

DAD & MOM

A Publication of
Back to Basics
Ministry USA, Inc.

Fondly Remembering Dad and Mom

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I had been on God's blueprint before I arrived at Iwo maternity ward in 1952

**Everybody's Got a Story. We are Shaped by our Stories.
However, If We Don't Tell Our Own Stories, Who Will?**

Excerpted from **WHITHER BOUND: CHURCHIANIZED NATION?**

"Once Upon a Time, There Were Dad, Mom, Yours Truly, and ..."

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FONDLY REMEMBERING DAD AND MOM is the "teaser" or "bait" to introduce the author and his writing style to those who are not familiar with him and his works. The author's big themes are distilled in this lighthearted booklet. This booklet also doubles as the brochure for the Christian organization, *Back To Basics Ministry*, a Biblical Counseling and Literature Ministry. For that reason, we want to circulate **Fondly Remembering Dad And Mom** as our all-purpose free booklet to whosoever. The author believes that posterity is enriched when we tell and pass on our stories, our happy ending stories of Providence (the Veiled Presence behind the scenes).



This Booklet is the **Appendix** (titled, "Fondly Remembering Dad and Mom"), and the **Postscript** to **WHITHER BOUND: CHURCHIANIZED NATION?** by the author. It is published to create awareness and direct readers to our website of many free resources, www.BackToBasicsMinistry.org. It is freely distributed to raise funds for free circulation of "Whither Bound, Churchianized Nation?" as e-book, audio book and soft cover paper editions.

Scan the QR code on the frontpage or on page 39 to access our website and to donate.

If *WHITHER BOUND: CHURCHIANIZED NATION?* had been a Movie, *FONDLY REMEMBERING DAD AND MOM* could have been its Trailer.

"**Dad and Mom**" (40pp) and "**My Story of God**" (40pp) are (1) the inspirational booklets of our two-sided ministry of **Christian Literature & Biblical Counseling**, presented through the prism of human-interest storytelling, and (2) the promotional resource for our Mission, which is, to saturate the campuses with our free inspirational literature which also offers invitation to our website www.BackToBasicsMinistry.org

We offer this booklet both as a free literature as well as distribution based on "take one for any amount of donation—1¢, \$100 bill or more" to avoid a haphazard dispersal system.

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One hand washes the other. We are reaching out to you with our ministry materials so we may be a blessing to your church/congregation and, vice-versa, that your church/congregation may be a blessing to our ministry as well. In doing this, we both give and receive; we bless and are blessed; we water and are watered in return, (Prov. 11:25). His name be praised.

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FONDLY REMEMBERING DAD AND MOM¹

“Sweet Mother (And Great Father), I No Go Forget You; For The Suffer Wey You Suffer For Me” (Rocafil Jazz)

My mother, Mrs. Omoboade Asande Ojewale, born in Otu-Oyo, did not have letters to her name; she never saw the inside of a classroom. My Mama was a hardworking and resourceful woman, as strong as a horse. She could turn sawdust or beach sand into a moneymaking venture. She worked and traded with anything you could bring to market to sell. When it came to doing a day’s job and earning a living Mama didn’t see gender lines. She dabbled into businesses and trades typically reserved for men and put the men to shame. My mother’s culminating vocation that gave her prominence and a measure of affluence was being a cattle owner, cow/bull butcher and fresh beef seller. In my opinion, few decorated surgeons with their scalpels could match her skill at dissecting a flayed and sheared cow/bull. Talking about anatomy, she would dazzle any professor of mammalian anatomy by her knowledge of the various organs, muscles, tissues and tendons in the mammalian body. She touched the organs I read in books.

My father, Mr. Moses Atilola Ojewale, born in Fiditi-Oyo, was an elementary school teacher. He taught for over 40 years. Sadly, after all those years of teaching, with many of his past pupils in highly paying government positions, corporations, and private businesses, my first salary was multiples of my father’s terminal salary. I didn’t realize this until I had access to his personal records after his decease. No wonder he always preferred teaching in village schools and living amongst the villagers so he could be offered a piece of farming land for him to supplement his salary with farming arable crops and annuals. I had a greater respect for him and a deeper sense of appreciation for all he sacrificed to raise his children. I couldn’t believe how he survived on the paltry salary.

Dad and Mom were not into hugging, kissing, and verbalizing “I love you” to demonstrate their love and affection to their weaned children. Dad and Mom spelt parental love with provision, presence and sacrifice, their children understood family love as respect, performance, and obedience. For example, my family couldn’t (didn’t is probably the right word) attend my graduation in June 1979 when I received my

¹ The Prophet Isaiah enjoined Israel of old, “...Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit of which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you...” (Is. 51:1, 2). Here is retracing my journey to the “rock from which I was hewn” and “the hole of the pit” out of which Christ dug me, to my “Abraham” and “Sarah”.

For you, IbukunOluwa, (aka, IBK, Ibukun, Blessing), this is filling you in on “The Grandparents You Never Met”, as a sense of duty and token of love from your Daddy.

Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture from the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University. For my Dad, the question was, “What’s next?” However, urged by his peers, my father made it to my graduation ceremonies in 1982 when I got my master’s degree in animal nutrition and husbandry from the premier university of Ibadan. The graduation photographs we took together told the story better than words could. In the photos my Dad and I took on my graduation, technically standing side by side as dad and son, you could easily sandwich a plump person in the space between dad and son on the happy occasion. The spatial gap must have looked like the family norm to the photographer because he did not bother to suggest to my father to wrap his arm around my shoulders as a memento on this august occasion. As a family, we were not the touching, feeling, emotional type; we were more of the cerebral or rational type.

Gbajigbo—You Never Heard of It. Believe Me, It’s on the Map, Somewhere

It did not matter how remote the village school was; Dad would accept the posting. There was a village primary school—please promise me you wouldn’t laugh—where my father was the headmaster and the only steady teacher for almost the two years, 1964 to 1965, that he taught there and he and his family lived there, because no other teacher would stay. The road to the village was not motor-able for most parts. Especially after it rained, which was expected being a rain forest zone, it was not uncommon for the vehicle to be stuck in the mud in the un-tarred road. When that happened, all able-bodied passengers would be mobilized to push it out, otherwise, the journey ended there. For the most part, one rickety lorry, which often had to be parked on a slope to ease push starting, designed essentially for transporting farm produce, made one in-and-out trip per day to ferry goods and humans. The lorry could be transporting as many goods and passengers inside the vehicle as it had on its roof, swaying from left to right, for the entire trip. I might be wrong on this, but I think the lorry was always puffing, “I think I can... I think I can... I think I can...” to psych up itself uphill.

From the relics of dilapidated and abandoned buildings in the village and the aged infrastructure of walled and roofed classrooms, one could surmise that the village and school once thrived as a booming economic center. It was a terminal village, looking much like a ghost town and deserted settlement. I had been promoted to be in class/primary 6 from my last school, in Iseyin-Oyo, where my father had taught for a year, when my father was posted to head the school in Gbajigbo. Unfortunately, there were no other students for the class, and I would have been the only student in class 6, so I repeated primary 5. I completed my Primary School education in 1965 and graduated from that village school at Gbajigbo-Oyo.

A young lady, a supervising educator from the School Board in the city once made an unscheduled and unannounced visit to Gbajigbo primary school. She was probably the only visitor from the city the school ever had in two years. She asked for my father’s note of lessons or lesson plan. Apparently, my father’s note of lessons was incomplete or not up to par. The lady was visibly upset. It was an adult conversation, but we knew she wasn’t happy with our teacher. She then collected the class notes of pupils from four different classes. She couldn’t believe her eyes. She glowed and beamed with excitement. We were delighted to see her demeanor changed and

improved tremendously towards our teacher. The volume of work in the pupils' notebooks impressed her. She checked every subject: Arithmetic, English, Science, Civics, History and all the subjects my father, the only teacher in the school, had taught in each class. She turned to the pupils—well, we weren't that many—and said we were lucky to have my father. She said many teachers who had one class to teach never put in so much for their class. She promised to send two additional teachers immediately. She kept her word. The two teachers came. They were more like tourists on sightseeing. They disappeared as quickly as they could.

Dad—the “Ever First” in Class

Dad had been orphaned at an early age. He had no uncle or relative of means to support him. He was exceptionally smart and intelligent. His nickname in school was “Ever First” because he always came on top in every class. Name it: language, math, science, art, craft, penmanship, and other educational activity, he was on top of his peers. Apart from occasional goodhearted remarks on his school career coming from his buddies and co-teachers when they socialized around kegs of palm wine, I once stumbled on some of his faded school report cards that proved the stories. With resources and the right environment, Dad could branch into any field of his choice. He had no means of continuing his education after the Standard School Leaving Certificate (now known as Primary School Leaving Certificate, or Elementary School Leaving Certificate). Dad started his teaching career after that, and later became a family man. Just for the record: a holder of the Standard School Leaving Certificate in Western Region of Nigeria (of the British Commonwealth era) in the 1940s—my father's generation—had a better command of the (Queen's) English, not to mention penmanship, than many high school or university graduates of succeeding generations.

Dad loved children and, for that, he was tagged, “Baba Ewe”, meaning, “father of little kids.” Children in the villages we lived flocked to him, not so much to receive candies—which he didn't have—but to listen to another moonlight story or receive one of his art creations. He was a good storyteller. He would design and create things to make the story or folktale come alive to the listening kids. After he had been able to save some money for further studies, I was placed with an aunt in Lagos and my mother and sister, Omotoyosi, of blessed memory, went to stay with Grandma in Otu so my father could attend a two-year Teacher Training College to obtain the Grade III Teaching Certificate. I was four years old at the time. The family was reunited after his graduation. At 6, at the beginning of the school year, in January 1959, I started my primary school education in Local Authority Primary School, Alawusa, Ilora-Oyo, where my father was a schoolteacher. He couldn't afford pursuing his education any further due to the demands and expenses of raising a family. He was inventive, imaginative and resourceful as a teacher. However, after many years in the system as a classroom teacher, he, again went back to school with in-service training, to obtain the Grade II Teaching Certificate which had become the minimum standard required for teaching, because he would be redundant if he didn't.

Romance in the Air—Here Comes “the Bride”

My father had met my mother when he lived in one of the big villages and towns that were served by the primary school where he was a schoolteacher. My father was the only educator my mother ever had to show her symbols on a slate or the letters of the alphabet or the numerals. Her classroom was their one-bedroom apartment as newlywed. The arrangement didn't last long enough for her to become a good reader or be able to scribble some words besides her name. I had shared their strange story of love and elopement in **“Out of the Miry Clay”**, a testimonial-like 128-page book I had published in 1993. A brief version will suffice here.

As the practice was in rural cultures in those days, the oracle was consulted regarding the right suitor for Mama. The oracle foresaw a stranger, not an indigenous person, in her future. This was anathema. The family would see to it that no stranger ever had any chance to come near her. Grandma then offered the prescribed sacrifices to the gods and performed the necessary rituals to keep this stranger away and at bay. As part of the ritual, a large broom had been used to sweep away every trace of this unwelcomed stranger from their vicinity. Though they were both from the same tribe and spoke the same language, my father was not one of the locals. He was the stranger. Back then, marriage was more of an agreement between the two consenting families than the individual partners in the wedlock. Grandma, Mama's nuclear and extended family wouldn't welcome any outsiders into their homes, not to talk of agreeing to such a union.

To forestall and further prevent the possibility of a stranger whisking her away in marriage, the family hurriedly made arrangements for another man, an indigene in the community, to marry my mother. However, the marriage didn't last. Due to a misunderstanding, Grandma, a “no-nonsense” woman, forcefully took Mama from her matrimonial home. This infuriated the husband, a noted *juju* man (enchanter), who was said to have placed a curse on her that she would never have any children. Not long after she had been yanked from the husband, the stranger, Mr. Moses Atilola Ojewale, a native of Fiditi, an elementary schoolteacher, was transferred to Otu. The teacher's eyes caught Omoboade and Omoboade's eyes caught his, and love ensued. However, everything about her love affairs with my father had to be a secret.

Mama's widowed mother was a strict and stern disciplinarian. She had lost all her children to childhood/infantile mortality, or in young adulthood due to lack of proper healthcare system, except my mother. You would think Grandma would pamper her only surviving child, but she didn't. In spite of her loss, Grandma was harsh on Mama as if she didn't care if she lived or died. Mama had unending chores from dawn to dusk and was always multitasking. With no father in the picture, because her father had died at an early age, Mama said she doubted her parentage and wondered if she was actually “this woman's” biological child. She said she often asked and pleaded with the older men and women in the neighborhood to tell her the truth if she was actually her Guardian's or Mama's child or an adopted child to deserve such treatment. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it was the “cruel” treatment that

toughened Mama, separated her from the pack, and made her a disciplined, independent, resourceful, and self-reliant woman.

As fate would have it, at the time that Cupid was in action—so to speak, my father had been transferred to another village primary school and had rented a room in that new village, miles away from the village where Mama lived. On the early hours of the pre-arranged day, my mother ran away from her mother’s home with a handful of all she could carry with her to meet my father, the schoolteacher, who was waiting for her with his bike on the outskirts of the town. The “solemnization” took place on my father’s bicycle as the couple rode stealthily on the footpaths to my father’s new station. With no clues to go by, the oracle was again consulted as to the disappearance and whereabouts of my Mama. The oracle indicated that she had run away with the stranger and that they should leave her alone. The couple resurfaced at Grandma’s doorstep after the birth of their second child, my baby sister named Omotoyosi, of blessed memory.

Unfortunately, and very disappointing for the young couple, Mama did not become pregnant as soon as the newlywed started living together. At the back of their minds, as a possible deterrent to pregnancy and source of their problem, was the supposed curse of infertility the first husband was reported to have placed on Mama. They kept trying and seeking medical and spiritual help, wherever possible. How long was the delay? I didn’t know. It could have been a few to many months, a year, or a few years. Back then copulation, even one time, was synonymous with pregnancy. The math was simple: A maiden or young woman had sexual intercourse = pregnancy. If she didn’t get pregnant, then there was a problem of infertility (or abortion). I was simply told that the first pregnancy was not as soon as anticipated and that they had waited and sought medical and spiritual help before Mama was pregnant with their first child. Available record located Dad’s teaching career in those towns and villages around 1949.

Earliest picture found: Yours truly by the right of dad, baby sister (of blessed memory) between dad and mom



Black is God-Made, God’s Masterpiece

One bright and lovely Sunday morning in October 1952, Dad rode his bike to Iwo Baptist Hospital where Mama had been admitted to have a baby. Dad found Mama sobbing, a newborn boy-child sleeping restfully on her breast. She was gently rubbing the baby’s body, as if that would wipe off some skin color. Confused at this, Dad asked why Mama was weeping while holding their long-anticipated bundle of joy. Between sobs, Mama replied, “They, they, they said, of all the children born in this

hospital, mine, my baby is the dark, dark, darkest baby they've ever seen." "Darkest!" Dad retorted, "Imagine all the while we've been waiting, trying, and desiring to have a baby and start a family. Now we have our first child, and you are crying that he's the darkest. What if we had had an albino? Aren't we going to be happy and love him? You aren't crying; those are tears of joy." Mama wiped off her tears. A smile, a deep sigh, Dad wiped his own tear of joy. Dad held his boy and asked Mama, "What name do we give our boy?" "Any name you suggest," Mama replied submissively. "We will name him Oluwafemi." Oluwafemi² means or literally translates, "The Lord loves me." That name was prophetic: THE LORD LOVES ME, even me.

Having been born on a Sunday, a holy day of worship and rest, Sunday became one of my names. Therefore, my birth certificate issued at Iwo Maternity and Baptist hospital, read: Sunday Oluwafemi Ojewale, Mother: Omoboade Asande Ojewale, Father: Moses Atilola Ojewale. Growing up, in schools and in the neighborhood, everybody called me by my first name, Sunday. Only my parents—Dad and Mom—called me Oluwafemi. They always did so with intentionality, as if to keep the story alive and fresh. Years later and married, friends, colleagues, peers in school and workplace, called me Michael—the baptismal name that replaced my initial first name. However, my *wives* (I remarried after the passing of my first wife) also preferred calling me Oluwafemi, in particular, my second wife, when it's just the two of us, alone. It's an endearing name. Sometimes, I wonder if they are calling my name to get my attention or mentioning my name to remind and encourage themselves that God loves them, or both. Yes, the Lord loves me, me, profusely melanin-endowed me! The African sun did not tan my skin; God made me BLACK! Ask my mother. I was pitch BOA (that is, Black On Arrival) even my mother needed help grasping reality. She was able to decode her bundle of heavenly gift and fully embrace her deep chocolate baby, because it had been written:

For You [God] formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them. (Ps. 139:13-16, emphasis mine).

Mummy Goes Back to Her Roots

Many years later, in the late 1970s, on my advice, to avoid the constant drama, suspicions, mistrust and infighting typical in most polygamous homes, Mama moved

² /O/lu/wa/fe/mi—5 syllables name/word (and musical too), as in 5-syllable words like *accommodating* (/a/cco/mmo/da/ting) and *accumulation* (/a/ccu/mu/la/tion).

back to her roots, to the native community where she had been born and raised. She was among *her* people. She had built a house with four bedrooms. There she lived and raised her two youngest children—Funke and Seyi³. During a visit, I had the pleasure of seeing the man who was Mama’s first husband, as the man was returning home from his farm. This was the man to whom she had been hurriedly married, to forestall the intrusion of the stranger, the man who was reported to have placed a curse of infertility on her. Truly, the elephant never forgets. Mama said that on her return, the man came to confess to her that it was not true that he had placed a curse on her; that he had done no such thing that was rumored. Mama said she helped him often as she could. All I can say, borrowing a phrase from Daniel chapter 1, verse 20, is this: Mama was “*found ten times better than*” him. What else can I say? Truth is stranger than fiction on many levels.

Yours truly during a visit to Mom



From time immemorial Mama cooked for her family “plus one extra plate”, and 99.9 percent of the time somebody would stray in that needed that extra plate dearly. When you asked her why she did this, she would tell you that she believed that her children, wherever they were in the world, would never be hungry, because God would send someone to feed them, the same way she’d fed other people’s children. If, after the extra plate was gone, another set of hungry men, women, kin, younglings came by, no panic. Mama was blessed with a booming voice. There and then, standing at her doorway, she would call by name, beckoning in off-the-chart decibels, on one, two or three women in the adjacent houses who quickly responded to her call. She would then begin to direct them and give them orders where to find this and that in her house and what to cook. With three- or four-women running helter-skelter in and out of the kitchen, pounding, grinding, grilling, bumping into each other in their hurry, soon wafts of sweet-smelling aroma of stew would fill the rooms. Out of nowhere in a couple of minutes would surface delicious, fresh home cooked meals. Those three or four women who came to assist her were happy she called on them because after having their own plate of food they would have extra plates to take home to share with their family members. That’s what Mama regarded as a good day when she retired to bed at night.

Now that she was back home, and back to her roots, my mother, “*Iya Oosa oko*”, as she was often called to reflect her rank in the ancestral worship system, could have been the high priestess of the family deity; a spiritual sect that had sworn to use its power to be protective and do good, and do no harm. She had been expected to carry on the torch, especially, being a born charismatic leader that she was. She was as well

³ Seyi (Oluwaseyi Ojewale), was the baby of the family. He was the leader of the Christian group on the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University. He died in July 1999, in his final year in an auto accident as he drove some members of the group to an evangelistic outreach. The circle is unbroken. The circle of kinship and belonging continues in this world and the next. Seyi, you are fondly remembered today, as always because you are alive in our hearts.

offered a chieftaincy title position by the leadership of the town. The title and position happened to be the type that could hardly be devoid of fetishisms. When she turned her back on all these and professed faith in Christ, it was like throwing down the gauntlet. It is unfortunate that, in many quarters, Pentecostalism has been reduced to, and defined by, speaking in tongues, brashness, spiritual gyration, hysteria and strange dramatics. As far as we could tell, my mother didn't pray in an unknown language, yet her stand showcased Acts 1:8 and summoned the hosts of heaven on her side. In my book, she was filled with the Holy Spirit, and her faith testified to "Holy Ghost Power," (quotation intentional).

If only out of curiosity, my Mama almost got the whole town to fill the pews of the First Baptist Church, Otu, to attend the special church service organized for her for the public to listen to her testimony. It was such a momentous occasion and talk of the town that the pastor ensured it was taped and recorded on a videocassette; it was at an era when the Video Home System (VHS) was in vogue. The service had been dedicated for her to share her story of faith with the public. Her public testimony preceded her water baptism, which was furthermore witnessed by the public. Needless to say, Mama got other women who had looked up to her as their leader to also confess Christ, because "if Mama Otu would dare take a stand against the ancestral gods, then there had to be more to Jesus and Christianity than having one's name on the church's register." Amen.

Mom at her baptism



A True Shepherd of God's People is a Rare Jewel

May God richly bless Pastor F. O. A. Alade, of First Baptist Church, Otu, Mama's pastor, wherever he is. He became like a son to my Mama, and like a sibling to Mama's children, and what a true son and "sibling" brother he was! It was an arrangement made in the heavens. Only Christians would understand the bond of that relationship. I still tear up when I remember how the Pastor was there for us and for our Mother when we could not be present with her. He was the one Mama called when she needed help, he was the family and son she had, and the one she confided in. He also called her "My Mummy" with endearment. In the waning years of our Mama's life until her departure from this world on August 28, 2008, when all Mama's children were in the big cities or outside the country, the pastor took care of her as if he was one of her biological children. That's the fruit of a faith worth believing and worth dying for, and an evidence of God's faithfulness to our Mama and to us. We have no regrets.

Our Mama's conversion and story were unconventional or the "other way around." We normally hear of and applaud parents who passed their faith to their children, and rarely the other way around of children who passed their faith to their parents. My

Mama’s children did not inherit her faith; she came to faith on the account of her children. All her children, including the two who had preceded her in death, had been Christian ministers, pastors, and lay leaders in the local churches before she came to faith in Christ. Mama came to faith through the ministry of the local Baptist church in Otu and was dramatically transformed. Thereafter, she lived, learned and served faithfully until she took her last breath. She wouldn’t miss Sunday school, mid-week prayer meeting, or evangelism for anything. This, to us, was the culminating answer to the prayers of her children. What a joy to see her act, behave and exhibit the same dynamism, abandonment, and craziness for Christ which she once regarded as excesses and fanaticism and which she once charged her children with. By His grace, Mama was finally able to discard her imaginary fears of all the negative things that could happen to her and believed the all-sufficiency of Christ to protect and carry her safely through whatsoever. Until we meet again, not soon, Mom. ☺



Seyi, the baby of the family, RIP.

DAD: A THEOLOGIAN PER EXCELLENCE **“Plus Jesus, Minus Satan, Amen.”**

Sadly, to my shame, it took me 70 years and many degrees from seminary, professional and theological diplomas to realize what a great theologian my dad was. My father had been the choirmaster in several village churches where he was a schoolteacher. He also had filled in as one of the regular preachers when a church didn’t have an ordained pastor. Unlike some of my father’s contemporaries, my father believed in, and practiced reflective and contemplative praise. Many of my Father’s contemporaries, with their impressive long prayers, were into what you’d call manipulative praise, or praise with ulterior motives. I’ll explain.

In my (Yoruba) culture you approach the chieftain or monarch singing his praise, cajoling him, and massaging his ego, so he can be kindly disposed to you. The local kings fed and thrived on such flattery that inflated their ego, so much so, that there were paid palace praise singers. Somehow, my father’s contemporaries had reduced the

eternal God to the level of local monarch who had to be buttered up, cajoled, and manipulated by saying the right words of praise that were designed to press the right buttons in the Deity. As far as Dad was concerned only a puny God would not see through such manipulative tactics. My Dad understood the thin line between a theocentric (God as central focus) and anthropocentric (humankind as central focus) “praise and worship.”

My father believed in a gracious and compassionate Jesus, the Jesus that was always willing to help, the Jesus the leper approached with the request, “If you are willing, you can make me whole.” Without a second thought, Jesus responded spontaneously, “I will, be clean,” and he was cleansed (Matt. 8). That’s the Jesus of my father’s theology. You don’t have to bribe or twist the hand of my father’s Jesus with manipulative praise words or long fast to curry His favor because He is intrinsically gracious and compassionate.

My father's concept of praise was spontaneous and reflective on the visible wonders of God's creation as well as pondering the invisible wonders of His grace in a person's life. It was praise for who God was to him, what God had done,

and was doing for him. His concept is best captured by these four old-time religion hymns, which were some of his favorites he often hummed or whistled. I will print the first stanzas of the hymns (you may check out other verses):

1. Praise my soul the King of heaven

To His feet your tribute bring
Ransomed healed restored forgiven evermore His praises sing
Praise Him Praise Him
Praise the everlasting King

2. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father

There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be
Great is Thy faithfulness; Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

3. O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,

Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!

4. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,

In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Those songs and hymn writers were praising God for who God is, not to manipulate God, or for any ulterior motives. Those were praising God for the grandeur and beauty of creation, praising God for His love and mercy and forgiveness, praising God for the gift of new life and the Holy Spirit, praising God for God's faithfulness and unconditional love in spite of us.

Today, however, some pastors, worship leaders, and gospel musicians admonish us

to praise God so God could be predisposed to bless us; that the more we praise God the more and faster God would bless us. They tell us that praise is the open sesame, the remote control, and the right button to press to get the Almighty's attention. Unfortunately, that concept leaves us with a God with such low self-esteem that He needed buttering up, a God that could not be expected to be gracious unless He's been induced with the right words that pressed the right buttons in Him. That puzzled me.

If praise is the remote control that activates the Almighty, isn't the one who holds the remote control the superior in that relationship? This is because their concept of God is on the same level as their relationship with the chieftains and monarchs. This whole concept, to me, borders heavily on spirituality than Christianity.

That was not true of my father. Especially in his senior years, if dad would say grace over a meal, pray before going to bed, or pray before going to work; his prayer was simple: **“Plus Jesus, minus Satan, amen.”** (Back then, in my overzealous, born-again “SU-mentality”, I had thought that was irreverent.) For Dad, that covered all the bases. What else to desire in a 24-hour-day? My father's Jesus was sovereign and gracious and needed no buttering up. To my father, Jesus was enough, kind, approachable, compassionate, and friendly. When you run to Him you are safe, and Satan is immediately out of the equation because of Jesus. For Dad, prayer was not about the right words but the right NAME and Mediator: Jesus. For Dad, prayer was more about the right relationship, about belonging in God's Family, and the privilege of being able to breathe out those endearing words, *“Our Father...”* with a knowing that He's there for you as your heavenly Father. Our chieftains were magnanimous but not necessarily

compassionate, benevolent but not essentially gracious; that's why you need to “seed in” something to approach them or win their favor.

I hear your protest loud and clear. You say, “How about king Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles chapter 20? Didn't he win his battle by praising God? Contrary to logic and warfare tactics, the king sent a choir to the warfront singing the praise of God, not armed and experienced soldiers, and artillery.” I say to you, “That's what *they* told you. Did you read the chapter? If you did, you would have noticed that the praise was not the weapon of warfare *per se* but a response to God's answer to their prayer and God's assurance of victory.” King Jehoshaphat, confronted with a coalition of enemy armies encamped around Jerusalem, had mobilized his people to fast and pray (vv. 3, 4). The king then led his people in a humble prayer, verses 6 to 12, beseeching God. In answer to their prayers God assured them of victory through a prophet/Levite, gave them strategy for the war, culminating in God's message through the prophet saying, *“You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!”* (v. 17). Afterward, the choir marched forth in praise, v. 21. It was the only reasonable thing to do when God had handed them the victory.

Lesson from Sunday School Class 101: When, like king Jehoshaphat, you have the assurance of God's Word, His voice, synchronicities or His confirmatory circumstances, or inner peace, that God has answered your prayer (John 10:14, 27; Rom. 8:14-17; Heb. 11:11; John 5:14, 15), you can begin to sing and praise God and do victory laps, even before the physical manifestation of the answer. Until then, continue to ask, seek and knock—Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-8.

Wherever the Shepherd Goes, the Sheep Follow

You can't really blame my father's peers because they were simply following the teachings of their spiritual leaders. In addition to putting the Almighty God on the same pedestal as our monarchs and chiefs, their spiritual leaders could also be

categorized in two ways: One, rule-based righteousness preachers, and two, the proverbial ostrich pastors. I'll explain.

Rule-Based Righteousness Preachers

For example, this is how the rule-based holiness spiritual leaders had (mis)read Ephesians 2:8. I will put the actual text in italics and parentheses.

“For by prayer (*by grace*) you have been saved through regular fasting and unfailing church attendance (*through faith*), and that because Heaven helps those who help themselves (*and that not of yourselves*); don't be fooled, there's no free lunch anywhere (*it is the gift of God*)”

(Misreading of Ephesians 2:8 by work-based salvation preachers).

If the rendering sounds appealing or familiar it is because it comes straight from the first chapter of Religion 101 recommended textbook, compiled by the Nicolaitans, and edited by Balaam (see Revelation chapter 2).

Of course, you and I know that prayer, fasting, church attendance and other spiritual disciplines are appropriate and necessary; it is just that these spiritual leaders have placed the cart before the horse. We do those things—prayer, fasting, and church attendance—in response to God's unmerited, free gift of salvation. It's the same principle in the Old Covenant. Abram “*believed in the Lord, and He [God] accounted it to him for righteousness*” (Gen. 15:6; see also Rom. 4:22; Gal. 3:6), meaning that Abram's righteousness was by grace, not by works, was credited to him by a generous God, and had nothing to do with his obedience to the Law that wasn't yet given and didn't even exist then. Also, God had already saved, delivered, and claimed Israel as His own (Exo. 6:1-8; 19:4-6; 20:2). God had said to Pharaoh, “*Israel is My son, My firstborn*” (Exo. 4:22c) and to the Israelites, “*I will take you as My people, and I will be your God... You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exo. 6:7; 19:6). Thereafter, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments (Exo. 20:3-17). The Ten Commandments weren't designed to save them and didn't save them; they served as code of conduct in the Kingdom of God.

Today, God freely covers the believer in Christ with His righteousness, gives him a new name and the status of a heavenly prince, and then endows him with the Holy Spirit to empower the believer to live into the calling that grace has conferred and bestowed on him. The question that remains for the rule-based righteousness preachers to answer is this: How would any mortal do enough righteous deeds, or how would any mortal know that he'd done enough righteous deeds, for him to confidently come to table and cross legs dining with the “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty”?

The Proverbial Ostrich Pastors (or Pastors who Bury their Heads in the Sand)

For example, God forbid, let's say there's a mass shooting at the airport on Saturday, leaving 10 innocent passengers/tourists dead and 20 others injured and hospitalized. The story is in all news outlets—TV, radio, social media platforms and your mobile phone news feed. Everyone who comes to church the following Sunday has the

unfortunate incident of the airport mass shooting heavily on his mind. That's a pink elephant in the sanctuary during the Sunday service. Here's where the pastors of my father's contemporaries enter the discussion. I am 99.9% certain that in more than half if not in all the great Evangelical and Pentecostal pulpits of my father's peers the preacher would not acknowledge the pink elephant in the room. He would go ahead with his PowerPoint slides and preach his pre-prepared "5 Steps to Get Your Miracle" or "3 Principles for Answered Prayers" as if nothing worrisome was agitating the minds of his listeners.

Why is that so? I cannot answer that question. I suspect that, to him, life, society and humanity were a disruption, intrusion or distraction from church ministry of pie in the sky, singing and preaching, and not an integral part of holistic ministry of the church. Who knows? Probably, he could not engage reality and the ministry had become for him a happy escape for him to live in his happily ever after fantasy world. Sadly, he had lulled his congregation into the same illusion. According to Jesus, "*They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch*" (Matt. 15:14).

The Eternal Versus the Temporal

Dad had a loftier concept of God than put God on the same pedestal as our chiefs, emirs and monarchs. Many things are wrong with viewing God through the lens of our chieftains, though that defective lens is the closest parallel to us in terms of understanding the power and authority of a sovereign. (Due to the US democratic, presidential electioneering system of governance, paying homage and subservience to, or veneration and autocracy of a sovereign ruler are foreign concepts to Americans). I'll mention two errors. One, the praise or worship of the temporal lords is out of fear, not love. Most of our chieftains are despotic tyrants. We have a saying in Yoruba that goes like this: "The chief sends for you and you are consulting the oracle (that is, to determine the outcome of your visit to the palace); if the oracle predicts peace, but the king says otherwise, what chances do you have?" Meaning: the oracle does not have the final say about your fate, because the king has the power of life and death. They are therefore feared. (See Prov. 16:14, 15; 20:2 for remarks on the king's wrath or favor.) The king wields absolute power over the physical existence of his subjects. However, he has no control over the souls of his subjects. God does.

Therefore, God is much more to be feared. Jesus said, "*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matt. 10:28). Yet, the Bible assures us of a loving God, saying, "*God is love. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us... Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (1 John 4:8b, 18, 19; Heb. 4:16).

"The Lord Your God is a Consuming Fire, a Jealous God," (Deut. 4:24).

To be blunt, the eternal God, unshielded and unclothed by His other attributes, is fearsome and TERRIBLE (uppercase intentional). Hebrews 10:31 says, "*It is a*

fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” “For our God is a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). God is certainly to be feared with a reverential awe. For lack of a better way to describe God, please allow me to compare the Eternal Creator and Holy God Almighty to a currency with two faces: a frontal and reverse face. The reverse face of God is Terrifying, Fiery and Consuming Fire; the frontal side of His face is Mercy, Love and Grace. Decidedly, out of God’s own volition, much like a default setting, God has chosen to constantly and permanently turn His frontal face typified by Mercy, Love and Grace face towards us (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Tit. 2:11-14). The Psalms, especially Psalm 103, speaks powerfully to this.

The second thing that’s wrong with the perception of the eternal God through the lens of our monarchs is that the worship and praise of these mortals are to induce and curry the chieftains’ favor and blessings, not essentially out of genuine love and admiration. In essence, it is a kind of “quid pro quo” which is defined as a favor or advantage granted in return for something; as in, “the pardon was a quid pro quo for their help in releasing hostages.” Some suggest that our relationship with God is on this basis, “quid pro quo” aka “what’s in it for me?” I know one of their favorite Scriptures for this, “*I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain*” (Isaiah 45:19b; KJV). I may also add my own favorite verse where Jesus said, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matt. 6:33).

Who am I to argue against such robust theological concepts, except to say that the patriarch Job was probably out of his mind when, with his body wracked in pain and sitting on piles of the rubble of his lost ventures, he declared, “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*” (Job 13:15). Earlier, when Job heard in quick succession, recurring tragic reports, he had been reported to have worshipped God saying, “*Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job 1:21). Habakkuk must be running high fever temperatures, because when confronted with the possibilities of the worst case scenarios of

devastations, he nonetheless proclaimed, “*Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls— Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation*” (Hab. 3:17, 18).

We eagerly quote, Philippians 4:13—“*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,*” to motivate ourselves to attempt a worthy goal, which is okay, except that it is without regard for its context. The context is in the preceding verses where the apostle Paul wrote about his contentment in whatever state of living he was in the two ends of the spectrum of life: between hunger and full belly, being abased and abounding. “*Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*” (Philipp. 4:11-12). For balance, we should equally and readily quote and apply the verse, Philippians 4:13, when we encounter the worst-case scenarios of life—just as the apostle had done.

This much I know: **Those who genuinely love God do not serve or worship God for rewards but are thankful for them,** “*For he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*” (Heb. 11:6b). “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also*

reap” (Gal. 6:7). I may also add Luke 6:38–
“Give, and it will be given to you: good
measure, pressed down, shaken together,
and running over will be put into your
bosom. For with the same measure that you

use, it will be measured back to you.”
However, some divine rewards are not
material or temporal; they are intangible and
eternal, and some others are not in life
terrestrial.

(I know I have stepped on some toes here but it’s okay. I am deliberately writing with
tongue in cheek and some sarcasm because the truth speaks for itself and is pervasive
to a keen looker. Intentionally, my jokes often camouflage my truth).

Our chieftains wouldn’t bless you unless you first blessed them but not Jesus. Our
monarchs would respond to us in kind; Jesus responds to us regardless, in spite of,
and without conditions. Dad knew best: Jesus is willing and able and gracious. In the
last decade of his life, my dad went about his daily businesses with: “Plus Jesus, minus
Satan; amen.” That was his favorite, on-the-go prayer. I still cannot believe why it
took me so many years to figure out the profoundness and simplicity of that.

The Third Eye Insights

This is for those for whom this discussion
on ulterior motives in praising God is still
not clear. Let’s break it down this way. Use
your third (or inner) eye. As seen through
the third eye or inner eye, in true praise the
worshipper’s head is lowered in penitence,
heart is bowed in worship and hands are
raised in surrender, singing, “How great
Thou art!” In manipulative praise the
worshipper’s head is raised, eyes looking up
and hands stretched out and cupped to
receive, screaming, “How great Thou art!”
As seen through the third eye, true praise is
the posture of a devotee on bended knees
massaging the Deity’s feet, singing “My
God is Awesome!” Manipulative praise is
the posture of an entitled petitioner on
bended knees grabbing the Deity’s feet out
of desperation, shrieking, “My God is
Awesome!”

with an attitude that says, “I’m all you’ve
got; I will tar your roads, build bridges and
hospitals IF you give me your votes.” (By
the way, you know too well what always
happens to those campaign promises after
you’ve given him/her your votes. Believe it
or not, I’m tempted to think that there are
church leaders with the mindset and attitude
that the heavens must be jubilant for having
them in God’s corner because even God
should feel indebted to them for all they do
for God’s Kingdom).

In one sense, manipulative praise and true
praise are traceable to one Old Testament
character, at different stages of his life.
Manipulative praisers and worshippers are
descendants of Jacob (meaning supplanter,
which is often interpreted as someone who
seizes, circumvents, or usurps). Jacob
believed he had to fight and work hard for
everything, including bargaining and
wrestling with God—*“If God will be with
me, and keep me... then the Lord shall be
my God... and of all that You [Lord] give
me I will surely give a tenth to You ...I will
not let you go until you bless me”* (Gen.
28:20-22; 32:22-31). Jacob was in the
driver’s seat and was dictating the term. “If

One more illustration that every Nigerian
should understand: As seen through the
third eye, true praise embodies a statesman
with an attitude that says, “Elected to power
or not, I’m here to serve you and to do all I
can to elevate this community, even if doing
so means losing my life in the process.”
Manipulative praise embodies a politician

God will be with me and keep me... then the Lord shall be my God.” It was conditional: “If... then”. Wow! That’s baffling to me!

9:11-13—“for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil... As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated’”). From then on, Israel could hear the Father saying, “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours” (Luke 15:31). As Israel, he didn’t have to fight anymore because he was the beloved of the Father. He didn’t have to bargain with God, he was God’s heir.

True praisers and worshippers are descendants of Israel (meaning prince of God, “one who prevails with God” or “let God prevail”). Israel came to the realization that, though undeserving and without merit, he had been chosen, beloved and adopted into Eternal Royalty (Mal. 1:2, 3; Rom.

You decide for yourself which group you might—happily or unhappily—have fallen into.

Is there a fine line between manipulative and true praise? Maybe, maybe not.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this long discussion on true/manipulative praise may be my personal struggle, and not my (Nigerian) readers’ issue. I’ve heard pastors and worship leaders in some Nigerian churches say something like, “God does not need anything from us, for the *‘cattle on a thousand hills are God’s,’* (Psa. 50:10). The only thing God requires of us is praise. Praise is God’s food. When you praise God, you are giving God His food. God will respond to you right away for, *‘God inhabits (or dwells in/is enthroned in) the praises of His people,’* (Psa. 22:3). When you give God His food, God will give you your food, or whatever you need, as well.” I struggle with that theological mindset.

buttons. I’ll vote for a God bigger than I—we-you-and-us put together so much so that “*In Him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28). I need the God of my early Sunday school classes, that is, the God who’s so big, mighty, and sovereign, we sang, “He’s got the whole world in His hand... He’s got you and me in His hand.”

If saying the right words is food for the Eternal Almighty that moves the Eternal Almighty to act in response to the “food” I serve Him, I struggle how I might consider that Deity as God rather than a puppet. I refuse to bow to a puppet god. I refuse to worship a deity on the same pedestal as our Chiefs, Emirs and Obas. I refuse to address as God a deity I may so easily cajole and manipulate with words of “praise”. That’s what I struggle with. I don’t want a God I may control (conjure or summon) at whim since I know what words press His right

Surprisingly, I’m okay with the quote, “**Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence,**” (which is a testimony to the power of prayer; a statement often attributed to Martin Farquhar Tupper or Charles H. Spurgeon). In that (Tupper/Spurgeon’s) quote, the petitioner is not the Omnipotent, God is. You wonder and ask: “Michael, how is, ‘Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence’ different from, ‘Praise is God’s food. When you praise God you are giving God His food. God will respond to you right away’? Aren’t they expressing the same sentiment?” In my mind, in one case, the mortal is appealing the Immortal through prayer; in the other case, the mortal is waving an open sesame magic wand called praise at the Immortal. Potato-*potah*to? Who knows? Again, I admit, it’s my issue, my struggle. Hopefully, someday, it will be clearer to me.

Food for thought: Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “*You worship what you do not know...*” (John 4:22). Could this same indictment be applicable to us today in a church culture where “praise and worship” is the in-thing; that we “praise and worship” what we do not know? (Have mercy, Lord.) “*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*” (John 17:3).

REMEMBER (“*Do not forget...*” Deut. 8:2, 11; Psa. 103:2)

This is what works for me, “remembering” or “not forgetting.” Someone should do an exhaustive word count for the number of times and places that the word, remember (or the phrase, “do not forget”), are used in the bible. I lost count. The word and phrase are everywhere, in the Pentateuch, Psalms and Prophets, (Deut. 15:15; Psa. 78:40-43; 106:19-22; Isa. 1:2-3). God wants us to remember, to recount, to keep afresh in our minds His past blessings, to thank and praise Him for them. The three notable yearly festivals of Old Testament were designed to force, if I may use that word, force, the Israelites to pause, recall, reflect, remember, and rehearse their history of God’s redemptive acts. In like manner, Jesus, on the eve of His crucifixion, instituted the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion), saying, “*Do this in remembrance of Me*” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24, 25). The Apostle Paul then reiterated, “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes*” (1 Cor. 11: 26). When we fail to remember the cross, when the imminent return of Christ has receded from our thoughts and considerations, when we forget God’s blessings, we lose our focus on God. The nation of Israel in Bible times always went astray after other gods because the nation forgot God and His acts in their history, because they failed to remember who they were and their covenant with God.

When we remember God’s past blessings, and do not forget His present mercies, they draw us closer to God—Psalm 42 (please check the two places that the word, remember, is used in that psalm). Remembering and thanking God and praising God for His mercies renew our faith, revive our spirit, and connect us back into fellowship with God. Unfortunately, we often forget the things we should remember, and remember

those things we should forget. The shepherd boy, David, gained courage and confidence to fight the giant, Goliath, because David remembered and recounted the past victories God had granted him when he had encountered the lion and the bear that had come into his sheepfold (1 Sam. 17). Somehow, focusing on God magnifies God, and minimizes the enemy. Somehow, in our perception, God becomes bigger and our problem smaller when we remember “what the Lord has done” for us in the past.

(See prayers of remembering and recounting of God’s acts in Israel’s history in Ezra 9, Neh. 9, Dan. 9, Psa. 78 and 136. Also note their effects on the covenant people.)

However, it isn’t God who comes to us, for God never shifts His position; it is the “panting” and “thirsting” of our souls (Ps. 42:1, 2) that bring us to find meaning, fulfillment, and satisfaction for our thirsty souls. For, as the scriptures say, “*You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart... He who seeks finds... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled*” (Jer. 29:13; Matt. 7:8; 5:6). As chaplain of the University of Lagos Protestant chapel in the first half of the 1990s, I once preached a sermon, titled, “Pause, Ponder and Pray.” It could be a prayer for help or of thanksgiving. In my message, I emphasized that if we THINK, we will give THANKS, and the more we will appreciate GRACE. It’s all about not forgetting, about pondering, and remembering. Old saints sang, “When I think of the goodness of Jesus, and all He has done for me, my very soul shall shout ‘hallelujah’, praise God, for saving me.” A hymn writer recommends, “When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed; when you are discouraged thinking all is lost, count your many blessings

name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” It’s a call to “Remember.” Even God remembers. God delivered Israel time and again because God REMEMBERED His covenant with their father, Abraham. What’s the point?

Here’s the point. I am not pressing the right button that feeds God’s ego when I praise God, which then makes God draw near to me. On the contrary, when I remember His goodness and pour out my praise regardless of what the present situation is—again, Psalm 42—the remembrance stimulates my faith, renews my spirit, and restores me back into fellowship with God. Old preacher said, “If God seems far from you, guess who moved?” (Not God, definitely. You did!) Spiritually, geographically, and relationally, God is where He’s always been from eternity. He never moved. We move and shift. “Remembering” and praising Him draw our souls to God who’s been waiting for us to return (Isa. 55:6, 7; Matt. 11:28). It’s interesting to note that Jesus prescribed this very word, remember, to backsliding churches in Revelation 2:5; 3:3.

Radio waves do not magically appear in the room when you turn on a portable transistor radio and adjust its antenna

to receive and play music (already) in transmission from your favorite FM station. No! The radio waves were in the room before you arrived and even before you switched on the transistor. In like manner, God has occupied and filled your environment before you think about praying or praising God, “*for in Him [God] we live, and move, and have our being*” (Acts 17:28). However, if I may say so, you are able to pick God’s signals when you turn on the receiver of your spirit and adjust the antenna of your mind to the right frequency, to God’s frequency. If, to you, praise is God’s frequency, so be it.

Back in the day, as a seriously committed young Christian, I remember that after a diligent study of the Bible and with the help of a Bible concordance, I had compiled a long list of names, titles and attributes of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. These names, titles, and attributes of the Triune God I would employ in my prayers in my efforts to induce the Divine I AM THAT I AM. It was fun. However, I don’t try that anymore. I don’t need to. I know the One Name that’s “above every name” (Philip. 2:9-11), and I have absolute confidence that that name is enough for me.

Like Father, Like Son

As I grew older, specifically after I had turned 65, I realized that my prayer time had shrunk considerably. Even my get-up-and-go prayer was shorter than my Dad’s. This was a little bit embarrassing and guilt-prone for me. I didn’t see it coming. Apparently, it had been building up. I remember that in the hustle and bustle of life in the city, Brooklyn, New York, as a schoolteacher, on many days if not daily, I had to be intentional and deliberate by setting a 15- or 30-minutes timer, for me to be able to squeeze in any uninterrupted chunk of time for private devotion. I hate saying, “squeeze in” but that was the reality. Otherwise, the day might end without a “pause to pray” slot, or retreat to my personal sanctuary where my soul could be renewed.

In the fast-paced city-life everything screamed at you as URGENT! Daily, you were confronted and bombarded with too many

distractions, too many side attractions, too many time competing and consuming demands for your limited 24-hour day, too many attention-grabbing events playing out or being displayed on your handheld or mounted screens, too much on your to-do list at home and at work that were almost impossible to juggle, too much of *too much* you were swamped, choked and breathless at bedtime, only to repeat the same the following day. Life, especially devotional life, wasn’t always like that for me.

For example, at 20, back in 1972 when I gave my life to Christ, I would challenge myself to pray all night, once a week, alone, because Jesus did so, periodically—Luke 6:12, and I wanted to be like Jesus. Then I had an exercise book for a prayer diary that contained the names of family members, civic and political leaders

and prominent individuals in society in Nigeria and elsewhere, special evangelistic/church revival events, countries, missionaries, etc. that I spent 4 to 5 hours interceding for—mostly prayer-walking back and forth in my room, alone. (Walking back and forth so I might stay awake and alert). Especially if I had to minister on any particular day, I often challenged myself to spend an equal amount of time speaking to God about the program the night before the day of the event, as I would spend preaching to the audience about God during the program. If I had an advance notification, I might spend the three nights prior to the event doing this. As a university chaplain in Nigeria during the first half of the 1990s, Thursday was my count down prayer vigil to entreat the Heavens and also prepare myself mentally and spiritually for Sunday service. (I thought I told you that I was “old school”.)

Now, a senior citizen, though spending less time on my knees or prayer walking, I don’t consider myself praying *less*, or prayer-*less*. The last time I checked, God, in Jesus Christ, does not love us more, and neither are we commended to God for fulfilling some obligations, such as praying for longer hours or fasting for half of the year. To believe otherwise would be “Checklist Christianity” of I-do-this, and I-don’t-do-that, more of the don’ts than the dos; all self-imposed, rules-based righteousness, which is an aberration, akin to walking away from sonship and freedom into the embrace of Mt. Sinai and the slave masters. Of course, I am the first to admit that, spiritually, there’s always room to do better, and be better. However, I refuse to use the word lazy or sloppy to describe my devotional or prayer life, because one, Romans 8:1 is true—“*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*”, and two, because

like Brother Lawrence, I also engage in “**The Practice of the Presence of God.**” Another way of saying that The Lord and I are in constant heart-to-heart conversation and two-way communication all the time. I “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17), which is a good scripture that soothes my conscience in this regard.

Albeit, it’s unbelievable that after 5 decades of devotional routine, it’s still a constant struggle for me to find and maintain a consistent “same time, same place”, uninterrupted block of time for my daily devotion. Now and again, I heave a sigh, “Thank You, Lord”. I still long for those 2, 3, 4 or more weekly consecutive hours spent on my knees or prayer walking in my room in the 1970s, but I couldn’t recapture them—no matter how hard I tried. Maybe they would never come back. Prayer-walk back then was to enable me stay alert while praying. Not so, now. Presently, my incentive for prayer-walking, stationary biking or using an exercise stepper is to multitask, that is, engage in physical exercise and intercession. It’s a routine primarily necessitated for the benefit of body exercise along with prayer.

These days, I walk around mostly breathing one phrase of prayer, “Thank You, Lord,” which is one word less than my Dad’s “Plus Jesus, minus Satan.” I’m not complaining of less time groaning on my knees. I believe in seasons of life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, and senior years. I’m just thankful for every step of my journey, and for every bump and stop on the way. And I’m equally thankful for every redeemed foolish misstep, recalibration and rerouting after unforeseen and humanly unforeseeable roadblocks and unavoidable stops. Talk about Divine GPS and grace so amazing.

Again and again, for every remembrance, recall, flashback or throwback, I say, “THANK YOU, LORD.” For my hopes, desires, goals, dreams and visions for future, I offer them up to Him, Who is Faithful (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13), and breathe again, “Thank You, Lord”, because He’s been too faithful to leave me now, too faithful to not see me through—as He’s done time and time again. I thought I always had seasoned my prayers with thanksgiving in accordance with Philippians 4:6, “*...in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*”, however,

presently, the clause, “with thanksgiving”, overshadows all requests. In terms of prayer life, I believe those undergirding “everlasting arms” of the “Eternal God” Who is my “Refuge” (Deut. 33:27) have graced and raised me from groaning to gratitude, contrition to celebration. It reminds me of the first verse of (late) Andrea Crouch’s Tribute—“To God be the Glory,” which goes:

“How can I say thanks
For all the things You’ve done for me?
Things so undeserved
Yet You gave to prove Your love to me
The voices of a million angels
Could not express my gratitude
All that I am
And ever hope to be
I owe it all to Thee.

Three surviving of the family: Side by side with Venerable Steve, Assistant Pastor Funke sitting on my laps (Photos taken in Feb. 22)



To God be the glory/3x
For the things He has done.”
(Andrea Crouch).

Psalm 71—Aging Gracefully With an Ageless Grace-filled/Grace-full God

Now I can say that I understand, to a great extent, the sentiments behind the Psalmist’s prayer in Psalm 71 (bold fonts and left borders, mine). As a senior citizen, this Psalm speaks to my heart so much that I tear up anytime I read it.

5 For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth. 6 By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother’s womb. My praise shall be continually of You.

⁷ I have become as a wonder to many, But You are my strong refuge.

⁸ Let my mouth be filled with Your praise And with Your glory all the day.

9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.

¹⁰ For my enemies speak against me; And those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together, ¹¹ Saying, “God has forsaken him; Pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him.”

12 O God do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!

¹³ Let them be confounded and consumed Who are adversaries of my life; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor Who seek my hurt.

14 But I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more. 15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And Your salvation all the day, For I do not know their limits. 16 I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only. 17 O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works. 18 Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come. 19 Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? 20 You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, Shall revive me again, And bring me up again from the depths of the earth. 21 You shall increase my greatness, And comfort me on every side.

The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord Shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. (Psa. 92:12-15).

PS: IbukunOluwa⁴, this appendix, “**Fondly Remembering Dad and Mom**”, is especially for you. I know you are a very smart girl. The reason you were not given Ojewale as a last name will be clear to you, because you’ll figure it out sooner than can be imagined. It’s a long story I hope to tell someday. I know as well that you’ll be proud of your hyphenated last name, Olu-Michael (4-syllables, /O/lu/Mi/chael, as in /A/la/ba/ma or /O/kla/ho/ma). You are unique. There could be a thousand Michaels in North America; you’ll scarcely come across another Olu-Michael. In biology, to discover the innate potential and possibilities of an organism, we study its four grandparents. I hope “Fondly Remembering Dad and Mom” gives you a window to our ancestry, our roots,



our genealogy, our family tree, our story, and ultimately, into the person you are. This is who we WERE, and who we ARE: **We Are the Beloved of God.** “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). Our skin color is dark, because God made us “*fearfully and wonderfully*” so (Ps. 139:14).

Like Grandma, work hard, pray harder and feed the hungry soul God sends your way. Don’t rest on your oars. In the words of a basketball coach, “Hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard.” Like Grandpa, learn, study, excel, nurture and exercise your creative spirit, and teach others. Love people, serve them, and enlist others to be on your team, because you cannot do it—your God-given assignment—alone; you need other people in your corner. Keep faith simple and real, like Grandpa, do everything, “Plus Jesus, Minus Satan.” Above all, pursue peace. It’s been said that peace begins with a smile. I’m glad you are playful and smile a lot, naturally. Keep it up. I love you, IBK. You know I really do. Bless you. “*May the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you*” (2 Thess. 3:16).

Lastly, IbukunOluwa, this is OUR STORY AS I REMEMBER IT. I have to put that caveat, “as I remember it” because I have often been accused of having lapse memory or that I have a selective memory, because I don’t always remember the bad things that happened to me or that people did to me. I remember only the good vibes. I think of it as a special gift from God. Though, technically, no one is trauma-free, I can say that 1 Corinthians 10:13 has been woven into my storyline, even before I learned to read the Bible: “*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*” I’m thankful to God for His faithfulness and for His grace that overshadows or numbs any horrible past experiences I might have had, so I may live and enjoy the present. I’m the firstborn child of our parents. It will not be out of place to say that I have a special place in their hearts, as they do in mine. I’m certain that it is possible that my other siblings might remember and experience our parents differently. However, “This is MY STORY.”

IbukunOluwa, “*Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments*” (Deut. 7:9).

⁴ IbukunOluwa (translation: The blessing of the Lord) is a 6-syllable name/word (/I/bu/kun/O/lu/wa), as in a 6-syllable word like *rehabilitation* (/re/ha/bi/li/ta/tion).

POSTSCRIPT

Reading over this work, **WHITHER BOUND, CHURCHIANIZED NATION?** (100,000+ words), I was mightily and embarrassingly surprised at the high levels and numerous numbers of first-person pronouns—I, me, we, etc. in the work. I never intended it that way. Somehow it read like an autobiography and valedictorian memoir at the same time. Even if I had set out to write an autobiography I might not have fared better, except for more intentional table of contents and sequencing of the narrative. Regarding reading like a farewell note, I know it will happen when the time comes and it will be a happy moment of my final salvation, but I am in no hurry to see Jesus—or to see Mom and Dad and departed siblings. What's the sense of hurrying to a place where you are going to live eternally FOREVER!!!

However, I LOVED THE SCRIPT! I loved its overall tone. Why? It put a smile on my face for two reasons; One, it is common knowledge that as far as science and technology are concerned future generations always build on and greatly improve on the achievements of generations before them. I'm not sure that the same could be said of religion—especially Christianity—morality and godliness in general. Moral decline, religious apostasy, postmodernism, relativism, decadence and devolution of erstwhile institutions and systems that once guaranteed safety and peace are what we are witnessing. With that in mind, as I again read every page of the script it was with a smile on my face, because it dawned on me that this work is my way of joining my voice to other voices out there and declaring: **THIS IS THE FAITH THAT WAS HANDED OVER TO US WHICH WE NOW GLADLY BEQUEATH TO YOU.** It is a TRUST to which you are now also ENTRUSTED, same way as we had been. Run with it and be faithful to the end. God's blessings on you as you do this.

Two, the Yorubas have a saying that the elders would not be in the market with a newborn baby's head not properly placed or

comfortably nestled on her mother's back (because the elders would step in to correct the situation). Back then mothers backed their babies, secured with a wrapper tied around their chest, atop their breasts; the market was an open public square. Meaning: the elders are responsible for spotting and correcting anomalies and abnormalities in the society.

Unequivocally, anyhow you consider it, by whatever criteria you choose to measure, Yours truly—even in Diaspora—is one of the Christian Elders or Statesmen in the land. I'm not a church founder, denominational leader or high-ranking ecclesiastical title holder, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain"* (1 Cor. 15:10a). I hope this work may rise in some measure to the level of what my saintly 6-month-old baby did in church on Easter Sunday, 2022. She was yelling hysterically and rebelliously, something out of character, during the preaching in church when the guest preacher had disregarded the old-religion refrain, "Jesus paid it all" and was offering redemption to whosoever for the paltry sum of N2000.00 (<\$4.00) on an Easter Sunday (see Didactic 002). Didn't the prophet Isaiah say, *"And a little child shall lead them"*? (Isa. 11:6d). To which I say: Lead on, IbukunOluwa. This work is my way of heeding Jude the Apostle's injunction to *"contend [contend earnestly, NKJV] for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people"* (Jude v.3; NIV).

Our Lord Jesus Christ had promised, "I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

The hopeful words of Gilbert K. Chesterton come to mind. Chesterton had said, "At least five times the Faith has to all appearance gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases it was the dog that died... Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave." Assuredly, the history of the Faith bears testimony that our

God is greater than the dogs (of despotic leaders, demonic ideologies, ungodly philosophies, religious falsehoods, ferocious persecutions, antisemitic regimes, etc. who

had attempted to bury the Faith) and is larger than all the graveyards combined. It'd been the attackers—from within and without—that had gotten buried.

“Quo Vadis?” (Whither Goest Thou?)

At the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples: *“Little children, yet a little while I am with you.”* Peter asked, *“Lord, whither goest thou?”* The Lord replied: *“Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards,”* (John 13:33, 36; KJV.) According to tradition, while the Apostle Peter was fleeing Rome on the Appian Way, Jesus accosted Peter and asked, “Quo Vadis?” (Whither goest thou?), the same question Peter had asked the Lord. Humbled by this encounter, Peter returned to Rome where, we are told, he died a martyr for the cause of Christ.

destination, Nigerian Evangelical/Pentecostal Churches? Specifically, please allow me to ask: Whither Bound, Churchianized Nigeria?

In one form or another, that question comes to each one of us, “Whither goest thou?” especially regarding our spiritual destination. In the context of this book, “Quo Vadis?” (Whither goest thou?) might be asked of the Nigerian church. Where is your spiritual

As an educator, especially one with a science background, I bask in asking questions, the right and sometimes hard questions. If this work has provoked questioning, raised a new set of hitherto unasked bold questions, then I would have done my best job. If, however I have provided some answers without further provoking questionings, then I sincerely ask for your forgiveness because, in that context, I haven’t lived up to my calling as an educator. I didn’t really set out to give answers or quell the search and end the discussion. On the contrary, to open the door for more discussions, to push you to question, doubt and reinvestigate those things you once firmly believed as they were passed down to you.

What Do You Want Your Readers to Take Away from This Book?

I’m glad you asked.

In brief, **the problem the book, *Whither Bound*, addresses can be termed the “lookalike syndrome”,** in Nigeria and elsewhere, for “All that glitters is not gold.”

The present religious landscape of the world is filled with JESUS LOOKALIKES—in the negative ways. The disciples of Jesus asked Him, *“What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”* (Matt. 24:3e). The first sign and warning Jesus gave them was this: *“Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ [that impersonation is the lookalike syndrome] and will deceive many... Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many”* (Matt. 24:5, 11; insert mine). Today, we are dealing with a plethora of Jesus lookalikes. Evidently, “the end of the age” is upon us.

These Jesus lookalikes are unlike the disciples of Jesus in Antioch who so much embodied and manifested the Spirit of Christ that the unbelieving onlookers, with evil and negative intentions, coined a derogative word, “Christians,” (meaning: Christlike ones) to deride them (Acts 11:26). Lookalike is the profit-making business of impersonation.

I began my discussion in Didactic 001 by drawing attention to two dangers in the church, 1) the preaching of an incomplete gospel, and 2) the preaching of a corrupted

version of the gospel. I advanced my thesis in Didactic 001 by using, as an illustration, the damaging effects of fake drugs. A fake drug is the lookalike or fake imitation of its genuine brand. In fake drugs, you think you are taking the medication that will cure your disease but the pill you are swallowing does not have the potency to do so. This may hurt you in more ways than you think. One, because the pill is not treating the cause of the disease, the disease progresses, and your condition deteriorates. Two, the chemical substances in the fake pill may do further harm to your body, and also overload your metabolic systems. Lastly, you have wasted money and resources buying fake drugs, poisoning yourself, and you may eventually die of the disease. How sad and pathetic! Therefore, we cannot begin to imagine the damages that “a fake Jesus” (as in fake drugs) or fake spiritual leader in the church can do to sincere seekers.

Believe it or not, we also have political-leader-lookalikes or occult-leader-lookalikes in many Nigerian churches. As it is practiced in cults and occult circles, it was a known secret that a certain political leader, a one-term ex-President of the US in this century (who shall remain nameless), always demanded sworn loyalty from his staff and close associates. Many church leaders in Nigeria, by the administrative setup of their denomination, demand loyalty and implicit obedience from staff, associates, and members to whoever is above you in the administrative echelon. If you get out of line, you immediately place yourself under a curse and those curses and imprecatory prayers are already enshrined in the unwritten rulebook of the church. Though unpublished and undistributed, the code of conduct is taught and understood by all members. Patterned after Old Testament Moses, it is top-down management style where you unquestionably obey the instruction of the leader. It is not uncommon to find some self-styled, self-ordained 30-year-old leader—addressed as Daddy by the members—ordering around members twice as old as he is. The military rule is “obey first before you complain”. In these churches, it is “obey first

[your leader at any stratum—pastor, deacon, group or sector leader, etc.] and never complain.” If you complain, that’s likened to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers chapter 16, and you know what happened to them, don’t you? (If you don’t know, please read Num. 16).

In this era of postmodernism, everything has a lookalike. Even Satan, the adversary, has his lookalikes. If you doubt me, please look into the eyes of many world rulers and political leaders from around the globe—if eyeball-to-eyeball isn’t possible, then consider the outcomes of their hidden plots, schemes, selfish, narcissistic and egotistical propaganda—and tell me how on earth you couldn’t find Satan lookalikes.

Kindly allow me to further explain the concept of lookalike in the following parables of Jesus.

In Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish house builders (Matt. 7:24-27), the two houses—one built on rocky foundation and the other built on sandy foundation—appeared the same to any observer until the rains fell, winds blew, and deluge and floods descended on them. Although the two houses were subjected to the same weather conditions, the difference in their foundations resulted in different outcomes. The end result was regrettable and devastating for the foolish builder. Also, in Jesus’ parable of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the 10 virgins were asleep in the waiting room with their lamps by their side. To any observer, the two groups were comfortable, relaxed, looking forward to meeting the groom, and probably snoring under the same cozy ambience of the waiting room. It was the late arrival of the bridegroom that proved the unpreparedness of the 5 foolish virgins. The end result was regrettable and devastating for the 5 foolish virgins.

On two different occasions Jesus gave two parables of two sons and their fathers (Matt. 21:28-32 and Luke 15:11-32). He told of two sets of siblings with the same last names, both working in the family business, eating dinner from the same family table but these two were heading in different directions spiritually, one

pair discordant with the Father. Lastly, in Jesus' parable of "Wheat and Tares" (Matt. 13:24-30), the owner of the field forbade his servants from prematurely uprooting the tares, which had been planted by "an enemy", because the two were intertwined. He cautioned and restrained his servant with these words, "*Lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest*" (Matt. 13:29, 30). The wheat and tares both grew and completed their life cycles in the same soil environment, same habitat, and same ecosystem. The separation and burning up of the tares happened at the time of harvest. **These were parables of two lookalike houses, two sets of lookalike virgins, two siblings under the same roof, who'd had everything in common, and two lookalike plants growing in the same field, but all with different eternal destinies.** The same hot water that hardens an egg softens a potato. The difference is what's inside, what they are made of.

In line with Jesus' dualism in those lookalike parables—not that I am attempting to put myself on the same pedestal with Jesus—I had mentioned and cautioned toward the end of Didactic 001 that we have two parallel streams of the Faith. First, **Authentic Christianity** and second, the practice of the **Religion of Christianity**, and that these two are identical in that they both mention and claim to serve

Jesus Christ and His Church. However, authentic Christianity is a relationship with a living Savior, and it is liberating, for Jesus has "*come that [we] may have life, and that [we] may have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10b). Authentic Christianity is Jesus only, and it is laser-focused on the New Testament, or, more appropriately, the New Covenant. It is rooted in "*having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 5:1) and "*the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all*" (Tit. 2:11).

On the other hand, the practice of the Religion of Christianity is a religion, a practice. It is fluffy, appealing, and enslaving. It fosters spiritual bondage to a Church Lookalike, which is an aberrant mirror image of that sacred institution called the Church—the Body of Christ. The church lookalike is an enterprise, mostly a family business. As its ultimate goal, the religion of Christianity furthermore engenders bondage to the superstar charlatans who own and run those church lookalike institutions. The practitioners, who propagate the religion of Christianity, either intentionally or inadvertently, are working to maintain and keep alive "*the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And [which] He [Jesus] has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*" and "*wiped [it] out*" (Col. 2:14).

Without any doubt, bad theology or false biblical teaching can produce a deeply religious and moral person. Even some cults, sororities, and fraternities, by the tenets and practices they have sworn to uphold and live by, can and do achieve this end as well. However, it is highly doubtful if bad theology can lead to authentic Christianity, or genuine Christian faith where the believer is living in active fellowship with the Spirit of the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "*You will know them by their fruits*" (Matt. 7:16). What fruits? Christlikeness—the same fruits the cynics in Antioch noticed that made them coin the word, Christians, which at the time was a sneer word. The practice of the Religion of Christianity is the lookalike of the Authentic Christian Faith. As in Jesus' parable, the end result could be regrettable and devastating for those engaged in the practice of the Religion of Christianity. Hear this charge from the Apostle Paul,

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. (2 Cor. 13:5).

Authentic Christian Faithful Versus the “Playing Church” Devotee

This is not to suggest that “Authentic Christianity” as described in the book, **Whither Bound**, is homogenous, monolithic, uniform or one-size-fits-all. This is far from being the case. **Authentic Christian Faith is comparable to water. Like water, it takes the shape (and color) of its container while retaining the essence of its substance.** Authentic Christianity is superbly diverse and positively pluralistic, comprising “*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language*” (Rev. 7:9). In different geographic zones and people groups, it branches out into many forms, shapes, spiritualities, cultural patterns, and it embraces and embodies contrasting and divergent denominational practices. Yet, with all these diversities and transformations, they all espouse, are united and rooted in one truth: **JESUS ONLY** as the All-Sufficient Lord, Savior, Deliverer, Healer, Sanctifier, Perfecter, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and the soon coming King.

In the authentic Christian practices, the Word and the Holy Spirit (through the prayerful ministry of the local church) are the midwives of spiritual births, national revivals, church growth and renewals. No human agency or denominational practice is endorsed as intermediary or mediator because this will only serve as a hindrance, eventually blocking the people’s view from seeing the real Jesus and may lead to substituting human agencies for the work of the Holy Spirit.

CHRISTIANITY IS EITHER THIS OR THAT; IT CANNOT BE BOTH

Christianity is either a *spiritual* life, that is, a life lived by the Spirit, humanly impossible and unattainable except by the indwelling Christ (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17-21) resulting in a Kingdom-minded people who strive to do God’s will

“on Earth as it is in Heaven” (Matt. 6:10), or Christianity is a *religious* life, that is, a noble, morally inclined humanistic movement doing good works, because it is the right thing to do for the health of society, not dissimilar to the Boys/Girls Scouts of the world. We seriously have to consider the fact that we are either a *Holy Spirit led* movement founded by a publicly crucified and gloriously resurrected living Leader, doing good works by His Spirit, in His name, as the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Matt. 5:13-16), or we are a *humanitarian* religious movement with an absent once-upon-a-time miracle-working-leader who’s now on furlough, doing the best we can in our own power to promote morality, welfare, justice and reforms in society. It is either/or, we cannot be both, and we cannot have it both ways.

When a person joins a local church, he/she becomes a member of that church, which is a social and sacred institution. However, when the person experiences a second birth, he/she is “born of God” according to John 1:12 and 13 and becomes an heir of God and joint heir (or co-heir, NIV) with Christ (Rom. 8:17). There’s a big difference between the two. **To conclude as succinctly as possible, “Authentic Christianity” is the outworking of the new birth or birth from above (John 3:3; 14:23; 1 Pet. 1:3) both in an individual’s life as well as in the corporate life of the collective of individuals we call “the church”.** Anything else outside this is “playing church”, “doing church” or “going through the [church] motions”; phrases I learned in the US.

Unfortunately, many gullible souls are riding in a church bus which isn’t traveling on “the Way, the Truth, and the Life”, hence does not have Jesus’s “Father’s House” as its ultimate destination for the passengers (John 14:1-6).

Who, Specifically, is This Work For?

You know by now that I will answer that question with storytelling, don't you?

In my undergraduate days the lecturers and professors poured into me. I was like a sponge, and I soaked up their wisdom. During exams, I regurgitated back to them, most times verbatim, the things they had deposited in me. That was the relationship; the exam was “return to sender”. Today, we call that passive learning, because it was not as transformative as it should have been. During my first master's degree I tiptoed around the subjects and the professors, because the possibility of moving up the scale and earning higher wages was at stake.

However, in my subsequent graduate (or post-graduate) studies, especially in the US, when acquisition of skills and knowledge, and not earning daily bread, was the issue, I engaged the subjects and my professors. I was an adult, new immigrant, black male student, and I behaved that way. If being black and an immigrant with an accent did not make me visible enough, I increased my visibility in every class by raising my hands and asking questions and instigating debates, because I wasn't in class to soak up knowledge but to actively reflect and process my thoughts. I wasn't anti-American though I came across to some that way. I challenged the professors and took them to task. From hindsight, I would say that I was unnecessarily self-conscious of my race, as well as being a new immigrant, and for these reasons—my skin color and accent—I had determined, been stubbornly determined, not to play or accept any inferiority role at any level, in any shade, shape, or form. (I was a *Great Ife!* and a *Great UI!* rolled together)⁵. In the process, I earned the respect of my professors and supervisors. We became friends and collegial (not necessarily peers). There was

hardly a class that the professor, especially in education courses, did not single out my paper and read portions as example of what he/she was looking for in a graduate level class. I was surprised when a colleague mentioned to me that our supervisor and boss in a CPE unit had said to him that I intimidated him. Maybe, I could believe that coming from one of my colleagues, but from the boss? I yelled, “Who?” “Me?” “No way!” “Impossible!” “He's the boss!”

I bring the same uninhibited, graduate school level, adult mentality to church. I don't come to church for the preacher, pastor, or bishop to pour into me. Rather, I come to church to engage life and the scriptures with the preacher and, from the engagement, collusion, intersection and interaction of life and scriptures, to hear an authentic word from the Lord. I'm not a tabula rasa, a blank slate—I have feelings and strong ideas that I need the pulpit to recognize, address and challenge, not ignore. It is unquestionable that uncountable times, there exists a chasm—a big gap—between what a worshipper believes from his Bible studies and prayerful devotion to God and what he's experiencing in his day-to-day life. Meaning that, even though the believer is not consciously and willfully living in unconfessed, known sins, there's yet a clash or misalignment between life (or reality) and the indomitable promises of the scriptures. That's when a fresh Word of hope, encouragement, assurance, and inspiration from the Great Shepherd through the ministry of His pulpit is especially needed and desirable. Therefore, if the service/sermon was refreshing and I was blessed, as much as possible, if he/she was available with no aggressive security

⁵ These were the rallying slogans of the alumni of the universities of Ife and Ibadan,

respectively; two world-class academic and research institutions in Nigeria.

personnel around him/her, I always edged my way to meet and shake the preacher's hand and give him/her my compliments and

unsolicited comments. That's the kind of engagement and adult relationship I expect for this work and me.

For that reason, this book, **WHITHER BOUND, CHURCHIANIZED NATION?** is not for every Nigerian. It is for Nigerians with their **SPIRITUAL EYESIGHT** wide open, who **THINK DEEPLY** and **RESPECTFULLY QUESTION EVERYTHING**, including questioning this book and its author. Are you up for that challenge? Let me close with 1 Corinthians 14:20 where the Apostle Paul admonishes, *“Brethren, DO NOT BE CHILDREN IN UNDERSTANDING; however, in malice be babes, but IN UNDERSTANDING BE MATURE”* (uppercase mine). Are you a child or an adult? Prove it.

Closing Prayer for the Pulpit

May God save us from pastors who teach the scriptures detached, disconnected and disjointed from life here and now on Monday mornings. May God deliver His pulpit from life coach preachers who confuse abundant life (John 10:10b) with human achievements and who would be more productive teaching and motivating the Boys/Girls Scouts of the world. May God rid His pulpits of demigods who charm the pews into stupor and oblivion. May the day come when character and content, motivation and inspiration, zeal for and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, Biblical exegesis and Christian discipleship, modeling and mentoring for leadership, are the happy duos that sparkle from every pulpit Sunday after Sunday, in Nigeria, the USA, and all over the world. Amen.

BEFORE I SIGN OFF—FYI

Presently, I am a chaplain in a New York State medium security correctional facility that may house about 1500 incarcerated individuals. I'm a chaplain to both staff and incarcerated individuals of all religions and no religious faith. I consider myself a good team player with the admin executive team. I minister and preach to a Protestant congregation behind bars, with 65 as the highest Sunday service attendance record. Yet, I prepare for the service and minister with intentionality and intensity in no way different than I would with a congregation of one precious soul sitting on a bench in a park, or a crowd of 65,000 souls in a cathedral bedecked with stained-glass windows. In about a decade as a prison chaplain, hundreds or probably thousands of men from different races, ethnic backgrounds, languages, with formal or no formal educational qualifications, different economy status, varying types of criminal records, first

time or recurrent incarcerations, etc. have been under my ministry as chaplain and pastoral care giver in the six months, one year, two years or four years of their incarceration. On some Sundays, I preach in what an inmate once termed my “seminar voice”, other times in my evangelistic voice, or a switch from one to the other in the same message. The goal always is pastoral. Some call me “my pastor” with a glow in their eyes; some see me as a role model or mentor. (I never made much of this.)

For many years in the classrooms of inner-city schools (especially in Brooklyn, New York) I had dealt with teenagers controlled by hormones leading them to display a flurry of fleeting mood changes. Such as, one minute she was cheerful, the next minute she was morose. I knew, from experience, that any hostility or semblance of it displayed toward

me wasn't about me and had nothing to do with me. For most times, the teenager's behavior to the teacher was a misplaced hostility or euphoria. The teenager was reacting according to the stress or bliss emanating from his/her conflicting internal and external environments. Therefore, whether true or false, I had chosen to operate with a mindset that nobody—teenager, teacher, inmate, coworker, supervisor or subordinate—had any valid, legitimate or concrete reason to hate or dislike me, except from bad judgment or prejudice (which was their problem, not mine).

In my Nigerian Yoruba culture, we give civility, pleasantries, and neighborliness their pristine meanings. A Yoruba person cannot come in contact or be in proximity with you without extending a pleasantries or well wish that's unique to that moment. For example, we have a word of greeting or well-wishing for every season, occasion, event, or hour of the day, such as, a greeting or good wish for you when you are sitting, walking, tripping over or falling, eating, traveling, returning from a trip, teaching, learning, working, relaxing, standing, getting out of bed, going to bed, you name it, we have a greeting or salutation for it. That's why it's hard for me to be in the same space with someone, walk by anyone at his/her desk, in the walkway, or lobby and not voice a greeting or send a good wish. Since the English language is paltry in this regard, I'm left with a hearty "How're you doing?", "Good Morning Sir", and "Good Afternoon Ma". That's disappointing for someone who loves clowning around. (Clowning is a positive energy which helps to lighten the atmosphere).

When I said "Good morning" to an individual at work, I deliberately put so much energy and enthusiasm into it you

would think I was saying "Good morning" to the universe that had just handed me a free cup of coffee. Though it had never been voiced, I was always conscious that this elation might validate the stereotype that Black people are loud, but that has never bothered me. I'm alive and well! God's air fills my lungs. If I walked into a space and sensed hostility, tension, or resistance, I took no responsibility for it because it had nothing to do with me. On my part, I would find ways to diffuse the circumstance and lighten the mood. If that didn't happen, their unhappiness wouldn't deter or dent my happy mood.

When I turned 60, I made a quality decision to have fun and find humor in everything I did and whatever came my way. Henceforward, I was at my best when I was clowning and having a bellyful of laughter. "A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22a; NIV). Occasionally, I got mail from an incarcerated individual about to reenter society thanking me for making them laugh during the Sunday services. I might act like one, but I never considered myself a comedian. It's just that I didn't know how to preach THE GOOD NEWS OF A LOVING GOD WHO SENT HIS SON TO DIE FOR OUR SINS, with a frown or scowl. (By the way, comedy is my TV staple. I'm stuck on the reruns. Comedians are so crafty, devious, and hilarious when they tell the bitter truth about your foolishness that you laugh so hard you forget you are the butt of their joke and end up liking them though the real you want to hit them.) I count it a privilege to be offered the chance of being part of their life's journey as their chaplain, a religious authority figure, father-figure, mentor, and, above all, God's agent of change.

My Philosophy as a Prison Chaplain

I don't think of an incarcerated individual as an island. Rather, I consider each one as a member of a (dysfunctional) family system,

tribe, or village that's in dire need of healing and restoration. I am therefore always conscious of the ghosts of aunts, uncles, sons

and daughters, dads, and mums present in every case, as well as unvoiced stories of the broken dreams and unfulfilled aspirations of the family, tribe, or village. With that frame of mind, I understand whatever I do, and however I do it, in three ways.

First, whatever I do or say, and however I do or say it, is a reflection of who God—whom I profess to represent—is. Is He God of love and compassion, who forgives, restores and always willing to grant yet another chance? I want them to come away believing such a God. For the same reason, while I don't make promises, I try hard to keep my word. Not because I am good at it, but because I represent a God Who keeps His Word. I am also aware that many of the incarcerated individuals came from a background of distrust and were well familiar with disappointments and broken promises from authority figures in their lives. I strive to be the exception, the authority figure that keeps his word.

Secondly, I consider every encounter as an indirect opportunity to reach out to the family, tribe, or village that the incarcerated individual represents, because, whatever happens to the incarcerated individual has a corresponding effect on the morale, emotions, and worldview of his village.

Lastly, whatever his crime or race, I imagine every incarcerated individual wearing a badge that reads, "*Imago Dei* (Image of God); Handle with Care." For, "*inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me*" (Jesus in Matthew 25:40).

The decade I spent in the classrooms as a science teacher in inner-city schools in Brooklyn had proved to be of tremendous advantage to my work in the prison system. As a teacher (once a teacher, always a teacher), I conducted my business in the prison with four eyes, two in my eye sockets and two at the back of my head. As a pastor, I walked into every situation with four ears, two on the left and right sides of my head and two on the left and right atriums of my inner heart. Intentionally, and to everyone's advantage and benefit—if I may say so, I wore these two caps

simultaneously: inner-city schoolteacher and clinical chaplain (or pastor/pastoral caregiver)—see *TEACH THEM*, Book 2, chapter 1. At any given point, I relied on the skills and charisma of whichever was appropriate for the situation. At the end of a day's work, when I dropped off my keys to go home, I forgot and left behind everything behind the prison walls. The slogan and advertising campaign for the city of Las Vegas put it well: "What Happens Here [in jail], Stays Here." From my discussions with other chaplains and prison facility employees I believe the ability to drop the keys and put the prison out of my mind is a gift, a real blessing.

Being a New York State paid chaplain/employee in a medium security prison facility frees me from worrying about the color of the carpet in the sanctuary, building extension or renovation projects, staffing and budgetary needs, or the outgoing and incoming diaconate or board of elders. Nor do I have to bootlick or curry favor of some donors. It also enables me to be able to think outside the box. (Happily, I'm encased in none.) The only thing I worry about is being my authentic self, comparing and measuring myself and ministry with no one else but myself and my calling, seeking to be and do better today than (I was or did) yesterday, and praying for grace to faithfully deliver to the world the message I was sent here to deliver. I come alive, play my music, dance my dance, craft and deliver my message especially when I run my fingers over the keys of a word processor. I print and distribute my sermons to the incarcerated men in attendance every Sunday service because the sermons were birthed on a word processor. (This is also part of my bending over backwards to compensate for my accent). It always warms my heart when incarcerated individuals tell me that they have a folder where they file my printed sermons, and that they study and share them.

I am not the miracle worker—Jesus is. In my book, every day with Jesus is purposeful, even in a jail cell. I know and preach a miracle-working Jesus, not merely in the third persons by recounting and retelling biblical miracle accounts or verifiable miracles from other

people’s testimonies but in the first-person singular as a beneficiary of daily miracles and divine interventions. My utmost goal is to introduce and connect the incarcerated individuals to this life-transforming, never-failing, miracle-working JESUS.

I usually have my wife winking at me or gently kicking my feet under the table to caution me when, characteristically, I crack my expensive jokes and display my dry sense of humor. Unfortunately, I don’t have that privilege when I am by my laptop. Please forgive my painful sarcasms, uncurbed dry sense of humor and bear with me if/when the messenger’s style blurs (or appears to make blurry) his message. I thank you in anticipation of your forgiving spirit. This work, **Whither Bound, Churchianized Nation?** which I’ve chosen to tag A PROJECT FOR THE MOTHERLAND, was clearly out of my radar.

It literally gave birth to itself because it had to be written. It was the product of a 6-months FMLA (unpaid) vacation in Nigeria, Dec. 2021 to May 2022.

In closing, I have a confession. Reading over, I was reminded that some Christians might charge me with immodesty. Have I been modest or immodest? I was able to resolve this when I asked myself: “Which of these two reports will gladden the heart of a parent: ‘Mom, it got broken,’ or ‘Mom, I broke it’?” I had a choice to speak of God in the passive voice (e.g., “God is able; God can do it.”) or in the active voice (e.g., “God is making me able; God did it for me.”) I guess you know my choice by now. We don’t serve a passive God. We serve a God who is active in His people, God who is creating mini stories here and there through the experiences of His people. I’m thankful to be counted as one of His. AMEN.

Lest I forget, I’ve never been prouder than I am now that I am an AMERICAN.

Questions for Reflection/Group Discussion

1. Relate your story of faith. How has God been made real to you or your family? (See a more detailed account of the author’s story of God in Part 3 of Didactic 001, pages 56 to 81 of *Whither Bound*).
2. What practice or practices in your parents and/or grandparents would you like to be perpetuated in your children and future generations?
3. The question: “Quo Vadis?”, “Whither goest thou?” comes to each one of us. Ask yourself: Where am I going... spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, and my commitments to myself, my community, and to God?
4. If we could (a) be mindful that each person we meet is not an island and that he represents a village, (b) that each individual is “Imago Dei” bearer of God’s image, and (c) that we are accountable to God how we treat our fellow human beings, especially the least, lost, last, and forgotten of society (see Matt. 25:31-46 and Luke 10:25-37), how will that awareness condition our human interactions in society?
5. As you go about your daily duties, do you ever imagine that you might embody and represent the hopes, aspirations and stories of your village or extended family, such that if you fail, they wither, and if you succeed, they thrive? That you are blessed to be a blessing; raised for such a time as this, (Est. 4:14)? (In other words, are you the Moses—the deliverer—of your village/extended family, and as you carry the burden and play the part, do you consider it as your God-assigned role?) If so, explain.
6. If (5) is remotely true of you, do you think that the different persons that you encounter daily might feel the same (that is, that they are “the Moses” of their village), and if so, is there something you can do (or not do) to make it easier for them as they carry the weight? Discuss. (Is it: “Don’t judge me until you know me”?)
7. The world is not in short supply of people who will offend you for no reasons whatsoever. I am naturally not a fussy person—those who know me can testify that I am not. However, when I turned 60, I made a quality decision not to be offended

- by whatever anybody did, not to give anyone the power to control my mood or happiness. Without making excuses or finding some justification for their bad behavior I chose to see past their actions, inhale-exhale and “let it go”, “let go and let God” and not let them determine my happiness. I attributed this to growing up.
- a. How is that attitude a good or not so good philosophy in a society that’s prone to hostility, selfishness, and out to devour you and take advantage of your good intentions?
 - b. Why is it that we sometimes find out too late in life—and some never find out—that many of our battles are not worth fighting, and countless things we’ve fussed over never truly deserve the time and attention we gave them? Explain if you can, how is it that we often learn this lesson late in life?
8. I read again the piece on true/manipulative praise and chided myself. I said, “Michael, what a waste of words and illustrations. Just say, ‘In my opinion, manipulative praise is selfish and self-centered; true praise is selfless and God-centered. One is, ‘I’m praising God to receive XYZ from God’, the other is, ‘I’m praising God because God is worthy of my praise, with or without XYZ.’” Nothing more.” Do you agree with that succinct explanation? Explain.
 9. In the “Third Eye Insights” the author uses three or four illustrations to describe true/manipulative praise/worshippers. Where do you find yourself, and why?
 10. Describe or explain, Christianity and Churchianity, similarities and differences.
 11. 3-2-1 exercise: (a) 3 questions that this booklet answered for me; (b) 2 questions that this booklet further raised for me; and (c) 1 reason why this booklet was meant for me.
 12. Life Application: What action or decision will make this booklet worth your while?

ADDITIONAL INSPIRATIONAL RESOURCES

Scan the QR code on the frontpage or on page 39 to access our website, a treasure trove of free Christian inspirational and educational resources. You may donate on our secure website @ www.BackToBasicsMinistry.org If you can send a donation, kindly do so. God bless you.

JUDICIOUS CIRCULATION

As the Lord provides, we may donate hundreds of copies of our booklets to a local church/ministry for their use. If/when we do, we still ask that these booklets be NOT sold or distributed willy-nilly. The circulation is to be based on “take one for any token donation—cents and pennies acceptable”. Any teenager, student or mature person who has genuine interest in reading the booklet should have some currencies in the wallet/purse that he/she could part with without being impoverished thereafter. This is to prevent a haphazard distribution system and ensure judicious circulation. As the scripture says, *“For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man”* (2 Cor. 8:21; NIV). However, no student or teenager who desires to have a booklet will be denied a copy for having nothing to “donate.”

If necessary, by the display desk, you may put this banner: “TAKE ONE BOOKLET FOR ANY AMOUNT OF DONATION—1¢, \$100 bill or more.”

First printed and released in July 2023,
to mark the second birthday of **IbukunOluwa Precious Olu-Michael**,
whose presence in our lives has changed us and modified our ministries.
Without her, **Whither Bound, Churchianized Nation?** couldn’t have been written.

DAD, THIS IS ESPECIALLY FOR YOU

(“Shaped by my story” (pg. 1), Dad would be proud of me for my authentic reflection below:)

Although my father had passed 10 years before I relocated to the US in the Fall of 1996, he would nonetheless have given me his blessing for the migration. Moreover, Dad would have encouraged me not to live as an alien but like a “son of the soil” in America. For, *“Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you”* (Jos. 1:3). As an American citizen, and a reflective Christian, I humbly submit this thought, because my father would be proud of me for doing so, even though *Whither Bound: Churchianized Nation?* was my reflection on Christianity in Nigeria.

AMERICA, WE HAIL THEE⁷

It is common knowledge that whatever is “off-color” or “deviant” in the Nigerian church, especially, in the free-for-all Pentecostal churches, is copied and learned from America. Many Nigerian Christian leaders—especially the entrepreneurial, highly motivated, self-starters and church founders—look up to America as standard of perfection in everything, including preaching, teaching, leadership styles, fundraising, building projects, etc. They learn the good, the bad and the ugly. Nigerians are generally good students, and in most cases, they perfect whatever they learn from American preachers, “as seen on television”, beyond the practice of their remote teachers, mentors, and role models. Their highest aspiration is to one-day visit the American churches and ministries they watch on television. Some Nigerian pastors are so enamored with America they’d argue with you until thy kingdom come to prove to you that America is “God’s Own Country.” To which I ask: “Which God? The god of the almighty \$\$\$, or the deity of ANTI-XYZ?” (Where XYZ is science, climate change, assault gun control reform, etc.) You could put a billboard, **“As Seen on US TV”** in front of many indigenous founder-led Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, because they are copycats of their TV models.

This is not a sweeping generalization or painting all American churches or church leaders on TV with a broad brush of bad influence on Nigerian churches, and African churches in general. I know, and I have great respect for many American churches and church leaders of high integrity that are passionate and committed to

⁶ A term popularly known on the Internet for when someone includes extra information that is off-topic to advance his or her own selfish interests. A promotion usually completely unrelated to the conversation.

⁷ “Nigeria, we hail thee,” was the first line of the first Nigerian national anthem at attaining Independence on October 1, 1960. Six decades later, those of us who were old enough to have waved the complimentary miniature Green, White, Green Nigerian flag that day now struggle to hold back tears from saying, “Nigeria, we *wail* thee.” Nigeria is endowed in every area except good leadership with foresight, skill and passion to harness resources for nation building. May God, again, remember us, turn to us in His favor and send us our Moses.

foreign missions and are sending short- and long-term missionaries, and seminary teachers to Africa and other Third World countries. Their approach is respectful and affirming. They form partnerships with African nationals, not “big brother, little brother,” or “big I, little you” mentality. They come alongside the African leaders as partners in the Kingdom. Sometime, the support is in form of building Bible or theological schools in the community, training local pastors and church leaders in their communities by the visiting or short-term bible teachers, rather than granting scholarship to a few Christian leaders to study abroad. The local leaders they train in turn take over the leadership of the schools and train their own people. They also support indigenous missionaries financially, with needed equipment, vehicles, and other resources. This group of American Christians has been real blessings to Nigeria and their continued influence in teaching sound doctrines and modeling ethical Christian leadership are most needed at this time.

AMERICA, WE HAIL THEE NOT (Or “America, We *Wail* Thee”)

Every survey indicates that Christianity and church attendance are on the decline in the United States. A recent study (2022) from the Pew Research Center shows that America’s Christian majority has been shrinking for years, and if recent trends continue, Christians could make up less than half the U.S. population within a few decades. That America’s Christian majority is facing steep declines is worrisome.

As one with background in the sciences, I approach life and issues by turning them into questions, preferably pint-sized questions that I can easily solve, or that will lead me to asking more questions. When my middle school students tell me they have some ideas for their science projects I ask them: “What is the question? Frame your idea in a question form for me, please.” Science is about asking (the right) questions and finding ways to answer them by formulating a hypothesis and designing experiments to test the hypothesis.

There was a conversation between the *researcher* and the *Christian* in me. So, the researcher in me asked, “*Why is Christianity declining in the US?*” *Could it be because...*

- 1) The Bible is not available in American language or not accessible to whosoever? The Christian in me answered: **An emphatic, NO.**
- 2) There are no preachers, and no one is preaching the gospel? The Christian in me answered: **Another emphatic, No! Preachers abound in the US, preaching is going on 24/7 on TV, radio, church buildings, social platforms, etc.**
- 3) *The researcher asserted:* The unbelieving world couldn’t see and haven’t seen any difference between themselves and professing Christians and therefore they feel pity for Christians and have no desire for what Christians claim they have to offer. *The rejoinder.* **Probably so! Most likely so! Unfortunately, this is true. You have a point here. For example, in the US, the rate of divorce, incarceration, drug addiction, domestic violence, etc. is about 50:50 among the worldly and Christianly people. Christians are as guilty of bigotry as the non-Christians. If Christianity works, why isn’t it making the difference? Why isn’t it working in the lives of many professing Christians and Christian leaders?**

This leads me to another question. *Researcher: Why is there no difference between those who claim to be Christians and those who have no interest in religion? Could it be that...*

- 1) Contrary to erstwhile proclamations and claims that the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the New Testament gospel change and transform lives, that this isn't true anymore or has been overstated. *The rejoinder: I doubt this. I sincerely don't believe it. The true preaching of God's word and Jesus as Savior still transforms lives and changes situations. God has not changed, and Jesus has not.*
- 2) *Researcher:* Though preaching and church attendance are going on, and mega churches are springing up here and there, there has been a departure from Biblical and New Testament truths. Now, watered-down gospel or half-true salvation messages are being preached, name-it-and-claim-it is the vogue, psychology has replaced theology in the pulpit, and the people are offered a spineless and fake Jesus (who himself needs rescuing). *The rejoinder: Sadly, I concur with you.*
- 3) Leadership! Numerous spiritual leaders, televangelists and mega church pastors in the land have been (a) known with the feet of clay, (b) are tainted with sexual scandals and money embezzlement, (c) conduct church/ministry like a family money-making business, (d) without regard for conscience and righteousness, under the guise of preserving conservative values and a theological framework of "The end justifies the means", have dabbled into politics, promoted, crowned, and proclaimed modern-day "Hitlers", narcissists, racists, bigots, chauvinists as saviors in order to appease their tribe and constituencies, (e) are known to exchange wedding vows and change spouses like ladies change shoes, (f) have been known for many unfulfilled and false prophecies they openly on national TV had prefaced with "Thus saith the Spirit of the Lord," yet—hit or miss—they keep on prophesying at every election cycle, (g) from their self-righteous Pharisaic reading and understanding of the Bible, they neglect grace and mercy typified by Jesus in favor of Mosaic "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," etc. The list is inexhaustible, and I have not mentioned their fundraising gimmicks, telethons, and reformatted versions of the old "sale of indulgences" to vulnerable souls seeking divine help. The truth is that their gullible constituency may be fooled, and has been fooled, again and again, but the world is not. These leaders are a bad press for Jesus of Nazareth. Most of their practices negate true religion, which provokes the question: Why would anyone, in his right mind, for his soul's salvation, desire their "Made in America", opulent, partisan Jesus, who'd been reeling under systemic racism? Can't you see that the Jesus of Nazareth, the true Jesus of the Bible, has been missing from many American pulpits a long time ago? *The rejoinder: Okay! Enough! I get it! I'm ashamed I have to admit that we've missed the mark.*

This leads me to another question: *What is the way forward? How do we stem the tide?*

First, let's talk. Let's not shy away from having honest conversation on these.

In the meantime, please read,

1. WHITHER BOUND: CHURCHLANIZED NATION? and
2. PULPITS, PEWS & POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE US: WHO IS USING WHO? both by Yours Truly, available on our website, www.BackToBasicsMinistry.org as free e-books. They are downloadable and printable for noncommercial purposes.

#shamelessplug. My name is Michael Ojewale and I approve this message. ☺

Free Resources, e-books, and audio books available on our website--www.BackToBasicsMinistry.org

CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS BY THE REV. M. O. OJEWALE, PH.D.

1. **TEACH THEM** Books 1 and 2 (most recent publications) -- 2021
2. **God and Suffering**—*A Theology of Hope and Healing*, published 2002, 151 pages
3. **Blessed Are Your Tears**—*Making Sense of Pain and Suffering Through Community and Storytelling*, published 2001, 149 pages
4. **Emotional Wellness**—*A Biblical Recourse to Mental and Emotional Well-Being*, published 2004, 191 pages
5. **Even a Caged Bird Sings**—*Discover how you may “Rejoice in the Lord Always”*, published 2004, 96 pages... AND MANY MORE...

CHRISTIAN AUDIO BOOKS BY THE REVEREND (DR.) M. O. OJEWALE

Uncle Mike Answers Your Questions—Read by a paid professional, 119,702 words, 21 chapters, 2014.

CHARACTER EDUCATION BOOKS, especially for public schools and concerned parents interested in promoting civility, decency, and virtues; non-religious, story-based; teacher-and-students friendly, workbook format, standard/letter paper size (A4 or 8.5” x 11”), downloadable and printable, by Dr. M. O. Ojewale

1. **Moonlight Stories from West Africa**—*Featuring Fifteen Tortoise Folktales*, workbook format; published 2012, 224 pages
2. **Let’s Talk About That**—*30 Talking Points for Teen Success* (2nd edition of *Success Motivation and Life’s Skills*)—workbook format, 2017, 208 pages.
3. **The Forty Nuggets of Wisdom for Life**, *Sequel to Success Motivation and Life Skills*, 2008, 166 pages
4. **The Forty Nuggets of Wisdom Virtues Exercise Workbook**, *Students’ Workbook and Journal*, 2017, 64 pages
5. **Teens of Character Resource Book 1**—*A Comprehensive, All-inclusive Resource for Life Coaching, Teaching Character, and Citizenship Qualities in an Educational Milieu*, published 2013, 240 pages

ADVOCATING DISCRETION: We live in an increasingly litigious secular society. Our practice of “Take a copy for any amount of donation” is intended to prevent our friends and users of our booklets from being accused by anyone of proselytizing or forcing our booklets on them against their wish. Suggesting a donation of even a cent/penny to receive a copy demonstrates personal decision and choice, without any coercion.

6. **Youth of Character Resource**, (Teens of Character Book 2), published 2013, 208 pages
7. **Youth With Purpose**, (Teens of Character Book 3), available online as e-book only, 2013, 206 pages
8. **Youth With Impact**, (Teens of Character Book 4), available online as e-book only, 2013, 178 pages

ON RELIGION AND POLITICS—FREE E-BOOKS:

1. **Pulpits, Pews, & Political Parties in the US:** Who is Using Who? Dec. 2020, 24 pages
2. **Nigeria’s 60 Tumultuous Years (1960-2020)**—Which Way Forward? Dec. 2020, 34 pages

WHITHER BOUND: CHURCHIANIZED NATION?

**A Passionate Review of Christianity
in Southern Nigeria (and a
Probable Clue to the Condition of
Christendom)**

**Featuring a Collection of 3 related,
dated, author-designed, color printed
materials: Didactic 001, Thinking
Aloud—2, Thinking Aloud—1, and
other didactic essays and
commentaries.**



Michael O. Ojewale

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MICHAEL O. OJEWALE/FONDLY REMEMBERING DAD AND MOM

Family Photo shoot in Nigeria to mark my 70th birthday: In the picture are my evergreen, endearing Sweetheart, Queen Praise, our charming then 15-month-old cute baby, Princess IbukunOluwa, and me, the king of the castle, Michael, the storyteller. IbukunOluwa was every bit a part of the mission.



Biblical miseducation is worse than Biblical ignorance because false theology leads to false expectation. Fake drugs, which are imitations or lookalikes of the genuine, will not heal your disease and may further damage your system. In like manner, spiritual falsehood offering a Jesus-lookalike, a fake Jesus, will not heal your soul and may further damage your life in more ways than you can imagine. In the end, half-truths may be as damaging as absolute deception.

What is WHITHER BOUND, CHURCHIANIZED NATION? It is:

- Essentially, a collection of 3 related, dated, author-designed, color printed materials, preserved and presented here in their original booklet format, as they were earlier circulated (from February to May 2022) in some parts of Lagos, Nigeria
- A compounded medication, in the spirit of 2 Timothy 3:16b (NIV) and Revelation 3:19, concocted and served with love, for the purpose of (a) teaching, (b) rebuking, (c) correcting and (d) training
- A 100,000+-word book that literally gave birth to itself because it had to be written
- For some, a hard pill to swallow. For others, it is “a word spoken in due season... a word fitly spoken,” and “open rebuke... the faithful wounds of a friend,” (Proverbs 15:23; 25:11; 27:5, 6). For the author, simply storytelling.

In local churches and chapels, we offer copies to interested persons based on: **“Take a copy for any donation you can afford.”** All donations and gifts will be thankfully received to sustain this readership-sponsored literature ministry. To the public, we use mail order sale by DHL, FedEx, etc. for those who request for copies in response to our national newspaper ads.

Our three-pronged approach: 1) To circulate this book, “Whither Bound, Churchianized Nation?”, in millions to enlighten the masses, equip and empower future church and denominational leaders; 2) to create awareness for free online resources on our website; 3) to raise funds for the distribution of “Teach Them” publications on campuses in Nigeria.

**A Publication of Back to Basics Ministry USA, Inc. www.BackToBasicsMinistry.org
 © 2023, Michael O. Ojewale ISBN 978-0-9888393-2-8 Civility Press, NY
 Email: Team.TeachThem@gmail.com**

From the Postscript: “This book, *Whither Bound, Churchianized Nation?* is not for every Nigerian. It is for Nigerians with their SPIRITUAL EYESIGHT wide open, who THINK DEEPLY and RESPECTFULLY QUESTION EVERYTHING, including questioning this book and its author. Are you up for that challenge?”