DEVOTIONAL MOODS BEHIND *NOMINA SACRA* IN JUDEO-CHRISTIAN AND MODERN THOUGHTS

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Abstract

It is obvious that divine names in Jewish literature carry the sense of identity, reverence and glory. The Jewish people out of reverence for the name of God over the centuries have attached devotional moods to the name of God. During the Christian era, Christian scribes have employed such reverence and the tradition for writing sacred names continued to the modern times. Using descriptive and analytical methods, this paper evaluates the concept of *nomina sacra* and the devotional moods associated to sacred names in ancient Jewish and Christian literature. Unlike other works, it also considers the modern expressions of sacred words particularly among Christians in the literary and non-literary worlds despite the rise of critical and scientific means, which have been questioning Christian religious texts. The paper cautions Christian scholars and Bible translators on the pressure secularism is exerting on the devotional intentions behind sacred words in our modern writings and the need for continuing this ancient Christian scribal practice in a technological world.

Keywords: Devotional Moods, reverence, *nomina sacra*, Greek contractions, manuscripts, Christian scribes, Tetragrammaton

Introduction

It is obvious that the divinity of Jesus has been questioned and abandoned in many critical writings from the Age of the Enlightenment in favour of the quest for the humanity of Jesus. The Bible and Christianity have been torn apart by critical and scientific enquiries. Such efforts among critical scholars are affecting the devotional moods associated to religious texts particularly the Bible and the faith.[1] Attaching devotional moods to words have been as ancient as writing in the Jewish and Christian corpuses. This practice started with the divine name particularly the understanding of the Tetragrammaton in the Jewish society. Ludwig Traube's invention of the words *nomen sacrum* in 1907 has created many arguments over the years. Subsequently, C. H. Roberts also revealed with an emphasis on the importance of the *nomina sacra* (26-48). Furthermore, scholars are concerned about the origin of the practice of abbreviating the sacred names in ancient Christian writings.

Such a quest on the *nomina sacra* has not been able to go beyond past understand and to evaluate the present writing skills. This paper intends to join a number of scholarly works to enlighten the academic community on the devotional moods attached to words in the ancient literary and non-literary worlds particularly among the Jews, the Jewish-Christian and non-Jewish Christian. It also evaluates the modern corpus of writing to show continuity on devotional moods on the *nomina sacra*.

Sacred Names in the Jewish Tradition

It has been a common thing among the Jews to revere God. From the days of Moses to the present day, the Jewish people have considered God as being one who has delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians. In ancient as well as modern Jewish thoughts, the name for Yahweh has attracted reverence among the Jews, Jewish-Christian and non-Jewish Christians. In extant pre-Christian Jewish biblical manuscripts, the divine name is characteristically written in special ways intended to distinguish it from the surrounding texts

as reflected by Emmanuel Tov on the Qumran Hebrew material (Hurtado 661). According to Pavlos D. Vasileiadis, the name of Yahweh is introduced by a Hebrew Quadriliteral name, known as *Tetragrammaton*. This name is transliterated in English as YHWH and occurs some 6,823 times in the Hebrew Bible and found in various inscriptions of the Biblical period such as Mesha stele of the 10th century, the Kuntillet Ajrud inscription of the 9th/8th centuries B.C.E. and the Lachish and Arad Ostraca of the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E (Vasileiadis, "Jesus" 2). This has been the most sacred name of God and speaks of God in the singular. Although the names of God are not of human invention, but of divine origin, though they are borrowed from human language, and derived from human and earthly relations (Vasileiadis, "The Pronunciation" 3).

In one of his works, Vasileiadis discusses the pre-Christian use of the Tetragrammaton, the usage in Christian and patristic period ("The Pronunciation" 5-8). During the Christian era, in the LXX, the divine name is given special treatment in some Greek biblical manuscripts of Jewish provenance with the Tetragrammaton written as ιαω (Hurtado 662; Vasileiadis, "The god *Iao*" 21-51). This Greek connotation is commonly used by Jewish-Greek magicians also particularly when they want to use the name of God to cast spell or in the form of phylacteries to protect people from demons or evil spirits. Such a connotation was predominantly used also by Jewish sorcerers in Egypt. Instead of four consonants, it has been rendered three vowels in the Greek mind to depict God as being the "I AM" particularly among Greek-speaking Jews.

The Ten commandment forbids the Jews calling the name of God in vain (Exo. 20:7) and it is believed that the Jews forgot the exact pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. This makes, according to Pavlos D. Vasileiadis, the Jews during the late Second Temple period (200 BCE-70CE), the priesthood and the rabbinic teachers began replacing the name with other metonymic terms, like "Heaven," "the Name," and so on (9). Vasileiadis states that Josephus wrote that at the end of the 1st century CE there were Jews like himself who knew the correct pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, though they were bound by the then current rabbinical interpretations not to utter it (Josephus 57, 2:276; 11:332). But there are no clear indications that the prohibition against uttering the name resulted in the common Jewish people's ceasing to use it (Runia 229-30). The pronunciation was heard by the people at least at the annual Day of Atonement, when the high priest had to pronounce it aloud. According to a statement included in the Talmud, "the Ineffable Name, having been pronounced in the Temple by the High Priest, immediately 'disappeared' from the hearer's memories" – thus being obscured the simple fact that common people knew the true pronunciation of God's name (Elior 778-81). Also, J. B. Harford states that "Rabbinic threatenings against the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton in the second century AD shew that so far the true pronunciation was not uncustomary" (144). G. A. Deissmann observes that the Tetragrammaton "in its correct pronunciation was, of course, still known to the Jews, though they shrank from using it, up to and into the Christian era" (335). Vasileiadis goes on to state that the tradition of the non-pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton was a rather later tradition, dating to the second century BCE, and enforced by the Masoretes after the second century CE. Therefore, all this indicates that until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton was actually well known among the common people ("The Pronunciation" 9-10).

It is obvious that divine names in Jewish literature still carries the sense of identity, reverence and glory. The Jewish people out of reverence for the name of God over the centuries, forgot the phonetics and how to write the Tetragrammaton. Contrary to the argument laid by Vasileiadis on the ability for the Jews to pronounce the tetragrammaton, the famous Scholem's manuscript speaks about the hidden, forgotten elements of Hebrew that are neglected in the Zionist enterprise. It speaks about the "names," the holy entities of

language, and warns of their apocalyptical potential. The names are holy words that lie hidden and silent in Hebrew, the ancient language of creation and revelation. Now, with the "renaissance of Hebrew," the holy names are transformed and "actualized" in a new, profane, territorial frame—the Jewish settlement in Palestine (Shahar 300-301).

Such a hidden meaning of the Tetragrammaton and other Hebrew words became more hidden in terms of their meanings during and after the exile when the Jewish people could not recapture the Mosaic thoughts on God and the Judaism. Such forgotten behaviours have continued even unto modern Judaism and the Christian era where Christians have had the freedom to call the name of God with the coming of Jesus. Many people still have issues with calling of God, such understanding is geared towards reverence for the name of God. It becomes worst when translations surfaced in ancient and modern languages. Of the three popular and main religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) in the world, Christians have been comfortable with the pronunciation of the name of God in Greek among the early Christians. With the emergence of translations, the name God, has been popularized, which makes the name to be dethroned of its divine reverence. In the same thought, Christians are chastised for freely pronouncing the sacred name even though Jewish tradition places stern injunctions against its utterance (Zaleski "Naming God"). Christians are also seen to be offensive, which is extreme to the practice in Judaism and Islam and that the Tetragrammaton should not be pronounced instead they should use the "The personal name of Jesus, the incarnate I AM, on whom the divine name in all its glory rests" (Zaleski "Naming God").

The name of God declares God's uniqueness, God's reliable presence and God's transforming blessings and claims (Soulen, "The Blessing" 47-61). But the name of God, unlike in the Mosaic Judaism, seems to be losing its reverence particularly with the emergence of civilization and the rise of liberalism of the 18th century. The Jews would regard the name of God to be so holy and would honour its significance in relation to the divine attributes of God. Even when copying the Torah, they tried to avoid errors on their parts because of how sacred the words of the Torah had significance.[2] The cabalistic connotations associated to divine names are awesome and should teach the entire world the place of reverence and devotions to sacred names. Such reverence to the name of God was extended during the translation of the LXX in the third century BC to further the Jewish tradition on a Greek text and later adopted by the Christian scribes.

Early Christians and Sacred Names

Throughout the generations of Christianity, there have been devotional moods ascribed to sacred names. Scribal practices in ancient Christianity have proven the use of *nomina sacra* in literature. Christian scribes generated this idea from Semitic habit for contraction of proper names to their first and last letters in Phoenician and Palestinian coins of the Hellenistic period and this idea was connected with the Punic towns of North Africa (Millard 71). Besides being an imitation of the Jewish practice, such practice of contractions from the Hellenistic period has helped the understanding and development of sacred names in ancient Christian literature on certain words particularly at the end of the lines. James R. Edwards put it: "*Nomina sacra* are contractions of select names and terms that appear in ancient Christian literature and art. Scholars agree that *nomina sacra* are particularly characteristic of early Christian texts and art and are not typical of manuscripts or art of demonstrably Jewish or pagan provenance" (816-9).

Scholars have documented on the *nomina sacra* but have always been in disagreement concerning the origin of *nomina sacra*.[3] Traube opines that the practice of writing in contracted form began among the Greek speaking Jews who imitated the Hebrew consonantal writing of the Divine name by omitting the vowels of Θεος (36) and he gives the impression that such practiced spread and included the contracted forms and other identifiable *nomina*

sacra but Paap is convinced that the full designation beyond the divine name Θεος is dominantly Christian (119-27). Such a position was criticized by Schuyler Brown as Κυριος being the origin of *nomen sacrum* among the Christians (7-19).

However, Edwards holds a different position from Hurtado and Tuckett when he stated that "to date the presence of a genuine *nomen sacrum* in an indisputable Jewish source is either extremely rare or nonexistent" (816-19). Kurt Treu also believes that *nomina sacra* began among the Jews prior to Christian usage and initially included both Θεος and Κυριος written as contractions with a horizontal lines placed over them to distinguish them in Greek texts where they served as translation equivalents for יהוה. Bokedal sums up discussions on the *nomina sacra as follows;* To sum up, three major models accounting for the origins and significance of the *nomina sacra* convention are still in play: 1) The *nomina sacra* are of Jewish origin and they mean something (Treu and Kraft); 2) the *nomina sacra* are of Christian origin and they have no meaning (Tuckett); and 3) the *nomina sacra* are of Christian origin and they mean something (Roberts, Hurtado) (20).

Although the early Christians have tried to maintain the Jewish idea of devotional mood on the name God but Treu was right that they initiated the idea of supralinear lines over the sacred names to distinguish the word from being an ordinary contraction. The idea was applicable to the persons of the Trinity and a wider range of religious terms (Hurtado 665; Soulen, "Hallowed Be Thy Name!" 14-40). Such an intention has provided a direction to the general understanding of the sacred names among early Christians.

Similarly, on the foundational spectrum of the *nomina sacra*, Millard states that it originated from Jewish mentality of writing the sacred name of God YHWH (Millard "Reading" 71) but Hurtado opines that the proposal is applicable to YHWH and cannot explain the peculiar Christian habit of contracting words to their first and last letters (Hurtado 655-73). In individual scribal features, however, the Christians practice seems to show adaptation of some non-Christian techniques. It is also probably adopted in Jewish tradition which such close analogies found for understanding the religious meaning and aim as many devout Jews treated the oral and written treatment of the divine name YHWH (Hurtado 660).

It can be said that the idea of Christian *nomina sacra* is ambiguous and 'syncretistic' as it has tapped from different sources to form standard approaches to the sacred names. Attaching devotional moods to certain words was Jewish but the general idea of Christian contractions of words as sacred names was a refined initiative which imitated the Hellenistic Greeks.

Apart from the question of origin, another related issue is whether the name God and/or Jesus generated the *nomina sacra*. George Howard opines that Κυριος and Θεος were the first considered *nomina sacra* among the non-Jewish Christian scribes who when copying the LXX found no reason to maintain the Jewish Tetragrammaton (392-3). Howard's pointing to the LXX above should have great significance as scholars sort out the classification of the *nomina sacra*. One wonders what was first translated God at that time. It would appear that such devotional intentions were transmitted during the make of the LXX which would likely put the name of God first before Jesus in the search for devotional intentions.

It can be said that the idea extends to the Ptolemaic's LXX even before the emergence of Jesus. Eldon Jay Epp argues for the Christian *nomina sacra* theory that God and Lord in the context of deity are witnessed in the Christian practice (5-55), a position which is contrary to Treu that 'Lord' and 'God' as *nomina sacra* are adopted from the Tetragrammaton and expanded to include varieties of Christian names and words (Edwards 816-9; Vasileiadis "The Pronunciation" 5). Hurtado suggests that it is likely that "early date and Jewish-Christian provenance of the suspended form of Jesus' name points to the possible origin of the *nomina sacra* in early Christian reverence for Jesus' name" (667). And that if the *nomina sacra* began with the special abbreviation of Jesus' name, it appears that very quickly the

other early-attested *nomina divina* (Θεος, κυριος, χριστος) were also accorded scribal reverence and written as sacred abbreviations (Hurtado 669).

An intermediate decisive position is stated in the work of Edwards when he believes in the Jewish or Christian origin because of the nature of *nomina sacra* found in some Oxyrhynchus papyri particularly P.Oxy. 1166, P.Oxy.1075, and P.Oxy. 1007 which are all dated the third century (816-9). However, these are somewhat late manuscripts as we have manuscripts, which are dated to the second century; in fact, the first quarter of the second century ($\mathfrak{P}^{52}$, though does not contain a sacred abbreviation) and presumably documents from the first.

The second century manuscripts contain traces of *nomina sacra* and enable us to date the scribal practice to the second century. Although the origin of *nomina sacra* takes us to the second century, Hurtado opines that it probably takes us beyond to the first century; hence, the four divine epithets (Ιησους, Θεος, Χριστος, Κυριυς) were known as *nomina sacra* and allowing minimal time for the practice to gain sufficient recognition and standardization. This would make the origin to be no later than the late first century with argument from ancient epigraphical evidence whereby there was a time lag of several decades when terms became "sufficiently familiar to be recognized in abbreviated form by the intended readership" (Hurtado 660). Hurtado's proposal needs to be reminded of the inability to possess a valid first century New Testament manuscript in modern text critical studies.[4]

It is clear that the Christian tradition recognized the devotional moods associated to the name of God in Jewish literature and the LXX which would make the argument for Θεος to be preferable over Ιησους. The Tetragrammaton was replaced with some form of the epithet "Lord" and the tetragrammaton has not been found in any surviving Greek manuscript of the New Testament (Vasileiadis and Gordon 23). But the regard and exaltation of the name Jesus among the early Christians and the New Testament writers in the first century would swing the pendulum to the other side and probably would suggest that sacred names particularly Jesus, God, Lord, and Christ were stressed to show significance and reverence in the autographs of the New Testament in line with Hurtado.

If such understanding is envisaged among the early Christians as a people, who started the practice, the name Jesus would have preference as the early church underscored the divinity of Jesus just as the name God as derived from Jewish-Hellenistic literature. Jesus' divinity was highly regarded and protected in the early church. Following such a practice of attributing divine quantum to Jesus, it is observed that:

> To equate a human being—Jesus— with the unfathomable and ineffable "I AM" is as much a logical impossibility and blasphemy to Jews as it is a focal point for Christians. To Jews, God enlivens human flesh but would never be born into it—much less die an ignominious death. In the Jewish tradition, God is neither male nor female and is not bound by earthly limitations. For the Jews, God exists by definition beyond body, space and time. For most Christians, though, the divinity of a fully human Jesus is unassailable dogma.... (Kelly "Naming God").

This makes Jesus' humanity to equate his divinity. His personhood is divine and his divinity is also human as revealed in the incarnation (Meynell 52-62) as it was pleasing to the early church to include the divinity of the Trinitarian heads as the understanding of God increased to include Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

As a result, *nomina sacra* were categorized in early Christian thoughts as reflected in discovered manuscripts. According to Hurtado, there are three groups: four earliest attested and consistently used words: Ιησους, Χριστος, Κυριυς, Θεος; three later additional words, πνευμα, ανθρωπος, σταυρος; and remaining eight, πατηρ, υιος, σωτηρ, μητηρ, ουρανος, Ισραηλ, Δαυειδ, Ιερουσαλημ which are less abbreviated; altogether fifteenth words (655). Tomas Bokedal states four categories of *nomina sacra* (13-14). Most of these *nomina sacra*

fall on the nominative and genitive cases and otherwise (Hurtado 656). The first order in Hurtado's classification are known to be dated to the middle or late second century (657). These are divine titles for God and Jesus while the other ones are respected human names and religious terms (Hurtado 659). Such categorizations have helped in the conceptual understanding of the *nomina sacra*.

The conceptual numeric value of the entire words considered as sacred words have been progressively added as the church grew and expanded in different generations. While Hurtado observes that fifteen words are considered *nomina sacra* above, Edwards opines that there are twenty words which are given such devotional moods by the Byzantine era. Edwards stated that:

> Other *nomina sacra*, which by the Byzantine era totalled at least twenty words, are the words for Spirit, mother, savior, heaven, Son, Father, man, cross, David, Israel, Jerusalem, Theotokos, and names of the apostles (especially John, Peter, and Paul). Several *nomina sacra* include also a third or fourth medial letter in the abbreviation. The final letter of *nomina sacra* may vary according to case ending. Regardless of the case ending or number of letters, however, a horizontal line extending the length of the abbreviation occurs above all *nomina sacra* (816-9).

Christian scribes in the early church have used these contractions of sacred words particularly putting supralinear or horizontal lines on top of the abbreviated letters to signify their devotions and differentiate them from being ordinary abbreviations. Millard states that scribes have abbreviated words such as God, Lord, Jesus, Christ, with great frequency, and also other words such as Saviour, Son, Spirit, Israel, Jerusalem, David, man, mother, father and heaven (*Reading* 70). The scribe would draw the attention of the reader by placing a horizontal line above the contracted letters (Metzger 14). The idea of sacred names was also for remembrance, a practice which continued in modern revolutions (Clarke 21-41).

There was no language barrier for this scribal practice as the discovery of manuscripts have proven. Hurtado observed that *nomina sacra* appear in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Slavonic and Armenian including manuscripts, inscriptions, amulets and icons until the Middle Ages (Hurtado 656). Most of them are from Christian documentary and literary manuscripts and some being private texts (letters, prayers and magical texts) and these private texts contained some errors; hence, from careless scribal tradition (Hurtado 658). They appear in Christian biblical manuscripts, non-canonical religious texts and in orthodox and unorthodox Christian writings (Hurtado 658). Edwards adds to the work of Hurtado particularly the extent of appearances in Gnostic literature that:

> *Nomina sacra* occur regularly in Christian literature and art in order to designate and distinguish words of special devotion and theological significance. In literature they are found in manuscripts and inscriptions, and in artifacts they appear in mosaics, icons, amulets, and various religious objects.... They are also found in Gnostic Christian texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of John*, and the recently published *Gospel of Judas*, where the standard IHΣ occurs twenty-four times for Jesus (816-9).

Unlike normal the Greek practice of abbreviating words, their distinctiveness in form, subject matter and formation from scribal Greek phenomena reveal the wide diversity of usage in the earliest centuries in the province of the Christian faith (Hurtado 658). They "are abbreviated in a contracted form, usually first and the last letters of the particular inflected form of the word, with a horizontal stroke over the letters of the abbreviated form" and such attribute "distinguishes them from the kind of abbreviations in non-Christian Greek manuscripts, ostraca, and inscriptions which are usually abbreviation by 'suspension', the first letter or two written and the rest omitted, with varying marks to indicate an abbreviated word" (Hurtado 658).

Although abbreviations are involved in both practices, the notion behind *nomina sacra* was not the same with the Greek abbreviated thought. Hurtado and Edwards state the difference between *nomina sacra* and Greek abbreviations that Greek abbreviations were meant to save space, time and labour. They also appeared in papyri but scarcely used in literary texts except in marginal notes and at the end of the line and there was no standard on preference and how to abbreviate (Hurtado 659; Edwards 816-9). In contrast, according to Hurtado, *nomina sacra* do not serve as abbreviations neither they are meant to conserve space or labour. They appeared in Christian manuscripts which are prepared for formal usage in public reading (659). The aim of writing *nomina sacra* was "to express religious reverence to set apart these words visually in the way they are written. In the *nomina sacra*, we encounter a fascinating manifestation of ancient Christian devotion, and these scribal symbols are perhaps the earliest surviving artefacts in Christian material culture" (Hurtado 659).

Like Hurtado, Edwards also puts the differences between the Greek contractions and *nomina sacra* in his own words:

> Although Greek numbers are also crowned with a horizontal stroke, none of them corresponds to Christian *nomina sacra*. Greek abbreviations, on the other hand, are conventions of utility in ancient texts, commonly followed by a dot at the end of a line. Such abbreviations are not crowned by horizontal strokes, as are all *nomina sacra* (816-9).

It is rational to say that the discovery of Oxyrhynchus manuscripts supports the Christian *nomina sacra* theory. The over forty-seven papyri recently discovered in Egypt contain at least two dozen *nomina sacra*, most with reference to "God" or "Lord," and some occurrences in the texts that could be either Christian or Jewish. Papyri with explicitly Christian terminology or context, or both, can be accepted as Christian (Edwards 816-9).

A lot of Oxyrhynchus papyri contain unique nature of *nomina sacra* as seen in *P.Oxy.* 1166, a third-century Greek text of Genesis, contains *nomina sacra* for "Lord" and "God": and *P.Oxy.* 1075, a third-century Greek text of Exodus, contains a *nomen sacrum* for "Lord." Moreover, *P.Oxy.* 1007, a late-third-century Genesis text (not on a scroll, however, but on a vellum leaf), follows the Hebrew Tetragrammaton with the Greek *nomen sacrum* for "God" (Edwards 816-9). In line 8 of PSI inv. 3407 A recto containing Matthew 2:13-16 of $\mathfrak{P}^{70}$, the nu is the last letter for the accusative article τον and because the υ̅ν̅ refers to Jesus, the scribe contracted the upsilon with a long stroke on top showing the divine name and nature of the Son (Metzger 14). Also, P. Oxy. 2384a of $\mathfrak{P}^{70}$ (Matthew 11:26-27), a text which shows relationship between the Father and Son, has the word πατηρ abbreviated as π̅η̅ρ̅. Similarly, in P. Aslan 112, a newly discovered and unpublished parchment, is a Coptic fragment of the story of Holy Family going to Egypt and contains damaged part of the *nomina sacra* (ⲡⲩⲛⲣⲥ ⲩⲛⲙ, the small child) to refer to the boy Jesus (Tambiyi, "Recovering" 116). Although the Coptic *nomina sacra* have been less studied because of their difficulty,[5] *nomina sacra* have had important impact in the understanding of Coptic sacred literature (Hurtado 20; Wegner 212; Comfort 207-8).

Generally, the practice of reverence to certain names came from the Jewish practice but there was need for continuity which Hurtado called "religious psychology between Jewish tradition and emerging Christian tradition" and such practice also was probably to signal readers that they should use a substitute for the divine name (Hurtado 663). Also, while there were various devices used by the Jewish scribes to express divine names, Christian practices were limited to standardized and abbreviated forms of key words, usually in contracted forms, with the horizontal stroke over the abbreviated word. The practice of earliest Christian devotion in the *nomina sacra* distinguished them from the Jewish matrix of Christianity which Hurtado believes that the "treatment of Ιησους and Χριστος in the same special way as Κυριος and Θεος is undeniably an early Christian innovation and signifies momentous

religious developments" (664). Such devotional intentions could prompt a modern attached sense of handling and configuring sacred names in a variety of search.

***Nomina Sacra* in Modern Writings**

Apart from being an ancient religio-literary practice of the Jews particularly the Tetragrammaton and among the early Christians, the writing of *nomina sacra* has extended into modern writings. Quite a number of words have been considered sacred in modern writings among Christian literary and non-literary religious writings. Most of these names are connected to the land of Israel for many scholars who are familiar with the Jewish depiction of God in ancient religious thought and the adopted practice in the early Christians. Since Christianity broke out from Judaism, one expects the binding nexus to remain strong unless on extreme doctrinal stance.

Hurtado's fifteen sacred words and Edwards's twenty words as *nomina sacra* have been adopted and the list opens room for new words in modern writings. While the Jewish people revered the Tetragrammaton, the ancient Greek writers had contractions and abbreviations of words particularly at the end of the margin. The early Christian corpus (Greek and Coptic speaking) adopted the Jewish and Greek sense but improved on it to denote the use of supralinear strokes on top of the abbreviations denoting sacred names as evident in many ancient Greek papyri and Coptic parchments. In the modern Christian literary thought, all related words within these religious corpuses are not contracted or abbreviated instead they are written in the devotional moods as discussed below.

Nomina Sacra are Capitalized: Most of these names are considered as proper nouns, which reflect especially the religious beliefs of Christians and the Jews. Words such as Jesus, Christ, Lord, God, Church, Holy Spirit, Angels are capitalized. Instead of being used in ambiguous sense, some of these words are used with the first letter capitalized to distinguish between Christian deities and the pagan deities. Apart from being proper nouns, words such as God/god, Christ/anti-christ, Jesus/jesus, and Lord/lord are given special attention. Some of these words are common words, which are connected to humans in the case of Caesar (as lord) in the first century, which brought conflict between the Christians and the Romans. Commonly used is the title, "His Lordship" which is used for bishops in modern Christian circles.

The divine nature of God or Jesus is expressed in a number of words. These are words that can be used for humans but when religious devotions attached to the names, they are capitalized in the case of Saviour, Healer, and Redeemer to mention a few. Words like Jewish, Religious, Christianity, Bible, Christians, and Romans as people are also considered sacred words. The computer underlines these words red when they are not capitalized.

A more form of devotional moods in modern Christian religious writings are when words are not only capitalized as proper nouns but the words are capitalized to show how significant the words are in the entire document. For instance, GOD, JESUS CHRIST and LORD. The list might go beyond these words depending on the devotion of the writer and how significant the words are to the writer and the readers.

Modern *nomina sacra* go beyond just nouns. Pronouns are also capitalized when referring to the Christian deity. Many people find it difficult to write pronouns referring to God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit as "he" or "him" apart from the beginning of sentence. Such masculinity and anthropomorphism of the personhood of God has been considered sacred also and are written as "He", "His" or "Him" in sentences.

They show Reverence/Devotion/Respect: Devotional moods are also attached to the names and titles, which are considered sacred. It has become difficult to bear such names because of the reverence attached to them. It will be weird to name someone "God" or "Christ" in the

English sense of the words. But in the African Christian thoughts, names like *Kazzah* or *Gwazah* (God in Jju or Tyap respectively)[6] and Chris without the final 't' are used to name children. However, since the name Jesus is a proper noun and a synonyms of Joshua, and Saviour, people today bear the name particularly in Israel, Spain, Portugal and Latin America. For example, a Spanish footballer who is called Jesús Navas Gonzále, Jesús Franco (Spanish film director) and Jesús Alou (baseball player), a practice among the Spanish people in the honour of the Lord Jesus. It is pronounced "Hay-soos" in Spanish. and in Portuguese it is written without the accent. Within this understanding, Gabriel Lewenstein observes, "In the Catholic tradition, it's a sign of honour and devoutness to name your children after important figures in Christianity, so there are a lot of Jesuses and Marys in predominantly Catholic regions like Spain, Portugal and Latin America" (Lewenstein, "Why is Jesus"). Religious and pious Christians, who understand the concept of devotional mood associated to the name of Jesus would find it uncomfortable; hence, associated with the deity of God and His Son.[7]

It has become a matter of choice. A similar incident of choice in relation to devotional mood is reflected in the textual analysis of Origen when he dismissed the name "Jesus Barabbas" and preferred just "Barabbas" in Matthew 27:16-17 with the motive that the name Jesus is not associated with evil-doers (Metzger 152).

There are also quite a number of people who use the word "godfather(s)" depicting human being(s) who fasten things for them of other people. It is an act of being superior to the other. Another word is "His Lordship" for the modern bishops in the Catholic church or various Pentecostal churches and other denominations. Such a title seems to depict equality with the Lord, which might be considered blasphemous within an intense Christian society. Whether another lord can be deduced from the Lordship of Jesus would reveal a fight with primordial usage in the early church as in the case of the Christians against the people in the days of Caesar Augustus of Rome.

They are reminders to the Readers: Words such as First Century, Church Fathers, Early Church, Apostles, Renaissance, and Reformation are written to always remind the readers that these are important periods and that people within these periods have played vital roles in the history of Christianity. It is unacceptable to write these words in normal small letters because of the relevance attached to them, although some writers would prefer to write them in small letters these days.

They draw the attention of the Readers: Another concept of *nomina sacra* in modern writings is the usage of definite articles for specific names whether ancient or in the contemporary times. The words, "the God," "the Jesus," "the Christ," "the Faith", "the Apostles," "the Apostle," and "the Church" etc. remind the writers/readers of the supremacy of these names and titles for Christian deities and religious people over the years in their sense of definiteness. To say for example "the God" might not be syntactically accurate unless it serves sometimes as a subject "The God of New Testament is a good and righteous God" or an object of genitive "to the God of Abraham" and many others. The same principle is applicable to these varieties of words in English and other related languages. In the Greek, Coptic and other related Semitic languages, all definite words go with articles but most times, the articles are not translated in preferred English translations. Using the definite articles makes the word definite as a first century Christian occurrence.

They show Significance to the Readers: There are many related terms, which have been set on modern computer word programmes to reflect the cautious nature on those religious words. For example, Tetragrammaton and Temple among many others. These words are

written to show and reveal the importance of the places or connotations to the Christian religious mind.

The 66 books of the Bible (such as Matthew, Mark, John, Genesis and Nehemiah etc.) also carry genuine writing significance in Christian literary and non-literary thoughts. For example, the word "mark" carries an English meaning but when a reference to Mark as a book of the Bible is meant, it is capitalized to show the significance to both the writers and readers. Modern word programmes on the computer do not show these significances automatically as the programmers (US or British), if they are not Christians, are not familiar with these devotional intentions.

Conclusion

Sacred names have been given special attention from the Mosaic Judaism to the modern time. The Jewish scribes devoted a reverence to the Tetragrammaton in the Old Testament and such devotions were transmitted into the translation of the LXX. Such thought coupled with the Hellenistic approach to abbreviating words among pagan scribes prompted an expansion, which developed to a more improved form of writing *nomina sacra* among Christian scribes of the second century of the Church; if not first century. The name God and Jesus had preference over a variety of words, which were considered sacred. While the Jewish and Christian scribes moderated *nomina sacra* in literature, the modern writers also invented a preferred way to convey devotional moods, which involve capitalization rather than abbreviations with horizontal strokes, to show reverence, and remind the readers of the significance of certain words.

But with the move for critical scholarship, which has been questioning the divinity of Jesus and the Christian faith, it is becoming difficult to identify sacred words from the secular. Devotional moods are no longer identified in modern religious literary writings. They are observed in non-literary works and Church related documents, which are sectarian and not exposed to scholarly scrutiny. Modern translations of the Bible and sacred works need to be reconsidered to ensure that devotional moods behind Christian religious words are stressed in our modern scribal and printed documents.

Endnotes

1. The dominant historical critical scholars are the *Jesus Seminar*, a group of scholars from universities and colleges based in North America who have rejected 82 percent of the entire Gospels and accepted 18 percent to be the *ipssisima verba Jesu*. They have questioned the stories in the Gospels and brought *The Gospel of Thomas* as a fifth gospel which revealed the accurate words of Jesus. A different view to the percentage is stated by a leading figure in the *Jesus Seminar* is 80 percent not being said by Jesus and 20 percent to be the words of Jesus. For example, see Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1994), 160. Robert Funk, R. W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (New York: Macmillan, 1993). For works which expose such modern thoughts see, for example, Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 26. Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1996). Gideon Y. Tambiyi, *The Historical Jesus and African Christianity* (Kaduna: Tubase Prints and Publications, 2019), 85-115.
2. Even with that effort by the Jewish scribes, a number of scribal errors were made and some correctors were summoned to correct the text. I have worked on a number of recently discovered Torah (Sephardic and Ashkenazi) and there were many patches and

corrections of different kinds; some by the same hand while other corrections by a corrector, a different hand.

3. For some recent scholarship on *nomina sacra*, see especially Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). A. Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 57-78. L. Traube, *Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kurzung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1907). A. H. R. E. Paap, *Nomina Sacra in the Greek Papyri of the First Five Centuries AD: The Sources and Some Deductions*, Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1959). Josep O'Callaghan, "*Nomina Sacra*," *Papyris Graecis Saeculi III Neotestamentariis*, Analecta biblica 46 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970). S. Brown, "Concerning the Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*," *Studia Papyrologico* 9 (1970), 15. C. H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 26–48. C. M. Tuckett, "'Nomina Sacra': Yes and No?," in J Auwers and H. J. de Jonge *eds.*, *Biblical Canons*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003) 431–58. S. Jankowski, "I 'Nomina Sacra' nei Papiri die LXX (secoli II e III d. C.)," *Studia Papyrologico* 16 (1977), 81–116. Alan Millard, "Ancient Abbreviations and the Nomina Sacra," in C. Eyre, A. Leahy, and L. M. Leahy, eds., *The Unbroken Reed: Studies in the Culture and Heritage of Ancient Egypt in Honour of A. F. Shore* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1994), 221–226. J. R. Wicker, "Pre-Constantinian *Nomina Sacra* in a Mosaic and Church Graffiti," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 52 (2009), 52–72.
4. Quite a number of efforts have been put to achieving the aim of the textual criticism. Recently, there have been doubt associated to the thrust of restoring the "original text" of the New Testament. For more analysis, see Maurice A. Robinson, "The Case for Byzantine Priority," In David A. Black ed., *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 126. B. B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1886; 7th ed. 1905), 15. Bart Ehrman, "Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior: An Evaluation," *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* (1998). Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* 2nd ed. (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. v, 124. Eldon J. Epp, "Issues in New Testament Textual Criticism: Moving from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth-First Century," In David A. Black ed., *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (Michigan: Baker Academie, 2002), 71.
5. An interesting document in this regard is P. Cotsen 1, a sixth or seventh century Coptic school book with a section of *nomina sacra* and their full spelling (fol. 53r, line 4-53v). For a description, see S. Bucking, "A Sahidic Coptic Manuscript in the Private Collection of Lloyd E. Cotsen (P. Cotsen 1) and the Limits of Papyrological Interpretation," *Journal of Coptic Studies* 8 (2006), 55–78. W. Andrew Smith, *A Study of the Gospels in Codex Alexandrianus: Codicology, Palaeography and Scribal Hands* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 219-25.
6. These are people of the Southern Kaduna, Nigeria. The name of God in the dialects are common and given to children to depict how God has been faithful to them or any occasion which they have seen God intervened during the time that the child is born. But whether the child is given that name to display the nature in terms of equality of attributes with God is not the focus.
7. See comments on the name of Jesus: "I really wouldn't want to name a person Jesus. I think that name should only be for my Lord" (Anonymous User 8/16/2005). "Please if you're going to be a parent don't be mean and call your son Jesus. Jesus is only supposed to be the name of Jesus (god) so please please please don't call your kid that unless you

want your kid to be teased for the rest of his life" (Charis 10/27/2005). "I cannot believe anybody would name their child Jesus. How stupid. It would be like naming your son "Allah" or "Buddha"" (Anonymous User 1/20/2006). "I don't think it's like naming your child Allah or Buddha. Those are titles, while Jesus is a personal name (a variant of Joshua)." (Caprice 2/13/2006). "No, I could never call a kid Jesus, it is God's name" (Lindamaree 3/8/2006). "I'm sorry, but you have got to be incredibly arrogant to name your kid after God Himself" (johann14 9/25/2007). "In my opinion, you shouldn't give that kind of name to your child. It just seems wrong. I don't encourage anyone to name, or especially change their name, to Jesus" (Anonymous User 10/25/2007). "Honestly, if you live in a place like the U.S., DO NOT NAME YOUR CHILD JESUS. I used to know someone named by it (though he tried to go by "J") because his parents thought he was a gift, which is great and all despite their family situation. Anyway, he rebelled a little then others got into fights with him. In some cultures the name is just not acceptable, so just simply be smart and choose another name or move to a Hispanic country. Don't give the chance of someone being ashamed by their own name" (Anonymous User 3/5/2011). "This name is for the Lord. NOT a person. Period" (GirlWithNOName 2/8/2011). "I'm a Christian, and I don't think it's blasphemous to name your son this, but it just seems... Weird. Especially among Christians, since we associate this name with our Savior. I don't want to say it's reserved for Jesus Christ, but it just kind of seems that way. I think it'd be better to name your son Joshua. It's basically the same name, but still" (Anonymous User 2/8/2016). For more expressions see "Jesus" http://www.behindthename.com/name/jesus/comments [Accessed 26th October, 2016].

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