



AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

A FETSCHRIED IN HONOUR OF
REV. PROF. ISAAC DEJI AYEGBOYIN *FINAL*
PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY



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AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

A Festschrift in Honour of
Rev. Professor Isaac Deji Ayegboyin FNAL @ 70
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African Christianity's Disposition to African Identity and Sociological Matters Arising

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Abstract

Church historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, among others, have written extensively on the interface between African Christianity and African culture, with insignificant attention paid to the issue of identity. This paper, in the attempt at filling the lacuna in previous studies, examined generally the disposition of African Christianity particularly some selected Pentecostal churches to African's cultural and traditional religious identity with emphasis on their sociological implications. Leaning on interviews conducted with members of selected churches such as African Independent and Pentecostal churches such as Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, The Apostolic Church, Christ Apostolic Church, and Living Faith Church in Ibadan, there is further explication of issues bothering on interface between African Christianity, cultural and traditional religious identity in Nigeria. Data obtained were analyzed using content analysis and discussed within the ambit of Émile Durkheim's functional theory of religion. Consequently, it is revealed that the teachings and practices of selected churches affected positively and negatively African cultural elements such as traditional names, marital status and social grouping. This, therefore, calls for a review of the practical interface between African Christianity and African cultural practices in such a way that the two would harmoniously work towards the production of a society that blends tradition with modernity.

Introduction

Many scholars particularly Church historians¹, anthropologists², and sociologists³ among others, have written extensively about the interface between African Christianity and African culture with insignificant attention paid to the issue of identity which is one of the key issues in the discourse. This is the lacuna this paper intends to fill, as it discusses the disposition of African Christianity, particularly some selected Pentecostal churches to Africa's cultural and traditional religious identity, with a view to underscoring sociological matters arising from it. In terms of methodology adopted in interrogating our subject of discussion, we had interviews with a few members of African Independent and Pentecostal churches such as Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, The Apostolic Church, Christ Apostolic Church, and Living Faith Church in Ibadan on issues bothering on name, marital status and social grouping. This was complemented with experiential approach which is predicated on our many years of sociological studies of religions in Africa and Nigerian societies. The data obtained were analysed, using content analysis and discussed within the ambit of Émile Durkheim's functional theory of religion, which states that religion functions in society by providing social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs; provides social control to enforce religious based- morals and norms to help maintain conformity and control in society; offering meaning and purpose to answer any existential question⁴.

African Christianity

From a layman's point of view, African Christianity is defined as Christian practices and beliefs in Africa. The emphasis is on the practices and not beliefs because Christian basic beliefs are universal, but the practice differs from one continent to another. In other words, we used the term African Christianity to refer to Christian practices by Africans and in African ways without necessarily deviating from the basic Christian fundamental beliefs and practices. We also want to note that given the fact that the term African Christianity is broad in scope, we shall limit its use to Nigerian churches, particularly the ones selected for the study which had been mentioned earlier. We limit our scope to Nigerian churches but with emphasis on some selected churches in Ibadan because of the obvious fact that, since the introduction of Christianity into Nigeria in the mid-19th century, as argue by Ayegboyin, the nation has witnessed a bewildering number of types of Christianity⁵. It is in the light of this development

¹ J.K. Ayantayo and S.A. Fatokun. (2005). "Religion and Culture" in G.O. Oguntomisin and V.O. Edo (eds.) *African Culture and Civilization: A Textbook for G.E.S. 102*. Ibadan: General Studies Programme (GSP), University of Ibadan. 41-51.

² Aylword, S. (1973). *African Culture and the Christian Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.

M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu. (1992). *The Social Anthropology of Africa: An Introduction*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.

³ J. K. Ayantayo. (2012). "Religion and Nigerian Culture" in A.S. Jegede, O. A. Olutayo et al (eds.) *Peoples and Cultures of Nigeria* published by Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan. 337-343.

⁴ <http://courses.lumenlearning.com> retrieved 30 January, 2019

⁵ I. D. Ayegboyin. (2017). "Taxonomy and Revolution in African Christianity: The Nigerian Experience". An Inaugural Lecture delivered on Thursday 9th. 13.

and obvious fact that Ayegboyin and Asonzeh-Ukah came out with what they call the taxonomy of churches in Africa⁶.

According to these scholars, the churches comprise: Mainline churches- those Christians who separated from Rome in the eleventh century through the great Eastern schism, and whose distinctive liturgical features are the Byzantine rite on doctrinal basis, and the acceptance of the first seven ecumenical councils, up to second council of Nicaea in 787⁷; Ethiopian Churches - the type of Churches that broke away from the mission churches because of their high-handedness; African Indigenous Churches- they are the churches that made concerted efforts to adapt Christianity to the African condition rather than accept the foreign trappings of western missionary religion; Pentecostal churches- the sects which have traditionally placed emphasis on the speaking and receiving of certain gifts of the spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophesying and healing as a sign of baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Of all the four types of churches mentioned so far, we paid attention to a few African Independent and Pentecostal churches. These churches, among other things, placed high premium on the concept of being born again as a form of identity. Pentecostal churches are known for this belief so much that some scholars classified them as Born Again Movement⁸. The belief in born *againism* has implication for the concept of African identity, which we shall dwell on significantly in subsequent discussion in this paper.

The Concept of Identity in Africa with emphasis on Yorùbá society

By a way of description, identity is synonymous with phrases such as individuality, uniqueness, distinctiveness, self, character, and personality of a person at one time or the other. Identity, as a concept, may be defined from: an individual person, cultural, occupational, social, political, economical and moral perspectives. However, what is common to the different basis or forms of identity is the fact that it (identity) is a thing that differentiates a person or community from the others.

When interpreted from the perspective of individuality, it may connote the name of a person. Name, in our usage, is a word that refers to or that can refer to a specific person. Therefore, name could also mean what someone is called or known by, whether real or imagined. It singles out the identity of an entity by directly pointing to it⁹. For the purpose of emphasis, we need to reiterate the fact that names are of different categories and are broad because almost everything has a name. But for the purpose of our study, we shall limit our discussion to name or names an individual bears. In some sections of Africa, names are associated with religious beliefs and practices, and family lineage. As such, they provide information about past and present religious beliefs and practices, which could, in a way, give reason why such information has to be preserved for the future or in the future. The preservation of such names becomes a religious/family pride as the case may be. As a matter of fact, every family is always conscious of what people say about her family name; the reason

⁶I. D. Ayegboyin and Asonzeh-Ukah (2008). "Taxonomy of Churches in Africa: The Case of Nigeria". *JOT: Ogbomosho Journal of Theology*, Vol. XIII (1).

⁷I. D. Ayegboyin. (2017). "Taxonomy and Revolution in African Christianity: The Nigerian Experience"... 15.

⁸W.J. Hollenweger, (1972). *The Pentecostals*. London: SMC. xvii. In I. D. Ayegboyin and A. Ishola. (1997). *African Indigenous Churches: A Historical Perspective*. Lagos: Greater Heights Publications. 17.

⁹*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*. (1974), Vol. 12, London: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. 814.

being that, as far as the Yoruba people are concerned, names are one's possession and a strong mark of identification¹⁰.

As it has been argued in the past, names tell the world what a person is because it is glued to one's personality¹¹. This perhaps explains why some parents or grandparents in Yoruba community always think of which name to give their grandchildren on hearing about their births. This practice is predicated on the proverbial saying: *Ile la a woki a to s'omoloruko* - meaning, 'we look inward into the house to determine what name to be given to a new born child. The implication of this practice is that names are not given for their sake because they go with meanings associated with lineage and circumstances surrounding one's birth.¹²

For instance, someone who does not come from royal lineage cannot give royal related names to his/her children. Taking this to religious realm, each religious practitioner gives his/her children names that depict his/her religious beliefs. We have a few example of name depicting traditional religious beliefs, royalty, family occupation and lineage. For example, names such as: Falope- to Ifa be the gratitude; this name is given to children of Ifa devotee (Ifa is a divinity of wisdom in Yoruba community of South Western Nigeria); Adeyemi - Crown fits me; this is given to a child from royal family; Ojenti- the *Oje* are the traditional entertainers who wear mask for entertainment. The name Ojenti suggests that one is proud of entertainment profession; and Ayantayo, meaning, one is pleased or being happy about drumming as a professional occupation.

When viewed from the perspective of group of individuals, the identity may be construed as something that has to do with what distinguishes groups (ethnic, religious, cultural) from another. By implication, each ethnic, religious, cultural group in Nigeria can be differentiated from the other by the names they bear, and these symbolize their identities. For example, names like John and Mubarak indicate Christian and Islamic identities respectively, while names such as Adekunbi, Chinedu, and Danladi are pointing to Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa ethnic identities respectively. Names like Ernst, Friedrich, Hans, Heinrich, Hermann, Karl, Otto, Paul, Walter, Wilhelm, Gerhard, Günter, Hans, Heinz, Helmut, Herbert, Karl, Kurt, Walter, and Werner pontificates towards German identities. The same could be said of European names indicating European identities such as James Smith, Michael Smith, Robert Smith, Maria Garcia, David Smith, Maria Rodriguez, Mary Smith, and Maria Hernandez. Conversely, Chinese identity is reflected in name such as Nguyen, Lee, Kim and Patel, Wang, Li, Zhang, Liu, Chen, Yang, Huang, Zhao, Wu, and Zhou. In the same vein, names such as Aarav, Vivaan, Aditya, Vihaan, Arjun, Reyansh and Sai are examples of Indian identity.

One important thing we need to add to this discussion is that identity is a product of culture and can be called cultural trait, knowing full well that culture is the totality of man's life. This is amplified by Iwe, who defines culture as a way of life that reflects people's distinctive genius and spirit, their fundamental character or ethos, value orientation, world-

¹⁰ O. A. Oyerinde. (2001). *Isomoloruko - Naming in Yoruba in Akojopo Imo Ijinle Yoruba, Apa keji*. Alagba Tunji Opadotun (ed.) Ibadan: Oyo State College of Education Publication Series.93.

¹¹ J. K. Ayantayo. (2017). *Character Speaks*. Ibadan: Samprints and Graphic and Co.

¹² M. Oduyoye. (1972). *Yoruba Names: Their Structure and their Meanings*. Ibadan: Daystar Press. 63.

view, institutions and achievements in the various fields of human endeavour – legal and literary, artistic and scientific, religious, philosophical and technological.¹³

For this reason, we can safely argue that culture plays an important role in shaping identities, particularly when we look critically at activities of man on daily basis. This is so because culture is the combination of values, beliefs, and practices of a particular group. The importance of stating this fact is that identity is an innate thing, and this could be one of the reasons, among others, why individuals, group of individuals behave in a unique way at one time or the other. The identity is fully grounded in the history of a people, even though history has witnessed some elements of dynamism. It is important to note that the identity at any point is both absolute and relative. The absolutism has to do with some identity traits that have been institutionalized, particularly the aspect dealing with non-material culture, which consists of knowledge and beliefs, norms and values, signs and language¹⁴. The relative aspect of culture has to do with material elements, such as tangible objects and all kinds of physical objects produced by man such as hoe, bow, car etc. The point we are making here is foregrounded on anthropologist's definition of culture. Anthropologists define culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other habits and capabilities acquired by members of society¹⁵.

Finally, it should be noted that in African society, identity in some cases is constructed, reconstructed and sometimes conceived or attached to where, when, how one was born, one's completion, one's height, the place and the circumstances associated with someone's birth.

The Disposition of African Christianity to African Identity

As a tool to sustain African Christianity nursed and nurtured in African ways, a few of African churches engaged in what we can call identity review. This relates to some aspects of identity such as individual identity, name identity, social group identity and marital status identity. We shall discuss this as follows:

Individual Identity

As a way to sustain the new ideology of identity reconstruction, some African churches launched an attack on what are considered African names that have traditional religious flavour. This is evident in the way African Christianity added a new dimension to the identity of those who are converted from traditional religion to Christianity. This is evident in their emphasis on the term "born again". The term 'born - again' in Christianity generally refers to "spiritual rebirth", or a regeneration of the human spirit from the Holy Spirit, contrasted with physical birth. The phrase is used to describe someone who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is important to add that the *born again* came to refer to a conversion experience, accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in order to be saved from hell and

¹³ N. Iwe. (1985). *Christianity and Culture in Africa*, Onitsha: University Press Limited.

¹⁴ P. Hammond, (1979) *Anthropology: Introductory Reading: in Ethnology* (2nd ed), New York Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc., p20

¹⁵ K. Ogunbameru, (2000) "Culture: The Fabric of Human Society" in *Man and His Social Environment* (eds) Ogunbameru, K. and Rotimi, W. Lagos: Cardinal Crest Ltd, p51

given eternal life with God in heaven, and was increasingly used as a term to identify devout believers¹⁶.

History has it that the term *born again* has become widely associated with the evangelical Christian renewal since the late 1960s, first in the United States, and then around the world. Evangelical Christianity, which some people call evangelical Protestantism, is a worldwide, trans-denominational movement within Protestant Christianity which maintains the belief that the essence of the Gospel consists of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ's atonement¹⁷. It believes in the centrality of the conversion or "born again" experience in receiving salvation, the authority of the Bible as God's revelation to humanity, and in spreading the Christian message. The movement has had a long presence in the Anglosphere before spreading further afield from the nineteenth, to early twenty-first century.¹⁸

Arising from the born again mentality associated with African Christianity (which borrowed much from mainline churches) is the change of name phenomenon. For instance, during the first period, the Roman Catholic missionary, while acting on Council of Trent (1563) instructions and laws, insisted that the priests administering baptism gave names of Catholic Saints to new converts believing that their traditional names are evil or substandard¹⁹. The Anglican, the Baptist and Methodist churches among others apparently followed Catholic's pattern by substituting traditional African names with Biblical and sometimes European names which are called baptismal namers such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Esther, Deborah, Sarah, Cook, Brown and Stone, to mention but a few. This phenomenon is what Church historians like Ayandele dub as Christianization and Europeanization of Africans, which according to him disturbed African society²⁰.

However, the Independent African Churches (AIC) protested against the Europeanization of converted African Christians and therefore accommodated native names, including traditional religious names. What was of importance to them (AIC) was the submission of the lives of converts to Jesus. This allowance brought a relative relief to those who would have been forced to drop their names going by the first dispensation earlier discussed. This explains why pioneers of the Churches such as Sadare and Odubanjo, formerly of Precious Stone Society and later Christ Apostolic Church, retained their local and traditional religious names.

Paradoxically, some Pentecostal churches, particularly the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFM), reverse the allowance to bear traditional name which was possible in the (AIC). The Pentecostal churches in question alluded that traditional names, a few of which are related to divinities such as Ogun – Yorùbá god of iron and users of iron, Ifa, the

¹⁶M. S. Mullen in G. T. Kurian. (2012). *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, J. Wiley & Sons. 302.

¹⁷Brian Stanley Initials before surname. (2013). *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*, Vol. 5. 11.

¹⁸ Brian Stanley. (2013). *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*, Vol. 5. 11.

¹⁹ U. T. Nwangu. *The Journey of Aesthetic Names: Understanding the Meaning and Cause of your Name*. Lagos: Nuzomat Communications, n.d. 44.

²⁰E. A. Ayandele. (1966). *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. London: Longman Group Ltd.

Yoruba god of divination and wisdom, have demonic and negative spiritual connotations, hence must be changed or totally replaced with 'God' related names. On this account, names such as Sangogbemi (Sango – Yoruba's god of thunder favoured me) is changed to Oluwagbemi God favoured me; Fatowoju (Ifa is worthy of being looked upon) is changed to Jesutowo (Jesus is worthy of being looked upon) and; Oguntunde (Ogun, Yoruba god of Iron has come again) is changed to Olutunde (God has come again). A few others include *Jekayinfa*, meaning, "Let us praise *Ifa*" which is changed to JekayinOluwa, that is, "Let us praise God"; Ogundemilade, meaning, "Ogun has crowned me", is replaced with Oluwademilade – "God has crowned me"; Oguntomisin – "Ogun is enough for me to worship" is changed to Jesutomisin– "Jesus is enough for me to worship" and; *Ifafoore*– "*Ifa* has spoken well" is replaced with Oluforesayemi - "God has spoken well of my life". Consequently, there is an insistence on the complete liberation of the whole person from the shackles of pagan names with all their demonic manifestations. It is in the light of this that Ruth-Marshall describes Pentecostal Christianity as an institution which brought about a model for the construction of identity²¹.

Marital Identity

Some Pentecostal churches in Africa, especially within Nigeria, also reconstructed Africa cultural identity associated with marital life by given their members new religious orientation about marriage. The traditional African people placed much premium on polygamy and it was considered as a sign of political and economic strength. For instance, polygamists argue that the ability to have and manage two or more wives is a sign of political strength, while feeding many mouths by a number of wives and children they have is also a sign of economic strength. Hence, they proudly say they are much better than monogamists.

In the same vein, we notice through observation that some Pentecostal and Independent African Churches in Nigeria such as Christ Apostolic Church, The Apostolic Church, did not see much spiritual sense in polygamy and therefore gave new orientation to their members, convincing them that the Bible teaches one wife and one husband. Such churches quote some Biblical passages to back up their claim. Consequently, the new teaching – 'one wife and one husband' - became institutionalized in such a manner that in some African churches, it becomes a requirement or a condition for taking up some ecclesiastical positions such as deacon, deaconess, and accessing some doctrinal practices. For instance in Christ Apostolic Church, where I serve as a church warden, a polygamist is not allowed to take Holy Communion and could not be made an Elder or Deacon in the church. He/she is limited to take certain offices. Not only this, he/she must have married in the church and possess church marriage certificate. For this reason, the church thoroughly screens the marital profile of every potential church officer. It is so alarming that those who had married two wives or more before their conversion were asked to do away with others and remain with one wife before such individual could enjoy some liturgical services of the church. It is important to apportion the practices to denominations concerned as there are many AICs that are built on African world. Such denominations would not reject polygamy.

²¹ R. M. Fratani. (1998). "Mediating to Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism". A paper presented at the IFRA seminar of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, on the 27th of April. 5.

Social Grouping

African Christianity also embarked on what can be called gospel of social grouping which is quite different from the ones associated with an African culture. In the past African society, there was a strong belief in the culture of consanguinity that is otherwise known as blood relation or the property of being from the same kinship as another person and the quality of being descended from the same ancestor as another person. However at present, this has been grossly eroded. The practice was so strong that there were several families/social groupings. The family or social group emanating from the culture of consanguinity was formed with reference to gender and age. Among the Yoruba, we have groups such as *omookunrinile*, that is, male children of the family and *Omosuile*- that is female children of the family. We also have those that come under age grade such as *odomokunrin*- male youth and *odomobinrin* - female youth, *Agbailelokunrin* – old men and *Agbaillobinrin*-old women. These groups of people meet periodically such as 17days interval to discuss issues bothering on the welfare of members. They dine and wine during their meetings. The meetings also provide avenue for addressing social immorality found among anyone of them within the scope of their ethos. Rules and regulations made by this group are binding on their members. The belief is that blood relation is more sacred than other relationship.

African identity so nursed and nurtured within the context of culture of consanguinity has also suffered some setbacks with the emergence of new Christian group in the name of Christian fellowship. Christian fellowship comprises of Christians of the same or different denominations coming together to worship, praise, and adore God through His son Jesus Christ in a particular geographical place at one time or the other. Apart from worshipping God, they study the Bible together, reflect on it and discuss how it should be applied to their daily Christian lives. Christian fellowship occurs when two or more Christians are in one another's company for the purpose of reflecting on the Christian faith. The fellowship dated back to the early church Acts 2:42 when early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowshiping, and breaking of bread and prayers. This was done in accord by attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, receiving their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2:46-47).

Today, the fellowship has been enlarged more than the period of early church when new converts were meeting and praying at a point while waiting for the coming of Holy Spirit. It also takes different shades and colours, going by the fact that some of them are formed on the bases of with reference to gender (male and female Christian fellowship) denomination (Shalom Fellowship or Grace Fellowship), interdenominational - Baptist Christian Fellowship or Christ Apostolic fellowship, ethnic (Igbo Christian Fellowship or Deltans Christian Fellowship). In most cases, some of the fellowships meet at houses (house fellowship) and in churches. The activities of some of them have, in most cases, been integrated into the general church activities, timetable, schedule and programmes. Members of the Christian Fellowship are fond of calling one another brothers and sisters. They also take advantage of the Social Media: Facebook group, Instagram group, and Google Scholar group, Twitters group to socially and religiously interact, network and integrate with one another. They share ideas, biblical video, films, songs, sermon among others with one another. The issue of brotherhood could be explained in context of Jesus' declaration ...his mother and brethren 'were' those who did the will of God.

Sociological Matters Arising

At this point, we want to point out some sociological matters arising from the disposition of African Christianity to African identity. We used the term sociological in the context of social interaction, networking, and integration which are integral part of human relations. With this understanding, we can argue that the disposition of some churches to the issues of identity earlier enumerated have both positive and negative effects on social relations among Africans. The effects show that religion has both functional and dysfunctional disposition as identified by Durkheim.

On the positive note, we are of the opinion that, the disposition of African Christianity to traditional cum religious names, marital status and social grouping is that African culture is not static and hence, it is adaptable to change. The adaptation, in our view, brings about what we describe as identity acculturation or cultural modification. It implies adaptation to or borrowing of some identity traits of other people's culture including religion. Sociologically, acculturation is not totally dreadful because it gives allowance to learn from others. Adaptation or borrowing from other people is becoming expedient with the emergence of globalisation. Globalisation, according to King and Albrow, is the concrete harmonisation of the world as a whole, which involves a new conception of the world as a single and unified place.²²

Therefore with globalisation, no individual or group of individual could remain in what we can call identity or cultural cocoon because the world now is conceived as 'global society', 'global community', 'international society', and 'global village'. This is so because as pointed elsewhere, globalisation is the construction of oneness of the world. Thus, it is a move towards global unit in all aspects of human life: social, cultural, political, and economic²³. For example, globalisation in relation to communication connotes the existence of World-satellite Information System. On economic matter, it implies global pattern of production, consumption and consumerism. Culturally, globalisation suggests cultivation of cosmopolitan lifestyles. In the field of sport, it represents a creation of global sport such as the Olympic Games, world football competitions, international tennis matches and the spread of world tourism. In the area of politics, globalisation is concerned with the emergence of world political systems such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, coupled with the creation of global political movements such as Marxism, extension of the concept of human rights, the decline of the sovereignty of the nation state and the growth of a global military system.

Given this, it is a fact that the emergence of African Christianity and the progress it had made has widened the horizon of African people in all aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life. Little wonder why one of the interviewees, who is a member of Aho-Agbeja Christian Fellowship, averred that joining Christian fellowship has additional advantage because according to him, the fellowship provides opportunity to: mix and interact with people different from their locality and demonstrate sincere love for Jesus (1John 4:19-20; Romans 12:9-16); experience mutual acceptance of one another among radically different people (Rom. 15:7); gain opportunities for joy, mutual comfort, unity, encouragement and peace

²² Martin Albrow Initials before surname... and Elizabeth M. King (eds.) (1990). *Globalization, Knowledge, and Society: Readings from International Sociology*. Sage Publications. 20.

²³ G. Marshall, (1996) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* New York: Oxford University Press, p 202).

(2Cor. 13:11; 1Th. 4:18; 1Th. 5:11) and receive mutual encouragement and growth that comes from corporate worship before God (Col 3:16).

In addition, the constant mention of the need to be born again by manifesting the fruits of the spirit such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (Galatians 5:19-26) and doing away with old things such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders and drunkenness to a level helps some Christian to develop new character. There is such the tendency to advance moral transformation and discipline among them. We are not saying that African culture allows immorality, but the point we are making is that the constant reminding of church members through sermons and Sunday school class by the church go a long way to influence positively the character traits of Christians. In effect, Émile Durkheim's functional theory of religion, that religion functions in society by providing social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs; provides social control to enforce religious-based morals and norms to help maintain conformity and control in society among others, is activated.

Conversely, we also notice that the disposition of some churches mentioned above to identities related to name, marital life and social grouping is negative. For instance, the demand of some churches for change of name on the ground that traditional names have demonic connotation is imaginary. This is because names are more important to the namers than the named. Some of the names condemned had nothing to do with worshiping of idols. The mentality of African Christianity about traditional religion is an elongation of colonial and Western mentality and mindset that suggest that African religions are essentially idolatry, paganism, animism or totemism. Some names such as Ogundele, Ojewumi, and Onayemi had to do with family occupation such as hunting, entertainment and ornamentation. They have nothing to do with the so-called idols.

What is worrisome is that change of name phenomenon has wide implications for individuals, group of individuals and the entire Yoruba religious community in general. On the part of individual, the person changing his/her name is likely going to lose his/her identity because change of name would bring about cutting off his /her name from the family identity he/she had hitherto associated with. With the change of name, it becomes difficult to trace his/her family genealogy. It is interesting to note that some family names are very popular to the extent that members of such family are likely to enjoy public pride, integrity and honour.

For instance in Ogun State Nigeria, names such as Soyinka (the family name of Nobel laureate- Prof Wole Soyinka), Tejuoso (the family name of incumbent Oba Osile, Oke Ona, Egba, Ogun State), and Shonekan (the family name of interim President) are very popular. The history of a family and its name, the public pride, integrity and honour it attains give them upper hand above others to enjoy loan facilities in some banks. Therefore, a person changing his/her names from Soyinka to Oluwayinka, Shonekan to Oluwanekan or Tejuoso to Tejuoluwa, would have something to lose, though, he/she is creating a new identity, which would take a long period to gain popularity. In addition, changing name is tantamount to rebelling against one's background or genealogy, which is an act interpreted as sacrilegious as evident in Yoruba popular dictum which says: *Omo ale nif'owoosijuweile Baba re*. This means "only a bastard point to the house of his father with a left hand". Change of name in

history always brings about discord in the family. The translation of Yoruba expressions to English may not necessarily be direct.

From sociological point of view, it is arguable that the change of name could lead to crisis of identity, which Eriksson refers to as crisis within the concept of self²⁴. Thus, taking cue from Eriksson, we can define crisis of identity related to name as a situation when someone or group of people have lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity. It occurs when someone for one reason or the other does not see sense in the name he bears or given to him/her by parents. Identity or the question about identity is always of social significance because one's identity has social implication. Identity tends to display 'self' or 'I' in the midst of 'thing'. In modern sociology, identity is used widely and significantly in reference to one's sense of 'self' and one's feelings and ideas about oneself. In the light of this, we can speak of gender identity, class identity and religious identity. Sometimes, many Yoruba people believe that people's identity comes from the expectations attached to the social roles that they occupy in society at one time or the other.

On the issue of new social grouping which manifests in form of Christian fellowship, our argument is that as good as the fellowship is, experience shows us that it has technically reduced the tempo of African spirit of consanguinity and the premium placed on blood relationship in which children born of the same mother (having sucked the same breast) or grown up in the same compound have potentials of advance social cohesion. More often than not, most members of Christian fellowship who believe that their fellowship, which comprise members who are of different ethnic backgrounds, believe that the fellowship is more important than the blood related fellowship. In fact, the people at the grassroots, from where members hail from, are regarded as unbelievers because they are the one sustaining the traditional festivals, norms and activities of the local community. Because of the church teachings on the need for members to do away with their local traditions particularly the Pauline injunction that: *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? And what fellowship can light have with darkness?* (2 Corinthians 6:14), NIV we observed that many members of Christian fellowships feel at home with their Christian fellowship than the traditional fellowships. They have the impression that if they seek out fellowship with other believers, they will find themselves surrounded by new friends who will be their companion always without reference to stringent conditions like the one associated with their family/social group. This development - new fellowship in Christ - has dealt heavy blow on African culture as most Christians have abandoned their traditional cum domestic responsibilities associated with their family root in the name of new group-Christian fellowship.

The new born-again Christian give far reaching meaning to the fruit of the flesh which some of them see as characteristic of African traditional religion. By so doing, some African cultural practices such as polygamy and identification with family totems among others are viewed as adultery and idolatry. Consequent upon this, many modern Christians, or better put, born-again Christians deliberately cut off from the family root, believing that their family

²⁴ G. Marshall. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, 232 – 233.

traditions are antithetical to the new faith²⁵. These category of people lean on Luke 18:29 which states: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God".

From the above discussion, we can argue that African Christianity have brought about what can be referred to as identity destruction, which can be defined as obliteration, belittling and damaging of unique traits of an individual or group of individuals. Identity destruction, in most cases, begins with what can be called brainwashing, which psychologists refer to as mind control, coercive persuasion, thought control, thought reform, and re-education. It is the concept that the human mind can be altered or controlled by certain psychological techniques. Brainwashing is said to reduce its subject's ability to think critically or independently, to allow the introduction of new, unwanted thoughts and ideas into the subject's mind as well as to change his or her attitudes, values, and beliefs²⁶. On this account, brainwashing occurs when a new orientation is given to a person who suggests doing away with his /her previous cultural orientation to which a person was born, integrated, nursed and nurtured. The destruction goes with what can be likened to shaking the foundations upon which the culture of a people is built in such a way that someone is completely alienated from the existing culture or identity. With new identity African Christianity imposed on Africans through Christian teachings, many Christians experience what sociologists regard as social alienation, that is, a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment²⁷.

The alienation is manifested in the ways and manners by which some African Christians isolate themselves from their kinsmen by detaching, distancing, separating, parting, cutting off, turning away, withdrawing themselves from anything traditional, including traditional social grouping, festivals, dressing, diet, and other socio-religious engagements, which are unique to their families or the communities they hailed from. This development consequently led to a state of depersonalization or loss of identity in which the self seems unreal, thought to be caused by difficulties in relating to society and the resulting prolonged inhibition of emotion.

Furthermore, the alienation often leads to entrancement, which occurs when a person's conscious mind recedes and the subconscious becomes more evident, enabling the more direct suggestion and changing of thoughts that shake their foundations and moving them towards different ways of thinking and breaking with the past. This further weakens the unique ties that bind individuals together. With this, the person who dissociated himself/herself from her/his traditional home or religion or culture ended up in beginning a new relationship with new friends, and religious leaders as well as their beliefs, values, models and worldview.

²⁵ This is one of the teachings of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry (MFM) I watched on the Church's Television station.

²⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological> (Accessed, November 18, 2018)

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_interaction (Accessed, November 18, 2018)

Conclusion

This paper has, in conclusion, shown that the disposition of African Christianity to cultural and traditional religious identity in Nigeria is both positive and negative. The two have sociological implications for the sustainability of African identity. However, the emergence of acculturation arising from it presupposes that African culture is not static but dynamic. Nevertheless, there is need to foster African identity without which African culture is likely going to oblivion. This, therefore, calls for a review of the practical interface between African Christianity and African cultural practices in such a way that the two would work harmoniously towards the evolution of a society that blends tradition with modernity.

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