




A Pastoral, Ethical, and Medical reflection on the use of *Sobolo* in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the growing use of *Sobolo* (hibiscus tea), commonly known as *Yesu Mogya* (the blood of Jesus), for religious purposes within Ghanaian Christian communities. Rooted in Ghanaian traditional religious beliefs that regard blood as spiritually efficacious for healing, deliverance, protection, and atonement, the symbolic use of Jesus' blood has found contemporary expression in the consumption and application of *Sobolo*. This emerging practice has gained significant popularity, yet it has also raised concerns about ethics, medicine, and theology. The purpose of this study is to examine these developments from pastoral, ethical, and medical perspectives. A qualitative research approach was employed, relying solely on secondary literature, theological reflection, and cultural analysis, rather than interviews or empirical observation. The findings highlight both the cultural resonance and the potential risks associated with the religious appropriation of *Sobolo*. The paper concludes with recommendations for the modern church on how to engage in such practices theologically and pastorally while safeguarding the well-being of believers. It contributes to knowledge by offering a contextual theological critique of a contemporary religious phenomenon, bridging practical theology, cultural studies, and public health.

Keywords: Christianity, Commercialization, Jesus Christ, *Sobolo*, *Yesu Mogya*

INTRODUCTION

Sobolo, a non-alcoholic herbal beverage made from hibiscus leaves, is a popular drink in Ghana and other West African countries. It is believed to have originated in Ghana's coastal region in the 16th century and is currently used as a symbol of community, hospitality, and faith in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. In recent times, *Sobolo* has become associated with the drink, symbolizing *Yesu Mogya* (the 'blood of Jesus'), and has become an essential part of religious traditions and ordinances. As such, using *Sobolo* as *Yesu Mogya* is both a blessing and a challenge. It is beneficial to recognize that *Sobolo* holds a central place in Ghanaian Christianity as an effective means of connecting with God. In the traditional sense, *Sobolo* conveys an intense spiritual feeling that strengthens individuals' faith and compels them to build a relationship with God. In

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addition, *Sobolo* is a versatile drink that can be served both cold and hot, and can be made with varying levels of sweetness, making it an ideal and beloved choice for any occasion.

However, with a powerful symbol such as *Sobolo* as *Yesu mogya*, one must be aware of the potential for misuse and abuse of the substance. There is an ongoing debate about the highly patronized use of *Sobolo* in contemporary Christianity. Through a mixed-research approach, this paper contributes to the discussion by examining the pastoral, ethical and medical issues related to the use of *Sobolo* as *Yesu Mogya* in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. The paper also makes recommendations for the contemporary church.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blood in Ghanaian primal religion

The issue of blood sacrifice plays a significant role in Ghanaian primal religion because the devotees “place a high value on the atoning efficacy of blood sacrifice.”¹ The relationship between Ghanaians and blood sacrifice is multifaceted and rooted in diverse cultural and spiritual contexts.” “The sacredness of blood and its association with life are also central” to the Ghanaian indigenous worldview.² Blood links individual Ghanaians to their identity as members of a particular clan, which includes both natural and supernatural aspects. “Blood is the mystique force that connects the living and the living dead.”³ Ghanaians spill blood during sacrifice not only to attract the favour of the deity but also to maintain the relationship and the deity’s presence. As confirmed by Klawans, “the spilling of blood and proper performance of sacrifice serve not only to attract the deity but also to maintain the deity’s presence among the people concerned.”⁴ The blood sacrifice poses a sweet and pleasing odour for the deity and the living dead. Although blood sacrifice is a norm in Ghanaian primal religion, the practice varies widely among different ethnic groups. For instance, the Akans’ blood sacrifice method differs from that of the Ewes and Dagombas.

In Ghanaian primal religion, the Supreme Being, *Onyankopon*; *ancestors*; *nsamanfo*; *lesser gods*, *abosom*; and *the spirits*, *ahonhom*, form the core of their beliefs. The Akan, like other ethnic groups in Ghana, believe that their ancestors are still present among them and that they are the actual owners of the lands they currently possess. They “believe that the living live under the watch of ancestors, the spirits of the dead.”⁵ It is taboo in Akan tradition to neglect the ancestors, as they are connected by blood and kinship: “The blood of the ancestors runs through the clans.”⁶ Therefore, in Akan, blood is considered “the centrifugal force around which most rituals gravitate.”⁷ Kinship among the Akans is matrilineal. It is governed by blood and connected by clan. Akans believe that to enjoy good things in life (such as fertility, bumper harvest, and good health) and avoid bad omens (including sudden deaths, incurable diseases, and famine), one has “to comprehend the diverse constituents of both the spiritual and the physical.”⁸ Surprisingly, whatever happens to an Akan has a religious interpretation. To them, behind the physical is spiritual; behind the seen is the unseen.”⁹ Larbi’s view implies that in Akan traditional society, the supernatural (spirits) plays a significant role in their daily life.

Ancestors and spirits can bless or punish the living who disconnect them and their instructions. Therefore, the Akan people strive to avoid the displeasure of their ancestors and deities by offering sacrifices. Brown defines sacrifice as a “preserve the cosmological equilibrium in the society.”¹⁰ They are means by

¹ Isaac Boaheng, “Afodepreko Christology: An Akan Christian Theology of Jesus’ Once-For-All Sacrifice,” *Journal of Religion and Theology* 4, no. 3 (September 23, 2020): 34–41.

² Francis Machingura and Godfrey Museka, “Blood as the Seat of Life: The Blood Paradox among Afro-Christians,” *Perichoresis* 14, no. 1 (2016): 41–62.

³ L. Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), 23.

⁴ Jonathan Klawans, “Pure Violence: Sacrifice and Defilement in Ancient Israel,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 2 (2001): 133–55.

⁵ Boaheng, “Afodepreko Christology: An Akan Christian Theology of Jesus’ Once-For-All Sacrifice,” 35.

⁶ Machingura and Museka, “Blood as the Seat of Life: The Blood Paradox among Afro-Christians,” 35.

⁷ Machingura and Museka, “Blood as the Seat of Life: The Blood Paradox among Afro-Christians,” 3.

⁸ Kingsley E. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: SAPC, 2001).

⁹ Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, 43.

¹⁰ Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, *Religion and Society*, Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in the Social Sciences, A388 (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1945).

which culture maintains and restores broken relationships between God, deities, ancestors, and the community.” “The mystery and sanctity of human life and indeed of the life of animals are inextricably bound to blood.”¹¹

Among the Ga-Dangbe tribe in Ghana, blood is used for “cultural and religious activities in nature from birth to death of certain specific persons and for certain specific cultural practices.”¹² Osabu Kle confirmed that blood is used in almost all the customary rites of the Ga-Dangbes.¹³ Such as the birth of a royal of paramountcy, naming ceremonies, the twins festival, spiritual cleansing, and the demise of a royal member. Among the animals that are usually slaughtered for blood sacrifices are goats, sheep, fowl, cattle, and white doves.¹⁴

The Komkonbas in the eastern part of Northern Ghana are predominantly farmers. Their religious beliefs are not far from those of other tribes in Ghana. They offer blood sacrifices to their ancestors to seek assistance for a bumper harvest and protection. The blood of guinea fowls, goats, sheep, and other relevant animals is used on various occasions, including harvesting, epidemics, naming ceremonies, and the enskinment of chiefs.

The Use of Blood in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word for blood is [*dam*], most likely came the word [*adam*], concerning the colour of blood, from a word suitable meaning “red,” “from the word [*adom*] which represents the red colour.”¹⁵ The possibility to find a connection with the word [*adamah*], meaning “soil,” “earth,” or “red earth” is higher. Kraljik observes that, “a brief survey of those key occurrences show that the first explicit appearance of blood on the pages of the Bible took place very early, in (Genesis 4:10), where Cain sheds his brother Abel’s blood, and his blood ‘cries out.’”¹⁶

Jewish temple worship is centred on the offering of sacrifice, which mainly involves the use of blood. The primary purpose of the Old Testament sacrifices was to bring about “atonement:” the process of reconciling sinful humanity with God. Leviticus, for instance, describes blood as holy because life is sacred, and blood equates life because the life of every creature is its blood... “You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats must be cut off” (17:14). Animals were substituted for humans since human blood could not be used for sacrifice. The blood was the means of purification and consecration in some Old Testament context.”¹⁷ The connection between blood and life in living beings is inseparable because there is no life without blood. Therefore, “since blood is life, it can be the only substitution for another life, as one life is sacrificed for another.”¹⁸

Therefore, in the Old Testament understanding, “blood is a basis, presupposition, or center of physical human life.”¹⁹ However, this notion can differ between nations and cultures.

Use of Blood in the New Testament

The fall of humans brought sin to this world (Gen. 3:21), and the result of this action is death. Since the wages of death (Rom. 6:23), atonement is needed. Blood is meant “to make an atonement for your sin” (Lev. 17:11). Therefore, no sin can be atoned or forgiven without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). Blood is a

¹¹ Machingura and Museka, “Blood as the Seat of Life: The Blood Paradox among Afro-Christians,” 7.

¹² J. T. Tetteh-Quaynor, David Laud Amenyo Fiase, and Ebenezer Tawiah Sowah, “The Blood Culture of the Ga-Dangbe Tribe of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana,” *Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 2024, 3212.

¹³ Daniel Tetteh Osabu-Kle, *The Ga People and Homowo Festival* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2000).

¹⁴ Tetteh-Quaynor, Fiase, and Sowah, “The Blood Culture of the Ga-Dangbe Tribe of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana,” 3217.

¹⁵ Dalibor Kraljik, “The Notion of Blood in the Old Testament: Blood That Purifies and Blood That Defiles,” *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2022): 9.

¹⁶ Kraljik, “The Notion of Blood in the Old Testament: Blood That Purifies and Blood That Defiles,” 10.

¹⁷ Kraljik, “The Notion of Blood in the Old Testament: Blood That Purifies and Blood That Defiles,” 7.

¹⁸ M. F. Rooker, *Leviticus* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 236.

¹⁹ Kraljik, “The Notion of Blood in the Old Testament: Blood That Purifies and Blood That Defiles,” 12.

“key ingredient to bring about atonement in the biblical system.”²⁰ Hebrews 9:11 attests to the symbolism of blood as a symbol of life.

The shedding of animals' blood in the Old Testament was not uncommon, and this practice was replaced by the New Testament, which also involved the shedding of blood. Jesus paid the ransom for our sins by His blood (Matt. 26:28). For this, today we have life by His blood, which He willingly shed for us, and no more eternal death (Rom. 3:23-25). Through His blood, we have been reconciled to God (Rom. 5:1-2). This reconciliation and peace could not have been possible without the shedding of His blood. McArthur says, “There is no peace until you are at peace with the Prince of Peace.” Jesus has been the fulfillment of all ceremonial sacrifices, and no longer animal blood sacrifices to atone for sin. “The son of God had died as [our] sacrifice and had ascended to heaven to stand before the Father as [our] Advocate.”²¹

Yesu Mogya is a fundamental part of contemporary Ghanaian Christian faith, symbolizing the strength and protection that God provides to believers amid all life's challenges. This expression of faith reflects God's unwavering commitment to His people, providing them with love, guidance, and security, regardless of the circumstances. *Yesu Mogya* is a reminder to Ghanaian Christians that God is always with his people and will provide them with hope and strength in difficult times. This term is referenced in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, to express Jesus' power and authority. It is believed that *Yesu Mogya* brings comfort and assurance in moments of difficulty. The term serves as a reminder that God is always at work in believers' lives and that He will remain with them in every situation. *Yesu Mogya* serves as a reminder to Ghanaian Christians that God is always with them, offering reassurance and hope in times of hardship. This concept is noted in the New Testament of the Bible, where it emphasizes Jesus' authority and power. Believers view *Yesu Mogya* as providing a comforting sense of security, knowing that God is constantly active in their lives and will remain by their side, whatever the circumstance.

Most believers in Ghana have faith in *Yesu Mogya* as a source of power that brings peace and contentment to anyone going through stressful or fearful times. It gives strength to those who need it and reinforces the hope that, with God, no difficulty is insurmountable. With *Yesu Mogya* leading the way, they can keep their faith and trust that the Lord has good plans for them. Ghanaians trust in *Yesu Mogya* as a powerful force that brings hope to the lost, assuring them that God is still in control and will provide for their needs. It also provides the strength to spread the word of Jesus even in the most challenging situations. Believers in Ghana view the power of *Yesu Mogya* as a life-giving source of joy and strength, enabling them to follow Jesus faithfully. Ghanaian Christians view *Yesu Mogya* as a source of strength that allows them to serve as Christ's messengers in their communities. They believe that this power provides spiritual support and sustenance during difficult times, encouraging resilience in their faith. The term is seen as a way to keep the flame of faith alive in believers' hearts.

Yesu Mogya stands as a reminder that God remains devoted to His people even in challenging times. Believing Ghanaian Christians rely on this phrase to express their faith in the liveliness of Jesus in the world. It serves as a source of confidence for people facing difficulties, demonstrating the power of God and the ability to establish harmony in challenging circumstances. *Yesu Mogya* is a reminder of the strength and assurance that Jesus provides in times of difficulty and suffering. It is a reminder of the power of God's grace to give his people the courage and fortitude to carry on through life's struggles and to trust in Him even when our paths seem bleak. It serves as a reminder that no obstacle or challenge is too significant for God to overcome and that with faith and His grace, all things are possible. *Yesu Mogya* serves as a reminder of God's continuous presence and support in the lives of believers. Knowing that he is always present to assist them in times of struggle gives believers the courage and strength to persevere. *Yesu Mogya* empowers believers to maintain their faith in the Lord, knowing that He will never forsake them and is always there to help. *Yesu Mogya* stands as a symbol of comfort and solace for Ghanaian believers, conveying that whatever lies ahead, God will be there to ensure that things turn out for the better. It is a hopeful reminder of God's goodness and strength, offering assurance that He can take any situation and use it for His goodness. *Yesu Mogya* is a

²⁰ D. Mangum, D. John, and L. Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016).

²¹ Ellen G White, “What Was Secured by the Death of Christ.”, *The Signs of the Times*, 1889.

reminder that, even in the darkness and chaos, Jesus has given us hope and strength through His victory. It encourages Ghanaian Christians to trust in God's power and binds them together through awareness of Christ's presence in their lives and the love He has bestowed upon them. Ghanaian Christians use *Yesu Mogya* as a reminder of God's everlasting love and trustworthiness, which leads to transformation in their lives. It serves as a way to spiritually recharge and keep the faith, providing hope that God is always with them. *Yesu Mogya* emphasizes the greatness of God and the faithfulness of Jesus and reminds believers in Ghana of His power and provision, regardless of the circumstances.²²

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, non-empirical research approach that relied on critical analysis of existing literature, theological reflections, and cultural interpretation. No fieldwork, interviews, or surveys were conducted. Instead, the study drew upon secondary data from scholarly books, journal articles, biblical commentaries, theses, dissertations, and relevant cultural and religious studies that discuss the use of symbols, blood rituals, healing practices, and contemporary Christianity in Ghana. The method involved a thematic analysis that compared traditional Ghanaian understandings of blood and healing with Christian theological interpretations of the blood of Jesus. This analytical process enabled the researcher to evaluate the symbolic use of *Sobolo* as *Yesu Mogya* within its cultural, theological, and ethical contexts. The approach is interpretive and reflective, seeking to understand meaning rather than measure outcomes, and to provide a constructive pastoral and theological response to the phenomenon.

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

The Use of the Blood of Jesus by Ghanaian Christians

All the happenings in Ghana are believed to have causes. There is a saying that *bribi nsi kwa* means "nothing happens without a tangible cause." "For Ghanaians, 'life is a battle.'²³ There is a belief that our world is full of malevolent spirits who are always on the attack; therefore, one must always be ready to counter or block their activities by arming oneself. "This explains why the blood of Jesus, as a token, is employed by charismatics as both offensive and defensive armour."²⁴

The concept of blood retains its significant place in contemporary Christianity. No church can overlook the significance of blood. Blood plays a crucial role in Christian theology, church practices, and the Eucharistic services, as well as in the elements of bread and wine. It is a Christian belief that the wine represents the blood of Jesus Christ. Even in Christian Jargons, "The blood has washed my sins," "The precious blood of Jesus Christ has delivered me," "The blood saved us," etc. Kraljik confirms this in his article "The Notion of Blood in the Old Testament," in which he argues that "comprehending the role, significance, and function of blood in the Old Testament is important and necessary for proper understanding of the significance of blood in the New Testament, especially in the context of Christ's blood and his sacrifice."²⁵

Ghanaian Christians use the blood of Jesus to attack perceived enemies. It is not uncommon to hear some apotropaic statements like "*Me de Yesu Mogya dome wo*," "I curse you in the blood of Jesus," or "*Yesu Mogya nka w'anim*," meaning "May the blood of Jesus rebuke you," or "Be thou rebuked by the blood of Jesus."²⁶ Such statements are common among Christians in Ghana, particularly in charismatic churches. However, they contradict Jesus' teaching to pray for our enemies. There is no biblical justification for these statements. Christians are instructed to resist the devil (Jude 1:9). However, church leaders who commonly

²² John Kwasi Fosu and Mary Fosu, "Rhetorical Use of Sobolo (Hibiscus Drink) as Yesu Mogya (Blood of Jesus) for Holistic Healing in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of Biblical Theology and Christian Ethics," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no. 10 (2024): 1.

²³ C. Owiredu, "Charismatic Theology of the Blood in Ghanaian Christianity," 2023, 87.

²⁴ Owiredu, "Charismatic Theology of the Blood in Ghanaian Christianity," 87.

²⁵ Kraljik, "The Notion of Blood in the Old Testament: Blood That Purifies and Blood That Defiles," 8.

²⁶ Owiredu, "Charismatic Theology of the Blood in Ghanaian Christianity," 88.

make such statements often cite biblical texts, such as Revelation 12:11, as precedents, even though the Bible states that believers have overcome the devil through the Blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.

It is important to understand that the use of blood for spirituality is an African phenomenon and not attributed to a group of African Christians. *Sobolo* (hibiscus plant) symbolizes the blood of Jesus, or *Yesu Mogya*, for protection and healing. Some church leaders in Ghana who use *Sobolo* (hibiscus drink) as Jesus's blood did not encounter many problems due to the Ghanaian cultural and practical beliefs. Theologically, there is nothing wrong with using "plant products and symbolic objects for miraculous healing, both explicitly and implicitly rooted in the Bible."²⁷ This practice is rooted in the Scriptures, which motivate the use of plant products and symbolic objects for healing and deliverance. In Ghanaian Christianity, the use of *Sobolo* extends beyond physical well-being to encompass the spiritual well-being of devotees.

The greater patronage of *Sobolo* among some church leaders for healing and deliverance stems from the belief that, unlike in the Western context, miraculous healing remains a relevant phenomenon. However, Christians should know that the use of *Sobolo* as the only means of healing and deliverance is theologically wrong. God has various means to bring about healing and deliverance.

Historically, *Sobolo*, also known as *Yesu Mogya*, has served as a vital spiritual resource for many Ghanaian Christians in matters of personal and collective transformation. In specific customary contexts, this prayer is used to ask God for protection, healing and restoration. For this reason, pastors are more likely to support and promote the use of *Yesu Mogya* prayers in their congregations. However, some pastoral issues have recently been raised. With the increasing use of *Sobolo* as *Yesu Mogya*, pastors are concerned about how believers are using these prayers to seek answers to complex problems from God rather than exploring all the resources available to them. This could lead people to neglect seeking medical treatment for their health issues or resort to traditional methods that have not been medically approved. From a medical perspective, the use of *Sobolo* as *Yesu Mogya* raises concerns. A primary challenge is the efficacy and safety of this prayer form. In most medical settings, prayer is viewed primarily as a catharsis or spiritual resource rather than a substitute for medical procedures. This poses a challenge to the validity and safety of the use of *Sobolo* as *Yesu Mogya* as a mode of healing. Furthermore, many individuals using the *Sobolo* as *Yesu Mogya* may not be aware of the potential side effects associated with its use.²⁸

Pastoral and Ethical Reflections

Sobolo and Eucharist

The production of communion elements (wine and wafers) is carried out by special people, such as Catholic nuns, mainly imported to Ghana. Due to the rise in the dollar's value, these elements have become more expensive. Some pastors, especially those of charismatic churches, believe that *Sobolo* is a suitable substitute for imported wine. Prof. Raphael Nyarkotey is one of the advocates for the use of *Sobolo* as communion wine.²⁹ He critically compares the ingredients used to prepare *Sobolo* and those used in imported wine, arguing that there are no discernible differences. For him, this practice will even boost Ghana's economy.

Commercialization/Commodification of *Sobolo*

Francis Benyah observes that many Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors-prophets in Ghana have commodified the gospel "by employing various means of marketing to advertise, brand, and package religion as a consumer or spiritual product that can be bought to solve life-debilitating issues."³⁰ Some prophets have exploited this phenomenon to sell a wide range of items at exorbitant prices within their churches. These include handkerchiefs, water, bundles, and porridge; the most popular is *Sobolo*. *Sobolo* has become so

²⁷ Fosu and Fosu, "Rhetorical Use of Sobolo (Hibiscus Drink) as Yesu Mogya (Blood of Jesus) for Holistic Healing in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of Biblical Theology and Christian Ethics."

²⁸ Eric. Osei-Assibey, "Sobolo As Yesu Mogya: A Look at Its Use in Ghanaian Christianity," 2020.

²⁹ Raphael Nyarkotey, "Communion Wine and Sobolo: A Case for Economic and Religious Integration," *The Business and Financial Times*, 2025.

³⁰ Francis Benyah, "Commodification of the Gospel and the Socio-Economics of Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 29, no. 2 (2018): 116–45.

prevalent “due to the phenomenological description of its religious effect backed by the popular sharing of testimonies on social media platforms and television in Ghana.”³¹

The churches in Ghana have strongly condemned the act of selling *Sobolo* as ‘the blood of Jesus’, calling it an affront to their core beliefs and teachings. The General Secretary of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, Rev. Emmanuel T. Barfi, has called for *Sobolo* vendors to stop using such phrases, but the vendors remain largely unbothered by the criticism.³² The Presbyterian Church of Ghana has urged believers and pastors to be truthful in their teachings and symbols, directing people to the teachings of Christ and the Word of God. The church has also requested that the authorities take necessary steps to prevent the spread of such practices.³³ In addition, the Church of Pentecost, the Catholic Church, and the Methodist Church have all issued statements condemning the actions, stating that no beverage could ever take the place of the blood of Jesus. The church leaders also warned against exploiting the ignorance of Ghanaians by mixing such false religious doctrines with the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the church has clarified that the drink cannot be equated with the blood of Jesus and that its names and labels should not be used to deceive customers. The pastors have been accused of using their spiritual relevance to fraudulently take advantage of naive and illiterate people to make their profits. Jesus tells believers that it is a noble thing to give without expecting any return, which means that such pastors cannot put a monetary value on such offerings. Everyone must ensure that this malpractice is checked and eventually abolished to protect the integrity of the Christian faith.³⁴

The Bible does not explicitly address selling items in church, but it offers principles that might help guide one’s thinking. In the Old Testament, it was common for people to purchase sacrificial offerings from temple vendors. The buying and selling of goods in the temple are mentioned in several passages of the Hebrew Bible. In Exodus 35:24-25, God commands the people of Israel to bring all their offerings to the Tabernacle. Those offerings included materials needed for the temple, such as oil, incense, and wood, as well as animals for sacrifices. The merchants of the temple in the Old Testament operated businesses selling sacrificial animals, temple items, and foodstuffs. Different tradespeople, such as merchants, potters, smiths, and weavers, set up shop outside the temple gates and sold items related to their trades. Merchants sold sacrificial animals for the temple, as well as various foodstuffs, including wheat, barley, wine, oil, and spices. They also sold items needed for the temple, such as incense, textiles, and furniture. The merchants also provided services to pilgrims visiting the temple, including currency exchange, mediation, and the offering of sacrifices. They could also provide advice on religious matters. The buying and selling of goods in the temple was strictly regulated, and merchants could only make a modest profit. The sale of quality merchandise was also essential to ensure that the offerings presented to God would be of a high standard. All services and goods were taxed to support the temple and its priests.

In Ezekiel 46:1-4, the Lord sets rules for merchants in the temple, requiring them to be honest and fair in their dealings with customers and to avoid taking advantage of them. He demands that they charge reasonable prices and not use tricks or deception to maximize their profits. This illustrates the Lord’s stance on sound business practices and his opposition to greed. He also warns them not to cheat and take advantage of people, showing that He values justice and fairness in the business world. The Lord has created a system in which trust and integrity are the most important values. He expects merchants to abide by the same principles of honesty that will benefit both parties. The Lord reminds His people that it is essential to treat others with respect and to appreciate the value of their goods and services. He also demonstrates that creating a fair and ethical marketplace is crucial for a healthy economy. By ensuring that merchants act with integrity, the Lord encourages the development of a positive business environment.

Furthermore, these restrictions remind believers that people’s needs should always take precedence and that greed should not be allowed to supersede justice. The Lord also reminds them that every ethical

³¹ Benyah, “Commodification of the Gospel and the Socio-Economics of Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana.”

³² T. Emmanuel Barfi, “Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council on Sobolo Selling,” *Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council*, 2021.

³³ GhanaWeb, “Presbyterian Church of Ghana on Sobolo Selling,” 2021.

³⁴ GhanaWeb, “Ghana Churches Condemn Act of Selling Sobolo as ‘the Blood of Jesus,’” 2021.

system should include regulations and procedures to protect both buyers and sellers. This passage highlights the importance of fairness and justice in the marketplace and the need to establish systems that prevent exploitation. In this passage, the Lord reminds them that He has given them principles to guide their business dealings and that it is essential to follow them. The Lord also reflects His care and concern for all of His people in both spiritual and temporal matters.³⁵

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul warns against gathering commercial items inside the church (1 Cor. 11:21-22). The concept of church gathering places dates back to the early days of the church and has been a cornerstone of Christian practice ever since. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul expresses concern about the collection of commercial goods within the church. Paul states that when people come together at church, they should focus on the Lord of the church, not on physical objects or possessions (1 Cor. 11:21-22). When we focus on physical items, we can become distracted from the significant things. Paul believes that the gathering of Christians in the church should be for worship and communion with God rather than for commercial transactions. Paul warns against using the Lord's house for commercial purposes, such as buying and selling; it should be reserved for worship and spiritual growth. He suggests that people bring their things to the church and refrain from using it as a marketplace. Moreover, Paul believes that when believers gather, they should set their eyes on the heavenly life that awaits them. He not only prohibits the collection of commercial products in the church but also encourages the faithful to live their lives according to the gospel by cultivating Christian virtues such as honesty, self-control, obedience, and purity. Christian worship should be a place of sanctity, and the collection of commercial goods detracts from that. In churches, people should focus on God and the Gospels, not on the things of this world. They should be uplifting each other spiritually and enjoying the fruits of their labour, but not trading physical goods as though they are in a market square. The Lord's House should not be a place of commerce, and Paul's warning should be heeded. Churches should be used only for prayer and spiritual contemplation, not for the purchase and sale of goods and services. As Paul writes, "God is the Lord of the church," and the Lord's house should be regarded with reverence and honour. May believers strive to maintain these standards and keep their churches pure and holy. Ultimately, it is up to each church to decide what type of sale is appropriate and at what level of intensity. Selling certain goods in churches can generate additional revenue, but it must be considered to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. The church must establish policies and guidelines that uphold its moral standards and avoid causing harm, including food and drinks.

The commodification of *Sobolo* in the church poses a challenge in theological and ecclesial contexts. "Since the religious practitioners sell *Sobolo* to the patients [congregation] usually at a relatively higher price, it seems more reasonable to conclude that they are more interested in the commercial interest."³⁶ Jesus bridged the gap between the physician and the sufferer. However, the activities of these prophets still open the gap. The command was to let our actions be rooted in love and nothing more. "Godly power is always rooted in love, not pride; redemption, not revenge; and concern for others, not the self. God's power is humble, not proud, and inviting, not rejecting. Its symbol is the cross, not the sword."³⁷

Increase in Membership

The Prophetic churches in Ghana are attracting more people to their services. Over a thousand attend a service (though not all have their names registered as members). The Ghanaian prophet churches are attracting a growing number of people to their programs because their teachings and practices address the religious and cultural needs of the people. Chatfield observes that people's culture enables the "formation of a sense of individual and corporate identity. "Traditionally, African societies have depended on consulting mediums and oracles for all major ventures."³⁸ These consultations are done to gain protection, healing, and wealth.

³⁵ GhanaWeb. "Ghana Churches Condemn Act of Selling Sobolo as 'the Blood of Jesus.'"

³⁶ Benyah, "Commodification of the Gospel and the Socio-Economics of Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," 9.

³⁷ Paul G Hiebert, R Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, "Responding to Split-Level Christianity and Folk Religion," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 16, no. 4 (1999): 282.

³⁸ Charles Amarkwei, "The Church, Prophetism and Ministry of the Prophets in Ghana," *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal* 4 (2023): 1-12.

Ghanaians rush to these prophets and neo-prophetic churches to seek protection against malevolent spirits, travel documents, healing, and wealth, which are the main functions of these churches. As Amarkwei confirmed, “These characteristics continue to abound in contemporary prophetic ministry in Ghana.”³⁹ As a result of these roles, they tend to attract a significant number of worshippers, as most people seek to discover what the future holds for them.⁴⁰

These members are followers or worshipers, not members of the prophetic churches in Ghana, as outsiders may interpret them. They have their parent churches, mainly the missionary-established churches. They mostly go there for *akwankyere* (consultation), and in reality, most are not registered members of these churches.

The idolization of Sobolo in Ghanaian Christianity

Idolization sets in when Christians prioritize something over their trust in God or when they elevate human beings or things to a level of worship that belongs to the Almighty God. When people set their minds and hearts to seek things instead of God, it becomes idolatry. “Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God” (1 Chron. 22:19). Believers should note that every sin is an exercise in trust in something or someone other than the one true and capable God to satisfy, fulfil, or bless. Idolatry is divinizing what is not God; it is not only false pagan worship. According to Francis Bacon, idolization occurs when dependence is attached to a tribe, marking, den, and theatre.⁴¹

There are prophets in Ghana whose main motive is to use their calling or faith to leverage themselves by extorting monies from the worshippers through all means instead of seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Many of them are using the benevolent character of God to live a myopic lifestyle in which Christianity orbits around the universe of self instead of focusing on the message of repentance.

In Ghana, many prophets have not succeeded in shifting the attention of some worshippers away from practices such as *Sobolo* (herbal drink), *aburamunsuo* (well water), and *nkuto* (shea butter) to focus on God. It is not surprising that almost half of these people go there for these items rather than the word of God. Listen to the devotees' testimonies; it is rare to hear the name of God. It is always *sobolo* or *aburamunsuo*, and sometimes the prophet's name. Honour and glory belong to God. These things have now become idols in Ghanaian Christianity. Martin Luther's advice is still relevant, especially in times such as this:

I must counsel the gospel. I must hearken to the gospel, which teacheth me, not what I ought to do, but what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for me: to wit, that He suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death...that we should know this article well, teach it unto others and beat it into their heads continually.⁴²

Wilson Jared, in response to Lithur's counsel, argues that “the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and the extolling of His eternal excellencies is always an interruption, always a disruption.”⁴³ Christians, therefore, must be careful of the kind of teachings and directions they receive and consume to avoid incurring God's displeasure.

Sobolo and Spiritual Warfare

Baffour observed that “healing and deliverance have become a big business.”⁴⁴ Like all Africans, Ghanaians believe that everything has a cause; nothing happens without reason. Monovalent spirits (gods, ghosts, witchcraft, voodoo) are always seen as the causes of these happenings. In Africa (Ghana included), good health and sickness are like two sides of the same coin. Good health is considered the well-being of the mind,

³⁹ Amarkwei, “The Church, Prophetism and Ministry of the Prophets in Ghana,” 7.

⁴⁰ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, “5. Ghana's New Prophetism: Antecedents and Some Characteristic Features,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies*, 2013.

⁴¹ Manly P. Hall, “The Four Idols of Francis Bacon & The New Instrument of Knowledge,” n.d., <https://sirbacon.org>.

⁴² Jared Wilson, “The Church and Idolatry,” *Worldview and Culture*, 2012, <https://learn.linonier.org>.

⁴³ Wilson, “The Church and Idolatry.”

⁴⁴ A. K. Baffour, “Healing and Deliverance in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Ghana,” *All Nation University Journal of Applied Thought (ANUJAT)* 6, no. 1 (2018): 268–81.

body and spirit, living in harmony with one's neighbour, the environment and oneself in all levels of reality – physical, social, spiritual and Supernatural."⁴⁵ Economic challenges, lousy health, divorce, failure to get a business contract and even the death of a baby may be attributed to evil spirits. "Most problems are regarded as spiritual in some sense, and this is the reason why the deliverance ministry has become so popular in Ghana."⁴⁶ Therefore, Africans view life as a battle and rely on the help of good spirits to exorcise them from these entanglements.

With this African mentality and belief, the introduction of *Sobolo* as Jesus' blood by some prophets in Ghana was the right solution to the work of the evil spirits. Many who patronize the drink believe it is the right weapon to counter the activities of these evil spirits and their work; hence, the high patronage. Whether *Sobolo* solves all their spiritual problems is a topic in the following article. While some believe their issues have been resolved, others assert that they remain unchanged and, in some cases, even more severe than in their original state.

The book of Isaiah speaks of how Jesus was "pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). Like the blood that symbolizes this sacrifice, the *Sobolo* ceremony is considered a reminder of the depth of suffering Jesus endured for humanity. When believers remember this, it should not only fill them with immense gratitude for Christ's sacrifice but also encourage them to strive for righteousness in their daily lives. *Sobolo* is an outstanding example of how culture and faith can come together to form a ritual that not only strengthens the bond between believers but also reminds them to lead lives of faith and integrity. The *Sobolo* ceremony is more than just a tradition for many; it is a reminder of the immense love that Jesus showed us when He chose to die on the cross. It symbolizes the death of Jesus and how, through his death, humans are forgiven and healed. Thanksgiving to God for His mercy and grace should be a daily practice, accompanied by a commitment to live by Scripture. *Sobolo*, as a ritual, holds the potential to unite the church in remembrance and honour of Jesus' sacrifice—an event that transformed the course of human history. In commemorating this profound moment, we draw attention to Jesus Christ, who paid the ultimate price for reconciliation with God, bringing healing and restoration to broken lives. The *Sobolo* ceremony stands as a symbol of divine forgiveness, affirming that, regardless of past mistakes, God's mercy is accessible to all who turn to Him and receive His gift of salvation. The remembrance of Christ's death on the cross powerfully illustrates His unwavering faithfulness, even in the face of human weakness.

Although human suffering cannot be equated with the suffering of Christ, *Sobolo* reminds believers of the nearness of a God who lovingly pours out grace each day. Its symbolism underscores the importance of atonement and the transformative power of forgiveness. In every circumstance, the life and death of Jesus Christ remain a beacon of hope. His sacrifice testifies to the boundless love of God and the extraordinary lengths to which He went to redeem humanity. *Sobolo* serves not only as a communal act of remembrance but also as a vivid reminder of the healing made possible through Jesus' self-giving love.

By focusing on principles found in the Bible, these scriptures can guide day-to-day living and decision-making. These scriptures can help individuals find the strength and courage to stay on the path of godliness and live an abundant life. By listening to the Word of God, believers can be strengthened to resist temptation and live holy, blameless lives before the Lord. Pastors should be aware of the spiritual implications of using '*Sobolo*' as '*Yesu Mogy*' and ensure that any use respects the Ghanaian Christian faith. Pastors should also be aware of the potential for misuse and abuse and be mindful of the risks associated with *Sobolo* use. Churches should establish guidelines to ensure that the elements of communion are not mishandled or mistreated and that communion is celebrated in a manner consistent with Christ's teachings. Additionally, pastors should be attentive to the spiritual aspects of communion as it can provide an opportunity to share God's love and grace with those who partake. Finally, pastors should be mindful of the cultural and traditional aspects of the Catholic communion, as these can be meaningful and help reach out to believers across different cultural backgrounds.

⁴⁵ Abraham Adu Berinyuu, *Pastoral Care to the Sick in Africa: An Approach to Transcultural Pastoral Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 1988).

⁴⁶ B.Y. Quarshie, "Is African Christian Worship a Joyful Noise to the Lord?," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 8, no. 2 (2005): 9.

Sobolo and Spiritual Healing

The evidence to support the use of *Sobolo* as a form of prayer is found primarily in oral tradition. Certain African societies believe that consuming *Sobolo* allows them to connect directly to their ancestors and the spiritual realm on a higher plane. It is believed that drinking *Sobolo* can bring good luck and favour from the ancestral spirits, as well as offer protection from evil forces. Its consumption is also believed to help bring the Divine into one's life and facilitate communication with the Divine, allowing people to manifest their wishes and desires. The drink itself does not provide knowledge but instead serves as an aid to open an individual to spiritual guidance and understanding. It helps to reduce mental noise and open the heart to the truth. People often report that drinking *Sobolo* helps bring clarity and inner purification. It is often taken before meditation or ritual practices to deepen a sense of peace and connection to the Divine. Additionally, the use of *Sobolo* as a form of prayer is associated with many religious ceremonies, rituals, and feasts of African societies.

Medical reflection

First, consumption of *Sobolo* in large and unregulated amounts can lead to diabetes and other health complications, so it must be consumed in moderation. Secondly, *Sobolo* has spiritual implications for those who partake, so participants must show respect and reverence for its significance while enjoying the beverage. It is also important to remember that *Sobolo* is not the only way to embody the blood of Jesus and that there are various other ways to access God and have meaningful experiences with Him. Nonetheless, *Sobolo* is a powerful symbol of communal love and faith, and its Christian association makes it a sacred event that binds individuals together. In short, the use of *Sobolo* as the 'blood of Jesus' in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity presents both blessings and challenges, and should be approached with respect and caution. It is appreciated for its spiritual ties and is loved for its flavorful taste, enabling all individuals, regardless of their religion, to draw closer to God, to themselves, and others. As such, it is a precious symbol with enduring power and should continue to be cherished.⁴⁷

In recent years, the use of "*Sobolo*" as a form of prayer and blessing, known as "*Yesu Mogy*," has become increasingly popular in Ghanaian Christian gatherings. This form of prayer is gaining increasing recognition and popularity for its perceived spiritual and healing aspects, while also raising significant pastoral and medical concerns due to the lack of scientific evidence for its effects.

According to Ezekiel 47:12, their fruit will serve as food, and their leaves will be used for healing. This implies that the fruit and leaves of plants can be used for more than just sustenance and decorative purposes. Humans can consume the plant's fruit as a source of food, while the plant's leaves can be used to treat ailments or made into medicinal concoctions. This natural remedy has been used by various cultures worldwide for centuries, and many plant-derived natural remedies are now being used as complements to modern medicine. Plants are an invaluable source of nutrition and healing and can be used to naturally treat a variety of conditions. *Sobolo* is consumed for a variety of ailments, including colds, headaches, muscle aches, fever, indigestion, diarrhea, and even malaria. In recent years, the traditional uses of *Sobolo* have been incorporated into modern medical practice in Ghana. Doctors are experimenting with the use of *Sobolo* in therapies for malaria, cancer, and other serious illnesses. It is also used to improve nutrition in people who do not have access to a balanced diet and to promote physical health. *Sobolo* is also being used in a holistic approach to health, with doctors emphasizing the importance of physical activity, rest, and a positive mental attitude. Some medical centers now offer seminars where the uses and benefits of *Sobolo* are discussed with patients. This demonstrates the continued relevance of this traditional herbal remedy in modern medicine. *Sobolo* helps digestion, is rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals, and is known to have anti-inflammatory benefits and pain-relieving properties. *Sobolo* also has soothing effects and helps reduce

⁴⁷ Nathaniel Muller, "Sobolo: The Blood of Jesus and a Bond of Faith in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity," *The Journal of West African Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018): 43.

feelings of anxiety and depression. Additionally, regular consumption of this traditional beverage has been linked to improved overall cognitive function, increased productivity, and improved memory.

Despite its benefits, overconsumption of *Sobolo* can lead to dehydration, increased heart rate, excessive urination, and higher-than-normal glucose levels. Consuming too much of the drink can put one at risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and other health problems due to its high sugar and caffeine content.⁴⁸ It is also known to negatively affect the gastrointestinal system due to its high acid content. Pastors should consult medical professionals when preparing *Sobolo* for their church members due to the potential health risks associated with *Sobolo* use and encourage those using it to be mindful of these risks (Eze. 47:12).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The practice of *Sobolo* drinking in Ghana has spiritual and cultural significance and is often seen as a representation of religious faith. Although it can be beneficial when used moderately, it is essential to exercise caution and consult a doctor before engaging in this ritual. Additionally, the ethical and legal requirements of local churches in Ghana must be taken into account to ensure that *Sobolo* does not cause harm. Ultimately, it is essential to recognize that *Sobolo* is intended to be viewed as an expression of faith and will continue to be part of many people's cultural practices in Ghana. Understanding its context and implications is essential to ensure that it remains a symbol of hope and perseverance for all Christian communities. To ensure the safe and ethical consumption of *Sobolo*, it is vital to moderate consumption and understand its context and implications. It is also essential to be aware of the local church requirements and to consult a doctor before participating in the ritual. Local churches should also provide education and resources to their worshippers to ensure that *Sobolo* is not abused. Ultimately, individuals should be encouraged to view *Sobolo* as a manifestation of faith and use it as a symbol of hope and perseverance within their Christian communities.

CONCLUSION

The increasing use of *Sobolo* as “*Yesu Mogy*” among Ghanaian Christians reflects a dynamic interplay between indigenous cultural symbols and Christian ritual practice. While *Sobolo* reinforces communal bonds and spiritual devotion, our pastoral, ethical, and medical analysis highlights significant concerns: the risk of spiritual commercialization, potential health implications of unregulated consumption, and the blurred lines between symbol and substance. To safeguard both faith integrity and congregational well-being, church leaders must provide clear teaching on the sacramental function of symbols, establish basic health guidelines for the use of *Sobolo*, and model ethical stewardship of cultural resources. By integrating sound medical advice with robust theological reflection and pastoral care, the contemporary Ghanaian church can honour its artistic heritage while promoting responsible and spiritually authentic practices.

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