

# Esoteric Signs and Symbols in Akan-Ewe Socioreligioculture: Indigenous Constructs for Post-Missionary Theology and Christology



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## ABSTRACT

This study explores esoteric signs and symbols within Akan-Ewe sociocultural and spiritual traditions to uncover indigenous theological and Christological constructs for post-missionary Africa. Employing essential, functional, and ethnographic theories from the phenomenology of religion, the research discovers that Akan-Ewe spirituality contains profound constructs that provide frameworks for the existence of God, the nature of existence, the sanctity of life, and moral accountability that resonate with yet are distinctly different from Western missionary Christianity. In the search for frameworks that adequately and sufficiently fill the impasse created by the prejudices and polemics of Western (Missionary) Christianity against Africa's context on one side, and attempts by African Christianity to decipher alternatives that provide the right answers to the questions emerging from its Christianity, the study discovers that within Africa's socioculture and spirituality are embedded esoteric signs and symbols which possess frameworks that provide relevant contexts for Theology and Christology in no less rational ways than Western/European (missionary) contexts. By applying substantive, functional, and social-relational phenomenological approaches alongside qualitative methods, the research contributes to decolonising African Christianity, offering viable alternatives for theology and Christology that emerge from Africa's own intellectual and spiritual traditions. The findings hold significance for African Christianity and postcolonial theology, advocating for frameworks rooted in indigenous epistemologies rather than missionary paradigms.

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## INTRODUCTION

For Africans, culture is important, it shapes identity, spirituality, jurisprudence, and cosmology.<sup>1</sup> Nothing has relevance if presented outside a cultural context. Nothing holds relevance when stripped of its cultural context; traditions, language, and rituals derive their meaning from the frameworks that African socioculture and spirituality provide. It is this culturally rootedness and relevance that foreign

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel E. Idang, "African Culture and Values," *Phronimon* 16, no. 2 (2015): 97–111; Aborisade Olasunkanmi, "A Philosophical Appraisal of Basic Cultural Values in African Tradition," *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance* 6, no. 2 (2015): 1–12.

systems or religions, i.e. Western/European (Missionary) Christianity or Islam, continue to struggle to eradicate African beliefs and practices or religions, despite adopting African cultural elements as entry points for engagement. For Sogolo, Africa's socioculture and spirituality are anchored in enduring beliefs, values, and ethics within which are signs and symbols, or totems, categories that encapsulate profound spirituality and present deep spiritual, philosophical, and cultural connotations, conveying spiritual truths, cosmic principles, and moral values.<sup>2</sup>

Rose and Allen observe that in ancient cultures such as Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Jewish traditions, esoteric signs and symbols conveyed truths beyond the limitations of language, embodying meanings "worth a million words." These symbols functioned as profound metaphysical and cosmological frameworks, encoding spiritual principles that ordinary discourse could not fully articulate.<sup>3</sup> For example, Reemes discusses the *Ouroboros*, a serpent or dragon consuming its tail, as a recurring motif in Egyptian, Greek, and Alchemical traditions, a symbol that encapsulated eternity, cyclical renewal, the unity of existence, and the infinite interplay of creation and dissolution.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the *Pentagram*, a five-pointed star often enclosed in a circle, holding layers of significance across ancient mysticism, pagan traditions, and occult practices according to Urmă, depending on context, represent the harmony of the five classical elements (earth, air, fire, water, and spirit) or, in Christian symbolism, Christ's five wounds (hands, feet, and side), signifying sacrifice and redemption.<sup>5</sup>

In his examination of the *Mandala*, a geometric, often circular design with radiating patterns prominent in Hindu and Buddhist spirituality, Pilgrim maintained that it represented a microcosm of the universe and mapped the journey toward enlightenment, embodying cosmic order and the seeker's path to self-realisation.<sup>6</sup> For Youvan, the *Hexagram*, a six-pointed star formed by intersecting triangles, central to Jewish *Kabbalah*, represented dualities, spirit and matter, masculine and feminine, emphasising equilibrium and the interconnectedness of opposing forces.<sup>7</sup> In Akan-Ewe socioculture and spirituality, there are such signs and symbols that present not just cultural aesthetics but deep constructs. Wiredu maintains that they are formulations made from years of encounters and experiences with the supernatural, which have been organised and translated into symbols, which communicate transcendental lessons.<sup>8</sup>

This study, therefore, examines esoteric signs and symbols within Akan-Ewe socioculture and spirituality that present relevant frameworks for post-missionary Theology and Christology in Africa. After identifying some, the study examines them to decipher the kind of Christological constructs they present and their legitimacy or relevance as a framework for Theology and Christology. Acknowledging that in contemporary Africa there is a need to develop expertise, a framework, and nomenclature that communicates the gospel within the context of changes that have occurred in global Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, shift in its centre of gravity from the global West to the South and Africa's emergence as the new centre of gravity.

### The Akan-Ewe Culture

The Akan-Ewe people form one of over 3,000 ethnic groups in Africa and a cross-section of over 100 among Ghana's population (45.7% and 13.9% respectively). Their cultures are among the strongest and largest due to their population size and socioeconomics. According to Kea, what is unique about the Akan-Ewe is the kind of relationship that exists between them due to the Akwamu Empire and the activities of Tɔgbui Atsu Tsali (a renowned Ewe priest from *Notsie*), whose name the Asante adulterated to *Anokye* (or Kwame Frimpong Manso). He made significant contributions to the building of the Asante Kingdom, the defeat of the Denkyira at the battle of Feyiase in 1701, and the

<sup>2</sup> Godwin Sogolo, "Foundations of African Philosophy: A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought," 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Denny, Rose and Rowan Allen, *Ancient Civilizations of the World. Scientific e-Resources*, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Dana Michael Reemes, "The Egyptian Ouroboros: An Iconological and Theological Study," *University of California, Los Angeles*, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Maria Urmă, "The Pentagram as a Living Cross," *Anastasis Research in Medieval Culture and Art* 3, no. 1 (2016): 76–87.

<sup>6</sup> Richard B. Pilgrim, "The Buddhist Mandala," *Literature and Medicine* 8, no. 1 (1989): 36–41.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas C. Youvan, "Geometric Symbols and Divine Proportions: The Pentagram, Hexagram, and Their Religious Significance Across Cultures," 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

establishment of the Asante Empire.<sup>9</sup> According to Wilks at Akwamu, King Ansa Sasraku introduced Tɔgbui Atsu Tsali to Osei Tutu, who had fled from Ntim Gyakari (Denkyira), who had murdered Obiri Yeboah, Osei Tutu's uncle and was after him too for rebellion and failure to submit to Denkyira suzerainty.<sup>10</sup>

At Akwamu, Osei Tutu was told about the exploit of *Tɔgbui Atsu Tsali*, who asked to meet with him. As fate would have it, they both liked each other immediately. When it was time for Osei Tutu to return to Kwaaman (present Asante), Ansa Sasraku agreed to allow Tɔgbui Atsu Tsali to go with him so that he would help build a mighty kingdom, fight Ntim Gyakari and remove the suzerainty of Denkyira on Asante. According to McCaskie, on arrival at Kwaaman, Tɔgbui Atsu Tsali helped reorganise Asante by first forming a confederacy. This provided enough troops for an Asante Army. With his spiritual backing, the royal honour of Osei Tutu, and his desire for freedom, the Asante commenced earnest preparation and finally defeated Ntim Gyakari at Feyiase in 1701.<sup>11</sup> According to Agyemang Atsu Tsali's exploit did not end there. He went ahead to provide the *Sikadwa* (the golden Stool), which is the heart of the Asante kingdom or confederacy and the mystic sword (*Afena*), the removal of which would symbolise the disintegration of the Asante confederacy.<sup>12</sup>

Legends exist around the planting of the sward on the ground, which says, Okomfo Anokye requested the hair, nails and crowns of the kings that made up the Asante Confederacy, buried them and placed the sward on it. The relationship that exists between the Akan and Ewe is therefore deep. In respect to the exploit of Tɔgbui Atsu Tsali, the Akan even have a proverb that says *yemfa aduro nko anwona*, even though they say *yemfa aduro nko agona* (translated, as 'you don't send medicine to Ewe or Agonaland). This is why certain practices or rituals in the Akan-Ewe cultures present such a striking resemblance. That notwithstanding, because of the alleged murder of Tɔgbui Atsu Tsali by the Asante for his outrage in exposing a rot that had gone on in the Palace or too much knowledge of the Asante's secret. A certain level of antagonism seems to exist between them, transcending politics, religion, hospitality, etc. Nevertheless, the similarity between Akan-Ewe cultures and the relevance they present is recognisable.

In addition, like all other tribes, according to Fortes, Akan-Ewe socioculture is built around clan-based kingship; however, for the Akan, inheritance is matrilineal, but for the Ewe, it is Patrilineal.<sup>13</sup> The Akan changed their inheritance system due to an alleged incident that occurred in the Palace regarding paternity. It is only a woman whose childbirth cannot be disputed because there are bodily signs that show when they are pregnant. This is not because the Akan placed a special interest in the status and role of women, since practical evidence proves otherwise, but that the maternity of a child is usually and all the time easy to determine compared to men. Nevertheless, with time, the Asante learnt to respect women since they form an important part of the social structure and family system.

### **Esoteric Signs and Symbols in the Akan-Ewe Culture and Spirituality**

One of the beautiful things about Akan-Ewe culture is the presence of signs and symbols, or totems. These signs and symbols, or totems, speak about all kinds of issues in life. From the recognition of the existence of God to the sophistication of the universe, the mystery, complexity and value of life, peaceful co-existence, spirituality, ancestors, divinities, and recompense of sin or greediness, etc. All sorts of avenues or media of moral lessons surround Africans. For Ossom-Batsa and Apaah, these signs and symbols remain significant in African cultures and traditions because they form a major part of education or mentoring pedagogy.<sup>14</sup> For Opuni-Frimpong, this underscores one of the principal means

<sup>9</sup> Ray A Kea, "Akwamu-Anlo Relations, c. 1750-1813," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 10 (1969): 29–63.

<sup>10</sup> Ivor Wilks, "The Rise of the Akwamu Empire, 1650-1710," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 3, no. 2 (1957): 25–62.

<sup>11</sup> Tom C McCaskie, "Komfo Anokye of Asante: Meaning, History and Philosophy in an African Society," *The Journal of African History* 27, no. 2 (1986): 315–39.

<sup>12</sup> Yaw Sarkodie Agyemang, "Okomfo Anokye and Nation-Building in Ghana: A Reflection on Ancestors, Myth and Nation-Building," *Drumspeak: International Journal of Research in the Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2009): 150–77.

<sup>13</sup> Meyer Fortes, "Kinship and Marriage among the Ashanti," in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (Routledge, 2015), 252–84.

<sup>14</sup> George Ossom-Batsa and Felicity Apaah, "Rethinking the Great Commission: Incorporation of Akan Indigenous Symbols into Christian Worship," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 1 (2018): 261–78.

of education- teaching through visuals. The education of young Africans was, therefore, intentional and purposeful.<sup>15</sup>



This symbol is translated as *Gye Nyame* (except God). For Amoateng, it represents not just the recognition of the existence of God (*Onyankopɔn* or *Sogbo Lisa*) but that some things are left with God only or unless he permits.<sup>16</sup> Platvoet argued that recognition of *Onyankopɔn* or *Sogbo Lisa* in Akan and Ewe cultures long before Western (Missionary) Christianity demonstrates a remarkable feature of Akan-Ewe spirituality.<sup>17</sup> This had always proved that Africans did not just have enough knowledge of God, but they experienced him in a personal way. That is why they could conceive such ideas of him. *Gye Nyame* is not just a name but also a demonstration and a statement of the understanding and relationship that Africans recognised existed between *Onyankopɔn* and them. According to Amoah, *Gye-Nyame* provided a profound context and conception of how Africans perceived and conceived that relationship.<sup>18</sup>

*Gye-Nyame* affirms that in the conception of Africans about God, no power, spirit, or being is equal to God. He has no equals. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, within all things, visible and invincible. He is the creator and sustainer of all things, visible and invisible. *Gye-Nyame* is a statement of conviction and confession that inspires confidence and resilience, reminding people that, no matter the challenges, God's power surpasses all obstacles and adversaries, and that with him, everything is guarded. Nothing escapes his sight, the good, the bad, or the ugly. This provides a strong context for the belief in the antagonistic nature of the African cosmology. The Akan-Ewe, therefore, believed that, if there was any protection, deliverance, or fortification, it must be with him. This is why prayers are offered to him. This shows that Africans did not just know God; they experienced him in a personal (intimate) way and communicated with him. This they did not try and error.



This symbol is *Nyame Nwu Na Mawu* (God will not die for me to die). This represents the absolute dependence on the ability of God to protect those who rely on or depend on him. For Ekeke and Ekeopara, even though Africans believed in the Supremacy of God, they also recognised a hierarchy in the divine cosmology.<sup>19</sup> They believed that although *Onyankopɔn* or *Sogbo Lisa* was the supreme god, there were divinities and spirits that he gave charges or commands. Others remained who were malevolent and caused chaos or destruction. This belief acknowledges the presence of good and bad spirits in the African cosmology. The reason why *Nyame Nwu Na Mawu* is such a strong symbol. For Rowbory and Rowbory, it meant, no power or authority transcended or surpassed him; therefore, being in him was the best protection.<sup>20</sup> For Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Appiah, and Nartey, his belief informed a relationship guided by morality and ethics that ensured that the relationship that existed with *Onyankopɔn* how he was to be approached, was untainted.<sup>21</sup>

That notwithstanding, the fate of each individual in the family or community is connected with everybody. Life is viewed as a web where every element - humans, animals, plants, etc - is connected and influences one another. The spiritual realm, including God, ancestors, and spirits, is integrated into daily life. Nature is not separate from humanity but part of the interconnected system. This interconnectedness of fate is what is vocalised by the Zulu/Xhosa "*Ubuntu*" expression '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', which is translated 'I am because we are,' that is, a person is a person through

<sup>15</sup> Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "Akan Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Christian Faith in Ghana: A Review of the Major Works of Robert Rattray.," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 7, no. 8 (2021).

<sup>16</sup> Kofi Amoateng, "Engaging Theology and Theological Education in the Majority World: Recognizing Visual and Symbolic Theology from the Akan People's Illustrations.," in *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith*, vol. 6, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Jan G Platvoet, "Nyame Ne Aberewa: Towards a History of Akan Notions of God.," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology NS* 4 (2012):41-68.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Amoah, "An African Prayer from the Heart of a Woman.," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Religion* 7, no. 1.2 (2016).

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> David Rowbory and Julie Rowbory, "A Christian Examination of the Concept and Identity of the Supreme Being in African Traditional Religion.," *African Traditional Religion Research Paper*, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> J E T Kuwornu-Adjaottor, George Appiah, and Melvin Nartey, "The Philosophy behind Some Adinkra Symbols and Their Communicative Values in Akan.," *Philosophical Papers and Review* 7, no. 3 (2016): 22-33.

other people. For Mbiti, as argued by Adeate, the individual is defined not in isolation but through relationships.<sup>22</sup> Thus, a person's identity and humanity are only fully realised in connection with their community, which underscores the importance of collective well-being.



This symbol is *Nyame or Awurade Baatanpa* (God the good parent). The symbol is a recognition of God as a good parent. *Obaatan* in Akan is parent. *Obaatanpa* is a good parent. If *Onyankopɔn* (God) is *Baatanpa* (good parent), then He is our *Agya* (father) or *Enna* (mother). Even though *Obaatan* in the Akan language is translated as Good Mother, *Obaa* is female, *tan* is parent, and *pa* is good. However, *Obaatanpa* is often not used in the strict sense of the word, but rather, it carries the idea of a good parent (father or mother) since there is no such word as *Beematanpa* to cater for males. If used in this context, for Kumi, perceiving God as *Agya* (father) or *Enna* (mother) or Father-Mother as found in the Ga tradition, depending on which of his natures is more visible within that culture. The concept of *Obaatanpa* (good parent) demonstrates how God exemplifies good parenthood. That, first, as a parent, God provides the services needed for his children. Parenthood in African culture is, therefore, very important.<sup>23</sup> It holds profound significance, representing not just acts of raising children, but transmission and preservation of society's values, heritage and legacies across generations.

For Modise and Wood, perceiving God as '*Agya*' (father) establishes a *filial* relationship with him, it makes us God's children, which also demands from us the kind of service, honour and respect required by fathers (or parents).<sup>24</sup> In the African socioculture, fatherhood is a respected role, embodying authority, responsibility, protection, and guidance and transcends biological parenthood. A parent is not only the biological mother or father of a child but also anyone who assumes a nurturing, protective, guiding, or mentoring role within the family or community. Parenthood, therefore, extends to the extended family, including aunts, uncles, grandparents, and older siblings. Africans, therefore, approach God with this feeling of reverence and devotion. His name is treated with great respect and reverence, deeply rooted in spirituality, communal values, and a profound sense of awe for the divine. People use titles or attributes to refer to him rather than directly naming Him. Service to God, however, is adherence to instructions and performance of rites and rituals through ethical living, adherence to his commandments, and maintaining harmony in the community.



This symbol is *Nyame Dua* (God's Tree). It represents recognition of the presence of God. Wherever this tree is, it is believed that God dwells there. A tree that inhabits the presence of *Onyankopɔn* (God). It is considered sacred. People believe that when a child is sick and placed under this tree overnight, they receive healing. The leaves of this tree or the back of it are used for healing potions for sick people. In traditional healing centres, all kinds of sick people are tied under this tree for healing and provide shade for all kinds of good animals. For some reason, it is one tree that snakes do not go near. The belief in the ability of God to inhabit elements in creation provides justification for the worship of *Onyankopɔn* (God) through elements in creation, i.e. rivers, mountains, trees, animals, etc. The focus of the worship is not the elements but the *Onyankopɔn* (God) who inhabits those elements and therefore causes them to possess the ability to act as an intermediary for *Onyankopɔn* (God).

The misunderstanding of this concept and practices by Western (Missionary) Christianity has unfortunately branded it idolatry, etc. The point without mincing words is that Africans do not worship objects or elements in creation; rather, they worship *Onyankopɔn* (God), who is gracious enough to inhabit elements in creation and show his presence through them. Even though the elements do not sufficiently show the providence and sovereignty of God, at least they demonstrate a spirituality informed by the conviction of the existence and manifest presence of *Onyankopɔn* (God). The *Nyame*

<sup>22</sup> Tosin Adeate, "Mbiti on Community in African Political Thought: Reconciling the "I" and the "We"," *Phronimon* 24, no. 1 (2023): 1–15.

<sup>23</sup> George Kwame Kumi, *Good Father-Mother God: The Theology of God from the Perspective of the Akan Matrilineal Society of Ghana* (Fordham University, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Leepo Modise and Hannelie Wood, "The Relevance of the Metaphor of God as Father in a Democratic, Non-Sexist and Religious Society: An African Christian Perspective," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (2016): 285–304.

*Dua* or *Nyame Duaa* (God's Tree) is used for various things, such as medicinal, protection or fortification and warding off malevolent spirits. Significantly, wherever this tree appears, evil spirits do not stay close. *Nyame Dua* or *Nyame Duaa* (tree of God) is considered powerful and in a class of its own.



This symbol is *Nyame Nti* (Because of God). It is a recognition that man is always at the benevolence of *Onyankopɔn* (God). The symbol presents two perspectives on the role and recognition of *Onyankopɔn* (God) in the life of an African. First, whatever the African is or has is by the benevolence of *Onyankopɔn* (God). Africans believe that human effort alone is insufficient without God's favour. Even with hard work and diligence, success is attributed to God's will and benevolence, which fosters a sense of gratitude and humility. Since blessings are viewed as gifts from God, Africans often believe that these should be shared with others in the community. Generosity is therefore seen as a way of honouring God's benevolence. This belief helps people remain resilient in difficult times, trusting that God will provide for their needs. It also fosters contentment, as people accept that whatever they have is what God has deemed sufficient for them.

Second, in whatever an African desires to do, *Onyankopɔn* (God) comes first. It must be because of him that something is done or avoided. The rationale is that it is when the ways of a person or community please *Onyankopɔn* that he gives them continuous sustenance, prosperity and protection. As a result, reacting to external factors is always guided by the thought of maintaining the pleasure of *Onyankopɔn* (God). In this philosophy, a very important belief is shown. Human strength, success, and well-being ultimately depend on God. For Inusah and Segbefia, this informs a philosophy that provides a basis for many African proverbs and sage adages, i.e. *kokromoti a yensane ne ho mmo pɔ* or *kokromoti a wosane neho bopɔ a enye yie* (God is the tomb; if you exclude him in tying a knot, it does not get strong).<sup>25</sup> This philosophy implies that if you exclude *Onyankopɔn* (God) in anything, you cannot be successful. For this reason, Africans see themselves constantly at the mercy and grace of God, commencing every activity with acts of prayer or consulting God.

### Western (Missionary) Christianity in Africa

For Isichei and Fatokun, in the majority of its form in Africa, Christianity remained Western (Missionary). It promoted the culture of the West/Europe while prejudicing that of Africa without trepidation. They perceived African cultures and traditions as savage and uncivilised.<sup>26</sup> In the corridors of Europe and America, without encountering African culture or tradition, they had a prejudiced mindset. They refused to acknowledge the relevance and richness of the variety presented by the African culture and tradition. They had to force Africans into the Western/European world in abstraction. A culture and civilisation they presented as the best, the ideal, and the perfect one. Even though Christianity was a movement started by Jesus in the 1st century CE in Judea, it grew from his teachings. It emphasised love, forgiveness, and the Kingdom of God, his crucifixion and resurrection, which offered salvation and eternal life.

In Africa, Christianity came in three stages. The first was Africans sharing their experience of the Pentecost encounter as recorded in Acts 2 and their newfound faith. The second was the military engagements of Europe to the northern fringes of Africa through the Crusade campaigns, and the third was the colonialism of Africa through trade in humans, minerals and active occupation in African territories. In *Africa in the World: Capitalism, Empire, and Nation-State* (2014), Cooper argued about how Europe used tripartite Christianity, Colonialism and Neo-colonialism to push the culture and agenda of the West/Europe on Africa. For him, Africa's interest was never an agenda for Europe's activities.<sup>27</sup> In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (2018), Rodney highlights how the West/Europe adopted strategies to ensure that Africa remained underdeveloped. According to him, the agenda was

<sup>25</sup> Husein Inusah and Michael Segbefia, "Intellectual Virtues of Indigenous African Wisdom: The Perspectives of Akan Proverbs," *Being and Becoming African as a Permanent Work in Progress: Inspiration from Chinua Achebe's Proverbs*, 2021, 335–62.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995); Samson A Fatokun, "Christianity in Africa: A Historical Appraisal," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26, no. 2 (2005): 357–68.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Africa in the World: Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

to keep Africa as a raw material base to feed the industrialisation of the West/Europe.<sup>28</sup> For Meyer and Salvaing, until African Christians developed frameworks that focused on the significance of the African context, it remained a Westernisation/Europeanisation scheme.<sup>29</sup>

An African Christianity emerged. It emphasised the inculturation of Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship in African cultures and traditions or socioreligioculture and spirituality. African Christians, Theologians and Biblical scholars, therefore, began to engage critically with the bible and existing frameworks to develop the right expertise and framework that provided the right context for Africa's Christianity. Finally, an alternative was developed. This time, it did not force Africans to abandon their Africanness, identity and culture. It used the African culture and traditions as a basis for a framework that provided the right contexts.

### **Christianity in Post-Missionary Africa**

In post-missionary Africa, Christianity, its concepts, Theology and Christology have been subjected to critical study to liberate and decolonise the hegemony of Western (Missionary) propaganda. African Christians, Theologians and Biblical scholars are now convinced that, within the African culture and traditions, are legitimate and competitive frameworks that present the right context for Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship, just like the Western (missionary) framework. There is therefore no need to abandon the African culture or traditions since they present relevant alternatives. For Van Klinken and Gifford, three trends emerged, i.e. development of a non-Western framework for Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship, decolonisation, and reconstruction of Christian Theology and Biblical scholarship in Africa.<sup>30</sup> Non-Western framework for Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship. In the attempt to decipher relevant frameworks for African Christianity, Christians, Theologians, and Biblical scholars in Africa found Western (missionary) Christian frameworks lacking relevance for the African context.

It failed to acknowledge the existence within the African culture and traditions of concepts, philosophies and methodologies that could provide the right epistemologies and nomenclatures for Christianity. These concepts, philosophies and methodologies not only brought the African framework into recognition, it challenged the continuous relevance of the Western (Missionary) Christian framework in the globalisation of Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship. In the decolonisation of Western (Missionary) frameworks. Africans began to evaluate Western frameworks, which defined the context and content of Christianity and Theology, which they observed was Western-biased because it promoted the cultures and traditions of the West/Europe while condemning those of Africa. Decolonisation became the process of analysing theological perspectives and frameworks shaped by colonial ideologies and structures. It involved rethinking theological doctrines, liturgies, and practices to reflect an inclusive and diverse understanding of faith that honours the histories and cultures of non-Western peoples.

### **Theology in Post-Missionary and 21st-Century Africa**

For Agboada, emerging trajectories within global Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have presented critical challenges, i.e., a shift in the centre of gravity from the global West (Europe, America) to the South (Asia, Africa, Latin America).<sup>31</sup> Africa's emergence as the new centre of gravity and the globalisation of Christianity and Theology. This has brought critical challenges to Western (Missionary) and African frameworks for Christianity and Theology. They include the capacity of Western (Missionary) and African Christian frameworks to provide the kind of direction, context, or answers to the questions emerging within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The need to reexamine the continuous relevance of Western

<sup>28</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Verso Books, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> B. Meyer, *Christianity in the Contemporary African City: The Appeal of Christianity in Accra* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Bernard Salvaing, "Christianity in Africa. The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion" (JSTOR, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Adriaan Van Klinken, "African Christianity: Developments and Trends," *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Themes and Developments in Culture, Politics, and Society* (Brill Leiden, 2015); Paul Gifford, "Some Recent Developments in African Christianity," *African Affairs* 93, no. 373 (1994): 513–34.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Agboada, "The 21st Century and Globalisation of Christianity and Theology: A Search for the Right Framework for Christianity and Theology in Africa and Beyond," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10, no. 12 (2024).

(Missionary) and African Christian frameworks for Christianity and Theology in the context of the changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the challenges it presents. The urgency for African Christianity to decipher the right expertise, framework and nomenclature for Christianity, Theology, and Biblical scholarship. These changes have brought Western (Missionary) Christianity very serious challenges, including the loss of global hegemony.

Apart from anything, Christianity brought the West prestige and many economic benefits. It provided a strong environment for the establishment of Europeanisation in Africa. Africa's role as the new centre of gravity and home of global Christianity has therefore presented a serious trajectory. The African Christian framework can no longer be prejudiced or kept peripheral since it has proven to possess a competitive alternative for Christianity and Theology. This is more important in the situation where the globalisation of Christianity demands an assessment of existing frameworks to decipher the ones that can provide the direction and answers to the many issues and questions emerging from the rise of the circularisation and globalisation of Christianity.

### **African Framework for Christianity and Theology**

For Martin, in the context of the emergence and popularisation of spirituality instead of religiosity and cultural relativity instead of absoluteness, the African framework presents the best frameworks for theological nomenclatures.<sup>32</sup> This is because, within the African culture, there are no absolutes. Space is given to practices and beliefs that provide relevance within specific cultures and traditions. This provides a range of alternatives that can be explored. The African framework provides an alternative that fills adequately and sufficiently the impasse created by the absences within or failures of the Western (Missionary) framework that recognises or provides the right or relevant context for engagement. This does not mean that the African framework lacked focus; rather, it provided a multidimensional, multifaceted and comprehensive alternative that provided relevance for individual cultures and traditions. The African framework, therefore, presented a unique perspective on the challenge of globalisation of Christianity and the search for relevant context.

This is because the African approach to religion or spirituality is different. According to Mbiti for Africa, religion is very important. There is a thin line between the social and the religious.<sup>33</sup> This informs a complexity of socioreligioculture deciphered from experiences and fascination with the supernatural, conceived out of a careful examination of the dynamics and interactions between the physical and spiritual dimensions of life. The African approach, therefore, displays a variety of alternatives, which present distinct nuances. This allows every culture or tradition to develop its understanding and experience of the supernatural. The problem of a lack of relevant context for the globalisation of Christianity, therefore, does not emerge. Every framework presents a unique perspective that provides a context within which relevant frameworks or approaches are developed. It is these nuances provided by the tapestry of frameworks available within Africa's culture that present a challenge to the absoluteness of the Western (Missionary) framework and its refusal to recognise the legitimacy and relevance of alternatives available within other cultures or traditions.

The demand, therefore, for the Western (Missionary) framework to re-examine itself and attempt to represent its relevance in the context of challenges that have emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the quest to reengage with new cultures or traditions is imperative. The African Christian framework at least has shown the way. In every age, there is always a challenge to reexamine the framework and nomenclatures we espouse for research and engagement with new cultures and identities. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is one such age that Western (Missionary) and African Christianity both have to reexamine the frameworks and nomenclatures they espouse in the context of the changes and challenges presented by the trajectories and dynamics of the time.

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<sup>32</sup> Luther H Martin, "Rationalism and Relativity in History of Religions Research," in *Rationality and the Study of Religion* (Routledge, 2013), 145–56.

<sup>33</sup> John S Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Waveland Press, 2015).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that Theological and Christological constructs presented by elements within indigenous cultures and traditions must be developed and harnessed to provide the kind of perspective that gives the right answers to the questions and issues emerging from the changes occurring in global Christianity and the 21st century and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

The study examined Christological constructs in the esoteric signs and symbols within Akan-Ewe culture to decipher a framework for post-missionary Christianity and Theology in Africa. The study observed that within the Akan-Ewe cultures, there are signs and symbols that present great constructs that provide concepts that recognise the existence of God, the sophistication of the universe, mystery, complexity and value of life, ancestors, divinities, and recompense of sin or greediness, etc. In the search for relevant contexts due to changes that have occurred in the dynamics and trajectories of Christianity, including a shift in the centre of gravity from the global West to the global South and Africa's emergence as the new centre of gravity. A demand is made to develop different expertise and frameworks that can fill the impasse created by the inability or failure of Western (Missionary) Christian frameworks to recognise the availability of alternatives within other cultures and traditions or the relevance they provide for Christianity, Theology and Biblical Scholarship.

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