah.²¹ N.H. Ridderbos notes that: "as Amos has been called the prophet of righteousness and Hosea the prophet of loving kindness, so Isaiah has been called the prophet of holiness"²² God is absolutely separate from and exalted above his creatures. God alone has the right to be called 'Holy'; and no other person has the right (Isa. 6:3; 17:7; 40:25; 43:3 15:11 and 54:5). Isaiah recognized God as the Holy one and the whole earth is full of his glory (Isa. 6:3). It was this holiness of God that had so much influence on the prophet both at the time of his call and throughout his book.

The Kingship of God in our Contemporary Church

Kingship is an important institution in Africa, especially among the Yoruba. Every king in Yorubaland is well respected and in fact, it is not the custom of the Yoruba to treat familiarity with their kings.²³ The king in Yorubaland, "is the coordinating factor, the symbol of societal unity, the link between both spiritual and material."²⁴

It is of particular interest to note that the Yoruba have a similar understanding of the kingship of God as prophet Isaiah. For example, every king in Yorubaland has several many seraphs, that is, angelic beings that are in the service of God. However, as crucial as the roles of the earthly kings are, they are limited in various respects. They are limited to their jurisdiction or locality while Almighty God reigns in heavens and on earth. The earthly kings cannot see or know everything, thus, they rely on what their chiefs and servants tell them. However, God is omnipresence and omniscience. He sees and knows everything. The earthly kings are mortal beings who reign and die but God is immortal and He reigns forever.

Our contemporary church is filled with several prophets and leaders who have a good understanding of the kingship of God. These prophets and leaders recognize God in terms of His reign and sovereignty over every situation. They see God as the king who is seated on the heavenly throne; the one who sees everything that is happening in the universe; and the one who has power to control every impending evil upon His people. For example, Pastor S.O.A. Aremu towards the end of 2004 asked members of his congregation to pray and fast because God in His sovereignty has shown him vision of pestilence over some areas. Therefore, in order to avert the doom, he asked the church members to seek the face of God.²⁵

The kingship of God is also noted among the contemporary Yoruba prophets and church leaders as observed in several names and titles given to God while worshipping Him. Some of the names and titles include:

Oba Airi (the king above or the high-up king the unseen king)

Oba alaafin orun (the king who is the owner of the palace in heaven)

Obba atere kari aye (the king whose being spread over the whole earth).

Oba lana, oba loni, oba titi aye ainipekun (the king of yesterday, the king of today and the king who reigns in the world without end).

Oba arinurode, olumoran okan (the king who knows the inside and outside and the thought of every man)

Oba alewilese, oba aleselewi (the king who has absolute power to say a thing and then do it and the king who has power to decree a thing).

Oba adakedajo (the king who is the silent judge)

Oba to nsohun tenikan o le se (the king who has ability to do what no man can do)

Oba asoro maye (the king whose word does not change).

Furthermore, several of the choruses that are sung in our contemporary church do reflect the people's understanding of the kingship of God. Three of such choruses are:

1. *Mo beru*

Mo beruo

Mo berue

Oba to da aye

I fear you/3x

The king who has made the universe.

2. *Kabiyesi o, Hosannah o*

Eyin Jesu Kristi Oba aiku/2x

Egbe e ga

Eyin Jesu o

Eyin Jesu Kristi Oba aiku.

*Kabiyesi*²⁶, Hosannah

Give praise to Jesus Christ, the eternal king/2x

Lift Him up high

Give praise to Jesus

Give praise to Jesus Christ, the eternal king.

• *Oba to ju Oba lo/2x*

Your excellency *Kabiyesi o*

Oba to ju oba lo.

The king who is greater than other kings/2x

Your Excellency *Kabiyesi o*

The king who is greater than other kings.

Conclusion

It has been established in this paper that the kingship of God is a major concept both in Ancient Israel and our contemporary society. For Isaiah, the prophet saw God as the heavenly king who is seated on the heavenly throne. Also unlike the idols and earthly kings, he recognized God as the creator who is self-existent, immortal redeemer and the Holy one who reigns forever.

Our contemporary prophets and church leaders, like Isaiah, have a good grasp of the kingship of God as reflected in various names and titles given to God as well as numerous choruses that are sung to worship His kingship. Indeed, a proper understanding of the kingship of God will go a long way in our acts of worshiping Him. **Notes and**

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Notes and References

1. J.D. Watts, "Images of Yahweh: God in the Prophets" in R.L. Hubbard, R.K. Johnson and R.P. Meye (eds.) *Studies in Old Testament Theology: Historical and Contemporary Images of God and God's People*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), p. 135.
2. For detailed on this methodology, see, Justin S. Ukpong, "International and Decolonization of Biblical Studies" A commissioned Paper Presented at the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) Conference at Lagos State University, Ojo Lagos State. (July 6-9, 2004), p. 7.
3. The name "Amoz" should not be confused with the Prophet Amos cf. C.R. North, "Isaiah" in G.A. Buttrick et al (eds.) *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 5 volumes, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1984), 2:732.
4. For detailed information on the historical background of these four kings, see John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 4-17.
5. Levi Dawson, *The History of Israel*, (London: John Murrah Publishers, 1984), p. 83.
6. See John Bright, *A History of Israel* Third Edition, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 288.
7. Ibid.
8. John A. Martin "Isaiah" In John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Faculty: Old Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985), pp. 1029-1030.
9. R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co; 1982), p. 13.
10. For detailed discussion on both Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, see R.E. Clement, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 20-22 and R.E. Clements, *One*

Hundred years of Old Testament Interpretation, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 54-55.

11. R.B. Dillard & T. Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1995), pp. 269-270.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 324, 337.
17. Oswalt, *The book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, pp. 36-44.
18. The kingship of God is equally well discussed in the Book of Psalms especially, the Royal psalms which include Psalms 2, 8, 10, 24, 25, 47, 74, 89, 98 and 149.
19. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, p. 176.
20. Isaiah's vision of God is similar to what some other prophets experienced Ezekiel 1:3-28; Daniel 7:2-9: 10, etc.
21. Some of the verses include: Isaiah 1:4; 5:19; 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37; 23; 40:25; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14, 15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5, 55:5; 60:9, 14 cf. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, p. 33. The phrase 'the holy one of Israel' occurs only 6 times outside the book of Isaiah in 2 Kings 19:22, Jer. 50:29; 51:5; Psa. 71:22; 78:41 and 89:18 cf. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
22. N.H. Ridderbos, "Isaiah" in J.D. Douglas (eds.) *New Bible Dictionary* Second Edition, (Leicester, England Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), p. 525.
23. E.B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman, 1962), p. 14.
24. J. Omosale Awolalu & P. Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Religion* (Afrel), (Ibadan, Onibonoje Press, 1979), p. 141.

25. Pastor S.O.A. Aremu, CAC Agbala Iyanu, Ogbomoso December 2004.
26. Kabiyesi is a compound Yoruba word *Ka bi o si* which literally means "you dare not query him on anything he does". The English equivalent is your Excellency.