

Akan-Ewe Christological Constructs: Indigenous Christologies in Post-Missionary Christianity and Theology in Africa



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ABSTRACT

The study discussed Akan-Ewe Christological Constructs in Post-Missionary Christianity and Theology in Africa. The objective was to assess their capacity to provide the right frameworks for conceptualising the relevance and significance of Jesus and the gospel in Africa and his Christology. Using the ethnographic and phenomenological approaches, the study established that Akan-Ewe socioreligiocultures and spirituality provide a tapestry of frameworks that offer competitive alternatives to the Christological conceptualisation in post-missionary Christianity and Theology in Africa. The names *Onyankopɔn*, or *Twereduampɔn* and *Mawu Sogbo Lisa*, or *Mawu Kitikata* for instance, indicate how they conceive, or perceive God (Jesus) who is not a figure of imagination but the “Supreme Being”. He is the first of all, has no equals, the ultimate authority and power over all, and is held in the highest positions in sovereignty, knowledge, and goodness. He is infinitely powerful and superior. The study contributes to the decolonisation of the hegemony of Western/European (Missionary) Christian frameworks for Christianity and Theology in Africa and a search for alternatives that possess the capacity and competitiveness of epistemology or nomenclatures beyond the West/Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Bediako, recognition of the alternatives presented by Africa to frameworks that have defined the context and content of conventional epistemologies and nomenclatures of global Christianity has provided a tapestry of significant perspectives to existing frameworks that have failed to answer the questions asked by African Christians.¹ He maintained that the impasse of this failure and the vacuum created by the incapacity of African Traditional Religion to provide a parallel compendium that possessed the ability to bridge the gap between the African Christian experience and the hegemony of Western/European (Missionary) culture created a loss of identity for African Christians.² However, because indigenous cultures possessed a vast resource of vocabularies that provided the right framework for Christological construct, they could decipher their own identity within the context of the relevance of Christ for their experience.

¹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

² Kwame Bediako, “Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension,” *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (2000): 303–23.

In *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, Bediako highlights how African Christians have within the African Experience developed relevant frameworks that define the person and significance of Jesus.³ In *Jesus in Africa*, he argued that Jesus is not a foreigner who is just interested in the plight of Africans.⁴ Jesus becomes an African who identifies with the African experience and works within it to bring their liberation. For Bediako, failure to recognise this important role of Jesus is a limitation on the sovereignty of God. Not only is it right for Jesus to be presented in forms that are relevant to Western/European (Missionary) contexts. It is right for him to be presented in other contexts that provide relevant alternative Christological constructs. It is within this context and the challenge presented by the changed demographics of global Christianity, its shift from the global West to the global South, and the demand to decipher frameworks that provide competitive alternatives that this study is situated.

The study which focuses on the appraisal of Akan-Ewe cultural Christological constructs does not romanticise the vast vocabulary of expressions available in symbols, myths and lyrics in the indigenous African context that provides a perception of the person, status and identity of Jesus within the gospel in Africa and the African Christian experience but engage those constructs to decipher their legitimacy, competitiveness and relevance for Christianity and Theology in Africa and beyond. For Keith even though the African context and the alternative it presents are yet to receive the recognition it deserves, the emergence of Africa as the centre of gravity and permanent home of global Christianity in the 21st century is a testament to how it has been able to provide the right context for the interpretation of the gospel and identity of Jesus within the African Christian Experience.⁵ That notwithstanding, it does not attempt to be overly critical of the dangers of globalising the specificity of culturally biased or limited expressions.

The Akan and Ewe People

In Ghana (West Africa) the Akan and Ewe people form the first and third majority groups. According to NPHC (2000), they form 45.7% and 13.9% of the population respectively. While they share certain regional and historical links, they have unique cultural, linguistic, and social traditions such as *Akwasidae* for the Ashanti or *Odwira* for the Akyem and Akuapem and *Hogbetsotso* for the Ewe to honour their ancestors, and strengthen community bonds. For this study, a summary of the history of the Akan and Ewe people and some notable elements within their socioreligioculture or spirituality is presented to provide a context.

Origin, Socioculture and Spirituality of the Akan

The history of the Akan is found in the works of historians like Anquandah, Danquah, Goody, Meyerowitz and Klein.⁶ Others, such as Fisher, Ampomah and Dolphyne, focus on their religious and social structures.⁷ The available literature, however, is on the difficulty in determining their exact origin. Notwithstanding, oral traditions suggest they migrated from the Sahel Region, around present-day *Mali* or the *Sahara* in the 10th and 13th centuries and settled in the forest and coastal regions of the Gold and Ivory Coast. They established small chiefdoms and states such as the Bono, Denkyira, Akyem, Fante, and Akwamu around clan-based societies with matrilineage succession and inheritance

³ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Orbis Books, 2004).

⁴ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (OCMS, 2000).

⁵ Keith Ferdinando, "Christian Identity in the African Context: Reflections on Kwame Bediako's Theology and Identity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (2007): 121.

⁶ James Anquandah, "The People of Ghana: Their Origins and Cultures," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, no. 15 (2013): 1–25; Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Gold Coast Akan. Okanni Ba Abotafowa. Twi* (University of London Press, 1954); Jack Goody, "Ethnohistory and the Akan of Ghana," *Africa* 29, no. 1 (1959): 67–81; Eva Lewin Richter Meyerowitz, "The Early History of the Akan States of Ghana," 1974; A. Norman Klein, "Toward a New Understanding of Akan Origins," *Africa* 66, no. 2 (April 7, 1996): 248–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1161318>.

⁷ Robert B Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (Orbis Books, 1998); Kingsley Ampomah, "An Investigation into Adowa and Adzewa Music and Dance of the Akan People of Ghana," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 4, no. 10 (2014): 117–24; Florence Abena Dolphyne, "The Languages of the Akan Peoples," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 2, no. 1 (1986): 1–22.

systems. According to Goody, the Akan comprised the Bono, Asante, Adanse, Twifo, Asen, Fante, Akuapem, Akyem, Akwamu, Kwahu, Sehwi, Awowin, Nzima and Ahanta.⁸

For Tordoff and Migeod, one of the significant events in Akan history is the rise of the Ashanti Empire under Osei Tutu marked by the defeat of the Denkyira Empire under Ntim Gyakari in the Battle of Feyiase in 1701.⁹ For McCaskie, the instrumentality of Okomfo Anokye (aka Kwame Frimpong Manso) was critical.¹⁰ However, the Ashanti refuse to admit at least in public that Okomfo Anokye is not an Ashanti but a borrowed Priest from King Ansa Sasraku or an Anglo Priest who had migrated to Akwamu. For this study, we take a look at the right narrative about Okomfo Anokye, who he was, the role he played in the rise of the Akwamu Empire and how he came to Kwaaman (present-day Kumasi) with Osei Tutu to assist in the and establishment and rise of the Ashante Confederacy or Empire and defeat of the Denkyira Empire. The Story of Okomfo Anokye (*Okomfo* from *Notsie*) begins with the tyranny of King Agokoli at *Notsie* in present-day Togo during the mid-17th century. According to Greene, Agokoli instituted laws that put the *Dogbo-Nyigbo* (migrants) in *Notsé* or *Notsie* into serious hardship.¹¹

Because *Notsie* was a walled town, it was difficult to escape. Montgomery and Vannier indicate that it was here that the two brothers (twins) who were both powerful priests, *Atsu Tsala* and *Etse Tsali Ashimadi*, who later became Okomfo Anokye (Okomfo from *Notsie*) perfected their art.¹² Unfortunately, before the *Dogbo-Nyigbo* could escape, *Etse Tsali* already escaped, leaving *Atsu Tsala* (his elder brother) who refused to escape without the entire Clan (*Dogbo-Nyigbo*). *Etse Tsali* settled at Awukugua in the Akuapim ridge of the Akwamu Empire. According to Hanserd, here, he became a powerful priest and aid to Ansa Sasraku the Akwamuhene.¹³ With his help, the Akwamu Empire experienced great expansion. According to Wilks, at its heights, it extended to Ga, Adangbe, and parts of modern-day Togo.¹⁴ Their control of Fort Christiansborg gave them access to interactions with European traders, such as the Dutch, English, and Danes, as well as military expertise and advanced weapons.

The Akwamu Empire became very powerful and Kwaaman (*Kumasi*) was their ally. According to McCaskie, this is why when Obiri Yeboah was killed by the Denkyira in 1701, the nephew Osei Tutu I, his successor, was sent to Ansa Sasraku (the Akwamuhene) for protection.¹⁵ At Akwamu, Osei Tutu gained valuable training. It was here that Osei Tutu learned of the exploits of *Etse Tsali* (the Okomfo from *Notsé* or *Notsie*) the powerful spiritual aid and adviser to the Akwamuhene. Ansa Sasraku introduced Osei Tutu to him and they immediately became friends. When Osei Tutu was returning to Kwaaman (*Kumasi*), he requested Ansa Sasraku to allow him to go with *Etse Tsali* to help fight the suzerainty of Denkyira. Ansa Sasraku gave his permission. The best of Akwamu warriors accompanied Osei Tutu and *Etse Tsali* to Kwaaman. At Kwaaman, *Etse Tsali* was named *Anokye* (a corruption of *Notsé* or *Notsie*) the reasons were many so that people would think he was an Asante and trust him.

According to Nyarko, in *Kwaaman* (*Kumasi*), *Etse Tsali* now *Okomfo Anokye* (aka Kwame Frimpong Manso) helped Osei Tutu to form alliances with other states, such as Bekwai, Nsuta, Mampong, and Kokofu.¹⁶ These alliances helped strengthen Kwaaman by providing more troops and resources. According to Akyeampong and Owusu-Ansa, by the advice of Okomfo Anokye and the

⁸ Goody, "Ethnohistory and the Akan of Ghana."

⁹ William Tordoff, "The Ashanti Confederacy1," *The Journal of African History* 3, no. 3 (1962): 399–417; Frederick W.H. Migeod, "A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 15, no. 59 (1915): 234–43.

¹⁰ T. C. McCaskie, "Komfo Anokye of Asante: Meaning, History and Philosophy in an African Society," *The Journal of African History* 27, no. 2 (July 22, 1986): 315–39, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700036690>.

¹¹ Sandra E Greene, "The Past and Present of an Anlo-Ewe Oral Tradition," *History in Africa* 12 (1985): 73–87.

¹² Eric J. Montgomery and Christian N. Vannier, "Dawn of the Gods: History and Power in Eweland," in *An Ethnography of a Vodun Shrine in Southern Togo* (BRILL, 2017), 39–79, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004341258_003.

¹³ Robert Hanserd, "Okomfo Anokye Formed a Tree to Hide from the Akwamu: Priestly Power, Freedom, and Enslavement in the Afro-Atlantic," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 4 (2015): 522–44.

¹⁴ Ivor. Wilks, "The Rise of the Akwamu Empire," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 3, no. 2 (1957): 1650–1710.

¹⁵ McCaskie, "Komfo Anokye of Asante: Meaning, History and Philosophy in an African Society."

¹⁶ Nyarko JA, "The Guan-Kyerepon in the Suzerainty of the Asante, 1635-1750," *Philosophy International Journal* 7, no. 2 (April 1, 2024): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.23880/phij-16000322>.

leadership of Osei Tutu, the Asante became prepared for Denkyira.¹⁷ In 1701 at Feyiase, a strong battle ensued. Ntim Gyakari and the Denkyira were defeated and Obiri Yeboah was avenged. The Body of Ntim Gyakari was mutilated and paraded in the streets of Kwaaman and Denkyira. The defeat of Ntim Gyakari marked the end of Denkyira supremacy and the rise of the Asante Empire. The rest of the exploits of Okomfo Anokye, how he helped set up the Asante Empire, the creation of the Golden Stool which became the soul and unity of the Asante etc. are in various books and journals for further reading.

Akan Socioreligioculture and Spirituality

The Akan built a socioculture and spirituality around *Okomfo* Anokye's exploits and the rise of the Asante State. Okomfo Anokye was so significant that his life in Kwaaman/Asanteman and the events that ensued became very central to Asante's socioculture and spirituality. While the socioculture is built around clan (*Abusua*) based kingship and matrilineal inheritance, the spirituality is built around a complex traditional system. Fortes, Akyeampong, and Obeng have outlined nine clans: *Oyoko*, *Aduana*, *Bretuo*, *Asakyiri*, *Asona*, *Ekuona*, *Agona*, and the *Oyoko-Dako*.¹⁸ Every Asante belongs to one of these clans which determines their lineage, inheritance, and social identity. Each of these clans has totems (animals or elements) that have deep cultural, spiritual, and symbolic significance and provide a unique identity for its members. These totems were not animals or elements selected at random. They represent each clan's character traits, virtues, or historical roles.

The *Oyoko* clan is the most prestigious in Asante. It is the royal clan from which the Asantehene (king of the Asante) is selected. The clan is traditionally associated with leadership, governance, and political authority. The clan's totem is the Falcon (Eagle). The *Aduana* clan is the custodian of the sacred flame which symbolises life and continuity. They are considered spiritual guides and leaders within the Asante Confederacy. Their totem is a Dog with Fire in the mouth. The *Bretuo* clan is known for its association with strength and military prowess. They are often associated with defence, protection, and important military roles in the Asante state. Their totem is a Leopard which represents bravery and power. The *Asakyiri* clan is traditionally known for their wisdom and resilience. This clan is often called upon in matters related to conflict resolution and justice. The totem is a vulture which symbolises resilience and survival.

The *Asona* clan is regarded as one of the most diplomatic clans, often serving as mediators and peacekeepers within the Asante community. They are known for producing many of the intellectual and administrative leaders in the Asante kingdom. Their totem is the crow, which symbolises intelligence and adaptability. The *Ekuona* clan is associated with agriculture and land management. Members of this clan are often involved in farming and the management of communal resources, ensuring the sustenance of the community. The clan's totem is Buffalo, which symbolises strength, endurance and hard work. The *Agona* clan is known for its oratory skills and wisdom. The clan has the parrot as its totem. The parrot, known for its ability to speak, represents communication and knowledge. Members are often chosen as advisers, spokespeople, and diplomats, playing key roles in court and public affairs. The *Oyoko Dako* clan is a branch of the *Oyoko* clan. It is also associated with leadership, but it is distinct from the royal *Oyoko* clan which produces the Asantehene.

According to Danquah and Nkansa-Kyeremateng explained that the clan system forms part of Ashanti's social structure, governance, and spirituality which encompasses a system of complex beliefs that explains the universe, the existence of life, the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms, and the moral order of the world including views on creation, the role of ancestors, deities, and the cyclical nature of life.¹⁹ According to Smith, Platvoet and Danquah, Akan cosmology is *Nyame*

¹⁷ Emmanuel, Akyeampong and David Owusu-Ansah, "Wealth in Knowledge: Spiritual Service and Political Power in Precolonial Asante," *Journal of West African History* 8, no. 1 (2022): 119–41.

¹⁸ Meyer Fortes, "The Akan Family System Today," 1974; Emmanuel Akyeampong and Pashington Obeng, *Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005).

¹⁹ Joseph B Danquah, "The Culture of Akan," *Africa* 22, no. 4 (1952): 360–66; Kofi Nkansa-Kyeremateng, *Akan Heritage* (Sebewie Publishers, 1999).

(Supreme Being) *Onyankopɔn* or *Odomankoma*.²⁰ *Abosom* (Deities), *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* (Ancestors) and *Asaase Yaa* (Earth Goddess). Within each of these elements, there are complex systems of traditions, rites and rituals. *Onyankopɔn* is not just the name of *Nyame* (the Supreme Being) but his personality. Majeed, Sarbah and Adjei observed a distinctive nuance to the meaning of *Onyankopɔn* or *Odomankoma*.²¹ According to them in Ashanti linguistics, *Onyankopɔn* or *Odomankoma* is a combination of three parts; *Onya* or *Onyame* (the one who ‘satisfies’ or ‘provides’) derived from the verb *nya* (to get, obtain, or possess)

Onyame, therefore, means ‘the one who gives’ or ‘provides’ like the Hebrew *Yahweh Yireh* (Gen 22:14). The second part of the *Onyankopɔn* is *nko* (only or alone). It symbolises the singularity and supremacy of *Onyame*. He has no equals. It means he is the ultimate authority and power over all things and holds the highest position in terms of sovereignty, authority, knowledge, and goodness, being infinitely superior. In this name, four intrinsic natures of *Onyame* are emphasised, Sovereignty, Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence. The third part is the *pɔn* which indicates something elevated or exalted (most important). The apogee or apex of a hierarchy, *Onyankopɔn* therefore is *Onyame* who is the *ultimus*. *Odomankoma* on the other hand emphasises the mercy and love of *Nyame* or *Onyame*. It is a three-part word *Odom* (mercy), *nko* (only) and *ma* (give). The *a* is *ara* indicating what he usually does. Consequently *Odomankoma* means the *Onyame* who usually gives (shows) mercy or is full of mercy. This understanding of the nature and characteristics of *Onyankopɔn* or *Odomankoma* provides the context for an Akan spirituality and Christological construct.

Origin, Socioculture and Spirituality of the Ewe

Several accounts of the origin of the Ewe exist. Scholars like Amenumey, Spieth, Botwe-Asamoah, Skinner and Jenkins have provided useful information.²² Others like Greene, Wyllie, Parker and Venkatachalam have also done extraordinary studies on individual tribes within the Ewe ethnic.²³ Amenumey and Meyer, however, trace the origin of the Ewes to ‘*Adza to me*’ the biblical Babel (cf. Gen 11:1-9) in present-day Iraq where God confused the language of men for building a tower that reaches the heavens and this is credited as the source of the Ewe language ‘*Ewe-Gbe*’.²⁴ Dotse claimed that an ancestor called “*Gu*” led them to the delta of the river Nile, in present-day Egypt around the 11th century.²⁵ Nukunya submitted that the tyranny of the natives did not allow the Ewes to stay for long.²⁶ A warrior called ‘*Mi*’ led them out South-Westerly into Sudan close to present-day Khartoum. Jean-Philippe Gunn also claimed that, due to drought, famine, and slave raids by Arab slavers, they left South-Eastwards and came to Abyssinia, present-day Ethiopia.²⁷

²⁰ Edwin W. Smith, “Religious Beliefs of the Akan,” *Africa* 15, no. 1 (January 21, 1945): 23–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1156827>; Jan G Platvoet, “Nyame Ne Aberewa: Towards a History of Akan Notions of God,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* NS 4 (2012): 41–68; Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (Routledge, 2014).

²¹ Hasskei M. Majeed, “On the Rationality of Traditional Akan Religion: Analyzing the Concept of God,” *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 25, no. 0 (May 11, 2016): 127, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v25i1.7>; Cosmas Ebo Sarbah and Manson Anane Adjei, “The Akan Indigenous Concepts of Religion and Nyame (the Supreme Deity) and the Promotion of Inter-Religious Relations in Ghana,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, February 23, 2024, 23–33, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20241022>.

²² Divine Edem Kobla Amenumey, *A Political History of the Ewe Unification Problem* (The University of Manchester (United Kingdom), 1972); Jakob Spieth, *Ewe-Stämme* (African Books Collective, 2011); Robert W Wyllie, “Kponoe and the Tado Stool: A Problem in the Interpretation of the Anlo Migration Tradition (Ghana/Togo),” *Anthropos*, no. H. 1./2 (1977): 119–28; John Parker, “Migration, Erosion and Fishing Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana,” *The Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (March 9, 2003): 145–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853703308485>; Meera Venkatachalam, “Between The Devil and the Cross: Religion, Slavery, and the Making of the Anlo-Ewe,” *The Journal of African History* 53, no. 1 (March 26, 2012): 45–64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853712000059>.

²³ Sandra Elaine Greene, *The Anlo-Ewe: Their Economy, Society and External Relations in the Eighteenth Century* (Northwestern University, 1981); Wyllie, “Kponoe and the Tado Stool: A Problem in the Interpretation of the Anlo Migration Tradition (Ghana/Togo);” Parker, “Migration, Erosion and Fishing Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana”; Venkatachalam, “Between The Devil and the Cross: Religion, Slavery, and the Making of the Anlo-Ewe.”

²⁴ Divine Edem Kobla. Amenumey, *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times: A Political History with Special Emphasis on the Anlo, Ge, and Krepi* (Accra: Sedco Pub. Limited, 1986); Birgit Meyer, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation: German Pietist Missionaries, Ewe Converts and the Politics of Culture,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2002): 167–99.

²⁵ Kobla A. Dotse, *The Origins and Brief History of the Ewe People* (Silver Springs, Maryland, 2011).

²⁶ G.K. Nukunya, “Insider Anthropology: The Case of the Anlo Ewe,” *Etnofoor*, no. 1 (1994): 24–40.

²⁷ Jean-Philippe Gunn, “The Ewe in West Africa: One Cultural People in Two Different Countries (Togo/Ghana) 1884-1960,” *History Studies* 9, no. 3 (2017).

At Abyssinia, slavers followed them. They moved out, this time South-Westwards to the bends of river Niger and the middle reaches of river Senegal. Here, they made great contributions to the old Ghana Empire around the 4th and 13th centuries, at Walata, near Timbuktu, which was replaced by the Mali Empire, led by Mari Djata. After Mari Djata's death, the empire disintegrated and survived by the Songhai Empire. After the Mali Empire collapsed, they followed the Niger River South-Eastward to the Oyo Empire around the 13th century and settled at Ile Ife in Yoruba land. Here, they developed Ifa divination. When the Oyo Empire collapsed, they moved west to Dahomey in the present-day Republic of Benin and settled in *Ketu* or *Amedzorpe*. Here, according to Baku, they split into three groups, *Lashibi*, *Adotri* and *Woe*.²⁸ The first group settled around the Mono River and named it *Tado*. The second settled between the Mono and the Haho Rivers, which became *Notsie*. The third group settled at Adele and formed the nucleus of what later became the Kingdom of Dahomey.

According to Greene, at *Notsie*, they became semi-autonomous, developed a centralised kinship and built a wall to protect the city from slavers.²⁹ The King, *Tɔgbui* Adela Atogble, married a former wife of *Tɔgbui* Adza Ashimadi, the king of Tado called Asongoe. She gave birth to Kponoe Ashimadi who became Sri, and Awoamefia I. Her daughter Kokui Wala also gave birth to Tsatsu Adeladza, who became Awoamefia II. The Dogbo-Nyigbo prospered in Notsie. After the death of Akli the Chief of Notsie, Ago Korli became the successor. He put the Dogbo-Nyigbo through hardship and punishment. His reign is described as marked by tyranny and cruelty against the Dogbo-Nyigbo. He gave them three tasks, namely making rope out of clay (or sand), preparing or cooking food without leaving ashes, and making more out of mud with thorns, broken pottery, and sharp objects with their bare hands and feet. The hardship became unbearable and according to Montgomery and Vannier, it was at this point that an old woman called Mama *Tegli* devised a plan to enable the Ewe to break through the walls of Notsie to escape.³⁰ She told the women to pour water on the wall to soften it.

The leaders that led the Ewe out of *Notsie* included *Tɔgbui* Tegli, Tsali, Wenya and Mama Kokui. From here they settled in different areas across what is now Ghana, Togo, Benin, and parts of Nigeria. The Anlo Ewe settled around Keta and Anloga in South-Eastern Ghana and established the Anlo State. The Tongu Ewe settled along the Volta River in areas like Adidome, Sogakofe, and Mepe. The Some (*Somè*) Ewe settled in South-Western Togo. The Tado Ewe settled in present-day Togo and Benin. The last group *Agu* (or *Aja*) Ewe settled around Western Benin and South-Western Nigeria. According to Botwe-Asamoah, the Ewe, divided by colonial boundaries, sought to reunite.³¹ Presently they are spread across four regions; Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria.

Ewe Socioreligioculture and Spirituality

The Ewe socioreligioculture is built around a clan system known as *hɔwo* (singular *hɔ*) or family groups known as *fome* or *yo*. Greene identified fifteen (15) which are further divided into sub-clans and lineages.³² They include *Bame* (or Bami), *Agave*, *Adzovia*, *Anlo*, *Amlade*, *Klevi*, *Lashibi*, *Blekete*, *Tsiame*, *Dzevi*, *Dukɔ*, *Xlɔfi*, *Avegbe*, *Woe*, and the *Uifeme*. Each of these clans has its unique traditions, roles, and symbols. The *Bame* (or *Bami*) have five (5) sub-clans. The sub-clans and their totems include *Ablode* (totem Lion) for strength and bravery, *Kpedze* (totem Eagle) for vision and leadership, *Keta* (totem Dove) for peace and tranquillity, *Avenor* (totem Elephant) for wisdom and power and *Tɔgbui* (totem Turtle) for longevity and stability. The *Agave* sub-clans include *Adzigo* (totem Crocodile) for protection, strength, and endurance, *Kluvi* (totem Fish) for abundance, sustenance and connection to the water, *Awadada* (totem Python) for wisdom, patience, and power and *Budu* (totem Monkey) for intelligence, cleverness, and agility.

The others include *Adevu* (totem Deer) for gentleness, peace, and grace, *Dzokoto* (totem Eagle) for vision, freedom, and leadership and *Bateyi* (totem Tortoise) for wisdom, resilience, and long life. The *Adzovia* sub-clans include the *Afegame* (totem Leopard) for strength, courage, and royalty, *Agbadomi* (totem Lion) for authority, leadership, and fearlessness, *Torgbuiwo* (totem Eagle) for vision,

²⁸ Kofi Baku, "The Asafo in Two Ewe States," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, no. 2 (1998): 21–28.

²⁹ Sandra E Greene, "Sacred Terrain: Religion, Politics and Place in the History of Anloga (Ghana)," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30, no. 1 (1997): 1–22.

³⁰ Montgomery and Vannier, "Dawn of the Gods: History and Power in Eweland."

³¹ Kwame Botwe-Asamoah, "Ewe Nationalism; A Historical Perspective" (Southern Connecticut State University, 1977).

³² Sandra E Greene, "Land, Lineage and Clan in Early Anlo1," *Africa* 51, no. 1 (1981): 451–64.

spiritual connection, and vigilance, *Klu* (totem Crocodile) resilience, protection, and adaptability, *Afeto* (totem Elephant) for strength, wisdom, and family unity and the *Teti* (totem Python) for patience, wisdom, and transformation. The *Lashibi* sub-clans include *Dzomayi* (totem Panther) for courage, agility, and mystery, *Amatsi* (totem Owl) for wisdom, insight, and protection, *Adeha* (totem Buffalo) for resilience, strength, and endurance, *Yelɛwu* (totem Hawk) sharp vision, focus, and swiftness, *Atsevi* (totem Monkey) for cleverness, adaptability, and community spirit, *Agbakɔ* (totem Python) for wisdom, patience, and strength and *Tɔgbɛvi* (totem Elephant) for strength, wisdom, and unity.

The *Blekete* sub-clans include *Kadzɛnu* (totem Owl) for wisdom, mystery, and spiritual insight, *Adzadzɛ* (totem Python) for patience, strength, and spiritual protection, *Aveme* (totem Parrot) for communication, intelligence, and the transmission of knowledge, *Ahegbɔ* (totem) for vision, freedom, and leadership, *Seme* (totem Crocodile) resilience, adaptability, and spiritual protection, *Dzidoto* (totem Tortoise) for wisdom, endurance, and longevity, and *Atɔmevi* (totem Drum) for communication, rhythm, and spiritual connectivity. The *Klevi* sub-clans include *Amedzro* (totem Tortoise) for wisdom, patience, and resilience, *Amevɔ* (totem Deer) for gentleness, grace, and harmony with nature, *Atɔmi* (totem Python) for spiritual strength, patience, and protection, *Dɔmenu* (totem Owl) for wisdom, insight, and the ability to see beyond the surface, *Dzakplɛ* (totem Eagle) for vision, courage, and leadership, *Akɔda* (totem Crocodile) for resilience, adaptability, and strength in both water and on land, and *Tɔgbuiwo* (totem Monkey) for intelligence, adaptability, and community spirit.

These are but a few of the sub-clans of the main Ewe clans. According to Spieth and Toulassi, the clan system forms a major part of Ewe's social structure, governance and spirituality, which also encompasses a system of complex beliefs that explain the universe, relations between the physical and spiritual realms and a moral order.³³ It also includes views on creation, ancestors, the existence of deities (spirits), the Supreme Being (*Mawu*) and the cyclical nature of life (birth, death and reincarnation). Major elements within the Ewe cosmology include the Supreme Being (*Mawu*) *Mawu Sogbo Lisa*. For Agboada, the Ewe religioculture is the most active, or vibrant, pervaded by over 3487 deities venerated in several hundreds of families, homes and communities.³⁴ *Mawu*, the main deity (Supreme Being) of the Ewe, is considered to have two natures, male and female, therefore the name *Sogbo Lisa*.

The female nature shows the nurturing, compassionate, and gentle aspect of *Mawu*, often associated with the moon, femininity, fertility, and life-giving qualities. The Male nature represents a powerful, strong, and energetic aspect, often associated with the sun, masculinity, and vitality. *Mawu Sogbo Lisa* therefore is a representation of the harmonious union of *maleness* and *femaleness*, illustrating the completeness of God, containing care, kindness, and sustenance that symbolise the tender forces of creation that support growth and harmony and the strength, justice, and action that symbolizes the dynamic forces of creation that bring order, structure, and direction. *Sogbo* bridges *Mawu* and *Lisa*, emphasising powerful unity that combines the two natures within the divine (*Mawu Lisa*). It highlights the strength that balances gentleness, reflecting the completeness and harmonious duality of *Mawu Sogbo Lisa* in Ewe spirituality. According to Parrinder at *Ile-Ife* in Yorubaland, another nature of *Mawu* emerged; the *Dzɔgbɛ Se* and *Kitikata*.³⁵

Post-Missionary Christianity in Africa

Christianity in Africa has presented many trajectories meant to make it relevant to the socioreligioculture and spirituality of Africans. For Wilhite, from its initial contact in Africa, Christianity has gone through many faces including pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial.³⁶ Christianity in pre-colonial Africa remained foreign, unsympathetic and polemic with prejudicial and overly critical assessments of Africa's Traditions and Cultures. They were described as devilish, backward and savage because the hegemony of Western-European culture, which had provided the

³³ Spieth, *Ewe-Stämme*; Toulassi Boniface, "Traditionally Inherited Leadership among the Ewes in Togo, West Africa: Reasons and Beliefs: Building an Integrative Approach" (Regent University, 2018).

³⁴ Edward Agboada, "Ewe Cosmology and Spirituality: Implications for Christianity, Theology and Biblical Scholarship in Africa," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no. 6 (June 28, 2024): 1025–36, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20245618>.

³⁵ Edward Geoffrey Parrinder, "Theistic Beliefs of the Yoruba and Ewe Peoples of West Africa," *African Ideas of God*, 1950, 224–40.

³⁶ David E Wilhite, *Ancient African Christianity: An Introduction to a Unique Context and Tradition* (Routledge, 2017).

framework for Christianity, refused to regard the traditions and cultures of Africa as possessing the same capacity and legitimacy to provide an alternative. According to Nunn, in colonial Africa, when Christianity had found its way into the traditions and cultures of Africa but failed to change them, it began to look for new ways it could represent itself, but a great impasse had been created because of the vacuum it created between itself and the African traditional religion.³⁷

However, in post-colonial Africa, Christianity in Africa has transformed fully and completely into an African context-focused religion and presented many alternatives to the extent that in the 21st century, its centre of gravity has shifted completely from the global West (Europe and America) to the global South (Asia, Africa and Latin America). According to Andrews F. Walls, this has brought critical challenges and demands, including a demand on Africa (Christians, Theologians and Biblical Scholars) to mobilise the right expertise and develop appropriate responses to the challenges presented by the continuously changing demographics and trajectories of global Christianity.³⁸ For Walls, this presents two critical implications; how ‘mission’ is defined in the 21st century and beyond, will depend on what has happened in Africa's past and the changes that would occur. Again, the hegemony of Western-European (Missionary) frameworks for Christianity, Theology and Biblical Scholarship no longer remains the only legitimate one.

In post-missionary Christianity in Africa, Africa's context (framework) has presented very competitive alternatives that have provided the right answers and solutions to the questions and problems Western-European (Missionary) Christianity and Africa's Traditional Religion failed to solve. Several attempts have therefore been made towards the redefinition and examination of the meaning and relevance of Western-European (Missionary) Christianity within the African socioreligioculture and spirituality. In both of his works *Recent Developments in African Christianity* and *Trajectories in African Christianity*, Paul Gifford highlighted some of the critical developments, including the demand for the re-examination of the continuous relevance of the hegemony of Western-European (Missionary) Christian framework in the globalisation of Christianity and Theology, and the urgency to decolonise existing frameworks defined by Western-European (Missionary) Christian frameworks that have given context to global Christianity, Theology and Biblical Scholarship.³⁹ In *Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Kwame Bediako describes African Christianity as the renewal of a non-Western Religion.⁴⁰

In *Jesus and the gospel in Africa*, Bediako discusses the unique context provided by Africa for the conceptualisation of the relevance of Jesus and the Gospel in Africa.⁴¹ Jesus in Africa is not only just a religious figure but a symbol of liberation, healing, community, and cultural relevance. He embodies spiritual, moral, and redemptive qualities that resonate with the culture, values and historical experiences of the Africans. He is a liberator who embodies justice, hope, and resilience. He is a healer and provider. He does not only provide physical healing but also brings peace, reconciliation, and spiritual renewal. He is a mediator and ancestor (elder brother) who bridges the gap between divinity and humanity and shares in African suffering and identity. It is within this context and many others that attempt to present the capacity of Africa's socioreligioculture and spirituality to provide alternatives beyond the hegemony of Western-European (Missionary) Christianity that Christological constructs within Akan and Ewe socioreligiocultures in Ghana are appraised.

These constructs provide a glimpse of the significance of the role and relationship that exist between Jesus, the Father, and the Church and what relevance they presented to the African Christian in the search for answers beyond Western-European (Missionary) Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Not only did they provide a framework for religious discourses, but also criteria upon which African Christians responded to the gospel and defined the relevance of the relationship that must exist between them, the gospel and the Church without the hegemony of Western-European (Missionary)

³⁷ Nathan Nunn, “Christians in Colonial Africa,” *Unpublished Manuscript*, 2009; Nathan Nunn, “Religious Conversion in Colonial Africa,” *American Economic Review* 100, no. 2 (May 1, 2010): 147–52, <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.100.2.147>.

³⁸ Andrew F Walls, “African Christianity in the History of Religions,” *Studies in World Christianity* 2, no. 2 (1996): 183–203.

³⁹ Paul Gifford, “Some Recent Developments in African Christianity,” *African Affairs* 93, no. 373 (1994): 513–34; Paul Gifford, “Trajectories in African Christianity,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8, no. 4 (2008): 275–89.

⁴⁰ Bediako, “Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension.”

⁴¹ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

Christianity. It was unfortunate that the institutionalisation of Christianity diverted the message of the gospel into Western-European hegemonic propaganda or African Cultural Renaissance and hypothesised theologies and nomenclatures that did more harm than was necessary. That notwithstanding, the faces of challenges created a context out of which Christianity has been able to remain well-explored and relevant to every society and culture.

Akan-Ewe Cultural Christological Constructs

Akan-Ewe cultures are dynamic and rich with complex structures and constructs that provide a tapestry of contexts and frameworks for linguistics, artistry and spirituality that reflect how they communicate, create, and find meaning or connection within the physical and spiritual cosmology. Appah Akan and Ewe languages fall under the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language family.⁴² What is unique about these languages is their tonality, grammatical structure and verb serialisation. For instance, the pitch or tone used when pronouncing a word can change the meaning. They have a subject-verb-object order and often rely on suffixes, prefixes, or tone to indicate tense, aspect, and mood in verbs. These linguistic dynamics and variations give it a very distinctive and rich vocabulary within which there are rich cultural constructs that define their worldviews, traditional practices, and values that reflect their identity and provide a foundation for their respective societies.

The distinctiveness of the Akan-Ewe cultures and the tapestry of complex linguistic structures provided a context of cultural constructs that offer a distinctive framework for Christological discourses. Ekeke and Ekeopara argued that contrary to the claim that Africans did not know God until the West/Europe introduced him, showing that within the African cultures, worldviews and linguistic structures there existed expressions, stories and practices that demonstrated not just knowledge of Him but experience or personal relationships that established between people and him.⁴³ God was known and related to long before the West/Europe heard about Africa. It is within this framework that we are going to analyse some elected cultural constructs to see whether they provide legitimate frameworks for Christological discourses in post-missionary Africa. While God is called *Onyame* in the Akan language, in the Ewe he is called *Mawu*. The Akan and Ewe are quick to reflect some of the attributes in his name by also calling him *Onyankopɔn* or *Sogbolisa*.

For Prempeh *Onyankopɔn* or *Sogbolisa* (meaning the Great One or the Absolute) is the creator, omnipotent, omniscient, and all-present being, the source of all life, and goodness with divine authority and power over the cosmos and human destiny.⁴⁴ Even though distant, he is intimately involved in the lives and activities of the universe, providing guidance, protection, sustenance and balance. *Onyankopɔn* or *Sogbolisa* is *Omnipresent* and *Transcendent*. He is everywhere at all times, yet distant beyond the immediate reach of human understanding. That is, while he is deeply revered, he is also approached through various forms and intermediaries. *Onyankopɔn* or *Sogbolisa* is *Borebore* (*Ɖɔɔadeɛ*) the creator and *Twereduampɔn* (the dependable). He is *Mawu Kɔn* (the Mighty man or War) and *Mawu Tete* (the Ancient of days). He has no beginning and no end. He existed before time, through time and beyond time. Immensely powerful and personally close, involved in the daily lives of people.

For Munyao, these constructs are monotheistic and did not only seek to understand *Onyankopɔn* or *Mawu* but also the hierarchy of deities, spirits and divinities that constituted the theistic cosmology.⁴⁵ According to Stinton, it is within this context that the nature, role and person of Jesus, including the titles, such as *Messiah* (Christ), Son of God, Son of Man, Lamb of God, *Logos* (the Word), and *Emmanuel* (God with us) he is given and the significance they present in the context of the relationship that exists between God and humanity is presented.⁴⁶ For Kasambala, these cultural Christological constructs such as Ancestor, Mediator, Healer, Redeemer, Liberator, etc. provide

⁴² Clement Kwamina Insaideo Appah, "A Survey of Exocentric Compounds in Three Kwa Languages: Akan, Ewe and Ga," *Ghana Journal of Linguistics* 8, no. 2 (2019): 1–26.

⁴³ Emeka C Ekeke and Chike A Ekeopara, "God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology," *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2010): 209–18.

⁴⁴ Charles Prempeh, "Decolonising African Divine Episteme: A Critical Analysis of the Akan Divine Name of God (Twereduampon Kwame)," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 52 (March 2022): 269–91, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340231>.

⁴⁵ Martin Munyao, "Christology in Africa," in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology* (Routledge, 2020), 412–28.

⁴⁶ Diane Stinton, "Jesus—Immanuel, Image of the Invisible God: Aspects of Popular Christology in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 1, no. 1 (2007): 6–40.

sufficient grounds upon which they are understood.⁴⁷ This is why Adedeji, Manganyi and Buitendag argued that *Onyankopon* and *Mawu* are not just a concept or description of a person but a philosophy and incorporate four views: Theism, Deism, Pantheism, and Panentheism.⁴⁸

The ancestor Christology reinterprets Jesus' role and significance through the African socioreligioculture and highlights his role as a mediator, healer, and moral example. While deities are often understood as independent, cosmic forces or gods, ancestors are deceased members of the African family or lineage who have led exemplary lives and now mediate the spirit and physical realms. They are called upon for help in times of crisis or to ensure safety and success. They are respected as bearers of tradition and wisdom. Their lives and teachings are seen as a guide for moral and ethical behaviour. They are believed to watch over their descendants, providing protection from harm and offering guidance through dreams, signs, and other forms of communication. For Luka and Nyende, by framing Jesus as an ancestor, relating to him becomes more meaningful and bridges cultural beliefs with Christian theology that allows African Christians to live their faith in ways that honour both their spiritual heritage and Christian doctrine.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

Post-missionary Africa has brought many challenges to the hegemony and continuous relevance of Western-European (Missionary) Christianity and its capacity to provide a definition or framework for global Christianity, Theology and Biblical Scholarship. This challenge which has come as a result of the changed demographic dynamics and trajectories of global Christianity and its shift in the centre of gravity from the global West (Europe and America) to the global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America) has brought into question issues and factors that defined the context and context of Christianity, theology and Biblical Scholarship in the past. The failure of existing frameworks to provide answers to questions that emerged within socioreligiocultures other than the West/Europe complicated the problem and brought a demand for alternatives. It is within this context that alternatives such as the African became significant. It provided the kind of framework within which Africans could conceptualise the significance of Jesus, the gospel and the relevance it provides for Africans. These included the development of cultural constructs that gave expression to the relevance of Jesus and the gospel in African socioreligiocultures. The Akan and Ewe, who were the main subjects of this study, possess a tapestry of beautiful cultural constructs that provided expression to how they conceived, perceived and regarded Jesus within their socioreligiocultures and spirituality. He was not a figure of imagination but a deity (Supreme Being). He had no equals. The ultimate authority and power over all things and held the highest position in sovereignty, authority, knowledge, and goodness, infinitely powerful and superior (Omnipotence), knows everything (Omniscience), and is everywhere at once (Omnipresence)

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⁴⁷ Amon Eddie Kasambala, "The Impact of an African Spirituality and Cosmology on God-Images in Africa: A Challenge to Practical Theology and Pastoral Ministry," 2005.

⁴⁸ Adebisi G. M. Adedeji, "African Concept of God, Evil and Salvation in African Traditional Religion (ATR): Critique from Cultural Viewpoint," *Journal of Global Intelligence & Policy* 5, no. 9 (2012); Jele S. Manganyi and Johan Buitendag, "A Critical Analysis on African Traditional Religion and the Trinity : Original Research," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2002).

⁴⁹ Reuben Turbi. Luka, *Jesus Christ as Ancestor: A Theological Study of Major African Ancestor Christologies in Conversation with the Patristic Christologies of Tertullian and Athanasius.* (Langham Publishing, , 2019); Peter Thomas Naliaka Nyende, *Jesus, the Greatest Ancestor: A Typology-Based Theological Interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa, Annexe Thesis Digitisation Project 2018 Block 19* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh, 2006).

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