

AFRICAN CULTURE AND THE CHALLENGES/ INFLUENCES OF CHRISTIANITY WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO NAMES IN YORUBALAND

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is an all-pervasive and universal phenomenon. Each society and community of the world has its own peculiar culture which is distinct. The Africans in general, and Yorubas in particular, have their unique cultures which are much cherished and of great importance both locally and internationally. Awolalu puts this assertion right when he says: "No African group has had greater influence on the culture of the New World than the Yoruba."¹

However, with the introduction of Christianity a culture of the east repackaged and embellished by that of the West - African culture began to give way to this new culture. Ironically, Yoruba culture still flourishes in the New World in an unmistakable form. In the words of Bascom: "In several parts of the Caribbean and South America, Yoruba religion has been accommodated to Christianity, with Yoruba deities identified with Catholic Saints; in Bahia and Havana, especially, Yoruba religion flourished in an unmistakable form, whereas in Africa it has steadily given way during the past century to both Christianity and Islam."² Thus, it is axiomatic that our culture has been greatly affected by Christianity. One example of this is in the change of names from African to Christian.

Certainly, culture is dynamic and there is what sociologists refer to as cultural accommodation. Are we now saying that abandoning our culture, especially changing our names, an integral and so germane element of our culture, under the guise of superiority of Christianity, is an acceptable cultural dynamic?

Is it really true that until you change your name, after being saved, from Esubiyi, Sangolade, Ogunrinu etc. which are African names, to Jesubiyi, Moboluwarin, Olurinu, you will not be identified in the heavenly roll-call? Furthermore, is there anything like theology of changing vogue among contemporary African Christians? These and other related questions are what the paper is out to explore. In order to do justice to this, we will firstly clarify the concepts in question. Thereafter we will examine the Yoruba culture with emphasis on names, influence of Christianity and the changing faces of the Yoruba nomenclature, before we finally draw inferences from our findings and then evaluate.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

a. Culture: Cohen's assertion on culture is a good starting point for us. He states that "culture is plausible and seemingly easy to attain, yet it is difficult a goal to reach."³ This is due to variety of meanings attributed to it by various scholars in diverse disciplines. Consequent upon this, we shall try to display as many definitions as possible so as to have a proper perspective and broader overview of what culture is.

Etymologically, culture was from the Latin word "cultural", which means the cultivation of the soil. Comparatively, it also denotes the cultivation of the human mind via education.⁴ However, culture gradually moved from this original classical meaning

to a social condition and dimension from where it took upon itself several meanings. In the words of Dzurgba, "culture became associated with works of art, intellectual works, articulation of ethical principles, religion, politics and trade. This pluralistic concept of culture grew into a holistic way of life."¹⁰

Goodenough, who cites E. B. Tylor, defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of a society."¹¹ He expresses further that, culture can be seen and understood in two perspectives – the phenomenal and ideational order. The former posits culture as a property of a society or group which does not distinguish humans from other social animals, while in the latter it is a product of learning that consists of what the members of a human group have to know in order to function acceptably as members of that group in the activities in which they engage.¹²

Spencer also subscribes to this holistic concept of culture when he asserts that "it is the way of life shared by a group – a system of ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, expressiveness, and customs transmitted from generation to generation within a social group."¹³ This idea was shared by Otite and Ogionwo, though with modifications. They postulate that culture can either be used colloquially or scientifically. In colloquial terms, it denotes that someone has or does not have good manners or behaviour. Scientifically, culture is defined in blanket terms as the total way of life of a people.¹⁴

Redfield, cited in Bock, defines culture as "the conventional understandings, manifest in act and artifact, that characterize societies."¹⁵ It is deducible from these definitions that while some scholars believe culture is an abstraction that refers to everything the people in a particular group do, others see it in a wider dimension that affects the physical and mental behaviour of the members of a group. Culture comprises both material and non-material aspects; material in the sense of visible or concrete acquisition of man in society – artifacts such as houses, hoes, pots etc; non-material in the sense of values, norms, ideologies, knowledge, language, etc. Both material and non-material go together as the culture of a people.¹⁶

Taking cognizance of this, we want to agree with Defleur's submission that "culture refers to the total of all material, social, and symbolic creations that a society's members have incorporated into their overall design for living... the social heritage of a society."¹⁷

b. **Name:** Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines name as "what a person or thing is called; the particular word(s) regularly connected with a person or thing so that you can recognize, refer to or address them."¹⁸

A name is also "a word or group of words used to refer to an individual entity (real or imaginary); the name singles out this entity by directly pointing to it, not by specifying but as a member of a class."¹⁹

Giving of a name is customary and culturally bound. Even the Bible, according to Motyer, is no stranger to the custom, now virtually normative, of giving a name simply because it appeals to the parents.²⁰ There are different types of names and diverse ways of giving names. There are surnames, family names, personal names, baptismal and nicknames. Each of these names have reasons and basis for giving them. Motyer asserts that there are seven categories of names which incidentally underlie the purpose of giving names. These are: the statutory occasional, eventual, circumstantial, transformational or alteration at predictive or admonitory, and precative cum theophoric names.²¹

c. **Christianity:** This is a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and on the belief that he was the son of God.¹⁷ Christianity as a word only occurs in the Bible in the form of a nick name given to the believers in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Its Greek form "Christianismos" meaning Christianity, was first used by Ignatius; while its Latin, *Christianismus*, occurs in the works of Tertullian and St. Augustine. *Christianitas* another Latin derivative from, where our English Christianity emanated from, occurs first in the Codex Theodosianus. The name was coined by Christians to designate all that which Jesus Christ brought to them of faith, life and salvation.¹⁸

Historically, Christianity did not begin as a fully developed religious institution; rather, it began as one small sect in an out of the way province. The group was one among the many reforming sects, or splinter religious groups, within the diverse spectrum of Palestinian Jewish society.¹⁹ They sought to draw adherents exclusively from among fellow Jews, and they expected an imminent apocalyptic consummation of history and the establishment of a new, messianic social order. However, a new phase of diffusion began with Paul's Gentile mission. This culminated into the great problem of how Gentiles might be brought into the Jesus sect, taking cognizance of its strictures on Jewishness. To address this, Paul and others had to begin to work out a synthesis for Jewish and Gentile Christians to live within that society.²⁰

On the whole, Christianity is the religion founded upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Today, it is a world-wide religion and indeed contains the world's largest religious group. It has influenced government, thought, and art for almost 2,000 years.²¹ It has, of course, influenced the Yoruba people.

SUCCINCT HISTORY OF THE YORUBA

Bascom contends that the Yoruba of West Africa are one of the largest ethnic groups south of the Sahara, and in several ways one of the most interesting and important peoples of Africa.²² Geographically, it lies between the parallels 5.86° and 9.22° north, and between 2.65° and 5.72° east.²³ It is bounded in the south by the Bight of Benin, with extension from the eastern limit of Dahomey on the west to the western border of the kingdom of Benin on the east. It is bounded by the territory of the same kingdom in the east and by the Niger up to Etobe at about 7.3°N. The northern boundary continues along the 9° of latitude north of Jebba until it merges with the political boundary between the Northern provinces and the Southern provinces of Nigeria, which ends at the river Okpara on the French frontier.²⁴

The Yoruba, according to Lloyd, "are not really a single tribe, but (are) a series of diverse peoples bound together by common language, dress, symbolism in chieftaincy and ritual, as well as mythology and history."²⁵ Hence, within the larger Yoruba group are several sub-groups. In fact, history made us to understand that the designation "Yoruba" was originally applied to the Oyo subgroup who lived in Katunga (old Oyo) kingdom. This name, according to Bascom, was given to the Oyo Yoruba by the Fulani or the Hausa and is said to mean "cunning".²⁶ He asserts further that, originally, there was no comprehensive name for the Yoruba as a whole, and people referred to themselves by the name of their subgroups. The largest of these were the Oyo, sometimes referred to as "the Yoruba proper", and in some areas old men still deny that they are Yoruba since they belong to different subgroups.²⁷ Corroborating this diversity, Lloyd posits that the Yoruba of Nigeria are divided among over fifty kingdoms.²⁸

These subgroups include: the Ana (Ife); Isah (including the Mainigiri) astride the Togo Dahomey boundary; the Idasha (Dassa), an enclave in Dahomey; the Shabe (Ishabe, Share); Ketu (Iketu); and Ifonyin (Oho, Aho); Holli, Nago, Angago, (Dje) astride the Dahomey Nigeria boundary; the Awori, Egbado, and Egba of Abeokuta province and the Federal District; the Ijebu (Jebu) of Ijebu province and the Federal District; the Oyo of Oyo, Ilorin, and Ibadan provinces; the Ife Ijesha (Jesha) of Oyo Province; the Ondo, Owo, Ilaje, and Ekiti of Ondo province; the Igbomina of Ilorin province; the Yagba, Bunu, and Aworo (Kakanda) of Kabba province; and related Itshekiri.²⁹

Meanwhile, in spite of these diversities, there is a cultural uniformity among the Yoruba groups that clearly differentiates them from their neighbours. Parrinder points out that they are among the most numerous and coherent of the peoples in Africa. "Not only that, they were the most urbanized people in precolonial Africa." Scores of the Yorubas are also found in America as a distinct group. Parrinder confirms this when he says:

The Yoruba are also well known in the Americas where in some places, they have maintained their ancient customs virtually intact, in what Roger Bastide calls "preserved religions" to distinguish them from mixtures like voodoo. This great authority says that 'of all the African religions that have been preserved in America, it is undoubtedly that of the Yoruba which has remained most faithful to its ancestral traditions.'³⁰

This was corroborated by Awolalu who submits that there is a group of black Americans who colonized a place in South Carolina and called themselves the Yoruba group. They began to attract public attention in the U.S.A. around 1973-74 and, in his words, "they claim to be living the Yoruba way, for according to them, to live the Yoruba way is to rediscover the culture of the black Americans because most black Americans have their origin in West Africa, particularly, Yorubaland."³¹

From the above analysis, it is implied that the Yoruba are not a single tribe, but comprise several clans that are bound together by language, history, traditions, religious beliefs and practices. Their identity as Yoruba is more of response to the European presence then, and is often used situationally.

According to Slamone, who himself cites Eades, Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper, the Yoruba as an identity came into existence as a response to the European presence. Indeed, until fairly recent times, it has been a situational one, used when affiliation with a group larger than one's town was necessary. "Today, the Yorubas are the people that are bound together by that historical linkage to Oduduwa and they occupy a large area in South Western Nigeria, with pockets of them found scattered in other parts of Nigeria, some West African countries and even North and South America."

YORUBA CULTURE WITH EMPHASIS ON NAMES

As far as Africans in general and the Yorubas in particular are concerned, we cannot speak of the culture without instantly thinking of traditional religion. This is because the entire culture is saturated with religion. No wonder Idowu writes, "the keynote of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity."³²

Names, which are an essential element of the culture, clearly reflect their religious

nature. Ilesanmi posits that naming is a socio-religious activity among the Yoruba. One cannot properly discuss naming without understanding first of all their philosophy concerning children. The Yorubas, according to him, believe that a childless life is a calamitous life, a wasted existence.³⁶ In fact, producing children affirms the (unending and) continuity of the family's deity worship. He writes further:

Psychologically, they are signs of the natural productiveness of their parents. Their presence gives assurance to the aged parents that they would have a honourable burial. With the children around there is the guarantee that the worship of the family deity would not end with the death of the aged member of the family. Family professions and family titles are guaranteed by the presence of children... In fact, the children are the soul of the Yoruba culture. This continued growth of the culture depends on the continued production of children who can be incorporated into the oral cultural system to carry on the tradition.³⁷

Names are very important and significant among the Yoruba, unlike in European culture, where names are just to distinguish one person from the other. The Yorubas are not like that; nearly every name is a complete sentence. Not only that, Yoruba names are highly meaningful and are given for various reasons. Because of the roles of names in Yoruba culture, the Yorubas attach great importance to it.

This understanding was best articulated by Idowu when he writes:

Every Yoruba name has a character and a significance of its own. No child is given a name without a cause; and that cause is not the bare, inevitable one that a child must be born before it can receive a name! Every one of the names is almost invariably a sentence, or a clause, or an abbreviation of a sentence which can be broken into component parts. Besides, the name must tell some clear story, whether it be of the circumstances surrounding the child's birth, the state of the parents' or family affairs when it is born. Also with the Yorubas, the name represents character and the essence of personality, as among the Hebrews.³⁸

Thus, names are given after historic events such as wars, plagues, droughts, coronations, visitations of notable strangers, victorious deaths of heroes etc. The implication here is that such names will serve as reminders of the events and circumstances after which they were given. For example, a child called Babarimisa (father dodged me, or ran away at my approach) refers to the fact that the father of the child died when he was still in the womb; Aworinade (Ifa cult enters into the royal household); Ojewole (masquerade worship has entered our home) etc.

Another unique feature of Yoruba names is the monopoly of a certain name's prefix by some families or clans statutorily or for professional purposes. This, however, depends on the divinities such families or clans are worshipping. For instance, a family where Ifa (the oracle divinity) is worshipped, has names that always begin with "Ifa" or Awo-Ifatoki, (Ifa needs to be praised), Fawenu (Ifa knows one's heart or washes barrenness out of the stomach), Fasolu (Ifa is Lord), Awojobi, Awotunde, Fasawe, etc. The hunters who worshipped Ogun, the god of iron and one of the primordial divinities, had their nomenclature stem from Ogun: Ogunkunle, Abogunrin, Ogunbusola, Odewale, etc. In short, names in Yoruba-land are usually prefixed by the appellations of the divinities being worshipped. Thus we have Sangodele, Oyategbe, Oyamakinde, Irokogbemi, Ogunrinu, Fagbemi, Awojobi etc. From the mere mention of such names,

individuals are not only identified as persons different physically from others, but in the words of Ilesanmi "their status in the community, their rights and privileges are also defined by the names they bear."⁴⁰ It is in this perspective that one Yoruba proverb becomes more meaningful: "Eni ti ako ba bi ni ile ade, ko gbodo fade somo loruko," meaning "one who is not born to a royal family should not name his child after the crown".

There is also the opinion that names influence the bearers psychologically, that is, men act according to their names. E.g. anybody called Ajanaku (elephant) would want to behave mightily, while somebody called Okin (peacock) would try to act gracefully. A host of Yoruba names are brought from heaven (oruko amutorunwa). This centers on the manner of birth of the baby, e.g. Oke (a child born wrapped with membrane), Ige or Adubi (a child who stretches out the legs or the arms at the time of delivery); Omope (a child that is abnormally overdue before it was born); Lomitutu (a child that is allergic to warm or hot water or to any herbal preparation boiled in water).⁴¹ The Yoruba also have names for Abiku (incarnated child believed to have been previously born several times and with high probability of future premature death). Among these names are: Aja (dog), Malomo (do not go again), Kokumo (do not die again), Rotimi (stay with me) etc.

One can infer from the foregoing that in Yoruba socio-cultural context, everybody has to bear a name to which great importance is attached. So also, every name has meaning and purpose for bearing it. Names do not only serve the purpose of identification but they also "historicise, socialize, spiritualize and influence people psychologically."⁴²

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHANGING FACES OF YORUBA NOMENCLATURE

The actual contact of Christian missions with Nigeria started with the Portuguese and Spanish Missionary activities in Benin between 1645 and 1655. It is therefore not unlikely that ramifications of those early missions reached the Yoruba country, particularly Ile-Ife, which is only 180 miles away from Benin.⁴³

However, Christianity was properly introduced to Yorubaland around 1841, through the efforts to ex-slaves who were settled in Sierra Leone after their liberation. This was confirmed by Idowu who writes: "Christianity came again into Yorubaland, according to recorded history, in 1841, pioneered through the slaves who were liberated in Sierra-Leone. It came accompanied by Western culture and dressed up in European garb."⁴⁴

Suffice to reiterate here that those who advocated the introduction of Christianity into the Yoruba land were not the members of the Yoruba traditional society, but the Westernised liberated slaves. According to Awolalu, these people felt that "they were missing (in Nigeria) the sort of Western Education and Christian fellowship which they used to enjoy in Freetown. They also wanted their people in Nigeria to benefit from the light they had received."⁴⁵ It was therefore not a surprise that the missionaries were mainly received by these liberated slaves who were scattered all over important towns and villages, especially Badagry, Lagos and Abeokuta, on their arrival.

It should also be born in mind that our ancestors invariably accepted Christianity originally for pure economic reasons. Awolalu in his realization of this asserts that "the people in Badagry accepted Christianity for economic reasons, not for spiritual upliftment, nor from the conviction that Christianity was better than the traditional

religion."⁴⁶ Ajayi also confirmed this when he writes "they had welcomed missionaries, not because they wanted Christianity, but because they were weak and poor and they hoped that the missionaries could attract some trade back to the town."⁴⁷

Eventually, Christianity spread throughout the entire Yorubaland though with resentment and much struggle in some areas, the account of which is not our concern in this paper. Since then, there have been continuous impingements on the traditional religion and culture by this new faith. In his attempt to evaluate the assessment of Christianity's influence on traditional society then, Awolalu writes:

With the arrival of the missionaries in the middle of the nineteenth century, a new set of religious ideas was introduced, and new social groupings established. New converts, in some cases, were largely withdrawn from the community. They set out with the intention of converting the so-called 'heathen' to their own views in all things – religious, moral and social. This might be regarded as reasonable from their point of view, but they obviously assumed that the Yoruba religion was inferior to their own, naming it fetishism, idolatry, juju and heathenism. To them, to accept Christianity was the same things as accepting "civilization". And those who accepted Christianity and civilization, must, of necessity withdraw from traditional rituals of kingship which were directed to the divinities and ancestral spirits.... Thus, with the advent of Christian missionaries, a potentially violent intrusion was made into the social and political world of the Nigerian peoples. This violent intrusion also affected the religious life of the people.... The white missionaries and the liberated Africans who had accepted Christianity regarded themselves as representatives of British Christian civilization; for the Yoruba to be educated and civilized, according to these missionaries, was to adopt the British way of life and to boycott the traditional Yoruba culture.⁴⁸

Consequently, many converts had new names given to them for identification with the new religion and for easy pronunciation by the white missionaries. In the words of Arojoye, the missionaries "were baptizing the new converts and immediately giving them new names either from the Bible or from their own names that are reflective of their culture."⁴⁹

These names were mostly given at baptism. They were a pointer that one had been in contact with the overseas religion and culture. The natives felt that at baptism, the old or baby names were washed by the water in which they were immersed. Not only that, it also washed away the myth of the things of the past that were associated with tribal culture and thought to be unacceptable to Christianity and civilization.⁵⁰

If we assess critically these submissions, we must conclude that originally the missionaries were not preaching changing of names, talkless of emphasizing it. What they were after was conversion and then the giving of new names at baptism for identification and easy pronunciation. Thus, the first generation of Yoruba Christians were not really changing names but adding. Not only that, their belief was that the baptismal rite had washed away anything associated with their African names that were inimical to the new faith.

However, along the line, there arose this attitude of changing names by some so-called spirit-filled Christians or spiritual giants, especially around the middle of the last century, when there was that emotional outburst in a new dimension termed Pentecostal revival or Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Their position was that the traditional names

should be changed after conversion because they are accursed names which have some negative effects and experiences on the bearer. While corroborating this position, Okediran asserts that these people claim that whoever continues to bear such traditional names after his conversion would not receive the abundant blessings of God. He cites the example of one Obed Bashorun who is an elder in one of the Pentecostal churches in Ibadan and one Pastor. The elder opines that some Christians incur God's wrath on themselves due to the names they bear. The Pastor on his own part encourages all Christians to change their names after conversion since names carry serious meaning and consequence in the spiritual realm.³¹

The belief of these advocates of name change is that names like Ogunkunle, Oyategbe, Sangolade, Awojobi, Irokogbemi, Abogunrin, Ebguro, Awolalu, Fawenu, Fasawe, Osanyintola, Ogunrinu, Ojedele, Oyamakinde, Aborode etc, should be changed to something like Olukunle, Jesutegbe, Jesuroyi, Jesutobi, Kristigbemi, Aboluwarin etc. It is expedient and pivotal at this juncture to examine some personalities, so as to grasp their understanding and why they changed their names, on one hand, and some who bear names associated with Yoruba deities and do not change them on the other hand, before we can arrive at any evaluative conclusion.

Among those who had changed their names include Ayokunle, Chukwudile, Oyebola, Jesudokun, Oset and Jesusolu. According to Ayokunle who was formerly Ogunkunle, people with these names eulogizing African deities should change them since there is even a theology of changing names coined out from the scriptures. Quoting Proverbs 22:1, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches..." he said it will be a misnomer for him to bear and thereby exalt the name of an idol, since he believes and always emphasizes the power of confession, and names really imply our confession. He maintained that the conviction to change his name came from God. He heard a voice in 1984 that said "If I will use you, I will have to change your name." He however had to struggle for twelve years, since, he never wanted to change it considering what people would say, especially his family members. He posits further that it even results to split personalities and confusion, when you bear Ogunkunle and there is no Ogun in the house.³²

In his own case, Chukwudile, the National President of Children Evangelism Ministry Ilorin, an Igbo man who changed from Ofodile (oracle is powerful) to Chukwudile (God is powerful), asserts that after the conversion of all his family, they went into five days fasting and prayer in January 1st - 5th, 1997 to break the covenant with traditionalism. They consequently burnt all the idols and charms in their possession. Consequent upon this, God spoke to him on 7th April, 1997, at 8.00 a.m., that he should change his name from Ofodile to Chukwudile. Even though he disliked this, he had to obey God. He therefore remarked that if God is the one leading, it is good, but if it is not God, one may not change it since He is omniscient.³³

Biodun Oyebola believes there is a lot to a name; hence he dropped his original surname "Shofunke" (wizards give me to nurture) for Oyebola (chieftaincy mixes with wealth). His understanding was that Shofunke conflicts with God's counsel and it is fetish cum idolatrous. Hence, bearing such a name is like praising other gods, which is contrary to the will of God (Ex. 23:13; Ps. 16:4; Hos. 2:17; Jos. 23:7).³⁴

The story of Jesusolu is quite interesting. His original surname was Fasolu, meaning Ifa is Lord, in Ijesha dialect. The name belongs to his great grand father, who was a powerful traditionalist and warrior. The grand father passed on this power to his

father and in fact he himself was to succeed his father in this Ifa divination profession.

After his conversion and deliverance from the covenant attached to the name, for he had serious negative experiences and attacks from demonic forces, marine spirits, etc., he still maintained the name. He never thought of changing it, since he is the only surviving son of the father and thus wanted to preserve that heritage. He, however, affirmed that it was God Himself who changed the name to Jesusolu (Jesus is Lord) because of his calling into the ministry.⁵⁵

He testifies further that he experienced such a terrific demonic attack due to the fact that the powers of darkness recognized his place among them. In fact, the particular date and year he should have become a powerful man in the kingdom of darkness like his great grandfather was the time the issue of the call became more pronounced, confirmed and authenticated. Thus, he had no option than to comply when the issue of God changing the name came.

As far as Peter Jesudokun (Jesus is universal), the president of one Neo Pentecostal Church in Ilorin, is concerned, he was not directed by God to change his name from O Gundokun (god of iron is universal) to Jesudokun. He changed it because he believes Ogun the god of iron is not universal, but Jesus is. Similarly, Emmanuel Adedayo Oset, a prominent Pentecostal Minister of God at Ilorin and General Overseer of Canaan Ministry, was of the opinion that names that have prefixes of any of the African deities should be changed, maintaining that it is biblical. He however asserts that it is only the first personal name that must be changed and not the surname, since God deals with every individual by the personal names.⁵⁶

In sharp contrast to the above beliefs and standpoints is the postulation of African theologians and leaders who recently observed critically that an African can bear his native name and still remain a Christian. They opined that names have no significant role in the redemptive work.⁵⁷ This submission was corroborated by Aworinade, Irokogbemi, Aborode, Funmi Ojo and Fawenu in an academic interactive session.

Aworinade categorically affirms that he never believes in the theology of changing names. He argues that Israel was a name added to Jacob and not that Jacob was dropped, because the name Jacob became prominent even after his encounter with God (c.f. Gen. 32:2-28); 33:1; 35:1; 37:1; 47:7-11 etc). He stresses further that if there is any name to be changed, it should have been Jabez but God never changed it, rather he only answered the prayer of Jabez by breaking the demonic covenant associated with that name. While he agrees with the effects of names, he said it is only when one is under bondage of sin that negative effects exist. After conversion, Jesus has the power to destroy every curse. In fact, he sees this issue as being the result of ignorance of God's power which leads to limiting God. He submits that the old traditional name promotes evangelism.⁵⁸

Similarly Ojewole, whose appellation has bearing with the Yoruba idol of masquerade, also disagrees with the idea of changing names, except if God commands it. Even though he believes that certain demonic covenants are usually attached to African names, he opines that rather than changing names, it is such covenant that should be broken. If the name is changed and the covenant unbroken, it is like cutting a tree in the middle; it will eventually germinate again. He therefore emphasizes sanctification of the name instead of changing it.⁵⁹

In like manner, Aborode, whose name also has to do with idol worship, disagrees with the notion that African names have negative influences on the bearers. He states

that he has not and will not change his name. Despite the fact that he has not changed, things are working normally for him. He therefore perceives the people who changed their names as behaving abnormally and as people with hidden agenda. After all, a name has nothing to do with salvation and faith.⁶⁰

In the perception of Fawenu, whose prefix stems from an oracle divinity, bearing the name helps him to cherish the fact that he is born again. This is what his people used to be; where he is coming from, but now he is worshipping Christ the name exalts Christ. Despite the fact that he has been challenged on several occasions by people that he should change the name, he never bothered to because he did not buy the idea of doing something because others are doing it, neither is he under compulsion. So, he is not going to do that unless there is a strong personal conviction spiritually and rationally. He nevertheless admits the fact that he always prays against any genealogical or generational curse that might be associated with the name. He believes that God answers because he never experiences anything negative. He reiterates that he does not believe in any theology of changing names.⁶¹

EVALUATION

From the foregoing, it is clear that change of names leads to loss of identity. People and, importantly, incoming generations will find it an uphill task to trace where they are coming from. In some cases cultural heritages have been terminated. The African culture is gradually being eradicated. This action implies that we are agreeing with the notion of the Westerners that our culture is inferior to theirs.

All this is resulting from wrong indoctrination and mentality; fear of what people will say; what has happened and what will happen in future; hypocrisy⁶²; "holier than thou" attitude, for people to know that we are now on the side of the true God. Some even change because of the influence of friends.

It is pertinent to reiterate here that there is no scriptural support for the issue of changing names and that there is no theology of changing names enshrined in the Bible. People whose names were changed in the scriptures were for specific reasons. Abraham's name is an epitome of the beginning of a new man. Saul had his name changed to Paul for missionary purposes. Saul was a Jewish name meaning desire, while Paul is a Gentile name meaning "small" or "little". How could he have changed from "desire" to "small" or "little" ordinarily, if not for the evangelistic and missionary purpose? He changed for the fact that his ministry was to the Gentiles, so that the people could pronounce it well or even identify with them. Paul never preached to or forced the Gentiles to do what he had done, because it was irrelevant to them.

Moreover, the meanings of most of these biblical names we cherish today show that they are not religious names and even connote negativism more than Yoruba names. For instance, why do we prefer Caleb, which means "dog"; Mary, which means "bitterness"; Cecilia, which connotes blindness; and even George (farmer); to our own native names.

Is it not a misnomer for someone to drop Kalejaiye (stay and enjoy life an Abiku name) and still be bearing Caleb (dog which is also a name for Abiku in Yoruba), or for someone to drop Osunfunmi, Osunfunke (river goddess give me to look after) and yet retain Mary or Cecilia? Taking cognizance of this, we even can deduce that Yoruba names are more religious than the so called cherished Hebrew names.

Further to the above is the fact that the names people are changing are really not

their names but their surnames or family names. If really names influence the bearer psychologically, is it the name of your great grand father that has died or your personal name that will influence you? Is the effect of generational curse transferable through name or blood, that is, because of the same blood? These are some fundamental questions we must be able to address sincerely before taking any action. Indeed, changing their family names and not their personal names is a pointer to the fact that these people do not understand and know who and what they believe. After all God is a respecter of culture. Go into all nations and preach the gospel (Mk. 16:15) implies all tribes, ethnic groups and cultures. It says preach the gospels, not "change names".

Not only that, the fact that the Jerusalem council resolved that the Gentiles should be left alone to practice Christianity devoid of any Jewish customary rites is an indication of the uniqueness of each culture and that Christianity is to be practiced within and in line with the cultural framework it finds itself. It is on this realization that the paper agrees with Hastings, who also cites President Mobutu of Zaire, that "authentic African culture and authentic African names must not be disdained nor discarded but be revived from cultural imperialism of the West with which Christianity has most closely linked."¹

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have attempted to explore the meaning and significance of names in relation to the African culture and the influence of Christianity vis-à-vis the name changing vogue among the contemporary Yoruba Christians. We examined the two positions those who changed and those who have not and are still bearing names associated with African deities.

As this study shows, majority are changing names not really because of conviction but because of the mentality associated with names and wrong indoctrination by Bible preachers and teachers. It is hypocrisy in the highest sense. You are changing names yet you are not living a balanced, righteous life with God.

In compendium, this paper wishes to emphasize and state categorically that changing of a name has nothing to do with our destiny and faith. It is not the changing of names that matters but the change of hearts. It is high time we faced the reality of practicing our Christianity in our African context. If the early church did not force the culture of the Jews on the Gentile Christians, why then are we fooling ourselves today?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Bible teachers and preachers and indeed everybody must have the right value and theology.
- We need to be well grounded in the Scriptures by ourselves so that we will not be confused and our emotional cum spiritual insight and intelligence played upon.
- There is the need to refocus and receive the religion as it was originally, devoid of the culture of the west.
- People should have the correct perspective of names in relation to salvation.
- Building and maintaining sincere relationship with God is of utmost importance.
- More research and enlightenment campaigns are necessary on this so germane a topic so as to open the eyes of the people in the church.

End Notes

- ¹ J. O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (Essex: Longman, 1979), p. xiii.
- ² W. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1969), p. 2.
- ³ Y. A. Cohen, eds. *Man in Adaptation: The Cultural Present* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Coy. 1974), p. 1.
- ⁴ A. Dzurgha, *God and Caesar: A Study in the Sociology of Religion* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, 2002), p. 14.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ⁶ W. A. Goodenough, "Culture," in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*. Eds. David Levinson et al., Vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1996), p. 291.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-293.
- ⁸ M. Spencer, *Foundations of Modern Sociology* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1990), p. 53.
- ⁹ O. Otite and W. Ogionwo, *An Introduction to Sociological Studies* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1979), p. 44.
- ¹⁰ P. C. Bock, *Modern Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 17.
- ¹¹ O. Otite, and W. Ogionwo, *An Introduction to Sociological studies*, pp. 44-45.
- ¹² M. L. Defleur et. al., *Sociology: Human Society* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1979), p. 96.
- ¹³ Paul Procter, *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 936-937.
- ¹⁴ P. W. Goetz, et al. eds. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. 24* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1987), p. 728.
- ¹⁵ J. A. Motyer, "Name", in *New Bible Dictionary*, eds. J. D. Douglas et al. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), p. 728.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 810-821.
- ¹⁷ John Sinclair et al. eds. *BBC English Dictionary* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), p. 195.
- ¹⁸ M. C. Tenney eds. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 1963), p. 67.
- ¹⁹ L. M. White, "Christianity", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1 A. C. eds. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 926-928.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 928-929.
- ²¹ *World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: World Book Childcraft International, 1980), p. 406.
- ²² W. Bascom, *The Yorubas of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 1.
- ²³ N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), p. 21.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ²⁵ P. C. Lloyd "The Yoruba of Nigeria" in *Peoples of Africa*, eds. J. L. Gibbs Jr. (Prospects Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1965), p. 547.
- ²⁶ W. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 5.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

- ²⁸ P. C. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 551.
- ²⁹ W. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 5.
- ³⁰ G. Parrinder, while writing foreward to J. O. Awolalu's *Yoruba Belief and Sacrificial Rites* (Essex: Longman, 1979), p. ix.
- ³¹ P. C. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 547. See also Frank A. Salamone, "Ethnic Identities and Religion", in J. K. Olupona and Toyin Falolu (eds.) *Religion and Society in Nigeria: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 55-56.
- ³² G. Parrinder, while writing foreward to J. O. Awolalu's *Yoruba Belief and Sacrificial Rites*, p. ix.
- ³³ J. O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Belief and Sacrificial Rites*, pp. xiii-xiv.
- ³⁴ F. A. Salamone, "Ethnic Identities and Religion," pp. 60-61.
- ³⁵ E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (Ikeja: Longman Nigeria Plc., 1996), p. 5.
- ³⁶ T. M. Ilesanmi, "Naming Ceremony Among the Yoruba," in *ORITA* xiv/2 (December, 1982), p. 108.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- ³⁸ E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 30.
- ³⁹ In the interview conducted with Akinlolu Aworinade at Gbongan on 28/02/03. He asserts that Aworinade was his father's name and his grand father's name was Fatoki. Fatoki gave birth to Aworinade when Fatoki's father was being crowned as the Olubuse I, Ooni of Ife, hence the name.
- ⁴⁰ T. M. Ilesanmi, *ORITA*, p. 112. See also W. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 56.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- ⁴³ E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 224.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- ⁴⁵ J. O. Awolalu *Yoruba Belief and Sacrificial Rites*, pp. 186-187.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- ⁴⁷ J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891* (Essex: Longman, 1965), p. 34.
- ⁴⁸ J. O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Belief and Sacrificial Rites*, pp. 190-191.
- ⁴⁹ M. A. Arojoye "Baptismal Rite and Baptismal name in Christ Apostolic Church with Specific reference to World Soul Winning Evangelistic Ministry (WOSEM)" a B.A. Long Essay in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, May 1999, p. 89.
- ⁵⁰ J. S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*. (Guildford Survey: Biddles Ltd., 1971), pp. 110-112.
- ⁵¹ Wale Odediran, "Christians and the Name Changing Vogue", *The Nigerian Christian* (July, 1997), 9.
- ⁵² Interview with Supo Ayokunle, Pastor in charge, Orita Basorun Baptist Church Ibadan, 21 February, 2003.
- ⁵³ See M. A. Arojoye, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ⁵⁵ Interview with Jesusolu, Ilorin, 27 February, 2003.

⁵⁶ M. A. Arojoye, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁵⁷ Andrian Hastings, *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976), p. 37.

⁵⁸ Akinlolu Aworinade, Interview Gbongan, 28th February, 2003.

⁵⁹ Peter Ojewole, Interview, Ogbomoso, 29th February, 2003.

⁶⁰ Hexekiah Aborode, Interview, Ilorin, 2nd March, 2003.

⁶¹ B. O. Fawenu, Interview, Ilorin, 2nd March, 2003.

⁶² Amos Ogunbusola, Interview, Ilorin, 27th February, 2003. He himself wanted to change because of a message a pastor preached at a crusade. But his father who is also a pastor turned the request down technically. The father nevertheless ascertained that he had broken whatever covenant associated with the name. He equally confirmed the fact of people changing the name for him e.g. In his fellowship "TACSFON" where he is the secretary, the President never like Ogunbusola and in any of their programmes always write Olubusola. He himself, however is still waiting for his father to do the changing if need be.

⁶³ Andrian Hastings, *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation*, p. 37.