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CHRISTIANITY AND URHOBO-AFRICAN TRADITIONAL KINGSHIPS, CHIEFTAINCY INSTITUTIONS AND TITLE-TAKING

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Abstract

From the beginning of the biblical story and later, with the emergence of Christianity, the Judeo-Christian tradition has often had an antagonistic relationship with non-Judeo-Christian traditions. Culture with institutions associated with it, such as traditional kingship, chieftaincy, and title-taking, has often been portrayed negatively. Traditional governance institutions were to be shunned and condemned. The people of Israel saw themselves as being commanded by God to destroy the so-called “pagan” cultures and their kings, and all associated with their places of worship. Some Christians narrowly saw the Pauline admonition: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, but come out of them” as a call to shun traditional institutions and their rituals. This paper undertakes a critical, analytic, and hermeneutic examination of this issue, arguing that the relationship between Christian and traditional institutions, such as kingship, chieftaincy, and titles, should not be one of antagonism or ambivalence; rather, it can be one that mutually enriches both parties. The paper argues that it is right and appropriate for Christians to participate in traditional institutions of governance such as kingship, chieftaincy, taking of titles; when it is done without the Christians performing rituals to give worship and adoration to deities and or other beings, outside the supreme being. This paper shows that even in the Bible and in Church history, Christians have been involved in traditional governance and even been designated with “pagan” names. The paper concludes that Christians in Urhoboland and other parts of Africa getting involved in traditional kingship, chieftaincy, and title-taking is not wrong.

Keywords: Bio-resources, Wildlife, Utilisation, Endangered, Threatened

Introduction

Since the beginning of Christianity, it has often had a challenging relationship with culture. The relationship of Christianity with culture has been conceived in different ways. One of the most popular discussions of yesteryears on the matter was by the theologian Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr (1975) proposed five different ways people see the relationship between Christ and culture: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. As the names implies Christ against culture sees Christ as opposed and against culture, the duty of the Christian is to withdraw from the sinful world; the Christ of culture is accommodative and assimilates to culture, Christ above culture tries to reconcile the world to Christ; Christ and culture in paradox sees Christians as citizens of two world, the secular and the sacred and they have to live in both; and Christ as transformer of Culture means that the role of Christ is to transform the world. Niebuhr’s position does not exhaust how the relation of Christ to culture should be seen. The Fathers of Vatican II (1965) enunciated that Christ was incarnated into this world, into the culture of humanity, and thus transformed culture, and arising from this, whatever is present in culture that is godly and noble and does not contradict the values of the kingdom of God can be used

in the propagation of the gospel. The Catholic position comes to favour what has come to be known as inculturation. Outside the above, there are fanatical and fundamentalist positions that see the world as evil, Christians are to separate themselves from the world, and things like partaking in cultural festivals, taking of traditional titles by Christians, participating in village meetings, etc, are all considered to be evil. Christians who partake in them are seen as backslidden, not born again, and not Holy Ghost-filled. They are also seen as non-bible believing. Anything associated with African religious culture is seen as pagan and fetishistic. For those who see Christ as against culture, it is evil for a Christian to accept being a traditional king or accepting a chieftaincy title. The attitude that sees Christ or Christianity as opposed to traditional African culture is still prevalent today. Ahon (2016) reported that Mr. Roland Ogene, the Arch-Minister at God's Kingdom Mission, has denounced Christians taking traditional titles and opined that it is contrary to the will of God and the message of the bible, and it is a fetish and tied to African traditional religion and deities.

The concern of this paper is that this type of attitude is contrary to the best tradition of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the values of the God who loved humanity and sent his only begotten son into the world. All through the Bible and in the story of Christianity, elements of culture have always been used to advance the Christian religion, and there would be no Christianity today if not for culture. Christianity does not operate in a vacuum. There is no brand of Christianity, not even Pentecostal and evangelical Christianity, that has not used elements of culture to advance Christianity. This paper will use critical hermeneutics, historical, and socio-theological analysis to examine the issues involved in this paper. By way of procedure, the paper shall make conceptual clarifications, examine some elements of Urhobo-African traditional kingship, chieftaincy, and title-taking, and evaluate the Christian foundation for engagement in traditional kingship, chieftaincy, and title-taking. After this, some of the ways forward shall be proposed before the paper is brought to a conclusion.

Clarifications of Concepts

Key concepts that undergird this paper include Christianity, Urhobo-African culture, traditional kingship, chieftaincy institutions, and title-taking. Christianity refers to the religious faith tradition that emanated from the life and ministry of Christ. It is a religion that equally draws fully from the tradition of the Old Testament. Christianity is incomplete without the Old Testament. The divine relationship of God in scripture is progressive, beginning in the Old Testament and continuing into the New Testament and onward. Macy (2007) states that Christianity is a religion that is rooted in monotheism, belief in the centrality of Jesus of Nazareth in redemption. Christianity has been transmitted through cultures such as the Roman culture, Greek culture, etc, to contemporary times. It can actually be said that there is no Christianity that is influenced by culture, for it is always carried through the vehicle of culture and affected by that culture. Christianity gave birth to the Christian church, and the Christian church can be understood as the gathering of all who believe and affirm faith in Jesus and in how he lived and what he taught.

What is Urhobo-African culture? Espin (2007) writes that culture is essentially how a group of people share meaning among themselves and unveil themselves to one another as human beings, before even unveiling themselves to others. Social Communication Departments of AMECEA and IMBISA (1999) cite Taylor to state that: "Culture is that whole complex which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p.15). The term Urhobo-African culture is used to describe the way of life, traditions, religious beliefs, philosophies, food systems, fashion, technologies, etc. Culture, as known, refers to the totality of a people's way of life. The term Urhobo is used to describe the major ethnic group in

Delta State that mainly occupies the Delta State Central Senatorial District. They have occupied their land from time immemorial, and many traditions trace the history of many Urhobo people to Edo or Aka in Edo State. Africa, as used here, refers to the continent of Africa and people of African ancestry. To speak of Urhobo-African is a compound hyphenated word to identify that Urhobo has an affinity in terms of culture with the rest of Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa. Urhobo-African locates Urhobo in Africa. Urhobo-African culture is the culture of the Urhobo people, geographically located in Africa. Urhobo culture shares many similarities and commonalities in terms of traditional institutions with many other African societies. Urhobo-African culture is a way of saying that what is Urhobo can also be found in other African societies, and what is found in many other African traditional communities can be found in Urhoboland.

Traditional kingship, chieftaincy institutions, and title-taking are common throughout traditional African societies. Nwokocha & Nnatuanya (2024) write that among the Ibo Ozo title and other titles are very prominent. Title-taking or occupying various levels of leadership are part and parcel of every society. Even in the Christian bible, people held various titles or positions of authority, such as chief priests, judges, prophets, etc. Adegga, Degarr & Terkura (2021) write that: "The chieftaincy and traditional rulership institution is dynamic and one of the most enduring legacies from traditional African societies. Until the coming of the colonialists, the traditional institution led by chiefs, emirs, obas, Ezes, etc, performed legislative and judicial functions as well as political, religious, social, and economic roles, etc." (p. 15). And almost similar beliefs and norms inform all of them, with all of them rooted in the communal values of the community. Traditional kingship is in some cases also referred to as traditional monarchy or simply monarchy. Monarchy, which is often occupied by the eldest male in a ruling family or by heredity, is common in Africa. The monarch, called a king in many African societies or similar names, is the paramount ruler who superintends over his kingdom or territory, aided by a council of elders, chiefs, etc. If it is hereditary, it gets occupied by the eldest surviving male of the departed monarch. If it is by ruling families, the ruling family whose turn it is to produce a new king selects and provides one. Fiveable (2025) writes that: "Traditional monarchy refers to a political system where a single individual, usually a king or queen, holds absolute power and authority, often justified by divine right or historical precedent. This form of governance typically emphasizes hereditary succession and is characterized by centralized control over the state, as well as the maintenance of social hierarchies and customs "(para. 1).

In this paper, the term, chieftaincy institution is used to refer to the group or collective of all the persons, including males and females, that the king or monarch has given an honorary position in his kingdom, and they are designated chief. When a person is made a chief in a traditional ceremony, normally to mark the anniversary of the coronation of the king or other key historical events in the kingdom, the person takes a traditional appellation that indicates how he wants to be known and the role he/she want to play. In Urhobo, a chief created by the king is called "Olorogun." The title-taking that this paper is essentially concerned about is that of the honorary chief title. Of course, what is said of the chief applies to all other traditional titles. Etuk (2000) writes that chief is an honorary title awarded to an indigene for his recognised contribution, and when the person is awarded, he is given a descriptive name indicating his area of greatest contribution. and among the Ibibio people, you can have something like Obong-Ifiok (Chief of learning or wisdom). There are other titles, apart from that of chief. Though honorary, in traditional Africa, before a person is given a title, he is seen as a person of good character. Today, there are people of dubious character who are created chiefs, and people today buy it with money.

Urhobo-African Traditional Kingship, Chieftaincy Institutions and Title-Taking

Today, it is common to see Christians as traditional rulers in Urhobo kingdoms and Christians taking chieftaincy and other titles. The traditional king in Urhoboland is called Ovie, while the wife of the king is called the queen. The king of the Uvwie kingdom is a Christian, a catholic. The king of Okpe is a Christian, a catholic. The king of Agbon is a Christian. The king of the Olomu kingdom is a Christian, an Anglican. There are many other Christian kings in Urhoboland. You can hardly find any king in Urhoboland who is not a Christian. Some people are rooted in traditional religious practices and want to impose these practices on Christians who become traditional kings. Many Christian kings in Urhoboland have resisted this, while allowing for freedom of religion in their kingdom. There is no doubt that there are aspects of traditional kinship and chieftaincy institutions that may be fetish and even rooted in superstitious beliefs in time past; this is precisely why Christians should be engaged and participate in them to promote the transformation of these institutions. No human institution is perfect, and so they should all be subjected to transformation and change.

Etuk (2000) writes that in recent years, many Christians are now getting involved in being traditional kings, chiefs, etc. It is important to note that kingship is an important institution in almost all African societies. Okpevra & Ophori (2024) write that:

Across Africa, kingship has been a central institution in many societies, serving as a focal point for governance, religion, and culture. African kingship systems vary widely, from centralized monarchies to more decentralized systems where power is shared among local leaders. Historically, African kings were seen as both political and spiritual leaders, often believed to possess divine authority (p. 257).

It is common for kings in Urhoboland in various kingdoms to appoint some of their sons and daughters as chiefs. The title is honorary and is normally given to people of good character or who have demonstrated generosity or contributed to the development of the people. A chief was seen as a person of good character who was to uphold justice and work for the peace of the kingdom. People used to look to the chief with high respect. But today, it is painful to note that the chieftaincy institution has been corrupted. As many chiefs bought themselves into the institutions. Some traditional kings simply award chieftaincy to the highest bidder. Not minding their character. Chieftaincy is not for sale. Normally, when a chief is installed, he takes a title attached to his taking the chief. The title or appellation describes what is expected of the chief or how he intends that he should be perceived. It is now common to see Christians who are members of mainline churches such as the Catholic church, the Anglican church, etc, taking chieftaincy titles. It is very rare to see Pentecostals or some other evangelicals taking chieftaincy titles, for then it is evil and against their Christian faith. But it is not impossible. This present author knows of a Baptist member who took chieftaincy in his kingdom. Though some fellow Baptists fought against him, he stood his ground.

The monarch (king), elders, chief, and other title holders are traditional leaders. They don't exist for fun. There are specific functions attached to traditional titles and leadership positions. The eldest man in the village is called Okpako Orere, the eldest woman is called Okpako Eweya. Their positions carry power and authority with significant relevance in the social milieu. People look to these persons for guidance. When Christians say that because they are born again, they cannot be traditional leaders, they deprive themselves and the kingdom of this great opportunity to serve the people and be a vehicle for good governance. Aghamelu (2009) writes that traditional leaders are social leaders, and as social leaders, they are expected to promote justice, truth, and the well-being of the community.

The reality is that every person who is conferred with a chieftaincy title has a name attached to that title. The name attached to that title is to be performed. This author has heard of titles like Oniemo

(mother) , Awhemutuvwevwie (bring food home), Urukpe (light), and Ochuko (supporter). No traditional name attached to a title is useless or evil. They carry a perception of how the title holder wants to be known in the kingdom. Urukpe means light in Urhobo. A holder of that title intends that he will act as a light for the kingdom. Ochuko means guardian or protector, or supporter. A person bearing that title is supposed to act in protecting the king, the people, and the entirety of that clan of the kingdom. Emorhokpor (2025) has noted how the chieftaincy institution has been corrupted as some Urhobo kings now simply bestow it on the highest bidder, not caring that the person lacks integrity or has rarely contributed to their community, and not even consulting to ensure that it is people of upright character who are chiefs. The Urhobo chieftaincy title is now bought and sold in some cases. Among the Urhobo, the title Olorogun is comparable to the Ozo title among the Igbo.

What some Christians are often afraid of is that if you take a traditional title, you are likely going to partake in rituals that involve pouring libation to ancestors or partake in some other fetish things. While it is true that in some places these may have taken place in the past, today, many Christians have been able to stand up against such practices and have taken titles without partaking in any obnoxious rituals. Ekul (2000) writes that there are normally ceremonies and rituals attached to becoming a traditional ruler or chief, and these can involve pouring of libations to deities, ancestors, and the reception of certain paraphernalia of the office. It is normally these ceremonies and reception of paraphernalia that many Christians are afraid of in Urhoboland, and why they object to Christians becoming traditional kings or taking titles. But the reality is that today, somebody can become a traditional ruler, become a chief, join the council of elders, or take other traditional titles without partaking in ceremonies that offend true Christian values. This is one reason why Christians should be involved so that they can control and determine what happens in these institutions. The paper is not calling for replacement of traditional Urhobo customs, but the fact is that culture is dynamic. There are many elders in Urhobo villages who are Christians and open to Christian values.

The other day, this present researcher was researching the role of elders in conflict resolution in the Olomu kingdom. The present writer saw that in the process of traditional breaking of kola nuts, many of the elders now invoke the name of Jesus instead of calling upon the ancestors. Christianity is impacting traditional norms and values. It is time to be more engaged, not retreat. Etuk (2000) writes that whatever paraphernalia that is bestowed on the chief is a symbol of authority, honour, and dignity. A section of Christianity has indeed opposed the taking of traditional titles. Tonukari (n.d) writes that the socially and elevated title-taking system in Urhoboland has been attacked and rejected as pagan even without consulting with the traditional institutions, and thus their social control mechanism has also been weakened. A prominent traditional title among the Urhobo people is Olorogun. Tonukari (n.d) writes that in time past they took an oath before the ancestors, and this made them more serious in upholding morality and justice, but today the weakening of the institution has contributed to the spread of crime and evil in the land. From a Christian perspective, an oath should not be taken before ancestors, but those must be installed as Olorogun, making their commitment to the supreme being.

As we see it today in our land, traditional institutions are still very important. Even though their powers have waned in certain areas because of the modern postcolonial state and what emanates from the colonial era, they still have certain powers in their jurisdictions. In times of political crisis, they are often consulted and called upon to settle disputes. Governments' functionaries often visit the traditional ruler when they enter his domain. They are custodians of the traditional institutions, mores, and values to keep the peace and ensure that their domains are free from conflicts. During

times of political campaigns, those going into elections normally go to ask for their blessings and advice. They still make some rules and laws to guide their domains. Are Christians to allow these institutions that still carry enormous influence on our people to be outside their influence? The position of this paper is that Christians should be actively engaged and take positions in traditional institutions in Urhoboland and beyond. Etuk (2000) supports the position that Christians should be engaged in traditional institutions by saying that kingship or eldership is not evil, after all, there were kings and elders among God's people in Old Testament times, and there are godly kings in the Old Testament who brought to the idolatrous practices in their kingdoms to an end and administered justice.

Christian Foundations for Engagement in Traditional Kingship, Chieftaincy and Title-Taking

For a better understanding of the need for Christian engagement with traditional or cultural kingship, chieftaincy, and title-taking, it is imperative to look at the relationship between Christ (Christianity) and culture. Not all sections of Christianity indeed accept the fact that Christianity should positively interact with culture. For some, if there should be any interaction, it should be a hostile one, and Christians should confront and conquer culture. This paper notes that this version is a very narrow and parochial way to see the relationship between them. Christianity cannot exist outside culture. Christianity could not have existed if it had divorced itself entirely from Old Testament Jewish culture. And it will be wrong to see everything in culture because it is traditional as evil. While it is true that most of the early Christian missionaries, including some catholic missionaries, had a hostile attitude towards culture and condemned most cultural practices, by and large, the Catholic Church institutionally, especially after Vatican II, has a positive and healthy attitude and teaching concerning culture. Okoh (2010) asserts that the Christianity which was presented by the early missionaries was presented in Western garb, and it required Africans to abandon their traditional cultures and customs; they had no place for accommodation, rather African culture had to be torn down. There was nothing good in African culture; rather, it is a pagan religion. A similar view is expressed by Aleke (2022), "Christian missionary approach to Africa was more of a monologue and an imposition of foreign culture and ethnocentrism, characterized by pride and superiority mentality with little or no African cultural input and was either consciously or unconsciously inherited by the indigenous evangelizers" (p. 347).

In the Dogmatic Constitutions on the Church, the Fathers of Vatican II (1965b) enunciate: ...since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, the Church or people of God in establishing that kingdom, takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people. On the contrary, it fosters and takes to itself, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches, and customs in which the genius of each people expresses itself. Taking them to itself, it purifies, strengthens, elevates, and ennoble them. The Church in this is mindful that she must bring together the nations for that king to whom they were given as an inheritance, and to whose city they bring gifts and offerings (art 13).

The Christian church is to strengthen whatever is good in culture and not delete them, and these include traditional governance structures, kinship and chieftaincy institutions, conflict resolution methods, communal values, etc. It is painful when people equate all African traditional practices with idolatry and superstitions. This will help to present a true picture of the relationship between Christianity and culture. But for now, it is important to examine some elements of these traditional institutions in Urhoboland or in Urhobo-Africa.

This paper argues that there should be and can be a positive and healthy relationship between Christians and traditional institutions of kingship, chieftaincy, and title-taking. In this section, the

biblical and historic Christian foundations for this are now examined. In the Judeo-Christian story, God created the heavens and the earthly realms. But the two were connected and interlinked. God, who lives in the heavens, continually interacts with humans and even eats with them. In the Judeo-Christian story, there is no sharp distinction between the secular and the spiritual. All life was spiritual. The biblical cosmology resembles that of the Africans in some respects. All life is religious. The distinction between secular and sacred is a modern invention. The celestial and cultural intermingle. God of the Hebrews created human beings on the Earth and touched the soil or the sand in creating man. God comes to the garden even after the fall and communes and communicates with humans.

When Abraham comes into the land of promise, the bible says: “When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. ‘Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him” (Genesis 12, RSV). The oak of Moreh is a sacred tree and sanctuary where the Canaanites worshipped their god. This very place is the first that Abraham lodged in the Promised Land, and he built an altar there to God. For Abraham to build an altar in the premises of a sanctuary that the Canaanites considered to be sacred ground to them implies that Abraham interfaced with some elements of the religious culture of Canaan. You cannot be a human being without interfacing with other cultures, even non-Christian cultures. In the land of Egypt, it may not have been easy, but Joseph, an Israelite, functioned with a traditional religious title given by the Egyptians, yet he was a lover of God.

In Genesis 41, he is made second in command to the king of Egypt (he was next to Pharaoh). Joseph was given an Egyptian name, Zaphenath Paneah, and even married the daughter of Potiphera, a priest in the temple of Heliopolis. He wore traditional Egyptian garments. He was the governor of Egypt. He was given a ring with the royal seal. In practical terms, he functioned as the deputy traditional “Pharaoh” or a traditional leader in the land of Egypt. Esther, a Jewess who kept serving his God, was addressed by the traditional titles of the kingdom of Persia. She was adorned with traditional royal regalia of the Persians. So also Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego functioned in the palace of four great kings, and they bore the traditional titles and names of those kingdoms. Nehemiah, who served in the kingdom of Persia, would have been called and addressed in the Persian language and with Persian traditional names designating his office of being cupbearer, and not in Jewish titles. These persons from the Old Testament willingly, without being forced, functioned with traditional titles and names.

The Way Forward

It should be kept in mind that Christianity in Africa cannot survive outside authentic African culture. African culture is not the enemy of Christianity, but some cultural practices should indeed be abolished in the light of the moral values propagated by Christianity. Okoh (2010) rightly notes that: “Christianity will be digging its grave in Africa if it does not strive to be incarnated and to ally itself to African culture and traditions” (p. 97). Aleke (2022) writes that Christianity needs to radically rethink its style by witnessing to the Gospel of Christ through the medium of African culture, and there should be a strong dialectics between faith and culture. African culture does not exist in the abstract or simply theoretically. It is seen through cultural norms, beliefs, practices, and institutions such as traditional kingship, chiefs, elders, women groups, different traditional titles, and festivals. All these don’t have to be thrown away. Whatever is fetishistic, superstitious, “pagan,” and contrary to authentic human flourishing and human rights should be ethically evaluated and transformed.

Culture is dynamic, and as culture meets with other cultures, it should assess itself. Things like patriarchy, gender discrimination, etc, should be evaluated. There needs to be a strong dialectics of faith and culture, as Aleke (2022) puts it. Aleke (2022) writes that in the African setting, this means that African concepts, philosophy, wisdom, proverbs, and worldviews should be used as the prism through which the people perceive and understand God. By implication, African traditional cultural institutional personalities, positions, and institutions should be critically embraced, not denied. The people who occupy African cultural institutions, such as the kingship and chieftaincy, and who take traditional titles, are human beings created in the image and likeness of God. They, too, are children of God and beloved by God. The dialogue should be carried on in a compassionate and non-judgemental manner to see how any negative aspects of these institutions can be reformed and corrected. Preaching and denouncing African cultural institutions, as is common in African ambos and pulpits, does no real service to Christianity. Instead of condemning, the preacher should, in a critical yet compassionate manner, point out what needs to be corrected and set aside.

Ejenobo (2014) argues that Christianity should be divested from Western culture in Africa, and it should not be imposed on African culture; rather, Christianity should be contextualised to accept and appreciate African culture. It is painful to note that the same Christians who fail to appreciate African traditional titles readily accept Western titles, styles, and practices if they are brought in the name of Christianity. Ekechukwu (1988) writes that: “The message of the gospel is received according to the milieu and manner of the receiver. Nobody speaks from nowhere. For it is only when the people have incarnated Christ’s message in their cultural setting that it transforms them. Unless the African churches take the issue of incarnation seriously, they will continue having Christians with divided loyalties-one leg in Christian praxis and the other in traditional religious practices” (p. 143). It is painful to note that in time past, Christians were never permitted to bear African names in baptism, but they could bear English names. For most of Christian history in Africa, many Christian churches did not permit the use of vernacular language; it was as if God could only speak English or one of the biblical languages. The God of all the Earth was reduced to an English-speaking God, or a Hebrew or Aramaic-speaking God.

Before the coming of European colonialism, Urhobo and, by extension, African chieftaincy and kingship institutions and title-taking have existed for thousands of years and enabled African people to live and survive in their environments. All these should not be thrown away just because Christianity came to the soil of Africa. Christianity can truly take root on the shores of Africa, not by destroying African culture, but by incarnating in the culture. Jesus lived in an African culture as an infant when his parents took him to Egypt. If African cultures are evil, why would the parents of Jesus take him to African soil? Nwokocha & Nnatuanya (2024) write that: In Igboland, the Catholic Church has been able to study the Ozo title taking and ensure that the positive values inherent in it are not lost, and it has been reformed to remove all elements of idol worship. Traditional institutions need to be continuously reformed to see that they are in line with godly values and authentic human rights standards.

A vital way forward is to promote inculturation theology or the theology of inculturation. A word on the meaning of inculturation theology is appropriate here. Ukpong (1995) writes that: “The term ‘inculturation theology’ refers to a new way of doing theology that seeks to reinterpret Christianity and the Christian message from the perspectives of socio-cultural contexts and historical experiences of different peoples, and to challenge society with the gospel message” (p. 1). Inculturation theology is also seen by some as incarnation theology. In Christian theology, God

became a human being in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. God took human flesh (John 1:14). Just as God took human flesh and grew, and lived and ministered in a human culture, making use of the elements of that culture, so also the Christ gospel, when it comes into a culture, must take flesh and grow in that culture by making use of elements of that culture. As this paper has shown in the Judeo-Christian tradition, biblical personalities took titles and were embedded in human culture, even of so-called “pagan” cultures. You see this in the stories of Joseph in Egypt, Esther in the land of Persia, Nehemiah, etc, as outlined above. Even at the Areopagite hill in Athens, the apostle Paul adopted the imagery and title of what the people called an “Unknown God” to identify that this God has a name and he is the supreme being and the creator of the universe (Acts 17). It is what a title carries that matters and what it functions for, not the title in its naming. Titles are for service, and they have functionality. Traditional titles should not be condemned simply because they are conferred by the traditional monarch. For Christians, traditional institutions need to be “Christianised” and influenced by Christian values. It is difficult to transform traditional institutions when Christians refuse to partake in them. The admonition of Paul to “come out of them and not be unequally yoked” should be properly interpreted in its historical context. The same Paul who said, “Come out of them,” also asserted that believers can eat meat sold in the marketplace, which was often dedicated to deities of those communities. The Apostle Paul stood at the “Areopagite Hill,” which was a so-called “pagan” hill. How can you even evangelise if you don’t enter into a so-called “pagan” territory?

One big challenge with inculturating or incarnating Christianity into African culture is religious or biblical fundamentalism. Biblical fundamentalism accepts certain key doctrines of the bible and often interprets them literally without contextual and historical elements in mind, and asserts that only these can lead to salvation. For the biblical fundamentalist, only the bible matters. We don’t need any cultural elements to be saved. We are not to mingle with traditional culture or institutions. Nwobodo (2021) writes that religious fundamentalism upholds a strict and literal interpretation of religious texts, and only adherence to this strict interpretation saves. There is a vital need to have education in religious houses against religious fundamentalism. People need to be enlightened and educated to move away from biblical literalism.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the relationship between Christianity and Urhobo-African traditional kingship, chieftaincy, and title-taking. The paper noted that the relationship between the two variables has often been a hostile or ambivalent one. Some Christians, the paper argued, have read the biblical stories narrowly and argued that Christians should not partake or participate in traditional kingship, chieftaincy, or title-taking. To partake in them for them is against the Christian admonition not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Contrary to this position, the paper argued that Christians should partake in and be engaged in traditional or cultural governance institutions such as kingship (monarchy), chieftaincy, and title-taking. It was shown above that there were biblical instances in which some members of the people of Israel were engaged in traditional political institutions in the countries in which they found themselves. This was seen in the life of Joseph in Egypt, Esther in Persia, etc. It was also noted that the apostle Paul stood on the “pagan” hill of Areopagus and used the “pagan” title (to an unknown god) ascribed in a “pagan” altar to argue for the existence of the supreme being. He enriched and transformed the “pagan” theology of an unknown god. This paper rightly argued that elements of culture, which include the monarchy, chieftaincy, title-taking, etc, can be adopted by Christians in Urhoboland and beyond. Christians are not an exceptional breed set apart from the city. They are also members of the earthly city and should be engaged in earthly affairs

while worshipping the supreme beings and bowing their knees in worship to no other. Only when this is done will Christianity become more effective in Urhobo-African soil.

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