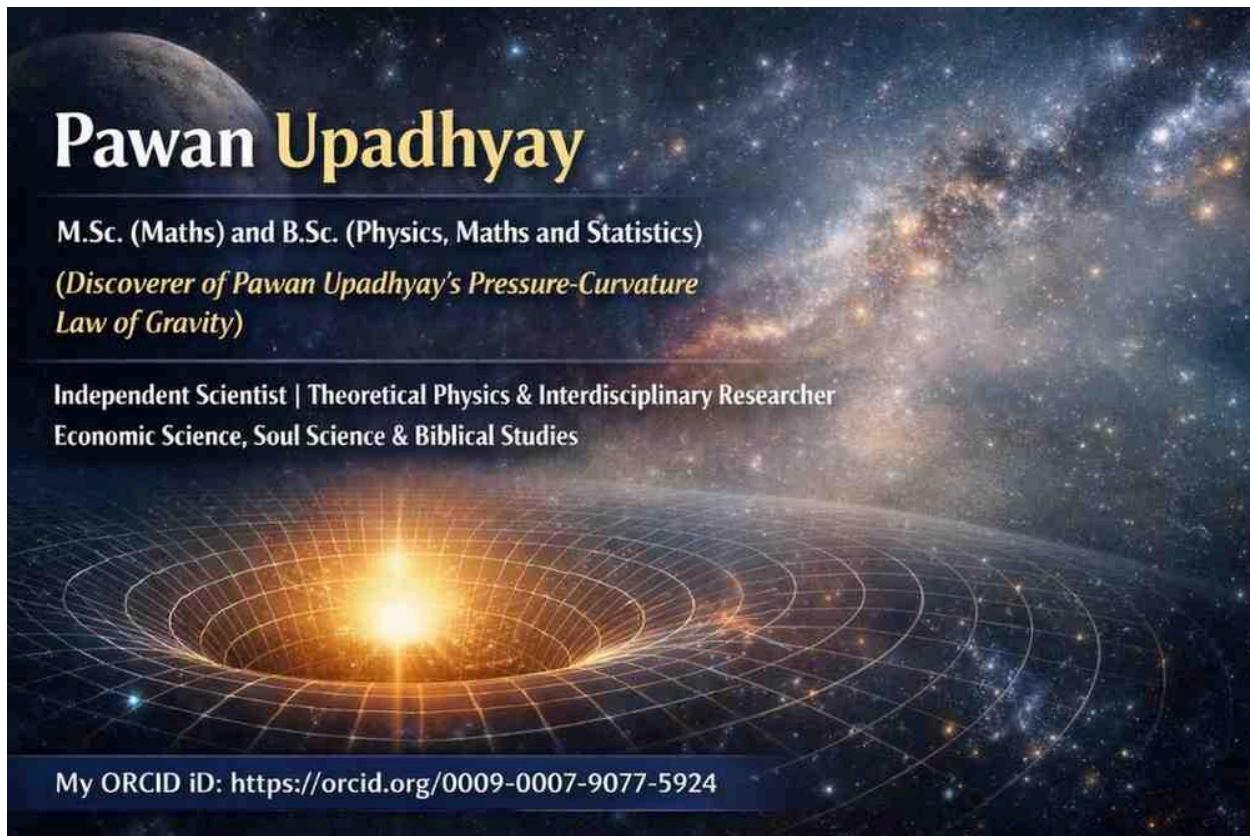


Names and Naming Ceremonies in Christianity: History, Theology, and Cultural Continuity

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Abstract

Personal names play an important role in human identity, culture, and religious life. In Christianity, names are associated with baptism, faith, and belonging to the Christian community, yet Christianity has never required the abandonment of pre-Christian or pagan-origin names. This research paper examines the practice of naming within Christianity, the theological meaning of names in Scripture, the role of baptism and confirmation, and the historical reasons why many Christians—especially in Europe and America—continue to bear

names with pagan or pre-Christian origins. The study demonstrates that Christianity transforms persons, not cultures, allowing names to evolve from religious symbols into cultural heritage.

1. Introduction

From ancient times, names have carried meaning, memory, and identity. In many religions, a change of name symbolizes a change of spiritual status. Christianity, however, developed a distinctive approach to names and naming ceremonies. While affirming the spiritual significance of names, Christianity did not impose a universal requirement to adopt new names at baptism or confirmation. This has resulted in the widespread use of names with pagan, mythological, or pre-Christian origins among Christians, particularly in Europe and the Americas.

2. Names in the Biblical World

In the Bible, names often reflect character, destiny, or divine action.

- Abram becomes Abraham (Genesis 17:5)
- Jacob becomes Israel (Genesis 32:28)
- Simon becomes Peter (Matthew 16:18)

These name changes were **divine acts**, not cultural mandates. Most biblical figures retained their original names even after entering into covenant with God. This establishes an important principle: **faith does not automatically require a change of personal name**.

3. Naming and Baptism in Early Christianity

3.1 Baptism as Spiritual Identity, Not Renaming

In early Christianity, baptism marked entry into the Church through faith in Jesus Christ.

- “*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.*” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Unlike some mystery religions, Christianity did not mandate renaming at baptism. Converts from Greek, Roman, Celtic, and Germanic backgrounds were baptized **with their existing names**.

3.2 Early Christian Examples

Many early Christians bore names of pagan origin:

- Paul (Latin)
- Luke (Greek)
- Mark (Roman)

Their holiness was defined by faith and conduct, not by etymology of names.

4. Christianity and Pagan-Origin Names

4.1 Cultural Inheritance in Europe

By the time Europe became Christian (4th–10th centuries):

- Pagan-origin names had been used for centuries
- They were embedded in language, family lineage, and law

Names such as Diana, Arthur, Helen, and Bridget had already become **cultural identifiers**, not acts of worship.

4.2 Theological Neutrality of Names

Christian theology holds that words and names are morally neutral unless used for idolatry.

- “*Nothing is unclean in itself.*” (Romans 14:14)

Thus, bearing a name once associated with a pagan deity does not imply belief in that deity.

5. The Naming Ceremony in Christianity

5.1 Baptismal Naming

In most Christian traditions:

- The child's name is given by parents
- The name is spoken during baptism
- The person is baptized **into Christ**, not into the name

- “*Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 28:19)

The sacred name invoked is the **Trinity**, not the personal name of the baptized individual.

5.2 Confirmation and Names

Confirmation strengthens baptismal grace but does not require renaming.

- In some Catholic traditions, a confirmation saint's name may be chosen
- The legal and personal name remains unchanged

This demonstrates that Christian identity is sacramental, not linguistic.

6. Why Pagan-Origin Names Persist After Baptism and Confirmation

Christians retain pagan-origin names because:

1. Christianity does not erase cultural heritage
2. Names become cultural over time, not religious
3. Scripture never commands name replacement
4. Faith is measured by belief and life, not vocabulary

This explains why Christians named Diana, Jason, Freya, Arthur, or Helen remain fully Christian after baptism and confirmation.

6A. Exceptional Cases: Baptism by the Holy Spirit and Divine Confirmation

Christian theology also recognizes **exceptional cases** in which God acts directly through the Holy Spirit apart from the ordinary sacramental sequence.

- “*John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*” (Acts 1:5)
- “*While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.*” (Acts 10:44)

In such special cases:

- The Holy Spirit Himself baptizes the person
- The divine calling is confirmed not primarily by ritual but by **spiritual fruits and miracles**
- Miracles serve as **God's confirmation** of the person's mission
- "*God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles.*" (Hebrews 2:4)

These extraordinary events do not abolish baptism or Church order but demonstrate that **God is sovereign** and may confirm a person directly by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Biblical Examples of Holy Spirit Baptism and Divine Confirmation

1. Cornelius and His Household

The Holy Spirit descended upon Gentile believers even before water baptism, confirming God's acceptance.

- Acts 10:44–48

2. The Apostle Paul

Paul encountered Christ directly through a heavenly vision. His calling was confirmed by spiritual authority, endurance, and signs.

- Acts 9:3–18; Galatians 1:15–16

3. The Apostles at Pentecost

The Holy Spirit descended with visible signs, empowering the apostles for mission.

- Acts 2:1–4

4. The Samaritan Believers

The Holy Spirit was given through divine action beyond initial baptism, showing God's freedom in timing.

- Acts 8:14–17

These cases demonstrate that **miracles, transformed lives, and spiritual authority** serve as divine confirmation.

Footnotes

1. Acts 1:5 – Promise of baptism by the Holy Spirit.
2. Acts 10:44 – The Spirit falling prior to water baptism.
3. Hebrews 2:4 – Divine confirmation through signs and wonders.
4. Acts 2:1–4 – Pentecost as paradigmatic Spirit baptism.

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5. Acts 9:15 – Paul's divine election confirmed by mission and suffering.

7. Case Study: Europe and America

7.1 European Influence

Most Americans descend from European immigrants who brought:

- Languages
- Traditions
- Naming systems

Greek, Roman, Norse, Celtic, and Germanic mythologies strongly shaped European culture long before Christianity spread to the Americas.

7.2 American Continuity

In America, these names continued because:

- They were inherited through family lines
- They had lost religious meaning
- Christianity never required name change

Thus, pagan-origin names survived as **historical artifacts**, not theological statements.

8. Common Pagan-Origin Names Used by Christians

The following lists document widely used personal names that originated in pre-Christian or pagan cultures but are now commonly borne by Christians in Europe and America. These names function today as cultural identifiers, not religious confessions.

8.1 Roman / Latin Origin (Mythology, Virtues, History)

- Diana (Roman goddess of the moon)
- Victoria (Roman goddess of victory)
- Aurora (Roman dawn goddess)
- Marcus (Roman war god Mars)
- Maximus (Latin honorific)
- Felix (Roman concept of fortune)
- Julian

- Silvia
- Claudia
- Cecilia

8.2 Greek Origin (Mythology and Classical Culture)

- Jason (Greek hero)
- Helen (Greek mythology)
- Penelope (Greek epic tradition)
- Iris (Greek goddess of rainbow)
- Alexander (Greek heroic tradition)
- Sophia (Greek wisdom concept)
- Nicholas
- Philip
- Andrew

8.3 Norse / Scandinavian Origin

- Freya (Norse goddess)
- Odin (Old Norse deity)
- Thor (Norse god)
- Erik
- Ingrid
- Astrid
- Sven
- Leif

8.4 Celtic Origin (Irish, Scottish, Welsh)

- Arthur (Celtic mythic root)
- Bridget (from Brigid, Celtic goddess)
- Kevin
- Fiona
- Patrick
- Aidan
- Maeve

8.5 Germanic / Anglo-Saxon Origin

- Alfred
- Edward
- Harold
- Walter
- Bernard

- Frederick
- William
- Richard

8.6 Slavic and Other European Pagan Traditions

- Vladimir
- Boris
- Igor
- Olga
- Mila
- Sviatoslav

These names were retained by Christians because Christianity never identified linguistic origin with idolatry.

9. Names, Identity, and Christian Faith

Christian identity is grounded in:

- Baptism
- Faith in Jesus Christ
- Moral transformation
- *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This newness refers to **spiritual life**, not personal nomenclature.

10. Theological Implications

The Christian approach to naming reveals:

- Respect for culture
- Rejection of forced uniformity
- Focus on inner conversion
- Universality of the Gospel across cultures

Christianity transforms persons while allowing cultures to be redeemed, not destroyed.

11. Conclusion

Christianity has never demanded the abandonment of pagan-origin names at baptism or confirmation. From biblical times to modern America and Europe, Christians have retained names shaped by their cultural history. These names no longer function as religious symbols but as cultural and familial identifiers. The Christian naming ceremony centers on baptism into the Holy Trinity, not on renaming the individual. Thus, Christianity demonstrates its universal character by sanctifying people without erasing their cultural identity.

Keywords

Christian naming ceremony, baptism, pagan-origin names, confirmation, European culture, American names, Christianity and culture