

## CHRISTAFARI: “NO MORE SONGS ABOUT JAH”

US-based Christian Reggae band Christafari recently made an announcement on their website which could stir up both the Christian and the Rastafarian community until a great extent. Their new album “Gravity” marks a shift in their approach and target audience, as they explain in their section of Frequently Asked Questions on their website.

The most significant change is that Christafari will no longer be using the Name “JAH” when they sing about the Most High.

On the Christafari website, founder Mark Mohr gives two reasons for this decision. The first one is that Christafari will no longer be targeting their music primarily to a Rastafarian and Reggae loving audience. Mohr claims that the Name of Jah is mentioned only once in the Bible and that he wants to “*focus my ministry approach on the numerous other names for God that are found far more frequently and would make our message even more clear to the listener*”. Whether this analogy means that Christafari simply wants to reach a wider and bigger audience or that there were other reasons too remains unclear.

The second reason is presented as the most important one and probably is. On the same page, Mohr explains why he used the Name of Jah in previous releases: “*You see, we have always used Jah as a culturally sensitive way to reach Rastas, (and still will individually), yet so many young gospel reggae artists are using our same ministry approach in trying to reach a completely different audience--the Christian church.*” Mark Mohr is worried that the frequent usage of the Name of Jah in Gospel music will lead into a situation in which it becomes unclear Who actually is meant when the Name is expressed. He sees Christafari’s leading role in the Christian Reggae and World as a reason to set an example to his fellow artists and writes: “*When I started Christafari and Lion of Zion ent., my primary goal was to see the Rasta church become Christian, yet one of the regrettable fruits of my labour, (due to uneducated imitation*

*by other artists) is the Christian church becoming more Rasta. This was never my intention."*

Christafari's decision will undoubtedly cause a lot of debate in the Rastafarian and Christian community. The message of their website raised some questions and the Dubroom asked them to Mark Mohr of Christafari:

DUBROOM: "Does this mean you are also going to change the name Christafari and the usage of Rastafarian cultural expressions such as the flag et cetera as they are installed with the same reasoning in mind as the usage of the Name of Jah?"

CHRISTAFARI: "Absolutely not. The name Christafari means three things in three different languages, of which the primary is the Greek definition for "Christ Bearers." Whether you look at our name in English, Amharic or even Spanish, it is very clear WHO we represent. That is all that I am trying to do—urge artists to clarify. The days too short for enigmatic music that merely entertains and speaks of an ambiguous God that could be interpreted a host of different ways."

DUBROOM: "Can you specify "universalists" and can you give an impression of the concept of "God" in universalist circles?"

CHRISTAFARI: "I go into full detail on this in the 13th day of Gravity (that will be posted at lionofzion.com only on June 1st). A portion of my commentary reads:

"In 2001, after the tragic fall of the twin towers in NY City America turned to God, and weekday church attendance reached a pinnacle as scared and confused citizens flooded into churches. In the midst of adversity we had truly become one nation under God"

"But then I remember on the 14th of September, I was sitting at home flipping through the channels on TV, and I came across a church service (it was on almost every

station). It was a memorial service for 9/11 in Washington DC and in this cathedral, each of the major religions was represented by their own spiritual leader, each behind his own pulpit and each one was speaking of and praying to an ambiguous God—a God that many believe is the same Lord that just goes by different names depending on which nation you are from."

"It is my opinion that there was only one clear religion being preached that day and it was blatant universalism—the whole many names one god theory. You know, the all rivers flow into the same sea principle? This concept, even in the simplest of forms doesn't agree with the foundational doctrines of Christianity, Catholicism, Judaism, or even Islam. For according to each of their texts there is only one God—It can't be both this religion and that belief are right (for they are inherently contradictory). It has to be either this one, or that one is the only way. So while I was encouraged to see such a tremendous unity during this tumultuous time, I was disgusted by the blurring of lines and revelatory compromise that was taking place."

Inspired by this, I wrote the chorus "Christ is the Only Way..." If it had been 4 years ago, I probably would have penned, "Jah is the only way," but given the present apocalyptic setting, and the overwhelming tolerance in the world for all religions except "Narrow Minded Christianity," I refused to veil my references of Christ any longer.

Let's face it, in this secular society, using the name Jah can often be the easy way out. It is not as offensive as the name Jesus and much less censored. Do you honestly think that a band like POD would have gotten as much respect in the mainstream if they said Christ in place of Jah? Probably not. This name is the stumbling block for all mankind, yet it is the fruit of all true salvation."

DUBROOM: “Is the following summary correct: "We're not gonna sing the name of Jah anymore because the fruit of such a thing is the 'Rastafarization' of Christianity"?”

CHRISTAFARI: “Yes, it is correct, depending on your interpretation. I will use the name when singing my past songs on stage and when personally ministering to a Rasta. I have not used this name in my recent recordings as an attempt to set a positive example for the plethora of young aspiring artists that I teach at music seminars in places like Trinidad and Tobago or Barbados, who think the best way to start off every song is by singing Jah, Jah, Jah, Jah... Now keep in mind, these guys are not dreads, nor do they know the Rasta culture intimately. They are not using this term to reach the Rastas, but to stroke the sheep. If they ever do talk about Selassie or Rastas, it is in a disrespectful manner that may make Christians laugh, but is at the expense of the ones that I am trying to save. Seen?”

DUBROOM: “Can you specify this "Rastafarization" (for lack of a better word)? How does it reveal itself and how can it be recognized?”

I would liken it to a secular urban R&B artist doing a token black gospel song when their lifestyle does not follow the message that they are singing. They simply sing the song in that style to add more diversity to their repertoire, not because of a conviction of the heart. I wear my dreads, sport ites gold and green, and use the name Jah so that I can become all things to all men—to reach the Rastas. This is not a fashion style or a ploy to sell more records. Yet there are some that view it as such. They try and sound just like artists like Capleton (minus a few words and there) and take this sound to the local foursquare gospel church! Whereas my intention is to go straight to the Bobo Shanti commune (and I have).

I just think that there is a lot of unnecessary cross-pollination going on that is simply causing more confusion. You must understand that your typical protestant church and your regular Rasta Nyabinghi are two completely separate audiences and each require their own unique approach when it comes to ministering the Lord's Word.”

DUBROOM: “Thank you for the interview.”

CHRISTAFARI: “I will also post these questions and answers in the Christafari forum because I feel that they will answer a lot of questions.”

#### RELEVANT LINKS:

Christafari Website  
Christafari FAQ Entry/Press Release  
Discussion on this topic on the Christafari Forum  
Discussion on this topic on the Dubroom Forum

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