

The Social Implication of the Name “Emmanuel” to the Christian in Africa

By

Ezichi A. Ituma, PhD

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Publication details

(2006) “The Social Implication of the Name ‘Emmanuel’ to the Christian in Africa” *Journal of New Testament Research*, Vol.1, No.1, Nsukka: Biblical Research Forum of Nigeria, pp.113–128

Introduction

At various stages in the salvation history man has received certain level of the revelation of God. Every successive revelation is usually attached to a name which man comes to apprehend and appreciate his acquaintance with God. Elohim, Jehovah, I Am are examples of names which the Creator God had associated and revealed Himself in the salvation history of man. These names were not mere vocals of identity but a revelation of an attribute of God as it relates to the salvation history. The task before this article, therefore, is to show that God, though transcendent is immanent in the societies of the world, including Africa. The point of departure to this conclusion is the major names of God in the Old Testament contextualized in Matthean *Emmanuel* to establish God’s accessibility to the African.

The word, Emmanuel, occurs only once in the New Testament (Matthew 1: 13) and twice in the Old Testament (Isaiah 7:14; 8:8). Though the word was not so popular among biblical writers it has come to anchor the divinity of Jesus Christ and therefore a moving term in Christianity. But even in the Bible the Jews used it in context. If Matthew used a term that anchored on the Jewish tradition was he expressing the same stance with his people or advancing a concept that bears a shift in meaning? If he advanced a shift in meaning, how significant was that to the African? How do we trace the etymology of the word? Has the etymology any effect on the African Christian? These are the questions this article intends to answer.

Context by Etymology

Emmanuel (Emmanuel) is an indeclinable Greek masculine noun transliterated from a Hebrew noun Immanuel. The three component parts of this Hebrew noun are “*im*”,¹ a preposition — **with**, “*anu*”, personal pronoun — **us**, and “*El*” which means **God**.² The name of the deity “El” was not exclusively a Hebrew word for God. In fact, “El was at a point a generic name for God in the entire environment of the Ancient Near East.”³ It will be recalled that the Jews were descendants of Abraham, who himself had left Ur of Mesopotamia in search of a better social order. When Joshua addressed the people of Israel in Joshua 24 he insisted that they put away all the gods their ancestors served beyond Euphrates and Egypt.⁴ This is an indication that the Israelites were at a time under the influence of the gods of Mesopotamia, Egypt (Africa) and their environment. It is true one may have to differentiate between the adoption of a name and the adoption of the philosophy or being of the name. Adoption of a nomenclature or a new generic parlance is not necessarily an ontological adaptation and influence. If, on entering the land of Canaan, the Israelites adopted “El” as the generic parlance for the deity as the Canaanites, it must be understood that their picture of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is quite different from the deity of the Canaanites. This does not rule out the fact that many Israelites had adopted these foreign gods. If they had not adopted these foreign gods Joshua would not insist that they put away the gods.

The introduction and worship of “El” as a foreign god did not begin with the Jews in Palestine as already pointed out. When Jacob left his father-in-law, his wife Rachel stole her father’s household gods.⁵ How much Abraham’s Yahweh is different from the “El” of the Canaanites may be difficult to

express. Anderson has noted, “It is hard to tell just what the religion of the patriarchs was, because as we have already pointed out, the traditions of Genesis have been revised in the light of the Exodus and Sinai covenant.”⁶ “El was the head of the divine family of Canaanite deities.”⁷

El, with its extension — Elohim and Elyon — is an anthropomorphic expression of a transcendent being now condescending to nature in order to be of service to the natural or mortal being. Indeed, El needed to help man out of man’s dilemma, without which he is useless to man and nature. One could now see how the name has something to express about his relationship with man and nature. Berkhof sustains this idea as indicated.

The most simple name by which God is designated in the Old Testament, is the name El, which is possibly derived from ’ul, either in the sense of being first, being lord, or in that of being strong and mighty. The name ’Elohim...points to God as the strong and mighty one, or as the object of fear.⁸

The implication is that God is strong enough to deliver man from the predicaments of daily endeavour. He is to be feared either in the form of reverence by those who honour Him or threat to those who oppose His word.

It should be borne in mind that divine names were expressive of the divine character or being yet, never the totality of the manifestation of the deity. It was an expression of self in the existence of human life. In a sense it confers a limitation of the divine personality as human language cannot express the totality of the divine personality. One can now observe the difficulty this poses to human thought. God is the incomprehensible one, infinitely exalted above all that is temporal.⁹

When El was to call Moses to the deliverance assignment El needed to declare his ability to deliver. Under the socio-political circumstances the Israelites saw themselves God needed to declare his ability or reputation as God.¹⁰ This therefore informs Moses’ question:

If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?

This is quite in agreement with what has been said earlier — divine name was symbolic of the deity’s attribute, character or manifestation to human beings.

Elohim is the name most commonly associated with creation, used in the E Tradition while Jehovah is a name of relationship with men quite popular in the J Tradition. In Concise Bible Dictionary it is stated of the name Jehovah that “God thus reveals Himself in one time as the ever-existing One: that is, in Himself eternally, He is always the same: cf Heb.1:12. The above relationship may be seen in the change from Elohim, the Creator, in Gen i, to Jehovah Elohim in chapter ii, when man was brought into relationship with God”.¹¹ The progression in revelation leading to a name that conforms to the revelation should be noted.

The unfolding of God’s nature to man is not only represented in the divine names but also in the theophonic names. The Jewish race expressed their apprehension of the divine revelation through the names they gave to their children. These names point to the fact that God could condescend and share in the affairs of men. For example, they saw God as the Ruler or Supreme Judge among men. This is also expressed in the name Daniel, which reflects the judgment of God or simply the judge.¹² *Shaddai* is derived from *shad* or *Shadad* meaning the ‘all powerful’ or ‘the Almighty’.

What has been said does not rule out the fact that the encounter of Moses with God posed some problem on who the God of Abraham was. Did the Israelites in Egypt worship the same God that Abraham worshipped? If they did not, at what point in history did they break off and why? If they worshipped the same God, why did Moses demand God’s identity? “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers sent me to you’ and they ask me, ‘what is his name’ ‘what shall I say to them?’”¹³ If it was only a matter of ability the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who led the Israelites out of Egypt had already registered enough victories that should confirm His identity. If we accept that Moses did not know Yahweh, having been brought up in Afro- Egyptian environment and so needed a religious conversion, we may as well try a reconciliation of the response he got. One

would have expected “I AM YHWH”, with the understanding that the Israelites will appreciate His personality. But the answer was, “I AM WHO I AM.”¹⁴ It is difficult to conclude that the Israelites would have identified the YHWH of Abraham if they had not witnessed the signs in the hands of Aaron and Moses.¹⁵ These divine emissaries needed to show that “I AM” was strong enough to deliver those under diabolic servitude. “Powers” are recognized by visible extraordinary manifestation. So, Moses had to show the strength of “I AM” above the gods of the Egyptians that held sway over the people.

The extended response was “The Lord (YHWH), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations”¹⁶. Abraham used the *Tetragrammaton*, *YHWH* (Yahweh or Jehovah), quite often though later he used it in compound with *Jireh* (Genesis 22: 14). YHWH is the name the God of Abraham is to be known and remembered always. How El became a substitute name for Israel’s God need to be defined. But it is in Exodus (3: 13, 14) the name derives from the Hebrew verb *hayan*, ‘to be’ — I am that I am.

It presents the unchangeable or Pre-existent God. It is God who is the same — what He is yesterday, is what He is today and what He will be. If He was faithful He is still faithful, and will remain faithful. If He was mighty, He is still mighty and will remain mighty. This covenant name was so sacred that “He that nameth the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 24: 16). It is also obvious that God was known to Abraham and his family by Jehovah (cf. Genesis 22: 14; 26: 28).

When the Hebrew nomads left Mesopotamia for the fertile crescent they went along with their religious belief in *Shaddai* — The mountain One, the deity who dwells in the cosmic mountain. According to Anderson, it was not a difficult task to see the “El” — Supreme father god – of the Canaanite religion as a contextual nomenclature for the supreme God, *Shaddai* of the Israelites.¹⁷ After all, El was the king, the father of ages or the eternal father. Only him lived from eternity. It was therefore a mere blend of nomenclature or semantics difference. But, this is only a modest interpretation to what should have been considered a syncretism or enculturation. This conclusion does not in anywhere assume that the El of the Canaanites’ deities conform in all contexts to El of the Hebrew deity.

In his “origin of Yahwism” Okwueze insists that the name Yahweh was not used by the Israelites until the “settlement.” He is of the opinion that the Israelites must have derived this name Yahweh from among the people they sought refuge.¹⁸ “In the Ugaritic Canaanite culture, EL was the proper name of the titular head of the hierarchy of deities (as in numerous other Semitic cultures)”¹⁹ Okwueze in affirmation with Alexander opines, “El was at a point a generic name for God in the entire environment of the Ancient Near East.”²⁰ This point should be seriously borne in mind. The location of the sanctuaries of EL defined the compound epithets. As a result, in Bethel he was EL Bethel (God of Bethel) or literally God of the house of God — Gen.12:8; 13.3;28:19;35:7). In Shalem Jacob created an altar, and called it El-elohe — Israel (God, the God of Israel, Jacob’s act of faith, appropriating his new name, but also claiming Elohim in this new sense as the God through whom alone he could walk according to his new name).²¹ EL Elyon (Gen.14: 18) is derived from Elyon which simply means “highest”. El Elyon therefore means Most High God. EL Olam (Gen 21: 33) at Beer- Sheba is a compound noun of EL and Olam. Olam is the Hebrew word for an indefinite time or age, an equivalence of the Greek *aion* - ever lasting God. EL Roi (Gen.16.14; 24:62; 25:11) – God of seeing. All these instances go to establish the fact that the Israelites saw their God in the generic name of God in the Ancient Near East, without necessarily adopting the pantheon of gods of the people or all the character of these gods.

But one would wonder why the Israelites, with their exclusiveness, could adopt and conceptualize El. The answer is that they found themselves in a society already rich with religious words and if they must be relevant to the environment, they must apply their religious beliefs within the framework of the established culture. God was not opposed, for once to the use of El as his name. Finding a place within the context of this framework they did not stop at the adoption of El as a name for God. One could see the adoption of foreign gods as well. The Hebrews were semi-nomadic sect of people as opposed to their host who were well settled. When the Jews got to the Fertile Crescent they found the people well fortified and they had to settle in the less fertile areas, which were the only available option. Being less fertile they made the mistake of expecting so much harvest as those of the

highly fertile regions of the Fertile Crescent. They attributed the rich harvest of the Fertile Crescent to the strength of the gods of the Canaanites. So, quite often they adopted the worship of these diverse gods of their hosts. They saw Yahweh as a strong warrior but not a God of agriculture. As a result of this, Okwueze noted “The Israelites adopted cult prostitution either as a way of worshipping Baal or as a way of worshipping Yahweh to make him an effective God of agriculture.”²² We find the prophets condemning the Israelites for the adoption of foreign gods and even cult prostitution.²³ However, that the Israelites adopted foreign gods quite often did not legalize the practice. God kept on warning them and many times punishing them for that purpose. There is no atom of doubt whatsoever that the religion of the Israelites remained quite different from that of the Canaanites. These conclusions establish that divine names had relevance to the social context of a people and not mere vocal identity.

The Emmanuel of Isaiah

The name Emmanuel is one of those divine names that have come into the New Testament to apply to Jesus. As every other divine name Emmanuel must have a socio-political root and relevant to both the first users and the compilers of the New Testament text. In the New Testament it appears only in the Gospel according to Matthew where it is applied to Jesus.

But Matthew’s use of “Immanuel” for Jesus stems from his Jewish trend of Messiasism going to the period of Isaiah. He saw Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy – Isaiah 7. Onwu has noted that the primary purpose of Matthew “was to show that Jesus was the Messiah promised by God in the Old Testament.”²⁴ We can see how this purpose influenced his adoption of “Immanuel, the signet child of Isaiah’s prophecy.

The prophecy of Isaiah prevailed when the Northern Kingdom — Israel — and the Southern Kingdom — Judah — were in wide cleavage against each other. Though King Ahaz was a bad King God still remembered the covenant with David. The resultant effect was to assure the people of His ever-abiding mercy and love, built not on Ahaz but on the covenant relationship with His people.

It is doubtful that Isaiah’s prophecy would have pointed to Jesus without a direct link to the immediate socio-political disharmony of Isaiah’s time. How could the birth of Jesus Christ some seven hundred and thirty one years later fulfil a prophecy that clearly specified a period within sixty-five years? In fact, the armies of the Assyrians in 722BC destroyed Ephraim, thirteen years after the prophecy.

To stunt Assyria’s growing political fame Syria and Israel determined a coalition with Judah, who unfortunately vacillated. To punish Judah for her wavering attitude Syria in coalition with Israel decided to attack Judah. The hypocritical Ahaz, King of Judah, was alarmed and trembled at this coalition. Isaiah told him not to fear the enemies that God would surely defend the land. He declined to Isaiah’s option for a sign, if in doubt. Isaiah therefore announced a sign from the Lord, “the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel... but before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.”²⁵ The Hebrew word translated virgin in the King James Version is ‘*alma*, which also means an unmarried woman. ‘*alma* could also apply to a betrothed virgin (cf. Deut. 22: 23ff).²⁶ In *The Living Bible Paraphrased* footnote the argument is that “the controversial Hebrew word used here sometimes means “virgin” and sometimes ‘young woman’. Its immediate use here sometimes refers to Isaiah’s young wife and her new born son (Isaiah 8:1- 4).”²⁷ But this position is shaky because neither Isaiah’s wife nor Ahaz’s was a young virgin.²⁸ Both were duly married. On the other hand Scofield overstretched the point thus;

The prophecy is not addressed to the faithless Ahaz, but to the whole ‘house of David.’ The objection that such a far off event as the birth of Christ could be no ‘sign’ to Ahaz, is, therefore, puerile. It was a continuing prophecy addressed to Davidic family, and accounts at once for the instant assent of Mary (Lk. 1: 38).²⁹

However dogmatic we may approach the prophecy we must bear in mind that Isaiah was a historical figure, exposed to excruciating socio-political problems under which he made his

prophecies. The point is so clear, on the immediate context, Ahaz was the addressee. But, which virgin fitted the immediate context is a puzzle. It is safer to partly adopt some points made by Scofield that the event pointed to Christ. But that would be as the eschatological fulfilment.

In the use of the name Emmanuel the Prophet re-states the unflinching covenant attitude of God. Victory would be for the people of God because God was with them. The symbolic child of the prophet fulfilled this prophecy in its immediate context. But, quite common with Old Testament prophecies the immediate fulfilment does not remove some remote future materialization of the prophetic utterances. It was not therefore out of place for Matthew to associate the birth of Jesus Christ with that prophecy.

The Emmanuel of Matthew

Severally the New Testament translates *KURIOS* for Yahweh. Berkhof affirms that “The name Yahweh is explicated a few times by variations of a descriptive kind, such as ‘the Alpha and the Omega’, ‘who is and who was and who is to come,’ ‘the beginning and the end,’ ‘the first and the last,’ Revelation 1:4, 8, 17; 2:8; 21: 6; 22: 13.”³⁰ Also, Bornkamm and Conzelmann have noted that the theology of Matthew is that of the early church.³¹ When Matthew chose the pericopes the obvious fact was that the post – Easter faith of the Apostles had shaped theology. Jesus had assumed all the attributes, which the divine name had presented. Dabney has shown that in John 8: 58 Jesus claimed the incommunicable divinity — ‘Before Abraham was, I Am.’³² By so doing the early church saw Jesus as the Self-existent and independent God. In the choice of citation Matthew combines two portions of Septuagint Isaiah : “*Idou ... Emmanuel*” is Isaiah 7: 14 while “*Meth ... Theos*” is Isaiah 8: 8, 10.³³ Having brought these portions together he saw Jesus as the fulfilment of the text.

Our concern, however, is the use of the name Immanuel and its implication to the African. We have already noted the Canaanite-origin of the El and its compound epithets. But, the adoption of the name El for the God of the Israelites was never challenged at any moment. This is an indication that God had no problem with it. *God’s problem is never the usage of terms that exist in a locality to describe His attributes.* The name Immanuel is a highly celebrated name of God in the Christian religion. It was applied to Jesus freely without any question to the etymology. Matthew wants to show that Jesus is “God with us”. He is the Great Deliverer long expected by the Jews. The Jews had suffered so much in the hands of foreign powers. Their hope of restoration lay in a messiah who would come from God, or on the other hand God Himself would come to rescue them. If Jesus was to be the saviour of the Jews he must be God as was expected by some of the Jews.³⁴ Matthew prepares the ground for Emmanuel in the earlier introduction of His other salvific name, Jesus. “The naming of the unborn Messiah would accord with popular notions; the symbolism of such a name was deeply rooted in Jewish belief; while the explanation of Jehoshua or Jeshua (Jesus), as He who would save His people from their sins, described at least one generally expected aspect of His mission.”³⁵ One cannot consider Immanuel without joining it with the use of the name of Jesus. In fact, Stendahl has noted that,

The main emphasis seems strangely enough to be on Emmanuel, and this is heightened by the added translation: “God with us”. This use of Emmanuel strengthened the point made about the name “JESUS” i.e. he who is going to save his people from their sins. These were two synonymous ways of speaking about the messianic age.³⁶ So, God would save his people from their sins that have led them to political servitude.

Eschatological Emmanuel

In Matthew’s use of Emmanuel he has adapted two sections of Isaiah’s prophecy. He combined Isaiah 7:14 and 8:10 to express the Messianic hope of the Jews of his time. In doing this he looks beyond the letters to a Son whose kingdom will have no end. He echoes Isaiah 9: 6 where the eschatological son indicates “God of hero’ (i.e. godlike hero, endowed with divine power).”³⁷ The Son of deliverance or Messiah was to share divine personality to overrun the terrifying oppressors of the people of Israel. Matthew saw in Jesus the Messianic aspirations of the end time where the Saviour is anointed — Christ. This anointing — Christ, (Matthew 1: 16) — “Connects him with the entire O.T. foreview (Zech. 12: 8) of a coming Prophet (Deut.18: 15 – 19), Priest (Psa.110:4) and King (2

Sam.7:7 – 10).”³⁸ Matthew sees Jesus as one who restores Davidic Kingdom of the Jews in its former glory. Though the devastated Israelites still grope in darkness and despair under Roman and Satanic bondage the birth of Emmanuel who saves his people from their sins marks a turning point in the salvific history of Israel.

But Jesus, for he shall save his own people from their sins, was manifested to deliver his people from their spiritual bondage which results in socio-political servitude. The people themselves saw only a physical bondage. Jesus, for example, will bind and exploit the Kingdom of Satan, thereby delivering and ruling a people given to him by his Father. We find Matthew reflecting this concept in chapter twelve. The people are amazed and they see in him the Son of David.

Finally, the prophecy of Isaiah could not be better interpreted without reference to Matthew’s Gospel. It was in Matthew that the virgin conceived and bore a son. It was in Matthew that Jesus came as the son of David to restore and to sit on the throne of David. Isaiah may not have given us clear picture of the conclusion of the matter. If we rely on him we grope in darkness. But when we turn to Matthew we appreciate the fulfilment of the prophecy in Jesus Christ. Isaiah has also made a spiritual and socio-political interplay in bringing out the realities of the Kingdom. But he couldn’t do otherwise, knowing that the Jewish aspiration was theological and the manifestation of Jesus fulfilled this hope. Theirs was a world where the spiritual has evaded the material realms of existence. Sickness and misfortune were caused by satanic forces as a result. Jesus needed to overthrow the powers that afflicted physical servitude. His presence brought an end to the reign of Satan. The power that sustained Gentile government against the people of God was satanic. In this eschatological manifestation Jesus was manifested to offer a universal kingdom of God. God’s Kingdom is the sphere where the will of God was done. Therefore the disciples were to pray, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God’s people can only be saved from the sway of Satan and evil government by “God with us” — Emmanuel.

The Relevance of the name to the African

If we consider Jesus as a human being without any divine attributes then he would be a typical Jew only relevant to the Jewish people. He could not be a nationalist for the Jewish state and also become one for the African. He would either be a Jew or an African. But Matthew was quite clear about his position: He was God, and God, to save his people from their sins. If Jesus was Emmanuel, then He must be relevant to the human race. As God, He is the Creator and Sustainer of the whole world. He could not create and sustain the whole sinful world only to effect his salvific appearance to a limited geopolitical culture. As God, His salvific strength holds sway over Africa and the African must resort to him as the Great Liberator.

But one may ask what about the various deities and nature gods of the African? How can the African worship divinities, spirits and ancestors yet claim Jesus as their saviour? It must be understood that even the various advanced cultures one time held some of the beliefs as those of the African. The Greek philosopher Euhemeros of Macedonia (320—260BC) said that the gods were departed chiefs and warriors, who had been venerated before their death and deified afterwards.”³⁹ We may as well consider the Greek mystery religions and even the deified kings of the Ancient Eastern worlds. Yet, all these regions are very much at home with the message and salvation of Jesus Christ today. The simple truth is that in the midst of varied divinities and spirits the African still strongly believed in the Supreme Being as the only and ultimate source of life and existence.

If the Jews got to Canaan and soon identified the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with El, there is no reason why the same approach would not congruously apply for African Supreme Being. The idea of a Supreme Being who transcends over all creation is not exotic in Africa. The Igbos of Nigeria have always had *Chukwu* as the “Great Source Being or Spirit. The Great One from whom being originates. Here is the Great Chi, from whom all human beings derive their chi or guardian spirits.”⁴⁰

Interestingly, as early as 1841 a German missionary has noted that

The word ‘Tshuku’ God is continually heard. Tshuku is supposed to do everything... Their notions of some of the attributes of the Supreme Being are, in many respects, correct, and their manner of expressing them striking. ‘God made everything: He made both white

and black' is continually on their lips. Some of their parables are descriptive of the perfections of God.⁴¹

The emphasis here is that *Chukwu*, the Supreme God is never alien to the African. *Chineke* means "God who creates". Only *Chukwu* creates. Everything came from Him. He is the ultimate source of life. The divinities and ancestors owe their power and being to *Chukwu*. In fact, this has led Iwe to argue very strongly that the Igbos are monotheistic⁴² and in a very strong sense he is right.

Immanuel, as an ontological reality, is a pointer to God's presence in the African soil – God with us. If God is with us, who can be against us? If God took refuge in Africa when the powers of darkness held sway,⁴³ it shows that Africa is part of His creation and that He is interested in Africa. An African does not need to be Anthony, Cosmos, Jamestina, Augustina, Henrietta, Kennedy or even John to become a Christian.

"Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins,"⁴⁴ is the ultimate position of "Immanuel". If Jesus did not die for the Africans, why are the Christians preaching in African society? Onwu has noted again "The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) expressed so clearly the universal scope and validity of the work of Jesus and the gospel preached by the church"⁴⁵. Unfortunately, instead of the validity of the work of Jesus to be preached by the Church in Africa *eurocentricism* and *europel* have engulfed the Christian message and lifestyle in Nigeria. The biblical significance of the name "Immanuel" should redirect our minds to the right attitudes. God has never been alien to the African soil. What Christianity brought was Jesus, the only Way to *Chuku* (the highest God). There is no argument about it. That *Chuku* can deliver any African enslaved by negative and diabolic covenants, through Jesus Christ, is well taken and very much at home in Africa.

If Christianity can freely adapt the name *IMMANUEL* then the Igbo divine concept and attributes could and should be adapted to without ado. Some of the native names in Africa represent the African belief and some are quite in resonance with the Christian culture. African names should find some place in the Christian parlance without relegation. Unfortunately, some African Christians indoctrinate their fellow Africans who bear traditional names into covenant breaking and denouncing of these traditional names as fetish, barbaric and satanic. Not only the Pentecostal but also some of the Mainline Churches insist on Western names for an African convert to be baptized. From the approach it appears God has no interest in anything African. Like the Jewish Christians who insist on the Gentiles to, first, become proselytes before conversion to Christianity, the African covenant-breaking Christians, by attitude insist that the African should become Western before he could become a Christian. The etymology of Immanuel, as a name, is opposed to this attitude.

Racial inferiority complex of some of the Africans and the Prima Donna complex of some of the western missionaries have largely contributed to the present theological malady in Africa. Onwu noted "The early missionaries who came to Africa in the mid-19th century saw Christianity and Christ through their cultural lens. Thus, they taught Africans about a "white God" and a "white Christ."⁴⁶ It was good that Onwu also rejected the trend by some African scholars to project the concept of a "black God" and a "black Christ."⁴⁷ If Jesus is "God with us" — Immanuel — then we must extricate Him of all contextual mythology. God is neither black nor White. But, historically — His incarnation — Jesus was a Jew. He was not a Westerner. He came primarily to liberate man — Black or White — from satanic servitude. We all share the same fate before God. If some were to share Him more, then the African would stand a better chance. After all, He came for the oppressed. Africans have had so much oppression, racial discrimination and political imperialism. Surely, Jesus would come for the African if one were to judge from this later argument.

We need a God that delivers an African not because he is an African but because he is a depraved sinner and stands in dire need of a Saviour like every other depraved human being, white or black. We need a God that shares the sorrows of the African to deliver him. We need a Christianity that would contextualize our cultural parlance to reach us more meaningfully than further enslavement through neo-colonialism and Western socio-religious imperialism. There is a strong need for covenant breaking from the African ancestral curses. The salvation given by Christ is strong enough to destroy these ancient curses. The African problem is not in the African names and language. We have got to a stage in African Christianity where the salvation position of every individual in God must be recognised rather than lumping all Africans inside one bag. An unchristian African should be seen as

unchristian and an African Christian, saved by the blood of Jesus Christ must be seen as an eternal inheritor of God's privileges and glory to be revealed. His name cannot make him a better Christian, nor yet an infidel. His traditional name identifies him before fellow human beings and not as a Christian. Otherwise, the armed robber facing execution, by the name John, Peter, etc. is already heaven-bound. Some of our "learned" African Christians are to blame for the problems in African Christianity. In their theologically naïve posture they have encouraged paganism where they should condemn it. Some theologians have not highlighted those meeting points between African culture and Christian culture. As a result there is confusion. This is not helping Christianity in Africa. Because of misinformation some African nationalists have perpetually positioned their hearts against the Christian gospel.

Conclusion

While *Emmanuel* depicts the presence and favour of God among His people the etymology of the name goes a step to show that culture can be purified and Christianised. Matthew further stretches this theology in his saying of Jesus, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (18: 20). This is an adumbration of the several Old Testament assurances that God is in the midst of His people. Jesus does not need to be black to become the saviour of the African. Therefore contrary to Udo's position we insist that Jesus does not need to be a *guest* or undergo the *guest initiation rite*⁴⁸ in order to save the African. Emmanuel — God with us — is a strong indication that the coming of Jesus has a place in African soil. Emmanuel is God in Africa. The African does not need to change his name or language to be accepted by God. He needs to accept the finished work. The incarnation expresses the love of God for man — African inclusive.

Endnotes

¹Benjamin Davidston, *The Analytical Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon* (

²E. M. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd., 1983) p. 408

³M. I. Okwueze, *The Old Testament as History, Religion and Literature* (Enugu: AP Express Publishers, 1998) p. 23

⁴Joshua 24: 14b, B. W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (England: Longman Group Ltd., 1986) p.34

⁵Genesis 31: 19

⁶Anderson, Loc. Cit.

⁷J. Kenneth Kuntz, *The People of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Old Testament Literature, History, and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974) p. 155

⁸Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981) p.48

⁹Ibid p.47

¹⁰B. F. Fubara-Manuel, *The Greater Purpose: The Sovereignty of God in the Context of Mission* (Lagos: Aida Publishers, 2004) p.31

¹¹Cf *Concise Bible Dictionary* (Germany: Gutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) p.321

- ¹²John Calvin, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986) p.95
- ¹³Exodus 3:13
- ¹⁴Exodus 3:14
- ¹⁵Exodus 4:40
- ¹⁶Exodus 3;15
- ¹⁷Anderson, Op. Cit., 36
- ¹⁸Okwueze, Op. Cit., 54
- ¹⁹T. Desmond Anderson & David W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003) p. 36
- ²⁰Okwueze, Op. Cit., 23
- ²¹See Foot Note on *Scofield Bible* for Isaiah 7:14
- ²²Okwueze, Op. Cit., 109
- ²³Ezekiel 16:15ff; 23:1ff; Hosea 4:10ff
- ²⁴E. N. Onwu, *A Critical Introduction to the Traditions of Jesus* (Enugu: Cecta Nig. Ltd., 1991) p.79
- ²⁵Isaiah 7:14
- ²⁶David F. Bright and Sinclair B. Ferguson, eds., *New Bible Dictionar*, Third Edition (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003) p.500
- ²⁷See Foot Note, *Scofield Bible* for Isaiah 7:14
- ²⁸Bright and Ferguson, Op. Cit., p.501
- ²⁹*Scofield*, Op.Cit., Isaiah 7: 13
- ³⁰Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981) p. 50
- ³¹Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) p. 20
- ³²R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985) p. 145
- ³³Barbara Aland, et el., *The Greek New Testament* 4th Revised Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) p. 3
- ³⁴E. A. Ituma, *Introduction to Early Christianity* (Lagos: Chinedum Publishers Ltd., 2003) p. 52
- ³⁵Okwueze, Op. Cit., p. 109
- ³⁶Matthew Black, *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, (Kenya: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1982) p. 771
- ³⁷*Ibid.* p. 497
- ³⁸*Scofield* footnote on Matthew 1:16
- ³⁹E. G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976) p. 31
- ⁴⁰N. S. S. Iwe, "Igbo Deities" *The Igbo Concept of the Sascred*, Papers Presented at the 1998 Ahiajoku Lecture (Onugaotu) Colloquim, No.4 1999, Ministry of Information and Culture – Imo State, p. 9
- ⁴¹*Ibid* p. 27
- ⁴²*Ibid*
- ⁴³Matthew 2: !3ff
- ⁴⁴Matthew 1: 21
- ⁴⁵Onwu, Op. Cit., p. 78
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p.255
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 256
- ⁴⁸E. B. Udoh, "Guest Paradigm : An Alternative Christological Approach in Africa" *Reformed World*, 39, 5 (1987) pp. 661 – 674, cited in Onwu, Op. Cit., p. 259