

An Igwebuikwe Approach to the Study of African Traditional Naming Ceremony and Baptism

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Abstract

Numerous African Independent Churches have obviously taken the initiative of adapting the Christian religion to the mentality and lifestyle of the African people. These adaptations have been achieved in the area of liturgy: sacred music, dancing, drumming and the use of African art and local materials at worship. These communities of believers have adapted the devotional prayers and hymns to suit the African mode of worship and needs. However, with recent developments in the area of inculturation, the Catholic Church has also advanced considerably well in the area of Africanizing the Christian message. These advancements notwithstanding, there still remains a wide ground to be broken. And one of these areas of concern is the possibility of a putting together a liturgical rite that combines the rites of naming ceremony and baptism at the same ceremony. This piece, therefore, discusses the importance of such a synergy and the difficulties in its realization. It strongly believes that there is the need for a cultural renaissance for a deeper africanization of the Christian message in such a way that the experience of the gospel message not only finds expression through elements proper to the African culture, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies culture, transforming it so as to bring about a new creation. For the purpose of this study, the Igwebuikwe Indigenous method of inquiry was adopted to emphasize the relevance of culture as a vehicle for the conveyance of the Gospel message. The theological

theory of inculturation has been patronized so as to bring out the theological imperatives for the study.

Introduction

One of the common rituals among the diverse African societies is the Life Circle Rituals, also called Rites of Passage or Rites of Initiation. Gennep (1960) defines this as “groups of rituals which celebrate transition from one phase in the life of an individual or a community to another” (p. 5). Fairchild (1965) defines it as “the ceremonies which cluster around the great crisis of life, or periods of transition from one status to another, notably birth, puberty, marriage and death” (p. 262). The performance of a particular rite of passage would mean that the person involved has passed from one stage to the other. These rites ensures a change of condition from one religious or secular group to another; it signals an outburst of new life due to the intervention of the divine; it recognizes the divine order; and re-enacts the archetypal patterns of the gods in *illo tempore* (Madu, 2011). In every rite of initiation, four stages can be mapped out: preparation, separation, transition and reincorporation. The rites of passage among Africans include: pregnancy, birth, puberty, marriage and burial rites.

Pregnancy rite facilitates the birth of the child and protects the mother and child from evil powers and malignant persons through offering a sacrifice. It is a rite of separation of the child from the world of the ancestors and incorporation into the world of human beings. It begins as soon as the woman misses her period. Most times, oracles are consulted as soon as a woman conceives and sacrifices offered. Why are oracles consulted? Ezenweke (2012) holds that it is generally believed that children have come from the divine with a message for the community, consultations

with diviners helps the community to know the message the child has brought.

Birth rites vary from one culture to another. However, in most African cultures, there are two stages of it: purification rites and naming ceremony. The purification rites according to Metuh (1985) begin after the woman gives birth, she and the child are secluded for purification. To establish the community ownership of the child, the umbilical cord connecting the mother and the child is cut as a sign of the incorporation of the child into the community. After the purification rite, the naming ceremony begins. Puberty rite introduces the child into the rights, privileges and duties of adulthood (Kanu 2018). Marriage as a community affair and discussions begin only when both families consent. The rite for the dead comprises two rituals: burial rites and funeral rites (Kanu, 2018).

This paper on the traditional rites of naming ceremony borders on the second rite of initiation, that is, the birth rites. Beyond a phenomenological study of traditional naming ceremony, looming at the horizon of this paper is the need to propose ways this can be inculturated into the Rite of Baptism in the Nigerian context. A detailed study of baptism would be taken for granted given that the audience is group of theologians. This study is targeted at retelling the African story, which has always been a 'single story' with the aim of minimizing apparent misconceptions and pave a way for mutual-fraternal commerce between the gospel message and local cultures.

Igwebuike Indigenous Method of Research

The method of research employed in this work is the Igwebuike indigenous method of investigation. It is anchored on the African worldview which holds that reality is related- each aspect relates

with the whole. It, therefore, understands reality within the context of relationships and experiences of interrelationships and interconnections.

This method of inquiry, therefore, forms a framework capable of harmonizing our thoughts and actions into active processes that simultaneously decolonize and indigenize. It is wholistic, ecological, cyclical and relational (Absolom, 2010). In studying African traditional naming ceremony alongside the sacrament of baptism, Igwebuiké research method understands the African traditional naming ceremony as a necessary path that was a preparatory discipline in African religious culture, to prepare the African for baptism at the coming of the Lord Jesus. In this case, traditional naming ceremony becomes a ‘school master’, given directory to the African from above to bring them to Christ. Beginning from the African traditional naming ceremony, therefore, makes it easier for the African to understand the importance of baptism. This is not in any way to equate baptism with traditional naming ceremony.

Igwebuiké is also a synergic methodology, in the likeness of the Pauline Areopagus (Act.17.23-31). At this meeting in Athens, Saint Paul, though he was not impressed at the sight of Athens, an idol-ridden pantheistic city and people, he –Paul the missionary *per excellence*, did not *prima facie*, condemn neither the idols nor the people. Paul’s sympathetic, non-dominant and non-derogatory approach created a free and natural ground for what Okonkwo (2019) refers to “his missionary-depth-grammatical-message-delivery” (p. 17). Paul proceeded with a secular wisdom and intellection and called the ‘idol-ridden-pantheistic Athenians-a “God-fearing and extremely scrupulous people in religious matters” (Act, 17:23). Paul did not gloss-over their religious and cultural values but rather showered

understanding to them. After his polite and humane method of meeting with foreigners – the gentiles, he still was vehement and firm in his solemn proclamations as the method *per excellence* for the condemnation of false gods and idolatry.

Theological Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed for the purpose of this study is the Inculturation theory. Inculturation emerged in a bid to make the Christian religion, coached in Western culture at home in Africa through dialogue. Shorter (1988), Metuh (1993, 1996a and 1996b), Crollius (1986), Schreiter (1991) and Walligo (1991 and 1996) had maintained that communication between human cultures can only take place effectively through dialogue and participation, through listening and through readiness to learn. Kurgat (2009) avers that it is only through interdependence in corporation, that conversions can successfully take place.

What is inculturation? According to Walligo (1986):

Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people.... It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity ‘truly feel at home’ in the cultures of each people. (p. 11).

Thus, inculturation is a conscious effort to help local people to be converted down to the very roots of their culture. It strives at attaining a synergy between the conversion of mind and the conversion of the way of life, so that people can live their faith in all its depth and be able to give it expression in their own way (Kanu, 2013 & 2016). Therefore, it emphasizes dialogue,

participation, through listening and readiness to learn (Kanu, 2012).

Theological Basis for this Investigation

a. Scriptural Basis

Jesus came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, His attitude towards the Jewish cult was one of Fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of His time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of Word in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, His fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented that of a “critical yes”, a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of his time. His autonomy found expression in His challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion (Kanu, 2019).

When Jesus preached the Gospel, He used categories familiar to His audience. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Matthew 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); uncaring rich (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during His time. St Paul writes, “To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some” (9:20 & 22). In this context, St Paul was talking about mission, in a way that brings the

Christian experience into the cultural experience of the local people (Kanu 2019).

b. Basis in Church Teaching

This proposal is in harmony with the economy of the incarnation and the teaching of Pope Pius XII, who in his *Evangelii Praecones* (Missionary Encyclical) addressed the missionary mandate and missionaries stating that:

The Church from the beginning down to our time has always followed this wise practice: Let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land, destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful. For the Church, when she calls people to higher culture and a better way of life under the inspiration of the Christian religion, does not act like one who recklessly cuts down and uproots a thriving forest. No. She grafts a good scion upon the wild stock that it may bear a crop of more delicious fruit (no. 66-67).

Ad Gentes that calls for borrowing from the customs, traditions, wisdom and learning of local people.

In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be. From here... the Christian life will be

accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture. Particular traditions, together with the peculiar patrimony of each family of nations, illumined by the light of the Gospel, can then be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the young particular churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, saving always the primacy of Peter's See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity (No. 22).

c. Basis in Church History

Justin the Martyr holds that different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for His service. He saw culture as a prefiguration of Christ: a *Logos spermatikos* (seed bearing word). He taught that the *Spermatic Logos* has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with Him and for Him.

Clement of Alexander established a fundamental theory- a harmony of faith and Greek culture, which places Greek philosophy at the service of faith.

Philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness until the coming of the Lord, and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of preparatory discipline for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. ... philosophy was given to the Greeks directly; for it was a “schoolmaster”, to bring Hellenism to Christ, as the law was for the Jew” (Cited in Kanu, 2019).

St Augustine taught that “as faith runs on earth and takes its citizens from all nations and languages; and faith is not to be pre-occupied with customs, laws and institutions, neither is it to reject or destroy any of these, but rather it should observe and conserve

them so that they do not constitute an obstacle to the religion that teaches the true worship of God” (Cited in Kanu, 2019).

Rite of Naming Ceremony: A Yoruba Case Study

Among the Yoruba, using Imesi Ile as a case study, naming ceremony known as “Iso Omo Loruko”, is an event during which a new born child is given a name. This usually comes up eight days after the birth of the child. According to Qurcoopome (1987), it is a rite that humanizes and socializes the child, making him or her a member of the human family. The ceremony is held in the family compound- the house of the paternal grandparents of the baby. This ceremony is very important not only for the child but also the community, as the name given to the child tells a story. Bamidele (2018) avers that:

... indigenous names, like most other African names, have high culture content. By this is meant that personal names are not simply labels used for mere identification purposes, as baggage tags are. On the contrary, an indigenous African name on the whole personifies the individual, tells some story about the parents and or the family of the bearer, and in a more general sense, points to the values of the society into which the individual is born (2018, p.3).

On the day of the ceremony, the oldest family member is given the responsibility of presiding at the naming ceremony. It begins with an opening prayer which is led by the eldest person in the family. After the prayer, he would exhort those present, reminding them of the family name and ancestry, and thanking God for blessing the family with a child. After the exhortation, the father comes forward with the mother carrying the child. It is the father who at this point would name the child. The eldest person presiding at the ceremony would then take the child in his arms and call the name of the child

after the father. This would be repeated by all those who are present. However, during the naming ceremony, some key materials are used to bless the baby. These materials include:

- a. **Honey (*Oyin*):** The president of the ceremony takes the honey or sugar and places it on the lips of the child, uttering the following words:

This is honey... take and taste. Sweetness doesn't leave honey's home. Your house will be as sweet as honey; your life will be as sweet as honey. Sweetness will be your portion in life.

- b. **Kola nut (*Obi*):** Kola nut is used for prayer against misfortune, sickness, bad omen, etc. The president of the ceremony would then take one of the kola nuts, among others, and place it on the lips of the child praying thus:

This is kolanut... take and taste. Of all the trees created by God, kolanut is among the greatest. May God make you famous and important in your family and town? Kolanut is of parts, your life will prosper and all your efforts will bear fruit. God will remove all problems from your way; peace of mind will be your portion.

- c. **Bitter kola (*Orogbo*):** Bitter kola among the Yoruba stands for longevity. At this point, the president of the ceremony would take the bitter kola and place it on the lips of the child and pray thus:

This is bitter kola...take and taste. Bitter kola will make you grow old. May you live long and longer? Your old age will not be useless and meaningless. Your old age will be

better than your youthful age. You will be left with good children.

- d. **Salt (*Iyo*):** Salt is used for cooking for the purpose of giving taste to food and it is believed that whatever you cook without salt will not be tasty. At this point, the president of the ceremony takes the salt and places it on the lips of the child and prays in these words:

This is salt, take and taste...life is sweet o, bad people cannot enter salt house. It has never been heard of that salt lost its taste; your life will not be tasteless or saltless.

- e. **Water (*Omi*):** No body hates water, neither is there anyone who can do without water in his or her life. At this juncture the president of the ceremony dips his finger in the water and drops some on the lips of the child and prays:

This is water... take and taste, water for bath, water for drinking. Eat and drink with people on the land of the living. If you drink this water, God will not allow it to run your stomach, if you bath with it, our creator will not allow it to scratch your body, take and drink and live long, and water disaster will not take you away.

- f. **Alligator pepper (*ataare*):** Alligator pepper symbolizes fruitfulness. It is used to pray for the child in these words:

This is alligator pepper, take and taste. Alligator pepper is always full of seeds. Your life will be fulfilled, you will multiple in life like 2000, 5000, and all your seeds (children) will be popular in life.

- g. **Palm oil (*Epo Pupa*):** Palm oil is used for cooking. It gives colour to food. It is used by the president of the ceremony to pray for the child in these words:

Oil is the blood of soap. This is red oil, take and taste. Honour respect, glory and peace of life will not elude you. All that makes life enjoyable, God will give to you.

- h. **Liquor (*Oti*):** Liquor does not fade or spoil. You can keep it for many years and it would not lose its original taste. It is used while praying for the child thus:

This is Liquor, Take and taste. Liquor is not rejected by people. You will not be rejected in your family; you will not be rejected in town. Happiness and good things will not elude you in life. You will have good health in life, poverty will not be your portion, and you will progress in life.

- i. **Fish (*Eja*):** Fish is known for its ability to survive. The president of the ceremony takes it and places it on the lips of child and says:

This is fish, take and taste. Fish doesn't feel cold in the river; the coldness of life will not destroy you. Fish is not sluggish in water; you will not be sluggish in life but will succeed.

- j. **Money (*Owo*):** The president of the ceremony takes money in his hands and pointing it towards the child and says:

This is money, money is used to enjoy life, take and hold it in your right hand, left hand; wander about, have it in your pocket but not on your neck (debt). You will not drop money in a leaking pocket. The God that provides will provide for you on every side. You will not make blood

money. Woman always make profit in the market, you will make profit in life.

- k. **White Cloth (Aso):** The president of the ceremony takes white cloth in his hands and placing it on the child, prays:

This is white cloth, our forefathers called white cloth, “the cloth of the gods”. It is an example of good behaviour. God will not allow people to stain you. The enemy will not have power over you.

These materials are kept on a table at the beginning of the naming ceremony for the use of the president of the ceremony. After the prayers, all present would touch the different items with their hands as a mark of their partaking in the blessings of the child. This is very important as the birth of a child in Africa is understood as a blessing to the community. This is followed by thanksgiving. A bowl is set on the table where the parents of the baby are seated, anyone who wants to give the baby a name says a prayer, drops money in the bowl and says the name they wish to give the baby. A person is assigned to note down the names given to the baby. After this, feasting and merry making follow.

The Relevance of African Traditional Naming Ceremony

The following are some reasons for naming ceremony in traditional African culture.

- a. **Naming Expresses Authority:** The naming of a child is a mark or expression of authority over the child by the parents and the community into which the child is born. Since the father is the head of the family, it is the father that gives the child a name. This explains why during the naming ceremony,

it is not the mother that pronounces the name of the child but the father. Even if in private, the mother suggested the name that the child would be called, it is the responsibility of the father to pronounce the name at the naming ceremony. Once the child is given a name, the child comes under the authority of the father, mother, family and community.

- b. Naming Symbolizes Incorporation:** The naming of a child is also symbolic of the incorporation of the child into the family or community. This is even more obvious in circumstances when the child is given the name of an ancestor of the community or family. In traditional African societies, when a child is born, diviners are consulted to know the ancestor who has returned, and the name the child would be given would be determined by the name or personality of the ancestor who has returned.

- c. Naming is Monumental:** A name is said to be monumental when it speaks of an event that has happened in a community. In this case, the name is used as a monument to recall that event. Thus, the name is not just a name or an identification tag, the name becomes a historical text.
 - i. Such names could be given at the birth of a child in whom an ancestor has reincarnated. The child, therefore, reminds the community of the blessing of the ancestor. Such names include:
 - Nnanna:* Father's Father
 - Nnennia:* Father's Mother
 - Nnamdi:* Father lives
 - Nnenne:* Mother's mother

Enyi Nnaya: His father's friend

Nnamele: Father's gift

Babatunde: Father has returned

Yetunde: Mother has returned

Yabode: Mother has returned

- ii. If a child is born at a time when the family is going through pain as a result of death, the child may be named:

Onwudinjo: Death is bad

Onwuemerie: Death has conquered

Onwubiko: Death please

- iii. If a child is born at a time when something good has happened to the family, the child might be named:

Chiamaka: God is good

Chijindu: God holds life

Chidiogo: God is generous

Chiemerie: God has conquered

Chiemeka: God has done great

- d. Naming is Prophetic:** The name given to an African child by the community can also be prophetic. A father could name a child as a prayer to bless the future of the child. Also, if after visiting a diviner and a bad omen is foreseen, a father can use a name to counter the bad omen. Such names include:

Chimamanda: My God won't fail me

Chidindu: God lives

Chinazo: God saves

Ikechukwu: The power of God

Chinedu: God leads

The Danger of a Single Story: Western Scholars' Perspective of Africa

The Western educational system, especially in the past, extolled the achievements of the West and denied African contributions so that what is known of Africa in many instances is limited to the usual stereotypes of the primitive, the savage, the inferior, etc (Onyewuenyi 1994). This is evident in the writings of many Western scholars.

Linnaeus (1735), writing in the 18th century, argues that all creatures were arranged by God in a great chain of hierarchy. In this hierarchy, the *Americanus* were considered tenacious, contented, free and ruled by custom. The *Europeanus*, he says are light, lively, inventive and ruled by rites. The *Asiaticus* are stern, haughty, stingy and ruled by opinion. *Africans* are cunning, slow, negligent and ruled by caprice. Gobineau (1853), writing in the 19th century, developed a racial anthropology, which argues that Europe had attained civilization while others, including Africa, are yet to.

As a child of the same racial climate, Hume writes: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even an individual eminent in action or speculation" (Cited in Kanu 2015a, p. 10). While Hegel avers that: "In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained to the realization of any substantial existence" (p. 93), Levy-Bruhl questions the veracity of an untutored African knowing God. Baker did not spare the Negro: "The Negro is still at the rude dawn of faith-fetishism and has barely advanced in idolatry.... he has never grasped the idea of a personal deity, a duty in life, a moral code, or a shame of lying." (Cited in Kanu, 2015b, p.10)

Unfortunately, while these were part of the curriculum of the western educational system, here in Africa, students were starved of information about their rich cultural heritage and the achievements of their ancestral home, while being stuffed with an overdose of the history and achievements of the West.

African Culture and the Missionary Enterprise: A Carryover of the Single Story

Does the white man understand our custom about land?, asked Okonkwo, “How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?” responded Obierika, and then he continued, “But he says our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe, 1958, pp. 124-125).

The developments in the areas of sociology and anthropology obviously shaped the missionaries’ conception of the African culture. The early missionaries saw the African culture in the negative light: as idolatry, fetishism, juju, animism, etc., and, therefore, treated her with little or no respect. The encounter between missionaries and the African culture can be described as a forced acculturation, which describes the situation in which the Christian culture imposed certain its elements on the African people, thereby forcing the African culture to derail from its unique tract of cultural civilization (Kanu, 2010).

Ekwuru (1999) avers that the first strategy employed was that of disassemblage, concealed in the exploitative colonial ideology of benevolent paternalism. It was first an ideology of condemnation, which identified everything “good to be white” and everything “bad to be black” (Kwame, 1981). Some missionaries made no appraisal of our peculiarities, our languages enriched with traditions of centuries, our parables, many of them the quintessence of family and national histories; our modes of thought, influenced more or less by local circumstances, our poetry which reveals the profundity of African literary wizardry. The drum was not heard in most churches, only the harmonious accompanying carefully translated European hymns sung to the tune of the west (Hastings, 1976). African names for baptism were rejected, and as a replacement, they encouraged the adoption of not only western Christian names, but also European family names like Dos Santos, Caetano, Johnson, Crowther, Anthony, Felicity, etc. The consequence is that the being, the *is-ness* of the African was affected and thus the need for a renaissance.

African Traditional Naming Ceremony and Baptism: A Search for Balance

Saint Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Africa*, observes that the African continent: “is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole.” (No. 42) Taking from this perspective, there is the need to retell the African religio-cultural story. Much of the stories we have heard presents the Christian message as an opponent of African culture and religion. The negative presentation and understanding of the African culture has led to the multiplicity of ceremonies, as African local people struggle between what has become part of their lives and the new

way introduced by the missionaries. There is, therefore, a need for a representation of the African culture in relation to the Christian message. There is also the need to reassess the multiplicity of ceremonies with the hope of deepening the faith of the African Christian. In this case, the question is, can the traditional naming ceremony, during which a child is named be merged with baptism, during which a child is also named? This brings us to the study of baptism and traditional naming ceremonies. These study, it is hope, would enhance dialogue between both ceremonies.

- a. **Both are exercises of authority-** In African traditional culture and Christianity, the naming of a child is an expression of authority over the child. The Scripture witnesses to this: “So he took some soil from the ground and formed all the animals and all the birds. Then he brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and that is how they all got their names. So the man named all the birds and all the animals” (Gen. 2:19-20). In fact, the Christian Scripture would enrich the African culture at this point, because it does not only see the naming of a child as an exercise of authority, but as the fulfilment of a divine mandate.
- b. **Both Rites Incorporates the Child into the Community:** In African traditional culture, naming of a child symbolizes the incorporation of the child into the community. In the case of baptism, the child is made a child of God and thus, incorporated into the community of believers.
- c. **Both Names are Prophetic:** The names given to children in African traditional culture and to Christians. In the Scripture, Abram was named Abraham- the father of a great nation at a

time when he had no child, the name was in this sense prophetic. Sarai was named Sarah- with reference to the future not the present.

- d. **Both names are Monumental:** African and Christian names are sometimes both monumental. For instance, in Scripture, Isaac (meaning laughter) was monumental of the laughter of the mother Sarah. Moses (meaning drawn out of water) because he was drawn out of water by Pharaoh's daughter.
- e. **Both Ceremonies are rich in Symbols:** While African culture use symbols like honey, sugar, bitter kola, kola nut, salt, water, palm oil, liquor, alligator pepper, etc., in baptism meaningful symbols abound- water, which is also used during African naming ceremonies; oil of chrisam and catechumen, which can be related to palm oil, in a limited sense though; white garment in traditional naming ceremony, which is also found in Christian baptism; candles, etc.
- f. **Both Names Indicate a New State of Life:** In African culture, the naming of a child specifies the beginning of a new phase for the child. This is not different in Christianity as the naming of a child at baptism also signifies a new phase in the spiritual journey of the child. In scripture, for instance, we have many changes in names that speak of a new phase:
 - i. Gen. 17:5, "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham. For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations";

- ii. Gen. 17:15, "Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name'";
- iii. Gen. 41:45, "Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt";
- iv. 2 Kings 23:34, "And Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim";
- v. 2 Kings 24:17, "Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah";
- vi. Dan. 1:7, "Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach, and to Azariah Abed-nego.

Conclusion: Retelling the Single Story

One of the major problems of Africa is the single or one-sided story that has been told of her by popular images. These stories suggest that Africa is a collection of wild landscapes, deadly animals and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and disease, unable to speak for themselves under the heavy weight of a religious culture that is savagery, superstitious, paganistic, etc., and awaiting to be saved by a generous white foreigner. These single stories were created and presented by popular images in sociology and cultural anthropology over and over again, to the point that Africans became this not only in the sight of her colonial masters but missionaries. The consequence of the single stories told by these popular images is that it robbed the African people of their dignity, and made the recognition of their

equal humanity difficult. It emphasized how Africa was different, negatively, without reference to our common humanity.

It is very difficult to engage with the African people within the context of evangelization without engaging with all the stories of the African people. Stories matter. They can be used as instruments to dispossess and malign. Stories can also be used to empower and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of people, but stories can also be used to repair that dignity. This is exactly where I think that African theologians and pastoral agents can come in to retell these single stories through adopting a theological method of investigation that is sympathetic, non-dominant and non-derogatory to the African culture.

This is urgent as circumstances are beginning to arise for the consideration of the possibility of making Christianity more at home in Africa through the incorporation of meaningful African values into the liturgy. And a case of great significance is the African naming ceremony and the rite of baptism. In so many parts of Africa, the traditional rites of naming ceremony is highly appreciated and celebrated. In fact, in most places, the naming ceremony is done even before the child is registered for baptism. This would imply that the child is already given a name traditionally, which becomes his or her first name, long before the child is given a name at baptism, which in many circumstances takes place about one or three months after the traditional naming ceremony.

In some traditional societies, priests have made effort to inculcate the naming ceremony to make it more of a Christian affair. In this case, the priest or catechist replaces the eldest man of the family or chief priest who would have, in the absence of the priest or catechist presided at the naming ceremony. To make it more Christian, the priest says the opening prayer, welcomes the

people and reads from the Scripture, which is followed by an exhortation on the power of a name from the scriptural perspective. Even after this development, questions continue to arise as regards the possibility of incorporating this ceremony within the rite of baptism. Here lies the challenge Catholic theologians and pastors may think about.

However, a couple of factors stand on the way to the africanization of the Christian faith. The first is the fear of syncretism. Many clergy men and lay people of the mainline churches are too cautious of giving any impression that they are syncretic or imitating the African Independent Churches who have advanced in this direction. If the African culture is not evil, immoral or superstitious, and can help give more meaning to Christian beliefs, why should these not be incorporated? We cannot move forward on the basis of fear. The Magisterium of the Church herself does more than mere alerting against syncretism: she calls for inculturation, based on a deeper knowledge and respect of our African cultural values and Christian faith! Another obstacle is distrust for things that are African Many Africans, see their traditional poetry, including freelancing with songs, dancing, and theatrical renditions as pagan. If we must progress in inculturation beyond a classroom exercise or an occasional event, there is the need to overcome the negative self-image syndrome we have of ourselves and culture.

The Igwebuike pattern of thought strongly believes that Christianity needs the African culture for its own advancement. To relegate the African culture to the background of mere obscurantism is a denigration at the expense of Christianity, a disservice to the gospel message of Christ. Christianity and the African culture are complementary. The Christian message, on the one hand, needs the African culture as a vehicle for its

advancement. The African culture at this point is at the service of the Christian message, serving as a vehicle for the conveying of the Gospel message within categories that make the gospel more meaningful to the African. On the other hand, the African culture needs the gospel message to reach its full potential. The gospel message deepens the meaning of culture and purifies the African culture of its inadequacies and integrates the authentic values of the culture.

As regards the possibility of a synergy between African traditional naming ceremony and the sacrament of baptism, this paper is not supposed to make particular conclusions. The mandate of the paper is to make general conclusions and observations for further discussions among competent theologians. This discussion is necessary, not only because there is the need to move inculturation beyond the walls of our classrooms and major celebrations, but because there is a need to make the gospel message more meaningful and relevant to the African people by employing African categories given to the African people as gifts from God in preparation for the Gospel message. For, as John Paul II, reminds us, Christian faith must become culture, since "a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived".

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