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EDITORIAL

As routine, the Managing Editor and I, sincerely thank all the authors who have contributed to this issue. We also thank our in-house and external reviewers for their continued support. Papers submitted that are not in this issue will be published in the September 2015 issue.

We continue to encourage scholars in any religious and theological fields who are interested in academic publishing to send their papers to **ERATS**. Our capable internal and external reviewers are ready to work with you.

We are expecting your work.

Professor Prince S Conteh
Chief Editor

GHANAIAN PENTECOSTALS AND THE CAUSES OF EVIL

JOSEPH QUAYESI-AMAKYE¹

Abstract

A discussion on Ghanaian Pentecostal Christology on evil and suffering must embrace the constituents, causes/sources, effects, understandings, perceptions and interpretative tensions. From the discussions, it is clear that Ghanaian Pentecostals hold multiple views about the causes of evil and suffering, namely, natural/physical, moral and supernatural. It is also evident that among common believers the spiritual causes of evil, particularly, those believed to come from witches is important. Evil and suffering are inimical to human wellbeing since they incapacitate the victim. From songs, sermons and practices, this paper describes and examines the way Ghanaian Pentecostals conceive evil and suffering. The paper approaches this from the perspective of common believers and leadership, and concludes with some propositions for contextualising evil and suffering.

Introduction

This paper is about the Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding of evil and suffering. It examines the Church of Pentecost (COP), a very big and fast growing church representing Ghanaian Pentecostalism, on how it interprets the phenomenon of evil and suffering. We ask: How do

¹ JOSEPH QUAYESI-AMAKYE holds a PhD in Theology from Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He is a Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of the School of Theology and Missions at the Central University College, Accra, Ghana. E-mail: joeamakye@hotmail.com

Ghanaian Pentecostal leadership and peripheral church interpret human suffering and evil? Ghanaian Pentecostals live in a predominantly Akan religio-cultural environment. The Akan whose language is the most popular, constitute about 42% of Ghana's population. I will describe and examine several discernible insights in songs, sermons and practices that reveal Ghanaian Pentecostals' views about the nature and sources/causes of evil and suffering. I will also bring out the inherent tensions between the leadership's views and those of the periphery on the topic. Finally, I will propose ways of contextualising the phenomenon.

I interviewed and discussed with COP's leaders, grassroots prophets of prayer centers, and prophets of the New Prophetic Churches (NPCs)² on their insights concerning the causes of evil and suffering. Since 1993 NPCs have become commonplace on the Ghanaian religious scene, commanding a large following in all major cities and towns and becoming the most popular characteristic of Ghanaian Pentecostalism today. COP's prayer centers and the NPCs constitute what I call Pentecostal peripheral prophetism. Peripheral prophets function outside the normal ecclesiastical framework of the Pentecostal institutional church in Ghana. As in Nigerian Pentecostalism, Ghanaian peripheral prophetism is organized less along denominational lines, with fluid memberships marked by zero-sum struggles for survival, anxiously in search of protection against the envy and jealousy of dangerous strangers who bewitch weakling humans.³

The Nature and Phenomena of Evil and Suffering

The Ghanaian Pentecostal conception of evil and suffering is contingent on the belief that human beings live in an unfriendly world. In many of their sermons, practices and songs Ghanaian Pentecostals disclose their conception and rejection of evil and suffering on one hand, and desire

² New Prophetic Churches are those Ghanaian Charismatic churches with strong emphases on the role of prophetic figures in the church.

³ Cf. Ruth Marshall-Fratani, "Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28/3 (1998), pp. 278-315

and craving for goodness on the other. In Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding evil and suffering taint God's perfect world and frustrate human existence. Evil has multifaceted meanings and can be fully understood through experience. It is anything that contradicts and deprives goodness and causes misfortune, harm and destruction to human existence. Suffering, on the other hand, is a state or condition of extreme hardship. It inflicts pain, hurts and aches to the well being of its victims. Both evil and suffering create unpleasantness, discomfort and insecurity to individuals, families, communities and nations. They hamper growth and progress and impoverish a person's life. Evil and suffering mirror existential bondages that people suffer that necessitate freedom and victory in Christ. This is amply illustrated in the song below which is often sung during evangelistic crusades:

All my fetters are broken asunder
I've seen my Saviour, my wonderful Saviour
Who is so precious to me
All my fetters are broken asunder

The song writer aptly captures the ideas of suffering as bondage, imprisonment and slavery by such a key term as fetters (chains). The idea of fetters conveys notions like being tied down so that one's upward mobility is restricted.⁴ Such tying down of enslavement/bondage results in a life of entanglements. Entanglements here may also imply impediments to life that require liberation from Christ. In what follows I will examine some implicit sources and causes of evil and suffering as understood in Ghanaian Pentecostalism.

Sources of Evil and Suffering

Physical/natural evil

Despite the general Ghanaian linkage of calamities to spiritual causality

⁴ Cf. Freek L. Bakker, 'Shanti Sandesham, a New Jesus Film Produced in India: Indian Christology in Pictures' in Freek Bakker et al. (eds.), *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, (Brill 2007), pp. 41-64.

Ghanaian Pentecostals concede that there are some evils which are part of the nature of things. In other words, they recognise that some evil and suffering are simply natural disasters that befall people. Thus, during its church services and conventions the COP receives testimonies that underscore how humans often suffer from untold physical/natural evil. They include inexplicable accidents, sudden and incurable illnesses, deaths and so forth. Many of these are reported in the various issues of COP's official magazine, *Pentecost Fire*. The incidence of such evil and suffering may be viewed as a mixture of factors. First, the causes of some physical/natural evil demonstrate clearly the human incapability or limitations to prevent certain things from happening to us. The human limitations to foresee contingencies of life mean that we discover too late that we have become victims of misfortunes. Second, the human failure to sometimes make right choices can result in some evil and suffering. Third, the causes of some evil cannot be attributed to human doing or structures. What all these show is that humans are incapable of doing everything, cannot notice what is behind their backs and discover rather too late that they are vulnerable to misfortunes which cause them a lot of suffering/trouble and misunderstandings. Later when I discuss supernatural evil we shall see how sometimes Ghanaian Pentecostals, especially common believers, give cultural/religious interpretations to natural evil.

Moral evil

Moral evil is a deviation of a moral agent from moral laws. Or, it is any violation of the plain principles of nature, justice and rectitude. Moral evil may be grouped under the following sub-headings, namely, societal/political and personal evils.

Societal evil

There are some evil and suffering that emanate from a society's negative attitude towards life. Oftentimes such evils and suffering are underpinned by selfishness, envy; greed, jealousy, hypocrisy and the desire to take advantage of others.⁵ Such attitudes overlook their net

⁵ See The Church of Pentecost, 'Rector warns against hypocrisy'.

effects on the well being of others and so may inflict untold hardships on an entire society. For instance, sometimes lorry accidents result from people's negligence to obey traffic regulations. Similarly, sometimes epidemics and floods are the natural outcome of the general Ghanaian insensitivity to the environment. Thus, social evil may occur because some people fail to adhere to basic principles of nature.⁶ Therefore, COP's ministers mince no words in criticising Ghanaians on retrogressive attitudes that retard national progress and development.

Indeed, COP's leadership incessantly indict Ghanaians for their mismanaged lifestyles, indiscriminate littering of the environment and general apathy to personal health.⁷ They alert the nation of the enormous economic implications of such attitudes to the nation: so much money is spent in fixing the resultant health hazards.⁸ Some negative tendencies affect individuals with broader implications on society. A good example is the neglect of parental responsibility. Hence, in a sermon titled, "Who is disturbing the Nation", Apostle Alfred Koduah, COP's immediate past general secretary, tied the ubiquitous presence of street children in many Ghanaian cities to parental negligence. Without a trade or education these unfortunate children engage themselves in alms begging or some life threatening activities like highway trading. Other negative

http://www.thecophq.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46%3Arector-warns-against-hypocrisy&catid=11%3Anews&Itemid=11 (accessed 26.10. 2011)

⁶ Apostle Opoku Onyinah. Interview by the author. 6 August, 2009.

⁷ The Church of Pentecost, 'General Secretary condemns permissive lifestyles'. http://www.thecophq.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45%3Agen-sec-condemns-permissive-lifestyles&catid=11%3Anews&Itemid=11 (accessed 26.10. 2011); see also Appiah, Emmanuel Kwesi, 'The Believer's Lifestyle' in *Tell the next Generation: Lecture notes on the annual themes of The Church of Pentecost (Vol. Two)* (Accra: National Literature Committee, The Church of Pentecost, 2008), 165-70; D.K. Noble-Atsu, 'The Role of the Minister/Church Officer in Combating Spiritual Darkness' in *Tell the next Generation: Lecture notes on the annual themes of The Church of Pentecost (Vol. Two)* (Accra: National Literature Committee, The Church of Pentecost, 2008), pp. 180-88.

⁸ Apostle Alfred Koduah. Interview by the author. 14 August, 2012.

tendencies directly affect society which Ghanaian Pentecostals draw the nation's attention to. These include the insipient laziness and apathy towards public jobs and matters, bribery and corruption and irresponsible use of public property in the Ghanaian social fibre.⁹ In Ghana many state projects have had to be suspended or done shoddily because some person(s) misappropriate state funds for selfish use. Also laws are selectively applied to benefit cronies or associates to the detriment of society.

Sometimes some social evils emerge from the misuse and misapplication of so-called religio-cultural values to define and determine people's behaviours. Indeed, misunderstanding other people's faith may result in religious conflicts. A new religion may be interpreted as an alien, invasive, parasitic, undesirable social menace and appendage to be removed. Under such circumstances human beings may become the willing and/or unconscious wicked tools to cause religious conflicts. In the early days of Ghana's Pentecostalism some adherents were arrested or/attacked by local folks for breaking traditional taboos. Even within the same churches or denominations certain figures have had to suffer one form of evil or other. For instance, COP prophetic figures have often accused leadership of misrepresentation and persecution. Underlining these misrepresentations and persecutions is leadership's discomfort that the prophets promote unscriptural teachings and practices.¹⁰ Such negative attitudes have often left pains, loneliness and rejection on the victims.

⁹ Cf. Alfred Koduah, *Who is Disturbing the Nation?* (Accra: Advocate Publishing Limited, 2008).

¹⁰ Elder Dan Owusu. Interviewed by the author on 27 August 2009; cf. Opoku Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost', an unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham (2002), 204-7; Opoku Onyinah, 'Circular Letter to All Assemblies', Accra, September 16, 2009; Paul Owusu Tabiri, *This is your Breakthrough* (London: Logos Publishing House, 2004); Matthew Ayoo, 'Pentecost Disowns Edumfa for Propagating "false doctrines"', *The Ghanaian Times* (May 31, 2011), p. 4.

Often culprits of religious suffering think they are carrying out their religious duties. In the case of non-Christian religions these sorts of religious battles ride on intolerance and fear of Christian supplantation: a religious phobia in the face of Jesus' uniqueness amidst other claims. Such intolerance may not fall short of rupturing blood ties. There are numerous instances about how Pentecostal converts are attacked by their own people as exemplified here: "I recall our difficulties in trying to hide a new convert from his murderous Muslim father."¹¹ Another COP pastor painfully narrated how one of his youth converts at Sampa District of COP was gruesomely decapitated by thugs that his own Muslim family contracted.¹²

Personal evil

According to Ghanaian Pentecostals personal evil and suffering are natural consequences of natural actions of people. Sometimes, by their own actions, people bring evil on themselves and others. These human actions and negative attitudes may cover large spectrums of life. Unfortunately, often such evil and suffering are distanced from personal irresponsible and thoughtless acts that become artificial creators of many untold mishaps. Some of such evils may result from unplanned living. There are people who live as if there is no future to consider. For example, as we noted in the foregoing section, neglect of parental responsibility has serious implications on the development and wellbeing of children. It is not uncommon for some parents to use their monies or even borrow money to finance funerals or buy clothes than invest the money in their children's education or development. Because the children are not (well) educated or are unskilled they are also not able to provide for their parents in their old age. Therefore, the presence of many beggarly old fellows in many Ghanaian communities exemplifies indirectly the sort of self-inflicted evil people may bring on themselves.

Similarly, succumbing to delinquent lifestyles through peer pressures causes lots of regretful experiences for many people in later years. Being

¹¹ Prophet James Osei-Amaniampong. Interview by the author. 19 August, 2009.

¹² Pastor Maxwell Asiedu Adubofour. Interview by the author. 20 October, 2009.

ill-equipped, with little or no education and skill, to face life they adopt criminal lifestyles which may result in their untimely deaths and/or imprisonment. For example, during the prayer and revival service of the Paradise Spiritual Revival and Healing Centre, Odorkor-Accra, on August 27, 2009 a woman requested for prayer for the miraculous release of her son from prison. Since February that year he had been sentenced to 65 years imprisonment for selling stolen mobile phones from robbers. In fact, the problem of teenage parenthood common in many Ghanaian communities may be explained in several ways, not excluding peer pressure and parental neglect of responsibility. In the event a vicious cycle of irresponsible living ensues. Thus, not only does irresponsible living produce evil that affects the individual but it may also produce a chain of evils that affect many more people.

Furthermore, some personal evils result from human greed for overnight affluence that makes people to commit heinous crimes against fellow human beings. Some COP members have fallen victim to such wickedness. In the October-December 2009 issue of the *Pentecost Fire* are stories about how some COP members were almost murdered for “get-quick” money making ritual purposes by some wicked fellows.¹³ Others suffered attacks from armed robbers or unknown assailants. For the first time in 1999, Ghana experienced serial armed robbery.¹⁴ Until then Ghanaians considered it a foreign phenomenon characteristic of neighbouring Nigeria. Hitherto, thieves stole with much trepidation.

¹³ Today, the desire for overnight affluence has pushed some Ghanaians to indulge in armed robbery and occult money making practices called *sakawa*. *Sakawa* that perhaps originated from neighbouring West African country Nigeria is a new ploy that employs occult rituals such as the carrying of coffins, ritual murders in the form of blood sacrifices and the removal of certain human parts for overnight affluence. Many of those involved are alleged to be young men in their late teens and early twenties. Newspaper reports indicate how neighbours have witnessed the nocturnal operations of *sakawa boys* in certain parts of the country.

¹⁴ Ken A. Attafuah, *Fighting Armed Robbery in Ghana* (Accra: The Justice & Human Rights Institute, 2008), p. 19.

Armed robbers boldly attack victims, maim or kill them.¹⁵ Some armed killings do not actually fit into the category of robbery. They may be motivated by reasons other than mere burglary. The motives are sometimes political or personal; either because the victim is considered to impede someone's or a group's progress or the achievement of a goal. Indeed, the near assassination of COP's former chairman, Michael Kwabena Ntummy, in 2006 incited lots of speculations as to what could be the motive of the assassins.

Finally, some Pentecostals feel that sometimes some spouses' selfish actions cause lots of pain to their partners. Eventually, the marriage may break. I illustrate this with a personal conversation I had with Adjoa, a deaconess of COP in Accra. She felt unhappy and cheated because her husband (who already had a son from his deceased wife) had consistently refused to go for medical examination in connection with their childlessness. She had been diagnosed of having no infertility problem. Yet because of his intransigence her expectations for becoming a mother was quashed.

Supernatural evil: God, spirits and ancestors

At this stage I turn my attention to examine the Ghanaian Pentecostal interpretation of the causality of evil in supernatural categories. Ghanaian Pentecostals, especially common believers, attribute evil to the actions of God, spirits and ancestors. Indeed, according to them this constitutes the greatest source and cause of evil and suffering. According to this line of reasoning evil and suffering may befall people because of non-human or spiritual forces.

God and Evil

Ghanaian Pentecostals reason that some evil and suffering result from human rebellion against God. Sin contaminates the faith community and

¹⁵ Cf. Charles Takyi-Boadu, 'Robbers Attack Obour', *Daily Guide* (September 21, 2011), pp. 1-17.

jeopardises its harmonious relationship with God. As the late Eunice Addison's (a foremost psalmist of COP) song below shows, God demands spiritual wholeness from his people:

Holy, holy, holy nation
Sin shall not abide in Jehovah's nation
This is a holy nation
This is my word, that you be holy

COP's understanding of spiritual wholeness is that the church as a holy nation of God must abhor sin. This is what God commands. And since the church comprises individual believers it is the believer who must ensure that this divine imperative is realised in his/her body. This is underlined in another of Addison's songs below:

I've heard some good news that gladden me
I've heard some good news that gladden me
That my body is God's temple
I will make it holy for the Lord

Holiness is important because by it the believer becomes useful to God. Elder Dan Owusu, leader of the Paradise Spiritual, Revival and Healing Centre, Odorkor-Accra, speaks for the entirety of COP when he identifies the following as some manifestations of sin: witchcraft, hatred, pride, immoral (sexual) living, bitterness, drunkenness, jealousy, envy, and occultism, among others.¹⁶ Nonetheless Ghanaian Pentecostals do not restrict the divine causality of evil to sin. Both Apostle Opoku Onyinah and Prophet J.E. Ameyaw (chairman and area head of COP respectively) believe that we cannot understand the problem of evil without appreciating God's sovereignty and love.¹⁷ Thus, although Pharaoh's hardened heart conditioned Egypt's destruction, yet remotely

¹⁶ Elder Dan Owusu. Interviewed by author on 17 July, 2009; cf. Prophet Kwame Prince Kpabitey. Interviewed by the author on 20 October, 2009.

¹⁷ Apostle Opoku Onyinah. Interview by the author. 6 August, 2009; Prophet J.E. Ameyaw. Interviewed by author on 18 August, 2009.

it originated from God who chose that approach to demonstrate his power to the Egyptians and love to the Israelites. The same action produced two results: evil to the Egyptians, goodness to the Israelites.

Evil spirits and evil

Apart from God being the source of evil, Ghanaian Pentecostals also identify bad spirits as a source of supernatural evil. Among Ghanaian Pentecostals, especially in prophetic circles, there is a strong belief that nothing happens accidentally or naturally: there is always a connection between physical evil and supernatural wicked forces.¹⁸ These include witches and wizards, charmers and sorcerers. This is equally the case with Nigerian Aladura churches.¹⁹ Therefore in some of their songs, sermons and practices Ghanaian Pentecostals they attribute the incidence of some evil and suffering to evil forces. This idea is not even totally rejected by leadership. In fact, Onyinah delineates moral evil from evil from evil forces: “The evil nature wars against us and sometimes we wish to be delivered from this body. Yet there are other evils and sufferings which are the works of the devil and his agents”.²⁰

The belief in the power of evil forces means that there is a subversion of the identity of the devil as a personal being with the myriad evil spirits in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Thus, although Pentecostals speak much about the devil, yet it is witchcraft, sorcery and other wicked spirits which they imply. These evil powers frustrate the human enjoyment of good life. Human beings become their conduits of hatred,

¹⁸ See Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “On the “Mountain” of the Lord’: Healing Pilgrimages in Ghanaian Christianity.” *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 36 (2007), p. 68.

¹⁹ Peter Ropo Awoniyi, 'Yoruba Indigeneous Spirituality and the Reshaping of New Religious Movements in South-West Nigeria', *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology. Vol. XVI. No. 1* (2011), p. 155; Isaac Deji Ayegboyin, 'Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions', *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology. Vol. XVI. No. 1* (2011), p. 169.

²⁰ Apostle Opoku Onyinah. Interview by the author. 6 August, 2009.

envy/jealousy,²¹ greed²² and competition for destabilising the unwary and innocent. Indeed, the diabolic nature of these evil spirits makes them to be tied with sins such as fornication, lies, unfaithfulness, theft, and so forth in peripheral prophetic circles.

Again, the belief that evil may originate from evil powers makes some Pentecostals sometimes tie seemingly natural and moral evils (burglary, theft, blackmailing, slander, flood or even car accidents) to demonic manipulations. In this way impediments and calamities that befall the Christian cannot be divorced from demonic attacks. In fact, according to this Pentecostal worldview nothing happens accidentally or naturally. There is always a connection between physical evil and the activities of forces of wickedness. Thus, evil and suffering may acquire a satanic face. Indeed, often people's understanding about evil and suffering is that of powerlessness, insecurity and attacks at the hands of the devil and his cohorts. This interpretation of evil and suffering is contingent on the belief that Christians are involved in an ongoing battle not only with their flesh but also with the devil.

There are two kinds of demonization - one is affliction in every conceivable area of life, and the other is the actual possession by an evil spirit that results in witchcraft or demonism. One way demonic affliction is detected is through the interpretation of dreams. The role of dreams in the diagnosis of evil causality is common to the peripheral prophetic worldview. For example, during testimony time of the Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, on TV Africa on September 7, 2009, a lady narrated a dream in which she was hit with a stone. She woke up to realise she was ill. Later she was diagnosed to have developed a hole in heart. Similarly, the church's Metro TV programme of November 5, 2009 showcased a lady who also narrated how she saw a ring put on her finger in a dream. She woke up and saw a ring on her finger.

²¹ See Linda Tenya, 'Man, 60, Kills Lover', *Daily Guide* (28 October, 2011); Sam Mark Essien, 'Jealous Man Stabs Rival', *Daily Guide* (29 September, 2011).

²² Fred Duodo, 'Ghanaian Politicians Greedy-Togbe Afede', *Daily Guide* (26 September, 2011).

The place of dreams in Pentecostal spirituality is that it provides a ready explanation for the spiritual causes of evil. It is generally recognised in the periphery that some dreams are ominous and require prophetic negotiation. As Rev. Prince Ohene Asare indicated in his sermon on TV Africa on November 24, 2011, they include the following activities in dreams: eating flesh, eating garbage, having one's breasts sucked, taking bath in public, having sex or tying nuptial knot, etc. The first two typify witchcraft initiation, the third cancer transfusion, the fourth shame and disgrace and the last two spiritual marriages. Indeed, in an interview on the "Pentecost Hour" on November 10, 2011, Apostle Alfred Koduah acknowledged that sometimes evil spirits may sleep with people that will manifest in their dreams as nocturnal emissions. Nonetheless, he was quick to indicate that God has given believers grace to differentiate between natural and spiritual problems such as nocturnal emission.

In spiritual marriages the human being is compulsorily joined into a disadvantaged unilateral marriage with spirit beings. Often such spirits are believed to be sea spirits or family witches which prevent victims from entering into or/and enjoying natural marriages. Some victims end up not marrying at all. Others may suffer marital conflicts and divorces. Still others may suffer childlessness because they procreate for a malevolent spiritual spouse. In fact, deadly diseases like the HIV/AIDS may be suffered not necessarily because one is promiscuous or physically infected but because one has been contaminated spiritually.

The "causal other"

The belief that evil is caused by wicked spirits is underpinned by what I call the "causal other". Peripheral prophetism often pushes causality of evil outside oneself.²³ There is a strong, uncompromising and entrenched belief in the "causal other" believed to be behind people's troubles, be

²³ The concept of the 'other' fits into Favret-Saada's 'remedial institutions' of rural France's *bocage's* interpretation of misfortunes and the 'evil eye' belief in India, Europe, and Middle East. See Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Malden; Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Pub, 2000).

they Christians or not. Causal agents, typically witches, place less powerful people in spiritual bondages that restrict their progress and success. As I have argued elsewhere this causality due to the “other” implies that “misfortunes” are rooted in the *other from outside oneself*.²⁴ Normal conversations with Pentecostal common believers or visits to prophetic services demonstrate their avid belief in this theory. The “causal other” includes people who have familial, occupational, educational and neighbourly connections with “victims”.²⁵ As enemies the “causal other” can cause people to acquire vicious and shameful lifestyles. Thus, vices like drunkenness, promiscuity, robbery, lust, etc. are often attributed to some wicked persons or forces.

Witchcraft

Perhaps witchcraft constitutes the most feared of all “causal others” in peripheral prophetism.²⁶ Witchcraft is considered by Ghanaians as an evil spirit which inhabits and possesses people to use them to commit evil against other people who are weaker than the possessors.²⁷ It is not a learned art that one may choose to understudy. Witches are believed to have the power to leave their bodies, especially at night, when they want to attend a meeting or attack their victims. Their activities are spiritual and are invisible to the naked eye. Witchcraft is personal and is possessed by human beings. Since its possessors are humans it shows the most intimate knowledge of its victims, hence, the fear and abhorrence of it. As the following testimony at the Paradise Spiritual, Revival and Healing Centre, Odorkor-Accra indicates, witchcraft is very selfish. A woman lost all her four children. Her mother confessed to be the causal witch because she did not want her sons-in-law to live overseas away from their wives. Indeed, witchcraft can be elusive and discreet.

²⁴ 'Prosperity and Prophecy in African Pentecostalism,' *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20 (2011), pp. 291-305.

²⁵ Elder Dan Owusu (Interview by author on 27 August, 2009).

²⁶ Seth Asare-Oduro, 'Spirituality in an African Indigeneous Church: The Case of the Saviour Church of Ghana', *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*. Vol. XVI. No. 1. (2011), pp. 125-40.

²⁷ Emmanuel Ati (Interviewed by author on 6 August, 2009).

According to Elder Johnson Andoh of the Down Town Prayer and Revival Centre, Kaso, to avoid being exposed some witches deposit their witchcraft at the entrance of church buildings before they join worship services. They take them up again when returning home after the service.

Prophetic meetings abound with stories that underscore the fact that witchcraft activities may be carried out via ordinary consumables, money, beads and clothing innocently received or purchased. These may result in witchcraft acquisition, incurable diseases/sicknesses and other problems. At the Zion Prayer, Healing and Evangelistic Centre, COP, Abowinmu, Enyan Denkyira, was a photograph of a young boy, purported to have obtained witchcraft from food given him by his maternal grandmother. Similarly, Elder Dan Owusu telepathically diagnosed a Sister Diana of her two years ailing condition as having been caused through her consuming some demonised fish from her mother-in-law. According to him the fish was her own flesh spiritually.

It is also asserted that witchcraft may be acquired when families covenant with deities for protection and lineage perpetuation.²⁸ Consequently, even a foetus can be given witchcraft. Sometimes the candidate's spirit rejects the witchcraft which then ensues in conflict between the human spirit and the witch spirit. Some peripheral prophets contend that it is the spirit-spirit tension which manifests as epileptic convulsion. Indeed, Onyinah²⁹ agrees with Debrunner's³⁰ and Field's³¹ earlier contention about the plausible connection between epilepsy and the causation of witchcraft among some Ghanaian tribes such as the Akan. More seriously, the rejection may even lead to death or insanity.

²⁸ Oscar Arthur (Interviewed by author on 1 August, 2009).

²⁹ Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft', p. 4;

³⁰ Hans W. Debrunner, *Witchcraft in Ghana: A Study on the Belief in Destructive Witches and Its Effects on the Akan Tribes* (Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot Ltd. 1961), pp. 58-59.

³¹ Margaret J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 154.

Ancestors and evil

In Ghanaian peripheral prophetism ancestral causality of evil is crucial. This is because so-called curses clients/seekers may suffer are often linked by prophets to the deeds or misdeeds of their ancestors.³² According to peripheral prophetism, the greatest evil the living can suffer from their ancestors is generational curses. Generational or lineage curses are transferable from ancestors down the family line.³³ Curses occur when family heads enter into alliances with traditional deities and other wicked spirits.

Thus, preaching in his Glorious Word Power Ministries International, Odorkor-Accra, on March 22, 2009, Prophet Joseph Owusu Bempah stated:

Curses are transferrable from one's ancestors to future posterity. At times it is important to delve into ancestral background. Ancestral families are great problem to us. The African problem has to do with the cursed African continent. Not all Ghanaians are lazy and useless.

Thus, curses beset members of particular families or lineages and may manifest in the forms of calamities like sterility, bankruptcy, failures, poverty, inexplicable illnesses, child mortality, premature deaths, strange deaths and a host of other misfortunes because of curses upon themselves or their posterity. According to this line of reasoning, the many problems Ghanaians, and for that matter Africans in general, go through can be explained from the perspective of a spiritual causality, namely, generational curses.

Gates, covenants and altars are basically three sources of curses that result from ancestral alliance with traditional deities. They provide the

³² Emmanuel Ati (Interviewed by author on 6 August, 2009).

³³ Samuel Onwona, *Overcoming Generational Curses* (Accra: African Christian Press, 2005).

platform, launching pad or operational base for the spirit or deity for whom they are established.³⁴ They are the means of unconscious dedication and selling of one's soul and posterity to evil spirits. Therefore they are the territorial spaces whose inimical occupants require forceful discomfiture through militaristic prayers or deliverance. Commenting on the covenantal idea in African church history and theology Ogbu U. Kalu posits that "Covenants can only be reversed by recognising their existence, potent reality, character and appropriate rituals of disengagement. They are legally binding and may not be simply wished away without due processes."³⁵ To Kalu then the reverberation of traditional understanding of covenant in Christian prophetism has necessitated the search for new ways of "studying African Traditional Religion, no longer as fossilised or exotic religion but as a living faith to be taken seriously."³⁶ In other words, there is the need for treating the primal religion as useful vehicle for acculturating the Christian faith for Africans.

Gates take the form of *juju*,³⁷ or ancestral occult involvement that later destroys the family line. Covenant results from a search for fruitfulness of the womb that reciprocates through the dedication of children to deities. Or it is a dedication to a deity in appreciation for cure of an ailment. In such situations patients' bodies are incised and rubbed with black herbal substances to protect them against evil forces. Covertly, the individual becomes the deity's property and is prone to its free intrusions.

³⁴ Oscar Arthur. Interview by the author. 1 August, 2009; cf. Abu Bako, *Establishing God's Altar Everywhere Taking the High Places* (Accra: Logos-Rhema Foundation, 2004); Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Taking Territories & Raising Champions': Contemporary Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa 1980-2010, Inaugural Lecture in Commemoration of Promotion to the Position of Full Professor Accra: Trinity Theological Seminary (2010).

³⁵ Ogbu U. Kalu, 'African Christianity: An Overview'. In Ogbu U. Kalu (Ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eriterea: Africa World Press Inc., 2007), p. 8.

³⁶ Kalu, 'African Christianity: An Overview', p. 8.

³⁷ Among West Africans *juju* is a spell believed to possess magical or supernatural power to harm somebody.

The effects of the covenant trickle down to the person's lineage. Some covenants are sealed with food taboos. Altars are set up when families in search of security and protection against evil forces go for an idol and plant it in their family.

Often there are specific locations in family houses: a room, a certain portion of the compound, etc. where the deity is placed. The power of the deity is revived through the pouring of libation on the representative idol. In Ghanaian Pentecostal spirituality salvation may imply a total breach with traditional deities and all forms of occultism. Hence, cultural rupture becomes critical to a debate on Christian involvement in chieftaincy, the custodian of traditional culture. Christian conversion is liberation in Christ from the controls and influence of those spirits. It is against this backdrop that Pentecostals continually sing such songs as the one below:

As for us we shall serve God
As for us we shall serve God
Our fathers served deities without any gain
As for us we shall serve God

This song looks at the pre-Christian past of the Pentecostal's ancestors when they vainly served and worshiped traditional deities. These deities and powers are considered by the Pentecostal believer as false and undeserving of his/her allegiance. This is a reflective assessment of the vanity of ancestral belief in the potency of those spirits. In the event the ancestors got nothing but curses. To the Ghanaian Pentecostal Christ offers what the traditional deities failed to give. Logically, Christ brings the blessings that the ancestors sought for but failed to get from the deities and spirits. Thus, Christ subverts the traditional deities and spirits of their role and power in the Ghanaian Pentecostal's life.

According to peripheral prophetic rationalisation a curse is antithetical to blessing. Thus, in his sermon at Jesus House for All Nations, Alive Chapel International, Tesano-Accra, on Sunday, March 15, 2009, the visiting preacher from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Bishop Owusu

Ansah stated, “A blessing is a divine energy that is spoken into a person's life through words to cause him or her to do something... A blessing is an attraction force that draws a number of things into the life of the blessed person (Deuteronomy 8:18)”. While a blessing empowers, a curse demeans. A blessing positively transforms, but a curse reverses fortunes and destiny. This is the idea that runs through the song, *Onyame na Waka* (It is God who has spoken):

It is God who has spoken
That I will be great
Till I become so great

This song which is a key song in peripheral prophetic services is crucial to prophetic interpretation of divine blessings. It apparently appropriates the Abrahamic covenant of blessing. It seeks to assure the Pentecostal God's faithful promise of greatness. Greatness here is an unlimited, encompassing and expansive word. In terms of peripheral prophetism it connotes ideas of promotion, child bearing, wealth, success (spiritual and material), abundance, possessions, fame, etc. which are understood as freedom from external controls. Clearly, Ghanaian Pentecostals reject any limitation to their lives. With the Abrahamic covenant in mind they repudiate any attempt by enemies to place curses upon their lives. The realisation of this repudiation may be achieved through various negotiation methods.

Finally, not all curses result from ancestral actions. Indeed, in the sermon of Prophet Joseph Owusu Bempah cited above there are some curses which result from “innocent” actions of people. They include the customary pouring of libation and performance of rituals by family heads on behalf of themselves and their families. Such acts “innocently” rope in their entire family into demonic alliances.³⁸ Similarly, in some cases curses may be underpinned by economic concerns. Hence, in a

³⁸ Cf. Wisdom K. Ayitey, *Broken Chains: Deliverance from Curses and Demons* (Accra: Mallsberg Press Ltd., 2001).

sermon on TV Africa, September 7, 2009, Prophet Akwasi Sarpong asserted that

Sometimes because of litigation over plots of land some of the litigants go for juju power to sow into the foundations of their houses. Such rituals may include the burying of animals. When a house is built on such foundations it is thus built on curses which affect anyone who goes to live in that house. Hence, anyone who goes to live in such a house may end up suffering setbacks such as loss of business, financial crises, etc.

Thus, sometimes curses take on economic value with spiritual implications when offended persons consult traditional deities or employ magic to impose curses on their offenders. The problem is the effects of the curse may trickle down to innocent people.

The economic dimension of evil and suffering

Our discussions on the causes of evil and suffering cannot be complete without looking at their pecuniary and physical effects on the Ghanaian Pentecostal person. To Ghanaian Pentecostals the greatest effects of evil that one may suffer are poverty and illness. What this means is that evil and suffering possess economic values. It is in this context that some Pentecostal sermons, prophetic practices and songs depict suffering and poverty as humiliating and undesirable.

Poverty/prosperity

Ghanaian Pentecostals conceive poverty as the antithesis of prosperity. It reverses fortunes. As Christiana Love's song below reveals common believers do not hide their abhorrence of evil and suffering. This gospel song which is played often on Ghanaian airwaves speaks volumes about the Pentecostal aversion for poverty because of its inherent devastation to human existence:

Suffering is not the best thing to be experienced

Poverty is not the best thing to be experienced
My God, don't let me experience what I fear
Suffering is not the best thing to be experienced
May I follow you to the end
Poverty is not the best, my Father help me!
Suffering is not the best, Jesus save me!

In this song Christiana reiterates the general Ghanaian aversion of suffering and poverty (financial lack). She reveals the Ghanaian innate fear of misery which is shared by even Pentecostals. This is because poverty has a way of making the world ignore and ridicule its victims. Poverty and financial hardship are horrendously destructive. Their incidence is a great source of suffering for many people. Indeed, the idea that poverty is a curse and financial hardship or misery is evil is embedded even in secular music and everyday conversations of Ghanaians. Poverty turns the streets of Ghanaian cities into arenas of beggarliness and unconventional markets. Similarly, public transports are invaded by drug peddlers and people who preach the Word of God for donations. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find some “confidence preachers” strategically positioned at lorry stations, on pedestrian walks and street edges working hard on the consciences of passers-by to get some token donations to “support the work of God”. These preachers and beggars are prepared to trade their self-esteem for a morsel of meal.

Meanwhile poverty goes beyond mere financial lack. In the Ghanaian context it may include marital problems. Ghanaian Pentecostals consider marital problems such as the inability to marry, bad marriages and childlessness evil that must not be experienced by believers. They are part of setbacks which depersonalise and reverse social status. In Ghana issues like childlessness in marriage are scorned and such marriages may be truncated through family and social pressure. Similarly, delayed marriages can result in social snobbishness, and suffer private and public gossip. This is because marriage and childbearing immortalise the individual and perpetuate a person's name, humanity and personality. The importance of marriage and childbearing lies in their ability to reverse status and fortunes. It is often believed that marriage positions

people on the road to prosperity. Children are priceless gem. A good marriage makes wealth possible and redefines social status. This can be appreciated when we realise the effects of wealth on the Ghanaian person. Wealth is crucial because it lifts people from obscurity to sudden prominence. This is why nobody loves to be poor. For society does not really care how one acquires and accumulates wealth. It does not really scorn at wrongful and unscrupulous acquisition of wealth. This is why people do not bother how they make their wealth. Wealth gives power.

Health/illness

Ghanaian Pentecostals join other Ghanaians to celebrate health as a very necessary and important requirement for enjoying good life. To them good health is a corollary of salvation. It is life itself for it opens great doors of opportunities to its possessor. With health one can get a job to do and thus reverse one's poor status. On the contrary, illness is a physical effect of evil Ghanaian Pentecostals abhor. Illness may be short or long and protracted disease that eludes medical cure. People who are ill or diseased are rendered incapable of fending for themselves or their relatives. To be ill is to be in pain and to reverse in socio-economic status. Illness potentially makes one become dependable on others. Consequently, Ghanaian Pentecostals sing a number of songs that reject illness.

Illness incapacitates and shatters dreams and aspirations. It leads to rejection and ostracism. It restricts life and stifles opportunities. Indeed, illness may result in a whole setback in a victim's life and succeed in rustling social networks and fortunes. This is why in Ghanaian Pentecostal songs, sermons and practices, illness is vehemently rejected. This again explains why the Ghanaian Pentecostal idea about good life sees life in the form of vitality, hopefulness, good health significance, greatness, celebration, social mobility, respectability, self-confidence, among other things.

The socio-economic devastation illness wrecks on victims is so enormous that some Pentecostal sermons prophetic practices and songs depict sickness and poverty in symbiotic terms. As I point out elsewhere:

By pinpointing the poor and the sick Ghanaian Pentecostals invent a deep concept; a concept that includes all people since normally people suffer from either or both enemies. 'The poor and the sick' becomes a religio-cultural, socio-economic, and political concept that requires Christological deflation. All such are assured of Christ's willingness to receive and welcome into a better life of abundance, redefinition, restructuring, and 're-modification'. Ghanaian Pentecostals thus believe that Christ offers the hope for the liberation of all who health-wise and wealth-wise are victimised. The poor and the sick must run to Him for their deliverance.³⁹

Thus, this Pentecostal conception of poverty and illness rationalises victory and freedom in Christ. This is why a Pentecostal sermon or song may assure and invite listeners to Jesus for him overturn their misfortunes into hope. To love life unsaddled with all evil one must turn to Jesus. In this way the good life is synonymous to salvation. In the section that follows I will evaluate the inherent ideas about the causes of evil and suffering per Ghanaian Pentecostalism and the Akan traditional religion.

Contextualising Evil

So far the discussions have sought to present Ghanaian Pentecostals' view on the nature, sources and causes of evil and suffering. This present section aims at proposing a middle way to our discussions on the nature and causes of evil and suffering. COP's leadership departs from common believers' total linkage of evil and suffering to spiritual forces that tend to deny personal responsibility. Accordingly, leadership insists that some of the evil that happen to people emanates from personal negligence or

³⁹ 'Ideas of the Divine and the Human in Ghanaian Pentecostal Songs', an unpublished MA thesis submitted to the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam (2008), pp. 33-4.

irresponsibility. Indeed, Onyinah notes (although not denying the possibility of physical attacks by the devil) that from the biblical (especially Pauline corpus) perspective most of the experiences assigned with demonic faces in Ghanaian Pentecostalism may appropriately be considered as the work of the flesh.⁴⁰ He contends that the devil is bent on influencing believers to live contrary to their expressed intentions and the word of God. Again, the Bible shows that the devil's attacks may not preclude manifestation of physical infirmity, death of believers, etc. But even under such circumstances the issue is not between the believer and the devil but between the believer and God under whose sovereign permission the devil attacks the believer.⁴¹

Consequently, the place of suffering or misfortunes in Ghanaian Pentecostalism ought to be placed within the context of the fall. As a result of the fall the whole human race suffers the general fate of a creation that has “been subjected to frustration”.⁴² Yet creation has hope of being “liberated from its bondage to decay”.⁴³ The implication of this is that Christ's death and resurrection inaugurate the eschatological hope of God's final salvation of his people. Yet the resurrection does not eliminate suffering but rather provides hope for God's final victory over evil. In Luke's theology on suffering “there is an eschatological limitation on the degree to which salvation is completely 'holistic' in this present age” such that it “does not guarantee it universally to the righteous”.⁴⁴ Similarly, in Paul (Gal. 4: 13, 14; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; 11:23-33; Philip. 2:27; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20) God may graciously heal his people or teach them to be humble. Hence, believers share in the general

⁴⁰ Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft', p. 362; See also his 'Deliverance as a Way of Confronting Witchcraft in Modern Africa: Ghana as a Case History' in *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5.1 (2002), pp. 107-34.

⁴¹ Quayesi-Amakye, 'Ideas of the Divine', p. 60; Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft', p. 365.

⁴² Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft', p. 35.

⁴³ Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft', p. 365.

⁴⁴ Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Church and Today* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 258.

misfortunes and suffering of all humanity. The theology of suffering then needs not always interpret suffering as the attack of the devil or the necessary or logical consequence of sin. It must rather consider three sources, namely, God, the devil and natural or neutral. Consequently, Ntumy and Onyinah⁴⁵ admonish Christians to embrace the pedagogical value of suffering in their lives.⁴⁶

Ghanaian Pentecostals recognise that the Bible gives alternative causes for suffering. Indeed, the Bible is clear on the pedagogical and sanctifying purposes of suffering and evil as evidenced in the Joseph story. Nonetheless peripheral prophets' presentation of the ubiquity of demons and the need for people to be extra careful about their destructive powers leaves much room to be desired. In peripheral prophetism clients/seekers are inundated with statements, instructions and rituals that present evil forces as very destructive and powerful. Such prophetic declarations and activities put clients/seekers unnecessarily in fear and at the mercy of some evil enemies. In the Bible demons and Satan are presented as opponents of God. They execute their plans to hinder or influence the people of God as they work for God. But such evil executions do not escape God's watchful eyes. In fact, the Bible teaches that God offers support and protection to his own (Lu. 22:31; Ps. 46).

We can say that a relevant Ghanaian Pentecostal theology on evil and suffering should allow a place for the plausibility of the demonic “causal other”. This is because in some cases psychological explanations may not be enough. Consequently, a problem that defies psycho-medical solution must be viewed more of a spiritual causality.⁴⁷ There are instances when no amount of medical or psychological help is able to

⁴⁵ Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft'.

⁴⁶ Michael Kwabena Ntumy, *Reflections: Taking a second Look at Life* (Accra: Xchip Communications, 2009).

⁴⁷ Apostle D. Y. Asare. Interview by the author. 28 September, 2009; cf. Abraham Akrong, 2003. 'African Traditional Religion and Development: Clash of Two Worlds of Discourse and Values' in Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. XIII, No. 3 (2003), pp. 36-50.

save the situation. Medical or psychological efforts prove there is nothing wrong with the individual and yet the reality is that the individual is suffering terribly. Such situations naturally will mean that the solution of the problem is deeper than physically or scientifically thought. In my view Ghanaian Pentecostals ought to take seriously the demonic factor when dealing with evil and suffering. Otherwise much of their efforts at helping the troubled may end up in failure.

Indeed, leadership acknowledge that there are some negative attitudes and social structures that negate individual and communal/social wellbeing. Such attitudes and structures call for a re-reading of the Bible that can result in socio-psychological re-orientation by all. Leadership's position shows how they take seriously the African solidarity. In many African societies human individuality is intertwined with the communal identity. It is the community which confers personality on the individual and determines or defines individual freedom, maturity and responsibility. Social cohesion and equilibrium are contingent on the interplay between the individual and communal norms, values and laws.⁴⁸ Religion serves as an enforcer and vehicle in the educational, medicinal, cultural, economic, social and political spheres of the society. This makes religion a multifaceted feature and character. Consequently, among Africans religious conversion carries various undertones for the whole society and its norms.

It is important to adopt a more robust and serious posture towards negative attitudes. This is because they are a recipe for personal, national and communal reversals. Often evil is distanced from irresponsible and thoughtless acts that become artificial creators of many untold mishaps. Such irresponsible and thoughtless actions include the use of the Bible and the media to deceive, oppress and misdirect people. As such the gospel of Christian consumerism and problem-free life is alien to true biblical teaching. In many parts of Africa the news media have fuelled

⁴⁸ Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1997).

troubles. Media images infest people's minds with unrestrained negative lifestyles. Sexual evils, cruelty, crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, etc. escalate due to irresponsible media amplification. Political tensions aggravate because of negative media twist to political activities. As such humanly inflicted suffering cannot be attributed to malevolent spirits.

In our discussion above I pointed out the Ghanaian Pentecostal restriction of the ancestors to generational curses. In peripheral prophetism the ancestors do not enjoy high profile treatment as spiritual members of the family, clan or community. They do not ensure communal cohesion and unity. If anything at all their “irresponsible” alliance with evil forces brought untold hardships on their human descendants for which reason they are repudiated. Fortunately, the Christ-event reverses the negative effects of the ancestral misdeeds in believers' lives. It is in this sense that Christ becomes superior to the ancestors. Unlike the ancestors Christ restores blessings on those who believe in him. This makes Christ a better “ancestral parent”. This explains why Ghanaian Pentecostals transfer the traditional idea of parenthood into their appreciation of Jesus Christ in their theological framework.

Jesus does not make him a first among equals of the myriad ancestors. Jesus belongs to a class of his own in the sense that he is God who became man to save humanity. Thus, for them the “ancestralship” of Christ, if accepted at all, is superior to that of the traditional ancestors. Hence, they do not recognise nor accept the so-called traditional intermediary roles of the ancestors. This is because they consider the ancestors ineffective to save humans from the perils of life. To the Ghanaian Pentecostal the ancestors are dead and incapable of helping their descendants. They are awaiting judgement by Christ. Therefore, any appeasement made to them is of no avail. It is not the ancestors who deliver the living from the vicissitudes of life, having failed to conquer death. Jesus shows his superiority over both the ancestors and death through his resurrection and subsequent exaltation to heaven.

Indeed, the superiority of Christ over the ancestors has power undertones. This is because Christ's “ancestralship” “positivises” and

transforms the whole concept of ancestorship. Contrary to the Akan belief that the ancestors are close to God and therefore exercise mediatorial and judicial powers it is Christ who the scriptures say performs these roles and functions. By his unique position and function he is Lord over the ancestors and gods. Consequently, the believer is assured of his assumption of all their powers and his cancellation of their terrorising influence upon humanity. And most importantly, Christ's "ancestorship" also guarantees humanity of the protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit and the understanding of spiritual realities.

The fact that Christ surpasses the ancestors ramifies in the undermining of the powers of the spirits. Traditionally, the African is prepared to trade his/her gods for more potent ones. Yet he/she is unwilling to do same with his/her ancestors. That underscores the significant place the ancestors occupy in the African religious life. Thus, by implication the ancestors to some extent are more superior to the deities and the myriad spirits. Since by the very nature of things the ancestors occupy deified status their subordination to Christ "de-divinises" them. This means that if Christ's "superior" ancestorship also makes them lose their sacral position to the believer. But this "de-divinisation" does not stop with the ancestors. It brackets in all the deities and spirits which receive worship and veneration from human beings. Indeed, by the very fact that the ancestors occupy a superior place than the deities in the Akan mind, any suggestion of Christ's superiority over the ancestors means at one and the same time the loss of power, influence and authority of both the ancestors and deities over human beings.

"De-divinisation" of the powers does not imply a usurpation of power by Christ. Christ is too powerful to usurp the powers of these spirits. Rather, it means he takes from them the allegiance and place that rightly belong to him but which the spirits had shrewdly made humans to surrender to them. Therefore "de-divinisation" makes it compellingly possible for the spirits to lose their traditional hold, control and influence over human beings. This means also that they are no longer justified to intimidate and strangulate human beings with any dictate and problem as they desire. Thus, to the Ghanaian Pentecostal "de-divinisation of the powers" is an

indissoluble component of victory and freedom in Christ. A corollary of this is that in Christ there is a demystification of political powers, traditional and secular.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to respond to the question: What are the ways Ghanaian Pentecostal leaderships and peripheral church interpret human suffering and evil? Consequently, the paper has discussed, examined and evaluated the implicit ideas in Ghanaian Pentecostals' conceptions and interpretations of the sources/causes of human suffering and evil. Clearly, both leadership and common believers hold multiple explanations about the presence of evil and suffering. Meanwhile the belief in wicked forces such as demons, witches and sorcery as sources/causes of evil and suffering is stronger in peripheral understanding than in leadership. One may attempt to explain moral causes of evil with some success but may not be very successful in rationalising physical/natural evil. And it is not easy to agree on whether all evil can be attributed to spiritual forces. Indeed, the fear of evil, which is often personalised as demonic subversion of goodness, underpins the strong belief in cosmic battle where humans become pawns in the hands of malevolent forces. From the entire discussions one is left with the question: How does it feel to live in this world? This is a world where human beings are endangered everywhere. They are like pawns in the hands of forces/powers greater than themselves. Some of these are physical/natural; others are moral while others still are supernatural.

RELIGION AND WELFARE IN 21ST CENTURY GHANA: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE WELLBEING OF THE PEOPLE

DAVID STILES-OCRAN¹

Abstract

Religion, particularly Christianity, has been an agent of welfare and development in Africa since the colonial era. The church, as part of their socio-economic responsibilities, have built schools, health centers, and literally ministered to the needs of the poor as well as the marginalized in diverse ways. This paper, in particular, is an assessment of the multi-dimensional church-state social welfare systems in Ghana with specific focus on the role of the church in the development of the well-being of the individual in terms of education and the family. It traces the historical background from the colonial era and concludes that religion and welfare are inseparable from each other; the significance of religion is seen in how sensitive it is towards the well-being of the individual and society at large.

Introduction

Religion in Africa is generally perceived as the way of life or the culture of the people. Mbiti, an African philosopher, is known for his popular

¹ DAVID STILES-OCRAN holds an MPhil in the Study of Religions from the University of Ghana, Lagon, and an MPhil in Intercontextual Theology, from the University of Oslo, Norway. He teaches in the School of Theology at Fountainhead Christian University College, Tema-Accra, Ghana. E-mail: cbimstiles@gmail.com

saying that 'Africans are notoriously religious.'² That 'Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.'³ The traditional religion of Africa is basically animistic-belief in the reality of spirits⁴ around us. This belief seems to pervade the praxis of other prominent religious traditions, namely, Islam and Christianity. Again, the notion of animism places more emphasis on the spiritual significance of a religious tradition, an aspect which is extremely difficult to reckon with objectively. Christianity, on the other hand, since the colonial era, has sought to promote the physical development or welfare aspect of religion which seeks to improve the wellbeing of the community as well as the individual.

This paper seeks to assess the multi-dimensional church-state social welfare systems in Ghana and particularly focuses on the role of the church in the development of the wellbeing of the people in terms of education and family. This is done by first tracing the various works of the churches to set the historical background.

Historical Background

Ghana, formally known as Gold Coast, is multicultural and religious pluralistic nation. She was colonized by Britain who, from the very inception of the crown, condemned the religious traditions of the people as 'superstitious, backward, and heathen'⁵ and sought to implement their political, socio-economic and religious agenda instead. Christianity, after the condemnation of the Atlantic trade on the continent, became a tool for the implementation of Western and European civilization of the nation. Christianity was literally forced on the people; they were left with

² John S. Mbiti (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*, Second Edition. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, p. 1

³ John S. Mbiti (1969), p. 1

⁴ John S. Mbiti (1969), p. 74.

⁵ Nail Ferguson (2003). *EMPIRE: How Great Britain Made the Modern World*. London: Penguin Books, p. 113.

no choice than to accept and became converts. 'The result was that many natives who were attracted to Christianity became Christians only in the mind but not in the heart.'⁶

Pre-Colonial Social Welfare

In the pre-colonial Ghana, the individuals received welfare assistance from the members of the extended family (both maternal and paternal sides), namely, uncles, cousins, grandparents and the like. They upheld and promoted the communal values where each member of the family felt the sense of belonging to the society: *I am because we are, we are because I am.* 'The practice of expecting assistance from family members grew out of the understanding that the basis of family wealth derived from land and labor, both inherited from common ancestors.'⁷ Thus, here, one can discern the existence of 'a local "secular" structure of poor relief.'⁸ The assisted individuals at the long round turned to give back in the form of reciprocity to ensure that other needy people's concerns were met. There was the practice of mutual interdependency within the extended family.

The kings and chiefs, being the leaders of the time, collected dues in the form of farming produce in order to ensure redistribution to the needy families. Just like the ordained deacons in the early Danish-Norwegian community collected money and distributed among the poor according to their needs.⁹ Today, the same system of welfare assistance prevails in rural areas where more than two-thirds of the country's population resides.¹⁰

⁶ Jones Darkwa Amanor, "Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation", *Cyberjournal For Pentecostal – Charismatic Research* 13. <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj13/amanor.pdf> (December 1, 2011).

⁷ "Ghana-SOCIAL WELFARE".

http://www.mongabay.com/history/ghana/ghana-social_welfare.html

(December 1, 2011).

⁸ Aud V. Tønnessen (2011). "Christian Social Work in an Age of Crisis and Reform: The Case of Norway", p. 1.

⁹ Aud V. Tønnessen (2011), p. 1.

¹⁰ "Ghana-SOCIAL WELFARE".

Post-Colonial Welfare Activities

After independence in 1957, the government of Ghana decided to take over, in a broader sense, the national social security system in order to provide assistance to pensioners and the old people in the society. This system went into effect in 1965, and later, the 'legislation was passed in 1970 to convert the system into a pension plan to provide for sickness, maternity, and work-related injury benefits.'¹¹ The government welfare programs were brought under the responsibility of the Department of social Welfare, a wing under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (now the Ministry of Mobilization and Social Welfare).

Notwithstanding government welfare, the program catered for individuals who were employed in the economy sector with no benefit for those in the private sector, still with about two-thirds of the national population residing in the rural sector. And so as 'the national economy was reformed, the Workers' Compensation Act of 1986 was passed to guarantee wages to workers in the private sector while they were undergoing treatment for work-related injuries.'¹²

In rural areas, individuals continue to turn to members of the extended family for financial aid and guidance, and the family is expected to provide for the welfare of every member. In villages, towns, and cities, this mutual assistance system operates within the larger kinship units of lineage and clan. In large urban areas, religious, social, and professionally based mutual assistance groups have become popular as a way to address professional and urban problems beyond the scope of the traditional kinship social security system. This is where the church comes in to aid the government to provide welfare for the well-being of the people.

Orthodox Christian Welfare Activities

Indeed Christian mission in Ghana, since the colonial days, has focused,

¹¹ "Ghana-SOCIAL WELFARE"..

¹² "Ghana-SOCIAL WELFARE"..

to a large extent, not only on the spiritual growth of the people, but also immensely on the socio-economic and physical or health aspects of their lives. The church in Ghana (that is, both Catholic¹³ and Protestants) has carried out immense projects to improve the quality life of the people. Some of these projects include the building of health centers, vocational and educational training centers, teachers' training colleges, provision of good water and building orphanages. Paul Gifford recounts the significance of the mainline churches in the following words:

The mainline churches have been of considerable significance in building the modern nation, particularly through their schools, to an extent probably unequalled in Africa. The schools-Mfantsipim, Adisadel, St Augustine's, Prempeh, with the government-founded but very Christian Achimota ... have created Ghana's élite since the nineteenth century... The general cultural impact of Christianity is incalculable.¹⁴

These immense and undeniable contributions to the society have created great religious space for the mainline or orthodox churches in Ghana. The question then is what has the new Christian religion got to offer in terms of the improvement of the well-being of the people?

Ghana's New Christianity and Welfare Activities

The phrase *Ghana's New Christianity* was used by Paul Gifford as the title of his book to describe a group of Pentecostal churches who, generally, prefer to be referred to as “charismatic” because they are not the traditional Pentecostal denominations that have been in Ghana for the past seventy years.¹⁵ Ghana population statistics shows that the latter, as well as Pentecostalism in general, represents the fastest growing

¹³ Alfred Koduah (2004). *Christianity in Ghana Today*, pp. 61 – 63, 281 – 296.

¹⁴ Paul Gifford (2004). *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*. London: Hurst & Company, p. 20

¹⁵ Paul Gifford (2004), p. vii.

Christian denomination in the country. The total number of Christians, according to the 2000 census, is 68.8% (Pentecostal / Charismatic 24.1%, Protestant 18.6%, Catholic 15%, and others 11%).¹⁶ The statistics changes significantly in the 2010 census with the total number of Christians increased to 71.2% (Pentecostal / Charismatic 28.3%, Protestant 18.4%, Catholic 13.1%, and others 11.4%).¹⁷ The statistics have actually attracted theological scholars' attention and the question of their significance in the society is much raised and debated. Indeed, the significant increase in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity leaves us with no choice the need for scholarly assessment of their socio-economic importance in the society.

Indeed, initially, the new Christianity was not conscious of the development of the socio-economic aspect of the adherents and rather laid much emphasis on the 'spiritual' thereby concentrating on exorcisms. Alfred Koduah underscores the fact that 'the Pentecostals initially failed to get involved in any social activities and theological training.'¹⁸ Today, there is a paradigm shift towards the promotion of welfare and the good life of the people by the new churches especially when there is marginalization in the country and the state remain helpless due inadequate social welfare resources. In this shift, they placed much emphasis on the importance of work, education and support for the needy and the marginalized.

In his research, Paul Gifford noted, for example, that the new churches (particularly the leader of the International Central Gospel Church, IGCC, Mensa Otobil) began series of motivational teachings on work as

¹⁶ "Ghana-SOCIAL WELFARE".

http://www.mongabay.com/history/ghana/ghana-social_welfare.html

(December 1, 2011).

¹⁷ See Ghana Statistical Service (May, 2012). *2010 Population & Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results*. Table 16: Population by sex, religious affiliation and region, p.40 - Census2010_Summary_report_of_final-results.pdf -Adobe Reader (Assessed on February 28, 2015, at 9.20am).

¹⁸ Alfred Koduah (2004), p. 55.

part of their religious vision. He expresses about them in the following:

He argued that God revealed himself as a creating God, a “God who works, a working God, not a lazy God. The principle of work is the most important principle by which man also manifests what is inside him. A person's attitude to work will determine how good their lives will be.”¹⁹

Also, as in supporting the needy in the Ghanaian society, the IGCC also have Central Aid which is committed to develop people and the communities they live in towards an overall improved living standards.²⁰ The church also has projects that support orphanages, schools and owns one of the fastest growing private universities in Ghana.

Another non-governmental welfare group under Ghana's New Christianity is the All Nations International Development Agency (ANIDA) which is a missionary and development wing of the All Nations Full Gospel Churches International. It is, indeed, the church's vehicle for demonstrating love and compassion to a needy world. ANIDA is a Canadian registered charity in the North America and also a registered non-governmental organization in Ghana, West Africa.²¹ Indeed, ANIDA is a multi-faceted Christian organization dedicated to serving individuals, families and communities confronted with poverty and economic distress.²²

ANIDA has established Women Development Centre (WDC) to respond to the need of about 58% of women living with HIV/AIDS in sub-

¹⁹ Paul Gifford (2004), p. 141.

²⁰ ICGC Projects Webpage:

<http://www.centralgospel.com/?root=news&cid=3&PHPSESSID=8160ea454e53425c20b3a28c91b83de9> (December 2, 2011).

²¹ Kwabena Vome's Project Work, 'The Role of ANIDA in community Development in Ghana', Long Essay Presented to Department of Business Administration, All Nations University College (April 2006), p. 1.

²² Excerpt from ANIDA hand-bills.

Saharan Africa particularly between the ages 15 – 49; women hold less advantaged economic, social and cultural positions in society; women experience gender inequality in the home, workplace and educational system; women are disproportionately affected by sexual and physical violence; there is a rise in female-headed households, with many living below the poverty line; and women lack access to education due to gender discrimination, domestic demands, traditional practices, safety concerns and learning environments at school.²³

The WDC was established to support the full participation of women and girls in every aspect of society through training and educational programs, including HIV/AIDS awareness, thereby effectively addressing gender inequality; and empowering women.²⁴ The Centre offers tuition-free education to women in the community. Funds are usually solicited from concerned individuals around the globe to run the Centre.²⁵

The discourse so far clearly demonstrates that Ghana's social welfare, like some other European countries, is inadequately determined by the government whose effort is able to cater for mostly the working class. Due to lack of funds, the welfare activities are limited to the privileged social class of the country. There is also the problem of nepotism and tribalism associated with redistribution of the social welfare. And just like the case of the role of the Catholic Church in welfare in France, 'religious bodies have no direct involvement in the public domain, which remains the responsibility of the state. They do, however, play an important part within the voluntary sector'.²⁶ The following seeks to discuss vividly the role of the contemporary church in promoting welfare

²³ Excerpt from ANIDA hand-bills.

²⁴ Excerpt from ANIDA hand-bills.

²⁵ Excerpt from ANIDA hand-bills.

²⁶ Corinne Valasik (2010). "Church-State Relations in France in the Field of Welfare: A Hidden Complementarity". Anders Bäckström and Grace Davie (eds), *Welfare and Religion in 21st Century Europe: Volume 1, Configuring the Connections*. England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, p. 135.

and well-being of the community.

Multi-Dimensional Welfare Services

In an attempt to define welfare, Bäckström and Davies note that almost 'all commentators agree that welfare begins with the basics: medical care at the point of need and education for all.¹²⁷ And that there are three aspects of welfare, namely, “having” which has to do with an economic or material side; “being” is 'welfare connected with skills, profession or identity'; and “loving” is 'welfare as something human and qualitative.'¹²⁸ Valasik points out the ambiguities in what entails in welfare and paradoxically, in the context of France, expresses that 'the concept of welfare becomes clearer when it is linked to the role of voluntary organizations and the Catholic: welfare then becomes charity, helping people in need.¹²⁹ Thus, welfare in Ghana can be seen in terms of the state and the church, separately, offering their moral, material, and financial support to the needy people so as to foster the well-being of the community. In this paper, we shall concentrate on two main areas of welfare, namely, education and family.

Much as the state has the sector that is responsible for social welfare, as stated earlier, responding to the welfare needs of the people has been a voluntary responsibility of the church as well. Welfare system in Ghana is in consonance with that of Britain possibly because they colonized the country. It was the then British government who implemented welfare systems which could be suitable for the advancement of their policies and business, particularly, the educational tool. According to Lé Mon, the underlying structure in Britain 'is a philosophy welfare where social assistance is considered to be a favour rather than an entitlement.'¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Anders Bäckström and Davie (2010) (eds), p. 8.

¹²⁸ Anders Bäckström and Davie (2010) (eds), p. 8.

¹²⁹ Corinne Valasik (2010), pp. 140 – 141.

¹³⁰ Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon (2010). "The 'In-Between' Church: Church and Welfare in Darlington", Anders Bäckström and Grace Davie (eds), *Welfare and Religion in 21st Century Europe: Volume 1, Configuring the Connections*. England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, p. 116.

Ghana's educational history dates back to 1592. Over the centuries education has had different goals, from spreading the Gospel to creating an elite group to run the colony.³¹ Educational system in Ghana has gone several phases, namely, the Castle schools, Mission Schools, the First Education Ordinance, the Accelerated Educational Plan, and the Post-Independence Educational Development.³² The Castle Schools or colonial schools were the schools which took place within the castles with aim of training the young people within the communities for the purpose of inculcating good character and good health and also to give them adequate knowledge of their history, beliefs and culture, thus enabling them to participate fully in social life.³³

The Mission Schools followed the Castle Schools with the arrival of the early Christian Missionary Agencies in the country, namely, the Wesleyan and Basel Missionaries. In the 1830s and 1850s, the latter established schools in the various towns along the coast of the Gold Coast and others few miles away from the coast. The purpose of the Mission Schools was to enable them to spread the Christian faith effectively among the indigenes since the missionaries had difficulties in the language. This went on until the first education ordinance was passed in 1852 to provide for a better education of the inhabitants of Her Majesty's forts and settlements on the Gold Coast.³⁴ The ordinance could not thrive successfully due to the refusal of the people to bear the cost of education through the Poll Tax.³⁵ In 1882, another ordinance was passed which divided the educational system into two: Government and

³¹ "A Brief History of Ghanaian Educational System": http://www.tobeworldwide.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=4 (December 6, 2011).

³² Joe Kingsley Eyiah (2004), "Brief History of State-Organized Education in Ghana", *GhanaWeb*, March 27, 2004: <http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=54812>, (December 6, 2011).

³³ Joe Kingsley Eyiah (2004).

³⁴ Joe Kingsley Eyiah (2004).

³⁵ Joe Kingsley Eyiah (2004).

Assisted Schools. The assisted schools were run by non-government bodies.³⁶ From this point onwards, the church had lost total control over education to the government or the state. Why?

The reason for the lost of the church's grip over education in Ghana in both colonial and post-independence eras is worth noting. Secularization as well as religious pluralism's advocates questioned the dominant role of the church in education. The situation can be likened to the Nordic pattern of church-state where as education was progressively secularized, the National Church progressive lost their influence.³⁷ Morgan is right to have observed that in 'many countries, conflicts between secular and religious forces-and/or between competing religious groups-crystallized around the development of mass education systems in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.'³⁸ Today, in attempting to regain her foothold in education, most denominational churches in Ghana own private educational institutions with virtually no state aid in their activities. There is actually influx of private universities owned by these churches and which are seen to be in competition with state-owned ones. There is a sharp contrast between the state schools and the religious based ones.

Another area of welfare worth noting is the family and the issue of gender equality. Unlike in the Scandinavian countries where pioneers in the development of family laws assigned equal status to men and women,³⁹ the Ghanaian family policy is more patriarchal in the sense that men are considered the “heads” of the family as well as the bread winners. For example, in cases of divorce in the marriage, the men are still held responsible for the upkeep of the children till they are old. This concept of headship of men in the family is reflected in the workforce that is

³⁷ Kimberly J. Morgan (2009). “The Religious Foundations of Work-Family Policies in Western Europe”, Kees van Kersbergen and Philip Manow, *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

³⁸ Kimberly J. Morgan (2009), p. 67.

³⁹ Kimberly J. Morgan (2009), p. 67.

marked by male dominance and women are mostly left to care for the children at home. Again, the situation in Ghana similar to the Norwegian past where, according Tønnessen: 'Philanthropy was deeply rooted in middle class perspectives on family where the norm was that the father carried the economic responsibility of the whole family and the mother the moral responsibility as well as being the caretaker of family.'⁴⁰

Due to long standing patriarchal history, Ghana is currently grappling with issues of gender inequalities, particularly, because the cultural rootedness of the situation. Ghana has had a history where more male children were encouraged to go to school and the female counter parts were made to stay at home to help their mothers in the kitchen and the up-bringing of the little ones until one of Ghana's pioneer scholars campaigned against that and encouraged the girl child education. 'Dr. Aggrey campaigned with great commitment for women's education. He believed that educating a man was to educate an individual, while educating a woman had a far greater effect on family and society.'⁴¹ Unlike Finland where there is gender equality: first women in Europe to receive the universal and equal franchise; 'the first women in the world to become eligible for parliamentary elections'; the women are highly educated, 'and their participation in the workforce is one of the highest in the world',⁴² the Ghanaian situation calls for salvage. There are, however, a number voluntary non-governmental bodies that are mostly church and faith-based calling on the government to aid salvage the situation.

Thus, Ghana's welfare system can be placed under Morgan's accomodationist model where the religious forces emerge preeminent and will have their interests accommodated.⁴³ The situation appears to be

⁴⁰ Aud V. Tønnessen (2011), p. 14.

⁴¹ Joe Kingsley Eyiah (2004).

⁴² Anne Birgitta Pessi (2010). "The Church as a Place of Encounter: Community and the Good Life in Finland", Anders Bäckström and Grace Davie (eds), *Welfare and Religion in 21st Century Europe: Volume 1, Configuring the Connections*. England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, p. 78.

⁴³ Kimberly J. Morgan (2009), p. 57.

more of competition within the voluntary section where we have various Christian non-governmental organizations pursuing several welfare activities and at the same time bidding for state's assistance.

Conclusion

The concept of social welfare and promotion of the well-being of the community, though culturally-based, is much more multi-dimensional in its praxis – religion, state and the family. The family welfare is culturally rooted and is still being practiced, but religion, particularly, the church and the state welfare systems, have had various phases as noted above. No one particularly is charged with the responsibility of the various welfare activities and the voluntary groups usually move into action whenever and wherever the need arise in the country. The church, particularly, the new denominations are responding rapidly to the present welfare needs in the areas of education, family, and other poor reliefs. Religion and welfare are inseparable; indeed, the evidential significance of religion is the demonstration of welfare that puts a smile on the faces of the suffering and the marginalized. This has been a joint responsibility of the state, church, and the family.

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A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF WESTERN PERCEPTION OF AFRICANS' RELIGIOSITY: 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES.

ERNEST NYARKO¹

Abstract

The Western missionary enterprise in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with all its zeal had a very negative assessment of Africa and African religions. The missionaries saw a great disparity between African religion and the Christian faith. Hence did not seek to make any creative engagement of the Christian faith with the African cultures. However, Christian scholarship in African Christianity reveals that primal religion offers new vistas for the Christian faith, not only in Africa, but, throughout the world. This article therefore, examines what Africa and its religion meant to the Western missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the wrong description of African religion by reviewing the report of the Commission IV at Edinburgh 1910. The paper critically assesses whether the negative image the Western missionaries painted of Africa, its religion and culture was really the case. Nevertheless, some positive contributions made on the African continent by the missionary enterprise will not be overlooked.

If there is only a minimal 'paradigm shift' as we pass from the spiritual universe of primal religions into the spiritual

¹ ERNEST NYARKO holds a Master of Theology in African Christianity from Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture. He is currently a PhD candidate in Biblical Studies (New Testament option) at Akrofi-Christaller Institute.

environment of the Christian faith (this is what we've been waiting for'), then one would want to pursue the matter by asking how the primal imagination might bring its own peculiar gifts to the shaping of Christian affirmation. This issue becomes even more pressing if Christian thought has hitherto been moulded by a worldview from which the living forces of the primal imagination seem to have been expelled.²

Introduction: Defining African Primal Religion

Defining the term primal can be a very difficult thing to do because the term is so diverse and so widespread in its expression. Primal brings to mind various descriptions like primitive, pagan, barbaric, crude, heathen, and animism and many others that were used by Western Christian missionaries to describe non-Western religions. In the course "Christian Faith and Primal Religions of the World with Special Reference to Africa" Professor Gillian M. Bediako defined term primal in this way: "Primal is a positive term that denotes anteriority. Primal thus describes universal, basic elements of human understanding of the Transcendent realm in relation to humanity, essential and valid religious insights that may be built upon or suppressed, but which cannot be superseded."³

The definition suggests that primal is universal since it is anterior and serves as the substructure of all religion. The 'peculiar features'⁴ the

² Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press and Orbis Books, 1995), p. 96.

³ Professor Gillian Mary Bediako, "Christian Faith and Primal Religions of the World, with Special Reference to Africa," class handout notes distributed on September 6, 2011.

⁴ Harold Turner in his attempt to contribute to the general understanding of primal religions as authentically religious, brought forward a six-feature framework that defines all primal religions of Africa and the world. These are,

primal has to offer are available to all peoples of all languages and religions. So the features are not peculiar because they are strange or foreign, but rather unique and original. The definition shows that the primal is in tune with something fundamental about what it means to be human, harkening back to creation. The positive nature of “primal” reverses the misperceptions created by missionary communication, and opens up a whole new realm of possibilities as now the African past and present can be creatively engaged. African primal religion, therefore, refers to the fundamental indigenous religious traditions of African people. Harold Turner, who has played a key role in promoting the use of the term in Britain has defined primal religions as the “most basic or fundamental religious forms in the overall history of mankind and that they have preceded and contributed to the other great religious systems.”⁵ Andrew F. Walls also believes that primal religions of people show their historical anteriority and their basic, elemental status in human experience.⁶ Thus, primal religions are never superseded, they are prior to all other religious traditions and underlie them all. African primal religion is used synonymous for African traditional religion, however, both terms are used interchangeably in this essay.

Africa in Missionary Thinking

Africa: The Dark Continent with no Religion

The nineteenth century saw a wide spread of Christianity across the Americas, Australasia, and the Africa continent. Kenneth Latourette uses the expression “Great Century” to refer to this period. He sees the period

kingship in nature, human weakness, man is not alone, relations with transcendent powers, man's afterlife, and the physical as sacramental of the spiritual. See Harold Turner, “The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,” in Victor C. Hayes (ed), *Australian Essays in World Religions* (Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1977), p. 30-32.

⁵ Turner, “The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,” p. 28

⁶ Andrew F. Walls, “Primal Religious Traditions in Today's World” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Translation of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 120-121.

between 1800 and 1914 as a period of massive missionary advance.⁷ Prior to this period, little was known about Africa by the world. Africa had been imaged negatively as “the dark continent” by the Western Europeans during their explorations of the African interior in the fifteenth century. The missionaries upon their arrival considered Africa as barbaric and a continent with no philosophy and religion, and thus everything that came from the land was dark. For example, a first-time visitor to Africa describes the prevailing beliefs among Western Europeans as follows:

As we steamed into the estuary of Sierra Leone on November 18th [1889], we found Africa exactly as books of travel had led us to anticipate a land of excessive heat, lofty palm-trees, gigantic baobabs, and naked savages. At five o'clock we dropped anchor at Free Town, called, on account of its deadly fevers, the 'white man's grave.' Immediately, our vessel was surrounded by boats filled with men and women, shouting, jabbering, laughing, quarrelling, and even fighting. ... Without exception it was the most confusedly excited and noisy lot of humanity I have ever seen.⁸

Somewhere in the eighteenth century, the Western European society formulated a theory known as “The Great Chain of Being” which provided the rationale for social inequality for Christians, deists and atheists alike. This “Great Chain of Being” was a decisive factor of

⁷ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (vol. v, *The Great Century in the Americas, Australasia, and Africa, AD 1800-1914*, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1943), p. 1.

⁸ William Harvey Brown, *On the South African Frontier: The Adventures and Observations of an American in Mashonaland and Matabeleland* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970); London: Sampson Low, Marstan & Co., 1899, p. 3. In Jones Jim, *Europe and Africa in the 19th Century*, (copyright 2010). Accessed on 29th August, 2011, from <http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/19thcent.htm>.

European outlook or worldview of primitive peoples. This conception which underlines the principles of plenitude, continuity and degradation had their widest diffusion and acceptance in the eighteenth century.⁹

In this classification,¹⁰ “the negro” was ranked last following “white,” “red,” and “yellow.” Thus, African peoples were considered as the worst among the least of all races, culture and religions. African primal religion was seen as animism, hence difficult for the missionaries to penetrate since it had neither literature nor scholars to expound its mysteries to the European mind.¹¹ In brief, African primal religion was seen to have no preparation for the gospel. In his book, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, Adrian Hastings, defines missionaries' attitude towards Africa as follows:

In fact neither in the nineteenth nor in earlier centuries did missionaries give much thought in advance as to what they would find in Africa. What struck them, undoubtedly,

⁹ Gillian M. Bediako, *Primal Religion and the Bible: William Robertson Smith and his Heritage* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 49, 51.

¹⁰ The word 'Negro' is used in the English-speaking world to refer to a person of black ancestry or appearance, whether of African descent or not, prior to the shift in the lexicon of American and worldwide classification of race and ethnicity in the late 1960s. The word 'negro' has its origin in Latin and is taken from the word 'niger' or 'nigr'. Niger or nigr means black. Later, it was taken by the Portuguese to mean 'black' or 'Black person'. Then, it was adapted by Spanish. The word Negro is used to mean a Black person. A member of a Negroid race is also called a Negro. The people of Negroid race inhabit the sub-Saharan Africa. Today, this word is not in technical use. This use of the word is often considered offensive. Negroes is the plural for 'negro'. Negro can be used as an adjective. It is used to describe the person who belongs to the Negro race of the sub-Saharan Africa. Anything that relates to this race or the people is referred to as 'negro.' Accessed on 13th July 2011 from <http://www.blurtit.com/q220152.html>.

¹¹ Kwame Bediako, “Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions,” in Samuel Vinay, and Chris Sugden, *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World: Evangelical Christologies from the contexts of powerless and religious pluralism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 85.

was the darkness of the continent: its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade. Evangelization was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible the better to encourage missionary zeal at home.¹²

What Hastings means here is that, the missionaries did not consider African preconceptions and beliefs before penetrating through them with Christianity. Missionaries of the Great Century were deeply influenced by the negative image painted of Africa and Africans and as Kwame Bediako recounts; “The missionaries on their arrival on the African continent defined Africa as dangerous place and its people as savages, uncivilized, and superstitious who had no religion and spirituality.”¹³ They hastily condemned the habits, customs and the beliefs of the Africans, and as Hastings puts it; “the missionaries treated anything pre-Christian in Africa as either harmful or at best valueless and considered the African once converted from paganism as a sort of *tabula rasa*,¹⁴ on which a wholly new religious psychology was somehow to be imprinted.”¹⁵ In simpler terms, Africans were considered to have no religion and no knowledge about God, hence the need to inculcate Christian ideas or philosophy into their minds. Africa was seen as a continent where God was actually hidden. Bénézet Bujo affirms that; “The Western missionaries did not find a paradise when they arrived in Africa.”¹⁶ They expected nothing good to come from Africa and its

¹² Adrain Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), p. 60.

¹³ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (UK, Regnum Publishers, 1999), p. 227.

¹⁴ The term in Latin equates to the English “Blank slate.” Blank slate is the epistemological thesis that individual human beings are born with no built-in mental content and that their knowledge comes from experience and perception.

¹⁵ Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, Maryknoll (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 37.

people. For them, there was nothing in Africa that can merit the name human and as G. Balander has noted; “The Africans were just cheap labor, tools which the colonizers could use to become rich.”¹⁷

African Primal Religion as Animism: A Look at Commission IV in Edinburgh 1910

The whole scale rejection of Africa and its religion was not just by a few missionaries. In the époque defining Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, the denigration of Africa's past was clearly elaborated. In the *Report of Commission IV, The Missionary Message in Relation to Non Christian Religions*, it was stated, “One of the most certain facts of the situation is that animistic heathenism is essentially weak through intellectual and moral bankruptcy and also through self mistrust.”¹⁸ In view of this negative assessment of “animism,” the conference believed it provided no foundation with which to build Christian mission on:

The lesson of the whole is that ethical teaching is almost entirely powerless until the religious nature is touched, that the earlier animistic view of the constitution of things *has to be broken and dislodged and supplanted* by the monotheistic view before power comes to live the new morality.¹⁹

African religion, so long presumed primitive. In 1866, an English anthropologist, E.B. Tylor, first used the term 'animism'²⁰ in his article

¹⁷ G., Balander, *The Sociology of Black Africa: Social Dynamics in Central Africa* (New York, 1970), p. 23, in Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, p. 39.

¹⁸ “Report of Commission IV, The Missionary Message in Relation to the Non-Christian Religions,” *World Missionary Conference 1910* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), p. 36.

¹⁹ “Report of Commission IV,” p. 36. My own emphasis is added in italics.

²⁰ Animism is derived from the latin anima which means breath, breath of life,

and later in his book, “Primitive Culture” (1871) to refer to religions that believed in the indwelling of matter by spirits.²¹ Tylor associated such religions with pre-literate societies with a simple technology.²² In other words, the term was used for societies that have maintained a simpler existence in closer contact with nature. The missionaries in the nineteenth century conceived African primal religion as animism. In the report of Commission IV, Herr Warneck defined animism as a form of paganism based on the worship of souls. Men, animals and plants are supposed to have souls; and their worship, as well as that of deceased spirits, especially ancestral spirits, is the essence of a religion which probably is a factor in all heathen religions.²³ Warneck implies that African primal religion is based on the worship of nature and spirits of departed ancestors with no focus on the Supreme Being (God). Warneck wrote that African primal religion is characterized with fear. He sees Africans as “animistic heathen,” who in the living forces of the gospel are not only in error but are slaves. Warneck sees Africa as not only dark in his vision of the world in which his religiousness is rooted, but even his own soul is a hostile power against which he must ever be on his guard.²⁴ In other words, religiousness in Africa according to the missionaries was limited to this world.

Again, the beliefs and observances of African primal religion were considered to be dictated by physical necessity alone. It is a physical salvation that is sought after—that their bodies may be delivered from the machination of the host of unseen world.²⁵ The notion was that African primal religion gives temporal relief in distress and material blessings. In other words, no spiritual blessings are expected from animism. It was for those who are considered of no value in the world. According to W.H.T.

and hence carries with it the idea of the soul or spirit. See John, Mbiti S, *African Religions and Philosophy* (2nd ed., Oxford: Heinemann, 1997), p.7.

²¹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 7.

²² Andrew Walls F. 'The Background to the Project and term 'Primal,' *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 12, no. 1 (June 2009): p. 1.

²³ “Report of Commission IV,” p. 6

²⁴ “Report of Commission IV,” p. 5, 8.

²⁵ “Report of Commission IV,” p. 8.

Gairdner, animism is the generic name for the religious beliefs of more or less backward or degraded people all over the world; a system the chief feature of which is a belief in the occult power of the souls of individuals, and their capability of continued existence after death; and in the similar power of other spirits, ranging from the spirit of plants or animals upward to those of powerful deities.²⁶

In a theory of religious evolution propounded in judging religion that rose through polytheism to monotheism, the argument and interpretation presented ranked African primal religion at the bottom of the scale,²⁷ condemning it as a religion far removed from realities, a religion which existed only in words but never practiced.²⁸ In line with this, G. Bediako has asserted that the missionaries saw African primal religion as “antithesis to Christian faith, as barbaric, crude, and lacking a sense of sin, as childish, immature and intellectually inadequate. It was considered to be materialistic, irrational and incapable of conceptual thinking, in contrast to the European idea of a rational Christianity, with abstract thought considered to be its highest manifestation. The primal religion was held to be naturalistic religion as against ethical religion.”²⁹ In one sense, African primal religion was thought to have a very low moral consciousness and stand on a low stage of human development, and intellectually was not prepared to accept the Christian faith. Warneck argues that;

Immoral as the Animist is, he does not feel his immorality as such. Not even the cannibal and scalp-hunter, who tortures his enemy in the most cruel manner, nor the

²⁶ Gairdner W.H.T., *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference*, London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910, p. 139

²⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 7.

²⁸ E. Amu, 'The Position of Christianity in Modern Africa,' *International Review of Missions*, October, 1940, pp. 477-478.

²⁹ Gillian, Bediako, M., 'Old Testament Religion as Primal Substructure of Christianity: Questions and Issues,' *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 12, No. 1, June, 2009, p. 4.

adulterer and thief, will admit that he is doing wrong.³⁰

This low moral consciousness and low intellectual state of the African people according to the missionaries were chief hindrances in the way of the acceptance of the Gospel.³¹ The social organization of animistic people was also seen as another hindrance to Christianity. Canon Dale wrote; “so closely interwoven with their social institutions are many of their superstitions and superstitious observances.”³² The average custom of the African community is the law for the individual. Loyalty to the society, and the desire to follow their fathers, are cardinal virtues of the Africans. This social life of the tribes in Africa fosters solidarity. The feeling of solidarity is a chief hindrance, since it makes the idea impossible for the individual that he should have to choose his standpoint when a new religion enters his life.³³ All these were hindrances to the spread of the Christian faith on the African continent.

The denigration of Africa's past had tremendous implications for the practice of mission in Africa. As Kwame Bediako said, since Africa represented a *tabula rasa* (empty slate) to write upon, “Africa was understood and interpreted, not in terms of Africa, but in terms of Europe, that is, of the European value-setting for the faith.”³⁴ And so when Western missionaries came they came with a “prefabricated theology” that produced an African church that, has on her hands communities of believers who, by and large, live ambivalent spiritual lives.”³⁵ Kwame Bediako and Andrew Walls, demonstrated how this denigration of the African past led to a crisis of identity for African Christians.³⁶ Walls stated the obvious; if one does not know his past he

³⁰ “Report of Commission IV,” p. 13.

³¹ “Report of Commission IV,” p. 13, 14.

³² “Report of Commission IV,” p. 17.

³³ “Report of Commission IV,” p. 16.

³⁴ Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 235.

³⁵ C. G Baeta (edt), Christianity in Tropical Africa) p. 433, Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 269.

³⁶ African scholars like Ali Mazrui and Ngugi wa Thiongo articulated how the

does not know who he is.³⁷ But this crisis was not merely academic but existential. It played out and continues to play out in the lives of millions of African Christians today. John V. Taylor intuited the nature of this crisis. He wrote, “Such Christianity becomes something to be put on at certain times and in particular circumstances and has nothing to do with other areas of life.”³⁸

Taylor sensed that whole areas of African life experience were untouched by the Gospel missionaries communicated. But, the West also denigrated its own primal past. Max Weber as early as 1917 noted the process of “disenchantment” in the West. In a lecture he said:

With the progress of science and technology, man has stopped believing in magical powers, in spirits and demons, he has lost his sense of prophecy and above all, his sense of the sacred. Reality has become dreary, flat, utilitarian, leaving a great void in the souls of men which they seek to fill by furious activity and through various devices and substitutes.³⁹

What Weber refers to as a process of rationalization also led to a neglect of the primal. The removal of spirituality from public life has led to a

imposition of European languages, obliterated the African memory thus contributing to the loss of identity.

³⁷ Andrew F. Walls, “Africa and Christian Identity.” *Mission Focus* 6. no. 7 (November 1978): p. 13, as found in Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 238. While this is obvious it did not appear obvious to missionaries!

³⁸ John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision; Christian Presence Amid African Religion* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1963), p. 12.

³⁹ Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber* (New York: 1969), p. 24 as found in James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1993), p. 407. The fact that Weber described the West's increasing preoccupation with technological efficiency as an 'iron cage' suggests he was not happy with this direction. The airless “iron cage” would suffocate the human spirit. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven; The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty First Century* (London: Cassel, 1996), p. 226.

sense of spiritual unease and alienation in the West. So in some sense, the crisis of identity that befell Africa also occurs in the West as the primal religiosity was lost.⁴⁰ There is hope then that a rediscovery of the primal past in the West may also bring about the spiritual renewal the West is in such dire need of.

A Critique of the Western Perception

Denigration of African Religion, Culture and Philosophy

As noted earlier, the Western missionaries who came to Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century considered African primal religion as having no religious content, hence wrongly described it as animism, pagan, barbaric and in contrast to the Christian faith. This predominant view hindered the Western missionaries from giving reverence to the indigenous African culture and religion. However, a critical examination through some scholarly works by African theologians, have shown that African primal religion and African culture is not as crude as the missionaries thought.

The sense of inadequate understanding on the part of the missionaries could be traced to the general attitude of moral and cultural superiority that characterized the worldview of non-Western continents. The missionaries came and threatened Africans to deny or give up their religious values and culture and embrace their Western ethnocentric beliefs, ideas and customs, a past which is not the past of the the Africans.

⁴⁰ As we have learned, though the primal may be lost, it can never be obliterated. American sociologist Peter Berger for example notes that “signals of transcendence” remain implicit in the West. Peter Berger, “Some Second thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1974) p. 129 as found in James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1993), p. 411 So there remains hope that an understanding of the primal might be renewed in the West, thus awakening the West from spiritual ennui.

James Baldwin, an Afro-American writer said; “The past is what makes the present coherent,” and the past “will remain horrible for exactly as long as we refuse to assess it honestly.”⁴¹

The Missionaries took no account of the African past because they saw no affinity between the Christian gospel and the African traditions hence did not support in developing or shaping the African cultural identity. The Western missionaries' attitude was to remove the civilization of the Africans and replace it with the Western civilization. In view of this, they did not have any creative engagement or deep and authentic dialogue with the African culture and religion. M.M. Thomas asserts that it was only later that they understood that the challenge was one of assimilation rather than substitution.⁴² Missionaries began to develop positive attitudes and made constructive affirmations about Africa, its religion and culture. In his article; “The value of the African's past,” Diedrich Westermann, a Westerner, stressed on the need to reassess and consider Africa, its religion, culture and philosophy in order to be able to understand and appreciate anything related to Africa. Westermann argues; “We do not take into account that the African has evolved a genius of his own. There is an African state of mind, an African view of things, an African material and mental culture.”⁴³ He believes that Africans have a past, attitude of mind, logic and perception about things. Hence, possesses very important qualities and if these qualities are sympathetically recognized and studied thoroughly, their missionary task in Africa will be much easier than trying to instill into Africans a past which isn't their past. Westermann argues that Africa's past is not to be

⁴¹ Obadina Tunde, “Slave Trade: A Root of Contemporary African Crisis,” accessed on 26th August, 2011 at 11:23 a.m. from <http://www.afbis.com/analysis/slave.htm>

⁴² M. M. Thomas, *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism: Collection of Essays and Talk* (Delhi and Tiruvalla: CSS and ISPCCK, 1996), p. 138,

⁴³ Diedrich Westermann, 'The Value of the African's Past,' *International Review of Missions*, Vol. XV, No. 59, (June 1926): p. 419.

obliterated but rather should be given a thoughtful consideration. Westermann holds that the African's racial individuality, his mental attitude, his heritage from the past, will forever be the true basis for the building of the African's future.⁴⁴

John Mbiti argues that Africans are notoriously religious. By this, he implies that Africans have a deep sense of spirituality. He adds: "Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament."⁴⁵ Mbiti continues to argue that "religion permeates into all departments of African life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it."⁴⁶ In light with this, G. Bediako says:

If we see traditional religions in this way, not as isolated entities unrelated to one another, but as a religious phenomenon of immense significance to Christian mission, then we are able to perceive the shared religious outlook and world view, the shared religious emphases that transcend the differences, and we shall be in a position to explore this special relationship with Christian faith, which is unique also in terms of the quality of interaction.⁴⁷

Concisely, religion filters through all spheres of African people and the understanding of African religion as unique in its own entity will help facilitate a fruitful dialogue between the Christian faith and the African

⁴⁴ Westermann, *The Value of the African's Past*, p. 419.

⁴⁵ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 1

⁴⁷ Gillian Bediako, "Introduction to Christian Faith and Primal Religions of the World, with Special Reference to Africa," Lecture Notes, Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, 6th September, 2011.

traditions, thereby giving Christianity an African imprint and character and to uphold the uniqueness and universality of Christianity.⁴⁸

Ephraim Amu in his assessment of the Western missionary approach to the presentation of the gospel to the indigenous Africans wrote in his article; “The Position of Christianity in modern Africa:”

It is generally accepted, and rightly too, that the African is naturally religious. There are deep truths underlying our indigenous religions, truths which may not be equal in weight to Christian truths, but which are dim representations of the great Christian truths. Let these truths be made use of in teaching the greater truths to the Africans. The very religious Athenians believed that there was a God they did not know, and they built an altar to Him, and they were right. St. Paul found no better language in which to refer to the God he was preaching than in the Athenians' own words on the altar: 'To the unknown God.' If Christianity were offered us by such methods as would make it intelligible to us, I believe the result would be amazing.⁴⁹

What Amu seeks to convey here is that Africans are very religious people with deep and inspirational truths, but yet those truths cannot be equally ranked with the Christian truths which the missionaries could have used as a *preparatio evangelica* to present the truth of the Christian gospel. The missionaries disregarded or took no account of the indigenous beliefs and customs of Africa. Westermann in his reasoning again about Africa's religiosity refuted the notion that Africans have no religion. He

⁴⁸ John Mbiti, “The Growing Respectability of African Traditional Religion,” *Lutheran World*, Geneva, vol. xix, No. 1 (1972): p.57.

⁴⁹ Ephraim Amu, “The Position of Christianity in Modern Africa” in *The International Review of Missions*, vol. xxix, No. 116 (October 1940), p. 479.

argues that even the basis of clan or family life in Africa is religion. He further said:

The African is not shaken by doubts in his religious beliefs, nor is his attitude one of indifference. His beliefs are to him objective and unquestionable truths. But they are more than objective. Religion is to him strength and comfort in daily life and work. At every step he takes, in every action he undertakes, he is supported by powers not his own, but at his disposal. He experiences the reality of religion... Religion is to the African the staff on which he leans in his wandering through life, and, however frail, he would be utterly lost without it... His Religion is an inexhaustible source of strength against the numerous evils that threaten his existence and well-being... His religion does not give him helpful or strong impulses of life and action, but it is to him helpful and protective.⁵⁰

Africa's religiosity is demonstrated in its community and corporateness. The basis of clan or family life in Africa is religion. Community life is religious in Africa. Asare Opoku observes that religion is at the root of African culture and is the determining principle of African life. So he argues that in traditional Africa, religion is life and life is religion.⁵¹ In other words, religion gives meaning and significance to Africans' lives. Being part of the society is practicing their religion and not doing so is to be cut off from the kinship and roots. African religion and social life lay great emphasis on communal welfare, values, concerns and kinship.⁵² So the African community life could have served as the preparatory ground for the spread of the Christian faith, however, the missionaries saw it as not fit for their faith. Mbiti asserts that the Christian idea of the church

⁵⁰ Westermann, *The Value of the African's Past*, pp. 425, 426.

⁵¹ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), p. 1.

⁵² Jacob Olupona K., and Sulayman Nyang S., *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*, New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1993, p. 374.

has parallels with African traditional life in which kinship and the extended family play a central role.⁵³ So, the African community life can as well be compared to the Christian idea of the church.

While the Western missionaries see a discontinuity of African primal religion and the Christian gospel, some African theologians such as John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako and Bolaji Idowu among others see continuity between the Christian gospel and African primal religion and culture. African theologians see Christ as not belonging to one culture. Christ has revealed Himself to all human culture and therefore Christianity is not restricted to merely one cultural environment. They show that the Christian gospel must be relevant to every culture. Kwame Bediako clearly indicates that every culture or religious tradition has some glimmerings of the divine word and truth which was given by divine inspiration and represent a sufficient guide to the full knowledge of God.⁵⁴ This means that for the gospel to be effective and meaningful to a specific group of people there is the need to first recognize that God from ages past has never left Himself without a testimony (Acts 14:17) and therefore the Christian gospel must be built and presented on that basis. Mbiti believes that “The gospel and Christ are special gift of God to mankind, and function only when they are constantly mediated through the church to man in his cultural and civilizational context. He further elaborates that the gospel and Christ are gifts of grace.⁵⁵ The Western missionaries could have allowed the African culture, as Bediako put it, to pass through the scriptures so that it would be refined to fit what God demands from Christians.⁵⁶ In this way, it can be said that the Western missionaries did not base their evangelism in Africa on an intelligent in-depth grasp of the African setting.

I share the same opinion with the African theologians that Jesus Christ

⁵³ Mbiti, *Introduction to African religion*, p. 190.

⁵⁴ Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 195.

⁵⁵ Mbiti, “The Growing Respectability,” p. 58.

⁵⁶ Kwame Bediako, “Scriptures as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition,” *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 4 (June 2003): p. 2.

has come to fulfill and not to destroy African traditional religion. However, not everything in the African traditional religion can be helpful. Hence those things which are not helpful in the traditional religion should be pruned and those which are useful should be preserved for the enrichment of life. The Western missionaries failed to transmit the Christian gospel as a fulfillment of the African culture. According to G. Bediako, there are more creative ways of considering this relationship between Christian faith and primal religions that help Christians to integrate their religious past with their religious present.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is absurd to say that Africa has no religious content, culture and Philosophy. Harold Turner calls for a ban of the many words used to describe the African religion and culture like animism, heathen, darkness, superstitious, demonic, opposing to Christian faith and primitive or native.⁵⁸ I believe every religion is native to where it originated and therefore African traditional religion cannot only be criticized with those many words. Primal religion as Mbiti and other theologians assert has served as the *preparation evangelica*. Mbiti contends;

It was in fact African religion more than anything else, which laid down the foundation and prepared the ground for the eventual rapid accommodation of Christianity in Africa, and for the present rapid growth of the church in our continent. With African religiosity whatever its defects might be, Christianity would have taken much longer to be understood and accommodated by African peoples...⁵⁹

Precisely, African primal religion and world-view have prepared the

⁵⁷ Gillian Bediako, "Introduction to Christian Faith and Primal Religions of the World, with Special Reference to Africa," Lecture Notes, Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, 6th September, 2011. 9:00 am

⁵⁸ Harold Turner, "The Primal Religions of the World and their Study," in Victor C. Hayes (ed), *Australian Essays in World Religions*, Bedford Park: Adelaide, 1977, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Mbiti, 1973, sighted in Olupona, *Religious Plurality in Africa*, p. 374.

religious and spiritual foundation for Africans to listen to the teaching of the Bible, to reflect upon them and to convert to Christianity without feeling any spiritual loss. On the contrary, they have gained a new dimension in their religious experience.⁶⁰

Tabular Rasa

The Western missionaries also regarded Africans as having no idea about the Supreme Being and therefore considered all those who converted from paganism to Christianity as a sort of *tabular rasa* on which a whole new religious idea or philosophy was to be imprinted. In other words, the missionaries regarded Africans as untutored people who had no idea about God. They described Africans as having a blank or nothing in their mind about the Supreme Being. But the African mind is not a *tabular rasa* as the missionaries perceived. The Supreme Being is recognized and given a premier position or status in African religion. The heart of the African's religiosity is the belief in the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being of the African is identified with some attributes similar to those projected in the Christian religious understanding of the Supreme Being as the creator and sustainer of the universe. Bediako contends that missionary practice undervalued and ignored the sense of God and His activity as perceived in African tradition.⁶¹ The missionaries had a Western outlook and a sole motive of presenting a higher spirituality and civilization which they opposed to the indigenous Africans. Prior to the nineteenth century missionary enterprise, Christianity was already deeply rooted in the history of the African continent. Christianity was and is the way of the life of Africans. Christianity did not come to the African continent with the advent of the nineteenth century Western missionary enterprise. Africans had knowledge about the Supreme Being and practiced Christianity in its own way and according to its experience. Westermann squabbles that even though Africans worship

⁶⁰ Mbiti, *The Bible and Theology*, p. 7, in Kabiro wa Gatumu, "Using Primal Resources to Appropriate the Bible: A Paradigm shift for Biblical Hermeneutics?" *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 12, No. 1, June 2009.

⁶¹ Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 270.

ancestral spirit and demons, yet, the belief in a Supreme Being is found everywhere within Africa. He says that in Africa, God is seen as “ancestor and sky.”⁶² This to the African means that God is too far away to be influenced by human agencies. Africans for so long have regarded God as the ultimate cause of everything, the originator and representative of the world order. Westermann further states that African belief in God is evident by the names they ascribed to God, these names are consistent with the Christian idea, hence the Christian missionary can present himself as ambassador of the God the Africans know. The ancestor god and the sky god may both be helpful in explaining God as the Father in Heaven.⁶³

The continuity of God with the pre-Christian tradition into the Christian consciousness is so important for Idowu. Idowu in his assessment of African traditional religion observes that Africans are “a people who in all things are religious.”⁶⁴ Idowu believes that African religiosity is in their recognition of only one God, the Supreme, Universal God, one and the same God, the creator of all the ends of the earth. For Idowu, the missionaries hardly made any attempt to build on this African sense of God or interpret its fundamental significance, hence their failure. He argues that, there was no 'proper foundation' for integrating African past experience into present reality.⁶⁵ Idowu in his presentation of the topic “The Predicament of the Church” during the seventh International African Seminar organized by the International African Institute in Accra argues;

It was a serious mistake that the church took no account of

⁶² Westermann, *The Value of the African's Past*, p. 425.

⁶³ Westermann, *The Value of the African's Past*, p. 434.

⁶⁴ E. Bolaji Idowu, *Orita*, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1967, p.11, in Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 1

⁶⁵ E. Bolaji, Idowu, “The Study of Religion, with special reference to African Traditional Religion,” *Orita*, vol. 1, no. 1, June, 1957, p. 12. In Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 270.

the indigenous beliefs and customs of Africa when she began her work of evangelism. It is now obvious that by a misguided purpose, a completely new God who had nothing to do with the past of Africa was introduced to her peoples. Thus there was no proper foundation laid for the Gospel message in the hearts of the people and no bridge built between the old and the new; the church has in consequence been speaking to Africans in strange tongues because there was no adequate communication. In consequence, the church has on her hands communities of believers who, by and large, live ambivalent spiritual lives.⁶⁶

God is no stranger to African peoples, and in traditional life there are no atheists. The concept of God or the idea about God is found in all African societies. Africa's knowledge about the existence of God is expressed orally through proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. Mbiti states that; "African soil is rich enough to have germinated its own original religious perception."⁶⁷ Mbiti believes that African religiosity and knowledge of God is also demonstrated in African prayers. He says that praying has always been the core of African religion. According to him, African prayers are addressed to the spiritual realities, of which African peoples are very much aware. These realities include God, who is the supreme over all. He points out that, though there are numerous spiritual realities, however, God always emerges as the clearest and most concrete spiritual reality.⁶⁸ In African prayers, God is seen as creator, sustainer, provider, ruler and

⁶⁶ Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 269.

⁶⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ According to Mbiti, 'The spirit' is the second category of spiritual realities, followed by divinities or national heroes to whom prayers are very occasionally addressed or whose names are mentioned in prayers. For instance in Ghana we mostly hear 'osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah' and other names of heroes in traditional prayers during public gatherings by traditionalist seeking for their blessings upon the nation Ghana.

Father, Mother or Parent. He argues that “a study of these African prayers takes us to the core of African spirituality, and adds a valuable dimension to our understanding of African religion.”⁶⁹ In other words, one can have a sense of how spiritual Africans are through the African prayers. What Mbiti again notes is that if the Western missionaries had studied and analyzed theologically African prayers to understand that Africans worship God in their own context, they wouldn't have described Africa's as religious illiterate. In respect to this, it can be said that Africans knew God and interacted with Him through their prayers, hence were fully prepared to embrace Christianity. However, the missionaries' inability to communicate the gospel in the context of African community life made them to see Africa as *tabula rasa* and not prepared for the Christian faith. As Mbiti asserts, Christianity must be contextualized, it must deepen its roots in the context of our corporate community life, the soil where the Gospel is being planted. From the above, it is wrong to think that Africans were introduced to God by the Western missionaries. Africans had heard of God, described God most eloquently, and maintained toward God proper attitudes of reverence, worship, and sacrifice. David Livingstone from his experiential Knowledge recounts; “there is no necessity for beginning to tell even the most degraded of these people of the existence of a God, or of a future state, the facts being universally admitted.”⁷¹

Low Moral Consciousness and Low Intellectual State

Another point of disagreement is the negative image that Africans have

⁶⁹ John S. Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1975), p. 1-21.

⁷⁰ John Mbiti, *The Ways and Means of Communicating the Gospel*, In C.G., Baëta, *Christianity in Tropical Africa: Studies presented and discussed at the seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 337.

⁷¹ David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in Central Africa*, London: John Murray, pp. 1857, 1858 in Lamin Sanneh, *Translating The Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 159.

no awareness or Knowledge in the moral sphere. Conscience can be seen as the outgrowth or development of the a priori or instinctual knowledge of good and evil. This implies that, sense of guilt is a natural instinct which results from man's a priori moral sense of good and evil. We see this moral sense of sin from Adam and Eve who after eating the forbidden fruit, became conscious of their sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:6, 17). This means that Man is always able to differentiate between good and evil of which Africans are of no exception. Every society has its ethical system of ideas and beliefs about what is right and wrong, good or bad. African societies as part of human communities also have ethical values, principles and rules that guide the social and moral behavior of its people. If Africans have a culture, religion and spirituality, then they have their ethical values that steer the affairs of their lives, hence, must have a sense of sin or their own moral values. Asare Opoku contends that morality originates from religious considerations; hence the two cannot be separated from each other.⁷² Rudolf Otto in his book; "The Idea of the Holy," identifies 'holy' as the fundamental element in religion.⁷³ He further elucidates how religion and morality are intimately connected. To him 'Holiness,' or 'Sanctity', are words which are charged with ethical import. He states that the meaning of these words to the large extent is moral. He quotes; "The better the character of deity and the divine becomes known, the more intimately it absorbs within itself all the highest moral and rational attributes."⁷⁴ All human beings are rational; so what Otto therefore means is that moral and rational are essential elements of every religion, of which African religion is no exception. In support of this, Laurenti Magesa has affirmed that morality or ethics is the very nature of religion.⁷⁵ Clifford Geertz, for example, has described it as intimately connected to religious belief and as the very expression of the religious belief. As he puts it, "Religion is never merely

⁷² Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 152.

⁷³ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: an inquiry into the non-relational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1924), p. 5.

⁷⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. xii

⁷⁵ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi, Kenya: Pulines Publications Africa, 1997), p. 14.

metaphysics.”⁷⁶ In other words, religion expresses itself in actions in which the needs and desires of human life are reflected.

From the above argument, African primal religion teaches people how to exhibit good manners and shapes peoples way of life and how to associate with one another in the community. Therefore, Africans cannot be described as having a low moral consciousness and low intellectual state. The Western missionaries did not understand the morality or the perception of the 'holy' of African peoples because they refused to sympathetically examine the world-view and ethos⁷⁷ of Africans.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

I have sought to show how Africa, its religion and culture were viewed negatively by the early explorers on the African continent and how those preconceived ideas influenced the Western missionaries thinking upon their arrival on the African soil. The negative report of Africa and its religion during the Edinburgh 1910 conference have been reviewed. The study has shown that Africa and Africans were not as barbaric as the missionaries thought. Africans were not religiously illiterate; however, the missionaries' sense of moral and religious superiority resulted in their inability to consider Africans rich cultural and religious heritage as preparation for the Christian gospel. The religious background of African peoples is not a rotten heap of superstitions, taboos and magic, rather it has a great deal of value in it for which Western missionaries could have adapted as the basis of their evangelism. The study has proven that Africans' minds were not *tabula rasa* or blank slate in terms of religion, but rather Africans were conceivably religious, had knowledge of God in the pre-Christian tradition, had sense of sin and moral values, principles and norms which guided their lives.

Again, the paper has indicated that Christianity is not a recent arrival in

⁷⁶ Clifford Geertz, “World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” in Magesa, *African Religion*, p. 14.

⁷⁷ Ethos here refers to the moral nature or guiding beliefs of African people.

Africa, neither is it an imported religion from Europe, but rather Christianity is a dynamic world-wide faith that has been a part of Africa for many centuries. In one sense, Christianity has been a continuous force in the African continent since the first century AD. Mbiti has stressed that, Christianity in Africa is so old that it can rightly be described as an indigenous, traditional and African religion.⁷⁸ What Mbiti affirms here is that, Christianity is not a modern religion to Africans or Africa, rather Christianity is as old as African primal religion. According to him, Christianity is very much an African religion.

Apart from the sense of moral and religious superiority, the missionaries spread Christianity in Africa by diffusion. According to Harriet Hill, the diffusion model sees little or no value in the old, and so replaces it without remorse.⁷⁹ The missionaries came with a certain pattern or laid down rules and with their European Ethnocentric ideas and beliefs and wanted Africans to adhere to these rules. The missionaries saw themselves as carriers of the Christian gospel and agents of civilization, hence despised Africans and disregarded their religious traditions. The commission to make disciples of all nations goes with it the ability to consider the nation's culture, world-view, belief systems and philosophy, and so therefore the translator or transmitter of the Christian gospel must respect the receptor's indigenous agencies. The communication of the gospel should not be in terms of a foreign language or of a foreign culture, but in the categories of local idioms and world-views. Paul proclaimed to the philosophical society of Athens about the redemptive work of God by using their own indigenous categories of their religious life. The task of the missionary is to be analytical of his receptor's culture because God, since ages past, has not left Himself without a witness. In view of this, Paul wrote; "I am greatly indebted both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians" (Rom. 1:14).

⁷⁸ Mbiti Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.223. see also Jonathan Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa* (Achimota: African Christian Press, 1996), p. x.

⁷⁹ Harriet Hill, "The Vernacular Treasure: A Century of Mother-Tongue Bible Translation," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006), p. 86.

God has always taken the initiative and our role as Christian missionaries is to listen to His voice in that recipient culture so as to reveal Christ to them. God has always been ahead in every culture, therefore missionaries should not consider their audience as a sort of *tabula rasa* or having no sense of sin, instead, find out what the audience already knows and believe. That means the missionary should always be ready to dialogue or engage with what his audience already knows.

Western missionaries however, upon their enquiry came to realize that Africans are not religious illiterates. This knowledge taught the missionaries that if they ever wanted or hope for any success, there was the need to enter into the African world by making use of the indigenous categories. They understood that the challenge was one of assimilation rather than substitution. Therefore, indigenous categories were employed to bring about assimilation of the Christian gospel.⁸⁰

The positive contribution of the Western missionaries on Africa continent cannot be overlooked. The spread of the gospel and Christianity through the introduction of Western education and improved technology brought a lot of improvements in the general life of the indigenous Africans. The Western missionaries who came to Africa helped to promote agriculture, trade and linguistic studies of the indigenous languages. Knowledge of the local languages became very important for the translation of the Bible. The missionaries helped in translating the Bible into indigenous languages. For instance, missionaries like Johannes Zimmerman and Johannes Gottlieb Christaller who came to Ghana helped in translating the Bible into some local Ghana languages. Zimmerman translated the entire Bible into the Ga language, wrote a Ga grammar book, and made Ga the literary language of the Ga-Adangme people of what is now southeastern Ghana. Christaller, the German Basel Mission linguist, Bible translator, and missionary to Ghana had the major task of Scripture translation and the production of other Christian literature for the growing indigenous

⁸⁰ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, p. 158.

Christian communities. Christaller studied the Twi language and in collaboration with some indigenous Gold Coast co-workers like David Asante translated all the books in the New Testament into Twi, including Psalms and Proverbs. In addition, he published a *scientific grammar* of the Twi Language and a *Dictionary of the Asante and the Fante Language*.⁸¹ This vernacular translation of the Scriptures nourished vital expressions of Christian faith in diverse contexts. Lamin Sanneh states, “Scriptural translation had invoked the beast of the tribe and there was no stopping it.”⁸² Not only does this insight correct the misperception of the role of the missionary, it also shows how as the role of the missionary receded with the rise of the indigenous assimilation, African Christians were now in the driver's seat of adapting and reconceptualizing Christian faith through their primal background. He further writes about the powerful impact translation had:

The import of this was to imbue local cultures with an eternal significance and to endow African languages with a transcendent range. The spirits of the ancestor, fitted with the engine of Biblical revelation, transformed local neighborhoods into commuter belts of heaven.⁸³

The point I am making is that, Western missionaries in the early years saw pre-Christian Africa as religious *tabula rasa* and not having anything that could merit the name human. However, their later adoption of indigenous terms for the central categories of the Bible in their translation and interpretation made a lot of impact on the African continent.

⁸¹ L. H. Ofofu-Appiah, 'Asante, David 1834-1892' Lutheran, Basel Mission Ghana, accessed on 14th November 2013 from <http://www.dacb.org/stories/ghana/asante/d.html>.

⁸² Lamin Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 7, no. 4 (October 1983), p. 166.

⁸³ Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission,” p. 166.

The foregoing discussion, shows that we live in optimistic and thrilling times! While there was a tragic failure on the part of Western missionaries to access the primal substructure in their transmission of the Gospel, the Gospel still took hold in Africa through vernacular translation of the Scriptures. The vibrancy and diversity of African Initiated Churches show the affinity of the Christian faith with the primal religiosity. It is now time for Africans to explore their primal religiosity and apply the treasure they find there and turn it over to Christ. The tired cliché one hears about the depth of Christianity in Africa as being a mile wide and only an inch deep is true only in one sense. Where the African primal religiosity has not been appropriated, Christianity tends to be shallow. But this is as true in the West as it is in Africa. The obliteration of primal past in the West along with the reductionist process of rationalization that Weber called attention to, removed the experience of the *numinous* from the West.⁸⁴ So the primal religiosity or spirituality is direly needed in the West.

African theologians like John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako have laid the ground work for this theological and existential encounter to take place. But one senses the encounter has only just begun and in some places it has not started at all. The legacy of missionary Christianity remains in the ethnocentric practices of missionaries. It remains in the passiveness of some African Christians who like missionaries have demonized the past. The perspectives that African theologians have had the privilege to discover, especially at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture needs to be explored and appropriated so that the primal past are not just theory but a reality, that nourishes Christian faith and witness.

⁸⁴ Scholars appear to be alert to this in the West and the need for reenchancement. Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman in *The Challenge of Religion after Modernity: Beyond Disenchancement*, note that the West is seeking reenchancement after being “tired” of modernity. They see this reenchancement coming from Eastern shamanism in the form of Buddhism and New Age religion. They appear to not be aware of the movement of Neo Pentecostalism.

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AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGES FOR A GLOBAL MISSIONARY ADVENTURE

SAMUEL OFORI KWAKYE¹

Abstract

In sub-Saharan Africa, it is generally believed that Christianity is the dominant religion.² Its teachings and doctrines have eventually subverted the older beliefs of African Religion (AR) in most African societies. Most taboos, customs, norms and religious practices which were hitherto adhered to without question, have all been neglected or challenged. This phenomenon is largely due to the influence of Christian teachings. Some of these teachings seek to denigrate Africa's religious and cultural practices as unchristian.³ Over the years, and in response to this phenomenon, many African Christian scholars have sought to present a proper understanding of African religious practices and beliefs. The ultimate goal, as could be observed from their works, is to re-orient both the African and non-African of their worldview about AR. This effort led to the assertion that the African religious heritage could be an integral part of

¹ SAMUEL OFORI KWAKYE holds an MPhil in Religions from the University of Ghana, Legon. He was until recently a lecturer in the Department of Biblical Studies at the All Nations University College, Koforidua Ghana. Pastor Ofori Kwakye is also the immediate past minister of the Akuapem-Ridge Interdenominational Church at Kitase near Accra.

² See O. U. Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story* (Pretoria: Business Print Centre, 2005) pp. 5-7

³ See E. Asante, *Toward an African Christian Theology of the Kingdom of God: the Kingship of Onyame* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995) p. 1.

African Christian experience and that what is judged of AR as unchristian could be rather considered as 'stepping stones' for the assimilation of the gospel by the African. AR has therefore become a significant consideration for African Christian Theology.

Introduction

Since the middle of the twentieth century the study of African Religion (AR) has increasingly gained attention from scholars from all over the world.⁴ The subject has now become a major study in religions in most universities in and outside Africa. AR has been given this prominence in the study of religion globally due mainly to the works of African scholars such as John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, Joseph Boakye Danquah, Harry Sawyer, Kwesi Dickson, and many others.

The above mentioned writers form part of the early African Christian scholars who responded to Western views about AR. They underscore the relentless efforts by such African Christian writers and scholars in responding to supposed erroneous views of Westerners about AR. Western people in general and Christian missionaries in particular were mostly over-critical about African culture and traditional religious beliefs at the time of their initial encounter with Africans. This could be observed in the various literatures that emanated from them as they attempted to describe and document African traditional religious beliefs and practices. For instance, the Western missionaries in their ceaseless efforts to bring Christianity to Africa encountered a society difficult to separate its religious and cultural settings from the secular. This was also completely different from the Westerner's society. The Westerner had also cloaked the gospel with his/her cultural identity resulting in a conflict of two different cultures and primal world-views as they

⁴ See YusufuTuraki, *Christianity and African Gods* (Potchefstroom: Univ. Press 1999) p. 10.

⁵ See J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1997) p. 1.

attempted to present the gospel to the African. This consequently led to the labelling of AR in various derogatory and prejudicial terms by the Westerner. Some of these terms include *animism, fetishism, totemism, paganism, primitive, savage, and magic*.⁶ Yusufu Turaki has noted rightly when he says, “The missionary model of presentation was overwhelmingly negative of the African pre-Christian religious and cultural heritage.”⁷

Again Western writers such as anthropologists and explorers also continuously labelled AR in terms most Africans find undesirable. In their attempt to find the origin of religion, anthropologists sought in various “primitive” societies clues to the origin of religion in human life. Africa which is mostly observed as having the most preserved traditions and cultures of life therefore became one of the 'available' sources for such research. In their interpretation of African religious life the anthropologists used many unpleasant terms such as primitive, barbaric, magic, savage, superstitious among others, to describe African religious practices. Some Westerners even went to the extent of denying that Africa had any religion.

It was such 'inappropriate' descriptions of AR by Western people that prompted response from African scholars - majority of whom are themselves Christians - in order to 're-label' AR from the African perspective and to reveal a better understanding of it. In pursuing this agenda some African scholars have suggested that traditional African experience of God is the same as that of the Christian and that the pre-Christian African knew God and for that matter worshipped Him aright. For instance, Idowu argues in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* that, the belief in and worship of one supreme deity is universal among all really primitive peoples. We deny this primary revelation only when we rob the created order of its revelatory quality and relieve man of his

⁶ See Turaki, *Christianity*, p.10.

⁷ Turaki, *Christianity*, p. 11.

inherent capacity to receive divine communication.⁸

Idowu's assertion stems from the Apostle Paul's injunction to all men that they are without excuse in knowing God because his existence is clearly revealed through creation (Rom. 1: 19-20). In other words such scholars, in expressing faith in God, regard African religious beliefs as similar to that of Christianity.

Indeed, many contemporary Western scholars agree to such favourable views of AR. Sundkler for example argues that the gospel was not the beginning of true knowledge of God but merely a continuation or fulfilment of the true faith that already existed in the pre-Christian African heart.⁹ In effect it is suggested that the African's method of approaching God for salvation is as valid as the way of salvation through the Gospel.¹⁰ AR is thus deemed the revelation of the Supreme Being of himself to Africans. This 'elevation' of AR is not wholly accepted by all African Christian scholars. There are other African Christian scholars who think that AR must be discarded completely as inefficient and alien in considering the true knowledge of God and genuine approach to salvation from God. This group of African Christian scholars, who are mostly evangelicals, is relatively the later to write about AR in relation to Christianity. Leonard Nyirongo for example does not only oppose the idea that the pre-Christian African knew God and served him aright but also condemns African Christian scholars and theologians who propose AR as a stepping stone for faith in Christ. He accuses them of denying the cardinal truths of the Gospel and that "They have not twisted what we might term 'peripheral' aspects of the Gospel but its very pillars. In doing so, they have – and continue to - deceive many Africans."¹¹ Kato also sees

⁸ Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, (eds), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1969).

⁹ See Bengt Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa* (London: SCM Press, 1962) p. 100.

¹⁰ See A. F. Walls, "The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture" in *Faith and Thought*, 108 (1-2), 1981, p. 49.

¹¹ L. Nyirongo, *The Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible? The snares of African*

the attempt to magnify the cultural and religious heritage of Africa and to see Christianity as a religion of the West as dangers that tend to universalism.¹² Tokunboh Adeyemo is even straightforward when he accuses Mbiti of espousing universalism in his book *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*.¹³ Nyirongo, Kato and others like them therefore do not subscribe to the idea of AR as a means of true worship of the Supreme Being as revealed in the Gospel. They see AR and African traditional beliefs as unacceptable in Christianity.

Thus we have opposing views from African Christian scholars in their responses to views of AR and its relation to Christianity. On one hand, those who would want the African pre-Christian religious tradition observed as relevant today as the Christian and on the other those who see the former as a dilution of truth or dangers in theological deviation. This controversy over the validation of African religious beliefs and practices is itself a challenge to African Theology.

The Quest for an African Theology

Nana Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III, paramount chief of Akuapem Traditional area of Ghana, observes that Christianity adapts the conditions of the areas it finds itself but this has not been evident in Africa.¹⁴ He reveals:

When Christianity moved from the then Asia Minor, now the Middle East, to Southern Europe, some of the peculiarities of the people there were incorporated into

traditional religion in Biblical perspective. (Potchefstroomse Universiteit: 1997) p. 1.

¹² B. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1987) p. 110

¹³ See T. Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1997) p. 97.

¹⁴ Addo Dankwa, *Christianity and African Traditional Beliefs* (Jamaica, New York: The Power of the Word Press, 1987) p.17.

Christianity. The Romans had imbibed into their culture a lot of Greek mythological ideas. It was, therefore, not surprising that the effigies of Christ, the Virgin Mary and other saints replaced the effigies of the many Greek and Roman gods as Apollo, Venus, etc.¹⁵

Nana Addo Dankwa's concern in this book is to “identify the problems inhibiting adaptation of Christianity to African Traditional Religion.”¹⁶ Nana Addo Dankwa is worried that whereas in Europe Christianity found it easy “to absorb some of the cultural manifestation of the beliefs held by those countries, such as the replacement of the 25th December birthday festivities of “Sol Invictus” with that of Christ,¹⁷ Christianity in Africa has not come to terms with similar pagan customs in Africa by absorbing them.¹⁸ The finality of his argument is therefore that “In Europe at the early period, Christianity came to terms with pagan customs by absorbing them,” thus taking on the cultural relics of Europe with it and it must not be difficult for Africa to also imbibe its relevant religio-cultural beliefs into Christianity. He thus agrees with African theologians and scholars who think that the African traditional religious and cultural heritage could be used as means of presenting and transmitting the Gospel.

It is such arguments and notions that have resulted in a quest for an African Theology. For instance, a major argument from the African scholars who defend AR is that Africans have known God and related to him in their own religious consciousness and experiences before Christianity was introduced to them by the missionaries.¹⁹ This fact of African religious consciousness and relation to God is observed and understood among other things through the titles and names given to God by Africans. In effect it is argued that these names explicitly portray how

¹⁵ Addo Dankwa, *Christianity*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Addo Dankwa, *Christianity*, p. 18.

¹⁷ Addo Dankwa, *Christianity*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Addo Dankwa, *Christianity*, p. 19.

¹⁹ See Y. Turaki, *Christianity and African gods*, p.vii.

Africans have perceived God and attest to how they have served or worshipped God prior to the introduction of 'European Christianity'. Some of these names offer similar attributes to God just as is found in the Bible. For instance, in Guinea, among the Tenda people, one of the names given to God is *Hounounga* which means "The Unknown."²⁰ This name indicates the knowledge about the transcendence of God among the Tenda people. This is what has been amplified by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 11:33). Again in Ghana among Akans, the designation *Borbore* for God indicates the originator, architect or creator.²¹ This also shows that the Akans have known God as the creator of all things.

It is through such similarities or sameness of conceptions of God between African religious beliefs and biblical teachings that some African Christian scholars enunciate their position that the gospel was not the beginning of true knowledge of God but a continuation of the true faith that already existed in the pre-Christian African heart. The implication is that the African Christian could use his pre-Christian religious belief to formulate a gospel consistent with both his African traditional beliefs and the biblical prescriptions for salvation of all peoples

For instance, Idowu believes that as a result of the 'inappropriate' approach by the Western missionaries, a completely new God was introduced to the Africans who had had nothing to do with their past religious experience. Consequently, he observes that the Church in Africa was affected as its community of believers by and large lived ambivalent spiritual lives. This is a case where the African Christian being able to go out of church straight to his diviner without feeling that he is betraying any principle.²² Idowu sees the problem as located in what

²⁰ See Asare Opoku, K. *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International Private Ltd, 1978) p. 15.

²¹ Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 15.

²² See Idowu, "The Predicament of the Church in Africa" in Baeta, C.G. (ed) *Christianity in Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)pp. 426-428.

he considers to be the heart of religion itself – the apprehension of God. Thus Western missionaries undervalued and ignored the sense of God and his activity as perceived in African tradition and introduced a completely new God. The missionary proclamation of the gospel was therefore not only theologically inadequate but also suspect. Idowu argues that the historical association of the Christian faith with western cultural values “...succeeded in enslaving the mind, in as much as it inculcated that the only way to human dignity and full grown personality was to be in everything like Europeans and to despise their own [Nigerian] culture.”²³ The remedy to this, for Idowu, therefore is to seek an indigenous church. This search for an indigenous church also requires an African theology which is at the same time authentically Christian and African. It is therefore not surprising that he dedicates one of his major works, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, to this course.

To Kwame Bediako this ideas and notions among especially African scholars have resulted in two distinct trends emerging in African Christian thought. The first of these trends was the theological dimension to the struggle for the social and political transformation of the conditions of inequality and oppression in South Africa which produced Black Theology – a theology of liberation in the African setting and in response to the particular circumstances of southern Africa. The other was the theological exploration into indigenous cultures of African peoples, with particular stress on their pre-Christian religious traditions.²⁴ The second trend is well trodden path which has produced many 'African Christologies.'²⁵ Bediako acknowledges that the broad aim of these trends was to achieve integration between the African pre-Christian religious experience and African Christian commitment in way that would ensure the integrity of African identity and selfhood.

²³ Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965)p. 5.

²⁴ See Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Regnum, 2000)p. 49.

²⁵ See C. Nyamiti, 'African Christologies Today' in Schrieter, R. J. (ed.) *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991)

The Conflict between Christianity and AR

The fact that earlier studies and assertions about AR fell short of a presentation of the true nature of the religion has been sufficiently addressed in various works including those of Western writers. What is at stake now is the 'conflict of understanding' as a result of the contacts between two different religious experiences and faiths, namely between Christianity and AR, brought about by different opinions among African Christian scholars. This section attempts a departure from the Western anthropological stance and socio-religious identity in judging AR to a search of the Gospel's interpretation of the beliefs, notions and practices of AR. This 'conflict' of understanding between Christianity and AR cannot be resolved outside the Gospel which is the absolute authority on Christianity.

Much of the happenings between the traditionalists and Christians in Ghana indicate a strong difference of conviction between the two religions. There are many instances when traditionalists and Christians have engaged in conflicts as a result of divergent religious convictions. A recent popular case is the confrontation between a traditionalist Kwaku Bonsam and some Pentecostal church leaders in Kumasi over whose "God" was superior to the other.²⁶ Christians in Ghana have also been attacked on several occasions by traditionalists for breaking their rules, especially 'ban on drumming' and noise making at a particular season of the year. The traditionalists always accuse the churches of being disrespectful of their customs and thereby disobeying their gods. The section therefore discusses four major conflicts between Christianity and AR and their implication to the African theology and mission enterprise.

I. Concept of the Supreme Being

A general understanding of AR is that the African believes in one

²⁶ See 'The Spectator'(vol. 9650, Saturday May 24 – Friday May 31, 2008) pp. 1, 16-17.

Supreme Being. Again it is understood that this Supreme Being is the same God that Christians profess and that he was known by the African before the arrival of the Western anthropologist and before they encountered the gospel. African scholars or theologians who have also claimed that the African knew and worshipped God aright before he came into contact with the Gospel, mostly base their arguments on evidences such as:

- the African's belief in the existence of God as the Almighty and Creator of all things,
- the African acknowledgement of attributes such as purity, infinity, eternity, omnipresence, sovereignty, providence etc, for God and
- his dependence on God as the provider of all good things including rain, children, prosperity, health and long life.

In the belief of God as the creator, Adelumo and Omosade find that “West African peoples copiously express their concept of God as Creator.”²⁷ They enumerate the various names depicting God as the creator among West Africans as follows: the Yoruba of Nigeria call him *Eledaa* – “Creator”, or “the owner of creation”; the Igbo also of Nigeria call God *Chineke* in his capacity as Creator. *Chineke* means “the spirit that creates”; the Mende of Sierra-Leone call God *Ngewo* – “the Great One that is in the sky from long ago”, and they regard him as the Creator, the Chief who made or created all things. Among the Twi-speaking people of Ghana, God is called *Odomankoma*, *Boreboreor* *Oboadee* – all three names are in reference to the creative nature of God.²⁸ There are also names of God among Africans that connote his kingship, Omnipotence, Transcendence, Immortality, Justice, among others. The emphasis of all the concepts is that God is known by the African just as the Bible teaches about him. Omosade and Adelumo conclude their argument on the African knowledge of God by stressing that these concepts about God in

²⁷ J. A. Omosade and P. D. Adelumo, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonjo Press and Books Ind. 1979) p. 48.

²⁸ See Omosade & Adelumo, *West African*, p. 48.

the African religious mind are significant in understanding their beliefs about God.²⁹ They are of the conviction that even though, “it appears that God is remote in so far as the divinities act for Him and receive worship” and that “prayers are rarely said to Him and worship impartially done, the emphasis of all the concepts is that all things point to Him.”³⁰ They assert that the divinities are only worshipped as intermediaries, and God has to get the report of every ritual to accept or reject it.³¹ Danquah also argues that we discover the meaning of these names to enable us appreciate the teaching and impression of the people of Africa concerning God.³²

The contention here for some Christians is whether such evidences amount to true knowledge and subsequently true worship of God. Nyirongo from the Gospel point of view argues that there are means by which God has decreed as being the right way to seek and know Him. He enumerates them as:

- through God's creational (general) revelation
- through the incarnation of Christ and
- through the bible (the written word)³³

In creational or general revelation Nyirongo affirms Romans 1:18-32 which contends that creation itself reveals God. From these verses Paul argues that creation reveals the nature and glory of God and therefore this revelation makes it inexcusable for any man to exchange the glory of God with any kind of image. He goes ahead to condemn the practice of representing God with any image. The context only shows that the men in question in Paul's presentation, did not possess this knowledge in themselves and that it was available in their midst, in creation, where God himself has made it manifest. Knowledge of God's existence

²⁹ See Omosade & Adelumo, *West African*, p. 52-53.

³⁰ Omosade & Adelumo, *West African*, p. 53.

³¹ Omosade & Adelumo, *West African*, p. 53.

³² See J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God* 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1968)p. 1.

³³ See Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 12.

therefore emanates from God himself through his creation. It becomes obvious then that all men have been endowed with the ability of knowing the existence of God through his creation. Omosade and Adelumo agree that the general revelation of God is “universal phenomenon” and therefore one cannot deny the fact that African peoples are capable of receiving and responding to the revelation of God.³⁴ Thus, the African knowledge of God by which he ascribes rightfully several attributes of God through the names he gives to God are as a result of this general revelation. Danquah, Mbiti and others are therefore right in their assertions that the African knew God before the encounter with Christianity and that they did so through their descriptions of him by the various names ascribed to him.

However, this means of knowing God is not enough since it could lead to different comprehensions by different groups of people from which phenomena of creation they would like to apprehend and describe God just as in the legend of the blind men and the elephant.³⁵ The question that remains to be answered is whether in the Gospels' perspective the knowledge of the existence of God and the right attributes ascribed to him validate a true worship of him. For example, in Apostle Paul's encounter with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens, he acknowledged their religious inclination as he observed their objects of worship including an altar with the inscription “TO THE UNKNOWN

³⁴ Omosade & Adelumo, *West African*, p. 12.

³⁵ *The Blind Men and the Elephant* is a legend described in poetry by John G. Saxe. It was six men of Indostan, *much* inclined to learning, who went to see the elephant (though all of them were blind), that each by observation might satisfy his mind. Each of them described and disputed about the elephant by what part of the animal they came into contact with. So while the first described the elephant as a wall by happening to fall against its broad and sturdy side, the second said it is like a spear because he felt its tusk, the third held the trunk and said the elephant is like a snake, yet the fourth felt the knee and said it is like a tree, the fifth who chanced to touch the ear described the elephant as a fan and the sixth blind man who touched the tail exclaimed that the elephant is like a rope. And so these men of Indostan disputed loud and long, each in his own opinion, though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong about the nature of the elephant. Cited in Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, p. 108-109.

GOD". Nevertheless, the Athenians knowledge of the transcendence of God did not indicate to Paul a right knowledge or right worship of him. He therefore saw the need to present the Gospel – the right way of worship – to them. Paul finds the necessity of the presentation of the Gospel among these religious people because God through Christ (according to Paul) now demands of all men to worship him in this way (Acts 17:16-34). As Scott Spencer asserts: "Paul's overriding concern in his oration before the Areopagus is to reveal true knowledge about God, redressing both the Athenians' basic theological ignorance, symbolized in the altar dedicated to an unknown deity and their gross perversion of God's nature through the worship of manufactured images."³⁶

Thus from the Gospel's perspective, as Paul would let us understand, the West African people's understanding of God's transcendence and knowledge of him as the creator do not become proof of right worship of Him. At the very end of the Areopagus speech in Athens, Paul affirms God's displeasure of such display of ignorance by indicating that such acts would no longer be tolerated by God because He has appointed a time and man by whom the world was going to be judged by His standards. (Acts 17:30-31). Thus as Scott Spencer interprets Paul:

Because the eternal God determines the schedule for all human existence, he has the authority to set a time of reckoning for human conduct. For a season, God has let times of human 'ignorance' unfold, in which idolatry has persisted; but 'now' he insists that 'all people everywhere' turn to righteous worship and living in preparation for 'fixed day' of judgment on the divine calendar.³⁷

The import of Scott's interpretation of Paul here is that any form of worship not prescribed in the Gospel falls under idolatry and is not a

³⁶ See F. S. Scott, *ACTS Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) p. 174.

³⁷ Scott, *ACTS*, p. 175.

The import of Scott's interpretation of Paul here is that any form of worship not prescribed in the Gospel falls under idolatry and is not a righteous worship of God.³⁸

II. The Africanising of Christianity

Another persuasion by African Christian theologians and scholars that lends itself to the aforementioned argument is that there are many ways to reach the Throne of Grace without 'going via the well trodden theological paths of Europe or America'.³⁹ This then leads to the call for an African Theology which seeks to uphold the dignity of the African personality by "Africanizing" Christianity. Idowu for instance, advocates a "theology which bears the stamp of original thinking and meditation of Africans."⁴⁰ Oduyoye commenting on this persuasion declares: "A living Christian faith in Africa cannot but interact with African culture. In fact there is being developed an interpretation of Christianity and specifically of Christian theology that one may describe as African. ... the process needs to be accelerated if African Christianity is to escape being a fossilized form of nineteenth-century European Christianity."⁴¹

What is worrying here is the attempt to assess Christianity in Africa not as in the Gospels but by the European cultural and social milieu. Such an attempt smacks of a reactionary theology in the efforts of the advocates of African theology. Agbeti has succinctly explained this thus:

It seems to me that it is not religion or Christianity *per se* that people tend to oppose in Africa but the foreignness of the Christian approach to evangelism and vital national

³⁸ Scott, *ACTS*, pp. 174-175.

³⁹ Cited in Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion. A Definition* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1973) p. Xi.

⁴¹ M. A. Oduyoye, "The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology" in K. Appiah-Kubi, and Sergio Torees (eds.) *African Theology En Route* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979) p. 110.

issues. It is the imposition of western culture and the garb of the Gospel that people react against. It is the interpretation of the Bible by the standard of the western social and cultural yardstick, without reference to the indigenous African spiritual heritage and social norms that stings some African Christians and theologians.⁴²

In other words, Christianity could be viewed and better understood in biblical terms and not in a particular people's cultural or social norms. Again it could be observed that the religious development of AR is quite distinct from that of Christianity. One may therefore err in attempting to place a judgment of one on another. What is now left is a proper perspective of the Gospel in the context of the African pre-Christian religious experience. This is not a call for judgment of AR but rather a thorough examination of its relation to Christianity in the light of the gospel.

III. African and Biblical view of sin

The belief in atonement and remission of sin as in Christianity where mankind requires Christ's blood because all have sinned against God is non-existent in AR. Nyirongo asserts that this is as a result of the African perception of sin, which is not considered as against God. The African stories of the origin of sin demonstrate in the African understanding that there is a break of relation between man and God.⁴⁴

These stories and others of like nature imply in the African religious view that it was God who withdrew from man as a result of the latter's fault. This impression is in sharp contrast to the biblical account where it was man who hid from God because of his sin against God (Gen. 3). Again whereas in the biblical teachings God works through his grace in Christ to restore this relationship with man, the African in AR does not seek any

⁴² J. K. Agbeti, *African Theology: What it is* (Nairobi: Afropress Ltd.1972) p. 3.

⁴³ See Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 55.

⁴⁴ See L. Spier, *Ancestor Worship* (New Mexico: UNM Press, 1997) p, 64

restoration of this relationship. God has become so far from him that he only needs to find intermediaries occasionally to enable him get to God for any assistance. Nyirongo succinctly concludes this notion thus “to the African, sin was originated by man when he offended God in one way or another. As a result of this God withdrew from man. He now deals with man through ancestors and nature gods”.⁴⁵ In effect the African does not seek an answer or atonement for the original sin of man. Sin is rather seen in one of three ways:

- moral offences
- breaking of taboos or customs and
- being in a state of ritual impurity.⁴⁶

As a result sin is seen as an offence against one's ancestral spirits, family, tribe or community and it follows that these are those the individual is to respond to with regards to sin.⁴⁷ It is therefore implied that the final consequences of sin in African traditional religious belief does not lie with God's judgment of mankind but rather with the anger of the ancestors and divinities who are the custodians of the community.⁴⁸ Nyirongo underscores the graveness of this notion in terms of Christian teaching by stating that, “In scripture sin is not simply a wrong act against an individual, family, community, or the ancestral spirits. To think of sin in this way is to rob it of its real weight and deadliness.”⁴⁹

Sin in the Gospel, as identified by Nyirongo is described in different ways. Matthew 15:18 for example indicates that sin is any thought, word and deed that falls short of God's standard. Again, according to 1 John 3:4, sin is lawlessness or rebellion against God. Sin is also described as a transgression of God's law in Romans 4:15. The Gospel therefore sees sin as an offence against the law of God. The yardstick for what is an

⁴⁵ Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 61.

⁴⁶ Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 61.

⁴⁷ Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ See Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 64.

⁴⁹ Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 65.

offence is therefore found in God's law according to Christian teachings. The African's inability to see offences to this extent but only against the community or ancestors shows why there is no attempt in AR to seek atonement from the original sin of man. In conclusion we may say that in AR there is neither paradise to be hoped for nor hell to be feared in the hereafter. This concept of sin becomes important in our discussion because of the role Africa will need to play with its theology in her global missionary work.

IV. Divinities as ministers and Christ as mediator

The significance of the divinities, mediums or ministers in African traditional religious beliefs stems from the concept, as noted by Mbiti, that God is awesome and for that matter, the African feels unworthy to approach him directly. These “divinities are on the whole thought to have been created by God.”⁵⁰ In general the divinities are thought of as being associated with God, and often stand for his activities and manifestations. It is also believed as Azeanya also finds out, that “these spirits are self-sufficient and do not therefore have to receive gifts from the Supreme God in order to distribute such to humans.... They have their resources and have full powers to act without consulting God or asking for permission.”⁵¹ The divinities can also be jealous, angry and revengeful. It is therefore good to always seek to be on the best of terms with them. These notions account for the conflict of understanding in the role of these intermediaries as sometimes they are seen as means to reach God with ones petition and another time observed as the source of the petitioner's answer. One is therefore not sure whether to regard them as the final or ultimate object of worship or to see them as mediums.

Mbiti states that “Out of the widespread feeling of respect which African people show in various ways towards God, some feel at certain times that

⁵⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions*, p. 75.

⁵¹ A. H Azeanya, “God, spirits and the spirit world” in K. Dickson, And P. Ellingworth, *Biblical Revelation and African beliefs* (London: Lutterworth, 1969) p. 42.

man should not, or is unworthy to approach God alone.”⁵² He must therefore present his needs and worship through intermediaries. These intermediaries, as Mbiti finds out, range from the “higher deities to ordinary spirits and ancestral spirits, and the ancestral spirits are the commonest as well as the handy ones.”⁵³

In regards to this Bujo goes ahead to propound a model for African Christology where Jesus is seen as an ancestor.⁵⁴ He explains that in Africa, the ancestors are deemed as those whose lives constitute the rule of conduct for the living. Thus it is those who have lived good, heroic or exemplary lives who are considered ancestors. The ancestors' lives also constitute an inheritance handed down to their descendants for their guidance and motivation to confront similar situations and challenges that they may face in their own lives. Thus as the living guide their lives with the examples of the ancestors, they are able to relate their own lives with those of the ancestors to share in their sufferings and misfortune or successes and joy. This is what calls for the remembrance and re-enactment of the deeds of the ancestors. Bujo asserts that “... the remembrance and re-enactment of the deeds of ancestors is a memorial-narrative act of salvation designed to secure total community, both before and after death, with all good and benevolent ancestors.”⁵⁵ Bujo's line of thought and interpretation of this religious practice among Africans resonates with Robertson Smith's⁵⁶ assertion that “Religion did not exist for the saving of souls, but for the preservation and welfare of society.”⁵⁷

⁵² Mbiti, *African Religions*, p. 67.

⁵³ See Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 52.

⁵⁴ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992)pp. 77-81.

⁵⁵ Bujo, *African Theology*, p. 78.

⁵⁶ Robertson Smith is an English ethnologist whose studies of the religions of the ancient Semites, among other works, had led him to the conclusion that “the origins of religion are to be found, not in belief in spirits, in animism or other state of mind, but rather, in the *social act*, in the rite or ceremony that symbolically binds the individual to his kinship community.” See, Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, p. vi.

⁵⁷ Cited in Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New

On the basis of this observations, Bujo advocates for a theology that can take as its starting point from these statements and considerations. He suggests that this could offer Africans with a new 'Messianic' title for Jesus Christ and a meaningful way of speaking of him. Thus Jesus could be known as Proto-Ancestor, Ancestor par Excellent.⁵⁸ In other words Bujo wants us to look at “the historical Jesus of Nazareth not only as one who lived the African ancestor-ideal in the highest degree but also brought that ideal to an altogether new fulfilment.”⁵⁹ He also asserts that through incarnation Jesus has assumed in Himself the whole of human history, including “the legitimate aspirations of our ancestors.”⁶⁰ According to him, this means the eminent assumption, by Christ, of the future which “the ancestors sought to guarantee.” Through such assumption “this future is now assured because our ancestors' experiences have been made efficacious in Jesus crucified and risen.”⁶¹ In this way Bujo wants us to see the incarnation as that event which enables the African to see Christ as the proto-Ancestor.⁶² Thus he concludes on this point, “being wholly African and authentically Christian are not incompatibles.”⁶³

The divinities and their participation in the daily lives of the people of Africa can therefore not be overemphasized. However, the bone of contention on these intermediaries is their place in the Gospel. It could be asked whether the intermediaries are gods in their own right or they are only mediators between God and men. This 'theology' obviously presents a challenge to the African missionary in his global task. This is because the gospel also affirms the need for man to have an intermediary between himself and God. However, this need for an intermediary is

York: The Free Press, 1965) p. vii.

⁵⁸ See Bujo, *African Theology*, pp. 77 – 91.

⁵⁹ Bujo, *African Theology*, p. 79.⁵² Mbiti, *African Religions*, p. 67.

⁶⁰ B. Bujo, “A Christocentric Ethic for Black Africa”, in *Theology Digest*, vol. 30, no 2, 1982, pp. 143 – 6.

⁶¹ Bujo, “A Christocentric Ethic”, p. 144.

⁶² Bujo, “A Christocentric Ethic”, p. 143.

⁶³ Bujo, “A Christocentric Ethic”, p. 144.

necessitated by the fall of man when Adam sinned against God (Genesis 3). This is in contrast to the significance of the role of the divinities in AR. Nyirongo enumerates their significance among others as follows: Power to make one's medicines more potent; Revelation of mysteries of life, for example, pointing out the enemies who have caused misfortune; Protection from harm by spirits or witch doctors; Removal of evil or calamities; Granting prosperity, good health, fertility and long life; and Conquest of wars.⁶⁴

Thus according to Nyirongo, the importance of the intermediaries to the African is not atonement of sin or moral stand before God, rather the social security, privileges or material blessings they are expected to receive from them.⁶⁵ Mbiti also indicates the following in AR: "Prayers are chiefly requests for material welfare, such as health, protection from danger, prosperity and even riches.... This faith is utilitarian, not spiritual; it is practical not mystical.... Augustine's description of man's soul being restless until it finds its rest in God is something unknown to African traditional religious life."⁶⁶

In effect, the Africans' reason for a mediator is for his own material or physical benefits just as Nana Addo Dankwa, and Bujo have explained about the ancestors. AR therefore does not seem to seek a remedy to the broken relationship between heaven and earth and between man and the Supreme Being which they also regard as once cordial and golden. This is in sharp contrast to the Gospel whose cardinal message hinges on the need and availability of the remedy for the restoration of this broken relationship. In Christian teachings, God is not responsible for the alienation that has existed between himself and man. This is also in contrast with the understanding we get from the African oral stories of creation. However, since Adam's fall, according to the Bible, it is God who seeks reconciliation and not man. Man has been hiding from God

⁶⁴ Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 53.

⁶⁵ See Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 53.

⁶⁶ J. S. Mbiti, *Prayers of African Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1975) p. 67.

whilst God has been longing to bring him back into fellowship with himself. (2 Cor. 5:11-21). This idea according to Nyirongo is central to the biblical meaning of mediator.⁶⁷ As such the Gospel teaches that Christ's atoning work on the cross has bridged the gap between man and God (Hebrews 10). The enmity that once existed between God and man as a result of the fall has now ended, according to the Gospel. The important thing to note here is that according to the Gospel, and also in contrast to AR, it is not so much the material blessings, spiritual protection or social privileges in this life that necessitates mediation, rather it is man's sin against God. And from the Gospel's perspective there is only one accepted means by which a person can get to the Supreme Being for assistance and this means supersedes all others. (Acts 4:12)

Again, the Gospel teaches that Christ's mediation role does not only supersede all others but also brings to an end any other mediation role by all other beings either flesh or spirit (Hebrews 10). In effect he becomes the only mediator recognized by God for all men, according to the Gospel. From the Gospel's teaching this efficacious sacrifice of Christ for all men underscores God's love for mankind (Rom. 5:8). It is by this reasons that he becomes the only and perfect mediator between God and man. The role of divinities and ancestors as mediators in AR therefore, according to the gospel, is not needed after Christ was made the mediator between God and man.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the above African 'theological ideas' is imperative if African Christians are to understand and minister a valid gospel in the contemporary world. This is understandable considering the fact that Africa now assumes an important role in world Christianity. Just as Andrew Walls asserts:

⁶⁷ Nyirongo, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 55.

One of the most important, perhaps one of the two or three most important events in the whole of church history, has occurred within the lifetime of people not yet old. It has not reached the textbooks, and most Christians, including many of the best informed, do not know it has happened. It is nothing less than a complete change in the centre of gravity of Christianity, so that the heartlands of the church are no longer in Europe, decreasingly in North America, but in Latin America, in certain parts of Asia, and, most important for our present purposes, in Africa.⁶⁸

This assertion about change of centre of gravity is now common knowledge and acknowledged in many books. Ogbu Kalu for instance, does not only affirm this assertion but argues further that Africa has been involved in “the Jesus movement” from its inception till today. He reiterates this point with reference to Africa's role (in St. Augustine and Tertullian) in the formulation of Christian doctrines, polity, liturgy, and ethics especially in Antioch and Alexandria.⁶⁹

Africa's contribution in the future to the Christian missionary enterprise would therefore be determined by what theology Africa projects in the now. It is therefore significant that the African Christian examines critically his theology with the global church in mind. To ignore this, the 'African missionary' would find him/herself propounding a theology that would be alien to those outside his/her continent. It would therefore be ideal for the African Christian to have a better understanding of AR based on the gospel's perspective of it and not by Western missionary and scholars' judgments.

Finally, it could be suggested that the African Christian response that

⁶⁸ A. F. Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History' in J. S. Pobee, (ed.) *Religion in a Pluralistic Society* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976) p. 180.

⁶⁹ Kalu, O.U. (editor) *African Christianity: An African Story*. (Pretoria: Business Print Centre, 2005) p. 3

calls for a contextualization of African Christianity rooted in what is called African Christian Theology is not the best way for Christianity. This is because the import and missionary implication of this could lead Africa into committing similar mistakes as the Westerner in other religious cultures. Kato rightly challenges some of these responses as being promoted by liberal ecumenism in Africa, and suggests that nationalistic loyalty should be distinct from Biblical faith. In other words, he finds the whole exercise of attempting a “theology which bears the stamp of original thinking and meditation of Africans”⁷⁰ as nationalistic. To defend this seeming trait to the authority of Scripture, Adeyemo indicates that the Protestant Reformation thesis of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) rests on positive answers to questions such as supremacy of biblical revelation as implied in Psalms 119:89, validity of the witness of the Bible concerning itself, and the words of the Scriptures as inspired of God and without error as indicated in 2 Timothy 3:16. African theologians must therefore be guided by the affirmation of the centrality of the Bible in their theological discussions regarding the African pre-Christian religious heritage. The desire to indigenise Christianity in Africa through an indigenous theology must not betray scriptural evidence of God and his dealings with man. This is because African theologians are not only presenting a viable theology suited to local realities, but also how they can help reshape a larger theological discussion among other cultures in the world.

This calls for an apt examination of the debate among African scholars with regards to Africa's quest for an understanding of its past and heritage in Christian history and an appropriate interpretation of its religious beliefs in the light of Biblical theology. When this is done and Africa is called to be a touch-bearer of Christianity, she will not be found wanting in the gospel she propounds to the world for the glory of the one who has called her to task.

⁷⁰ Idowu, cited in K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Carlise, Cumbria: Regnum Books, 1999) p. 267.

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CHRISTIANITY AND CONTEXTUALISATION: THE CASE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN GHANA

FRANCIS OPOKU¹

Abstract

Since the advent of Western missionary enterprise in Africa, native receptors of the gospel have not been passive, rather, they have consistently contributed to the planting and spreading of Christianity on African soil including the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. Initially the result of missionary efforts in winning converts were in trickles. However the additional efforts of local converts and preachers brought about tremendous growth in the church. This paper looks at the role of interpretation and application of some Adventist truth to Ghanaian socio-cultural issues. It is an inter-play between the SDA Church and some aspects of Ghanaian culture in enhancing the spread of the gospel. It focuses on the efforts the church is making to embrace some aspects of Ghanaian culture and adapt them to the evangelistic process. As such, several instances cited reflect some aspects of Akan world-view.

Introduction

A close observation of Africa and its societies will reveal that religion is at the root of African culture and is the determining principle of African

Francis Opoku is a lecturer at the School of Theology and Missions Valley View University, Accra, Ghana. Francis is also the Dean of Students in the same institution.

¹ Norman Lewis, *The Missionaries – God and the Indians* (Penguin Books, 1988), 43.

life. It is no exaggeration that in traditional Africa, religion is life and life is religion. Africans engaged religion in almost what they do. Religion gives meaning and significance to their lives both in this world and the next.

Many Christian missionaries have perpetrated the destruction of indigenous cultures through their ruthless and relentless practices from the stripping of forests and theft of land to the wholesale enslavement of populations.¹ This accusation sounds rather biased, but admittedly in recent decades foreign missions have frequently had a bad press while it is often acknowledged that missionaries have done a lot of good, they are increasingly regarded as agents of Western culture who have helped to destroy local traditions and who have had a major part in creating a church that has remained “foreign” to the people they came to serve. Too often missionaries have indeed simply exported a Western brand of Christianity to their field of labour. Tragically some have often failed to understand the deep significance of ancient traditions and values. Western intellectual framework within which Western missionaries worked, assumed the primacy of Western culture. Consequently, Western missionaries' attitude to African cultures and traditions was so negative that it ignored the critical features that could serve as springboards for the transmission of the gospel. The missionaries adopted the doctrine of “tabula rasa”. This doctrine of tabula rasa is a doctrine that claims that there is nothing in the pre-Christian (primal) cultures on which the Christian missionaries can build. Every aspect of the non-Christian culture has to be destroyed before Christianity could be introduced. The doctrine assumed that African cultures had no role in the missionary process and had to be radically displaced or suppressed in the pursuance of nurturing of deep Christian life.

With regards to the approach adopted by Western missionaries in Africa, Kofi Asare Opoku has this to say:

The Church in Africa..... was part of the cultural invasion from Europe which did not have much regard for the dignity of African culture and which therefore adopted

a disdainful and condemnatory attitude to things African. This in turn led to the despising and disbasement of the African. The intolerant and rather authoritarian manner in which this enterprise was carried out left a deep wound in the African Spirit. There was a negation of the African experience, in spite of the undeniable contribution of the Church to Africa.²

The consequence of the approach by Western missionaries was the fact that the type of Christianity introduced among the Africans was perceived as too Western in its character thus an “imposition” of European version of Christianity, which bore limited African imprint. Christianity was seen more as an imposition of Western values and world-view. Robert Schreier has this to say:

If contextualization is about getting to the very heart of the culture, and Christianity is taking its place there, will not the Christianity that emerges look very much like a product of that culture? Are we going to continue giving cultures the equivalent of an artificial heart....an organ that can do the job the culture needs, but one that will remain forever?³

It could be recalled that several attempts by the European missionaries to introduce Christianity to Africa were full of difficulties and failures. The Europeans' attempt to plant Christianity in Africa would not have succeeded had it not been some Africans who appropriated the gospel to suit their cultural milieu.

Seventh-Day Adventism and Cultural Adaptation

A culture is an integrated system that gives its people a sense of dignity,

² K.A Opoku, "The Church in Africa and Contemporary Sociological Challenges", *Ecumenical Review*, 40 (1988): 241.

³ J.J. Schrieter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Mary Knoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1985), 150.

security, identity and continuity. It includes the values, beliefs, customs, institutions and material artifacts of a group. It is stable, but at the same time sufficiently flexible to cope with the contingencies of change that confront it. E.B Tylor defines culture as 'the complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a person as a member of society.'⁴ This gives a clear view that culture is the way of life of people and the way they cope with all dimensions of the context in which they live.

In order to realize the necessity of appropriate adaptation, Seventh-day Adventists recognize that, each culture is distinct. Ellen White has written that “the apostle Paul varied his manner of labour, shaping his message to the circumstances under which he was placed.” She insisted that workers with God “are not to be....stereotyped in their manner of working, unable to see that their advocacy of truth must vary with the class of people among whom they are working and the circumstances they have to meet.”⁵ The model of adaptability is prescribed by the first verses of the book of Hebrews which is a guide from God to help understand how God accomplished the task of adaptability. He spoke “through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb 1:1). God communicated Himself and His plan of Salvation through the language, symbols, customs and culture of prophets and people. The content of the communication was given by God, but the means of communication did not disregard the language, setting or even the personality and education of the biblical writer.

The SDA Church recognizes the diversity that characterizes the Church and the world. At the same time they cannot overlook the fact that all cultures have been tainted by sin. The gospel by its nature challenges and calls for the transformation of each culture. To the church the Holy Spirit is the agent of that transformation, which can take place only if the

⁴ E.B. Taylor, *The Origins of Culture, Part 1* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 1.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1915), 118-119.

message is communicated in the context of the receiving culture. By this the gospel can be heard, understood, accepted and applied. Each human being is nurtured within a cultural context. Individuals and communities interpret the world through this context. They evaluate incoming ideas, beliefs and values through their own pre-existing worldview. The Church believes that if it is unable to share the gospel in terms that are intelligible to them, then it is failing to give people opportunity to hear, understand and accept God's world.

The church realizes that the need to be understood is revealed by the use of language. Language is probably the most pervasive characteristic of a culture. It encapsulates the thought forms, the belief system, and the worldview. It facilitates the expression of all that is vital and necessary in a culture. If people do not understand the language, conceptual communication is almost impossible. In matters of religion, no language speaks to the heart, mind and innermost feelings as does our mother-tongue. The possession of the scriptures in mother-tongues or vernacular means that African peoples have access to the original sources of Christian teaching, on the authority of which they could, if need be, establish their own churches. The use of the bible in the vernacular is a clear indication that we can hear God speaking to us in our own language. The African gets meaning in the use of the vernacular bible.

The importance of this fact is theological. The Christian belief that the bible in the vernacular remains in every respect the Word of God, has its basis in what took place on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, through the first Christian witnesses, spoke at one and the same time to people 'who had come from every country in the world' (Acts 2:5), each in his own language, causing them to 'hear the great things that God has done' in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-12). Hearing the Word of God in our own language is not to be sneered at and left to 'illiterates'; it is essential if we seriously seek growth in our understanding of Jesus Christ. It is upon this promise that when the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries came to Ghana, they embraced the use of the vernacular. The use of the vernacular bible was encouraged. A team of translators was set up to translate the New Advent Hymnal to "Ghana *Akwanwhefo Nnwom*", the

Twi version and 'Ghana *Advento Lala*', the Ga version. With the introduction of formal education by the Seventh-day Adventists, every school was mandated to open a night school to train adult church members who were not privileged to have formal education to learn how to read and write the vernacular so that they could read and understand the vernacular bible in their own language.

To make their worship look more Ghanaian and to be meaningful, local songs in the form of anthems, choruses and '*abibidwom*', a local vocal musical form normally performed by women groups in the church, are used at Sabbath Services. Sometimes the Choir and the Singing Band sing songs of local composers either in the tempo of highlife (a popular Ghanaian guitar band music), *adowa* (a traditional Ashanti court and recreational music) or *agbadza* (a traditional Ewe recreational music) to the admiration of the entire congregation. The simplicity of the lyrics and language is a motivating factor to urge the worshippers participate more meaningfully. The use of some traditional musical instruments is a clear evidence of how the church embraces contextualization. Though the church employs the use of some Western musical instruments such as the keyboard, trumpet and guitar, more often than not some instruments usually regarded as traditional are integrated in worship. These traditional instruments include some idiophones which include instruments like bells, rattles, stick clappers, and castanets.

Membranophones which are made up of drums with parchment heads like the '*donno*', the hourglass drum, are used. The rattle which is a gourd wrapped in strings of seeds popularly called 'maracas' is frequently used to accompany singing. These traditional musical instruments, whenever they are used to accompany any type of music bring meaning to the worshippers. Emotions are aroused, worship becomes lively and ecstatic and worshippers are integrated fully in the worship as they move the body rhythmically to accompany the music being played. On the mode of worship some choose to make a "joyful noise unto the Lord" (Psa 98:4). Others seek to solemnize worship by opting to "be still before the Lord" (Zech 2:13). Texts such as Psalms 46:10 and 47:6,7 and Ezra 3:11 indicate that there is a place and time for the modes of worship, depending on the circumstances.

Interestingly, early Adventist worship included speaking in tongues, loud laughter and shouting. By the dawn of the past century Ellen G. White, an early prophetess of the church began to call the church to order, warning against any worship characterized by a “bedlam of noise” involving “shouting, with drums, music, and dancing.”⁶ During a Week of Prayer in 1901 Ellen cautioned:

Careful management on all points is needed, so that we shall neither run into the fire of fanaticism nor drift into formalism, which will freeze our own souls and the souls of others.⁷

Quite apart from the use of language and other modes of worship, the church has other means of adapting to culture. Various labels have been placed on the process of adapting their message to culture. While I use the term adaptation for the purpose of this chapter, others use the terms such as critical contextualization, indigenization or incarnational mission. The point is that there is a God-given responsibility to ensure that the authentic message is heard. The Church believes that while they are always assured that the Holy Spirit brings conviction and conversion, God has placed on them the responsibility to communicate the message and power of the gospel in the best possible ways and with as much clarity as possible.

This responsibility involves two aspects. One aspect is the church's responsibility to adapt the message and the other is the need for the messenger to be adaptable. In the process of communication neither stands alone. However, for purposes of discussion there is the need to consider them separately.

Adaptation of the Message

Contextualization of the message is more concerned with manner and

⁶ White, *Selected Messages, Book 2*, P.36

⁷ White, *Manuscript Releases, Vol 17*, P.48

emphasis than with content. In an attempt to contextualize their message, the certain things are put under consideration.

First, the church tries to find the most effective way to communicate the truth of its fundamental beliefs for each context. In a given situation some beliefs may prove to be more effective as entering wedges, and others will not be so effective for this purpose. The church encourages indigenous members to find the most effective language, symbols and values that shape the communication of the message. In finding these appropriate means they will challenge their respective societies with the claims of the gospel in a much more powerful way than if language, symbolism and values were imported from somewhere else.

Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventism has not only made efforts to redefine religion in general and Christianity in particular in African terms but it has also played a role in the reconstruction of the state and the transformation of some of Ghanaian cultures in general. It has been emphasized that indigenous Seventh-day Adventist Christians need to be encouraged to find the most effective language, symbols and values that shape the communication of the message.

God and Saturday in Akanland

This section of the work seeks to explain how traditional Akan beliefs of “the Supreme Being (God)” is applied in the spread of the SDA doctrine of the Sabbath. It also demonstrates how the Akan concept of God resonates with the Sabbath doctrine.

Before the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries came to Ghana, there had been several beliefs and practices pointing to the fact that God is the Creator of the universe and He was thought as different from all other Spirits and divinities. His powers transcend theirs and He has a unique attribute of immanence. The Akanland of Ghana generally holds the belief that God is the Creator and a special name given to Him is 'Kwame', the name of a Saturday-born male. The name 'Onyame Kwame' literally God of Saturday, is quite a force to reckon with and a

reference point to one of the cardinal doctrines of the Church with regards to its Sabbath truth.

In the 1920s during worship, Saturday, the seventh and last day of the Akan week the traditional Akan Seventh-day Adventist has no problem recognizing 'Onyame Kwame' for His day, worshipping or paying Him homage in accordance with the wisdom of the elders and customs, as well as loving and obeying the will and ways of his Creator. According to an elder, Opanin J.K Amoah, if there is anything he is positive and categorically sure of, it is the knowledge that, God, the Supreme Being, is called Kwame in his language, and that the elders say His special day “birthday” or day of worship is Saturday. Anyone trying to deny this fact of Akan tradition would be considered dishonest.⁹

Traditionally, the Akuapem regard the weekly cycle as beginning from Sunday (first day of the week), and ending with Saturday (seventh day of the week). This is true of the Asante as well and of all Akan people. Rattray, writing in the early 1920s affirms that the Asante call God Onyame or Onyankopon Kwame “whose day of service is a Saturday”, adding that this Asante God is the same as Jehovah of the Israelites whom they worshipped on the Sabbath or Saturday.¹⁰ Two decades later, Dr J.B Danquah produced a work on the Akan and made some remarks on the Akan God of Saturday. Danquah noted that the Akan recognized that “all men are issue of the first progenitor, the ultimate ancestor and creative Nana whose day is Saturday: Nana Nyankopon Kwame ... the divinity whom the Akan call Nyankopon Kwame, the “Creator” God of Saturday.¹¹ This God of the Akan is also “The Supreme Being, the Saturday Sky-God.”¹²

⁹ Interview granted to Opanin J.K Amoah of Agona Ashanti SDA Church (Age 85)

¹⁰ Sutherland Rattray, *The Ashanti* (The Clarendon Press, 1923) pp 141, 144

¹¹ J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion, Second Edition* (London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1968), 29-30

¹² Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 7

The sacredness of Saturday to the Akan Supreme God, is again underscored by Danquah as follows:

The God of religion is therefore called “He of Saturday”, either because He is supposed to have been born on Saturday or that Saturday is the appropriate day for His worship. On every fortieth Saturday, called *Dapaa* or *Dapaada*, Open or Free Day, special ceremonies are performed in respect of Saturday's God.¹³

Subsequent researchers who followed the trail of Danquah discovered the same essential truth about the Akan God, namely, His sacred day of Saturday. Dr. K.A Busia, enumerating the various titles which the Ashantis ascribe to God observed that “he is also personalized as Onyankopon Kwame the Great One who appeared on Saturday.¹⁴ Williamson did not contradict his predecessors on this point. “Onyankopon”, he wrote, also receives the day name Kwame, the name of a male born on Saturday, which is reckoned to be the Supreme Being's day of worship. This day name also indicates that the Supreme Being is thought of as personal.¹⁵

The spread of the Akan people throughout the greater section of Southern Ghana is apparently one reason for the universality of the 'Onyame Kwame' concept among societies in this part of the country. It is against the background of some of the cultural contexts that the SDA Message has gained prominence in most of the Southern parts of Ghana especially the Akan speaking areas. The Akan doctrine or concept of God resonates with the Sabbath doctrine. The understanding is that some of the

¹³ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 43.

¹⁴ K.A Busia, *The Ashanti of the Gold Coast. African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African People*, (Ed. Daryll Forde Oxford, Oxford Universities Press, 1976), 192.

¹⁵ Sydney George Williamson, *Akan Religion and Christian faith: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions* (Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 1965), 87.

doctrines of the SDAs which find their interpretations in some of the traditional or cultural practices are easily employed to ensure effective communication and adaptability. If one is asked why the SDA Church is quite predominant in most of the southern parts of the country, particularly Ashanti, it is partly explained that the already existing cultural and traditional practices are the effective tools which are adopted to serve as a bait to attract the would be converts. The Church recognizes that their perception of truth develops in a linear historical progression and as such they apply it and communicate it in the richness and diversity of the Church and the world around them.

Adaptation of the Messenger

The Church holds the view that the task of its messengers is to identify with a people and their culture without losing their own identity. Integrity in mission demands both identification and identity. The Church contends that incarnational mission approaches the world with a willingness to take risks for the sake of the gospel, while at the same time maintaining integrity of the gospel and the mission itself. In other words, it takes the mission and ministry of Jesus seriously. Jesus is not only an example in personal piety but an example for all those who have been discipled and are willing to take the gospel commission as their mandate. The principle of identification without losing identity means that every aspect of the Church's interface with the world will be critically examined to ensure that they are facilitating rather than inhibiting the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Church, in using the incarnational approach to mission has several implications to follow. Briefly stated are the following:

- The incarnational method ensures that the message will make sense for each group of people.
- An incarnational approach by the cross-cultural worker communicates to the recipients of the message that although sin has tainted everyone and everything, all that is good and consistent with Christian faith in their culture is to be respected and affirmed.

- Incarnational mission establishes a participatory dialogue for seeking truth.
- Incarnational ministry and mission focus confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and awaken people in each cultural setting to their need of God's gracious provision in Jesus Christ.

The SDA Church started expanding in Ghana when African workers joined their missionary counterparts. It has been discussed in chapter two the role of some Ghanaian ministers and workers in the growth of the SDA church in Ghana. Tracing a brief history of the church in Agona Ashanti, it could be seen that the European missionaries had the task of identifying with the people and their culture without losing their own identity. This process helped the fast spread of the message to all parts of the Agona traditional area. The move to get Adventism started in the Ashanti Region of Ghana was initiated at a General Conference of the SDA Church held in Sierra Leone in the late 1913. It was at this conference that Pastor William H. Lewis and his group of men were instructed to build a base for SDA mission in the heart of Ghana which obviously pointed to Ashanti.

In October 1914 Lewis and his party arrived in Kumasi and some days later set out in search of new station. On November 6, 1914, the paramount chief of Agona, Nana Kwame Boakye I and his elders offered Pastor Lewis a large tract of land and a residential building in his palace for his immediate use until permanent headquarters were built. Pastor Lewis started the establishment of a church and school in the chief's palace. The chief sent a word to all his subjects to send boys to the Whiteman's school at Agona. In the middle of 1915, thirty- four (34) pupils were enrolled for formal education and five (5) converts for the beginning of Agona Church. Both the school pupils and the new converts used a room in the chief's palace as classroom and a place of worship. Lewis had the sense of belongingness throughout the period that he was housed at the chief's palace because of how he adapted himself the very situation in which he found himself. He could speak a little Twi and he had direct interaction with the chief and his elders and even to his converts. This, the people say was one of the attributes to the growth of the church. Instead of isolating himself and planting his

converts at a secluded place, they all socialized together to meet each other's spiritual and social needs.

When the missionaries realized the immense contribution of the African pastors and converts to the growth of the church, there was a shift in leadership roles. More Ghanaian pastors were permitted to lead the church from its headquarters to the local and district levels. Today, the Church is quite independent in its leadership roles. There is not a single missionary in Ghana as at now. From the headquarters of the church in Accra to the various conferences and missions fields all over the country are seen Ghanaian leaders shepherding the church to its present status.

The Dangers of Inappropriate Adaptation

To make their message heard the church needs to be alert to some very real dangers. The Church contends that just as they lose the effectiveness of communication of the message when they fail to contextualize appropriately and critically, so they lose its effectiveness when they evaluate the cultural context to such an extent that it dominates the content of the message. In these situations the Church will be in danger of losing the message itself. The Church deems it most important that it grants to each other the right to express its message in context, while at the same time recognizing that it has the responsibility to listen to others and by comparing various issues pertaining at a particular time, the best is taken to ensure favourable and healthy co-existence. At times it will be very difficult to find the balance between what appears to be opposite ends of the pole. If the church fails to do that and drifts in the direction of either an uncritical syncretism or an absolutist ethnocentrism, they do a great disservice to the universal mission of the Church. Seventh-day Adventists will best fulfill the mandate they believe has been given them by God as they honour and maintain beliefs and structures that unite them while continuing to work toward finding appropriate ways to critically contextualize their ministry and message. To the SDAs appropriate contextualization of ministry and message, adopting the incarnational model of Jesus Christ, already discussed in the chapter, is the means of bringing unity to the church.

Conclusion

The Seventh-day Adventist Church of today will be effective as it finds ways to express the message in terms of the culture of its recipients. This is what the Church refers to as Jesus' method. Relevant and authentic theology is the one that provides answers to the pressing needs of adherents and meet their vital needs and satisfy their hopes and aspirations by taking both the Bible and their entire cultural and historical milieu seriously. The church by honouring those cultural elements that are consistent with the gospel and the cardinal doctrines it upholds. People need to experience and express their faith in a way that gives identity as children of God. In spite of their Western origin and connections, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not dismiss African concerns as irrelevant.

It is however observed that much as the SDA Church adopts some modes of traditional elements to spread its message and evangelize the people, much caution is exercised. Many people question why the church does not use drums, either traditional or Western, why there is no clapping of hands and why the mode of worship is not like some other churches. These questions throw a big challenge to the SDA Church today because it seems it does not employ new trends in the style of worship. The explanation the SDA Church gives is that it does not want to be too 'worldly' since the application of excessive drumming and dancing may drift worshippers' attention to secular things rather than sacred things. Much as the SDA Church has been criticized for being quite selective and discriminatory in the application of some African modes in its worship, much effort is made to ensure its smooth running to face the challenges of the day.

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RHETORIC READING OF 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-4, 10-17

FELIX OPOKU-GYAMFI¹

Abstract

Many commentators on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians base their conclusions on the current culture of reading and analysing the text without due cognisance to the culture in which the immediate recipients experienced and understood the letters. Using performance criticism, this paper argues that Paul's reason for writing 1 Corinthians 1:1-4, 10-17 was to solve the problem of factions in the Corinthian church that might have arisen from the members' strong admiration for rhetoric and oral performance instead of theological differences. It interprets the text based on the "oral/aural" medium through which early Christians experienced the writings and traditions we have in the New Testament. The paper is organised under three main headings. The first section discusses the background of the city Corinth; the second section is on literacy in the Greco-Roman world; and the third section analyses oral performance elements in the passage.

Introduction

A written text in the ancient times had different significance compared to today's. It was an oral culture rather than a written one. Literary works in antiquity were most times read and heard in a communal setting than in the mostly individualistic setting of today.² Performance Criticism as a

¹ Felix Opoku-Gyamfi holds an MA in Theology from the University of Wales, Lampeter, UK. He is an Ordained Minister of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and a Lecturer in Biblical studies in the School of Theology and Missions, Valley View University, Accra, Ghana, where he doubles as the Dean of Men.

² Whitney Shiner, Proclaiming The Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark

method of interpretations thus offers a great deal of impetus into the interpretation of New Testament texts so much that it cannot be ignored. This method though primarily centres on the “oral/aural medium through which early Christians experienced the writings and traditions we now have in the second testament,”³ it embodies many other approaches such as Historical, Narrative, Form, Textual criticisms. This paper explores 1 Corinthians 1:1-4, 10-17 from a Greco-Roman oral performance setting.

The paper progresses through three main headings. The first section discusses the background of the city Corinth. Literacy in the Greco-Roman world is discussed thereafter, and oral performance elements in the passage is analysed followed by a conclusion.

Background of Corinth

Corinth was for a long time a city of the Greeks until it was destroyed in 146 BC. A century later, it was reconstructed at Julius Caesar's command as a colony of the Roman Empire. Freed slaves mainly from various parts of the empire populated this reorganised city. It was the economic backbone of the province of Achaia. It was well situated to serve as an interjection between the Corinthian Gulf and the Saronic Gulf ensuring successful commercial activity in the city.⁴ This commercial boom attracted several artisans and sophists who captured the emerging culture to gain popularity. With the freed slaves now turned into entrepreneurs and raised to social prominence, the competitive environment of the city was set. As such, culture of less literates, public speaking was seen more of display of one's substance. The art of oral performance included the delivery, posture, stage and presence. One characteristic thing that might have gained the admiration of the people of Corinth for excellence in oral

(London: Trinity Press International, 2003), 1.

³ David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies Part II,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 36 (2006): 180.

⁴ Leon Canon Morris, “1 Corinthians,” in *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 17.

performance was the Isthmian games (games that involved people orally arguing for a price) which was celebrated near the city.⁵

After Paul's discouraging experiences in, Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, he found a solace in Corinth where he met and befriended the merchant couple Priscilla and Aquila. He then began to preach in the synagogue there but with another opposition meted out to him he resorted to the Gentiles. That incidence led to the conversion and perhaps the baptism of the households of Stephanus, Gaius, Crispus, and the subsequent establishment of the Corinthian church. After a while, Paul left for other mission fields. The church Paul left behind may have been a collection of house churches that met in the houses of the rich church members.

The factional problem in the Corinthian church is mostly oversimplified with little knowledge of the background that occasioned the writing of the letter. Some limit the opposition to Paul in the two letters only to a mere psychological attempt of Paul to regain authority over the Corinthian Church. Others explain the opponents of Paul in Corinth as Christian 'Judaizers'.⁶

Others like Peter Marshall seem to explain the factional problems expressed in the letter to the Corinthians as something that Paul called unto himself because he broke the social convention for making friends (giving and accepting gifts) in the Greco-Roman society of antiquity.⁷ Upon reflection, it can be observed that such commentators base their conclusions on the present worldview of knowledge from written text, which contrasts the oral culture within which both the Corinthian church and the letters to them functioned. Again, we must not take it for granted

⁵ Rhoads, "Performance Criticism", 19.

⁶ Luther M. Stirwalt Jr., *Paul The Letter Writer* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 6.

⁷ For extensive study on the Social setting of the Greco-Roman world, see Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 165-251.

that the reaction of Paul's opponents in Corinth indicates differences in theological viewpoints.

Before one can adequately interpret the first letter to the Corinthians, the following questions need to be answered. What was the culture and situation in the Greco-Roman World of Corinth? How did the culture influence the church in Corinth? What was the role of letters in the oral culture? What elements of oral performance does Paul employ in the letter to address the factional problems in the church? What importance does this background offer to the interpretation of the letter?

Literacy in Greco-Roman world

Illiteracy in the ancient world was very high thus, the use of writing was reserved for the Nobles or the upper class of society, literate slaves and some freed slaves.⁸ Witherington estimates that the literacy rate among the Biblical cultures ranged from five to twenty percent.⁹ Among the Jews in Israel the literacy level could be as low as three percent. Literacy as used in the ancient world might have consisted of only the “rudimentary ability to read and write...enough for one's trade.”¹⁰ This reading and writing may not have been as fluent as it is in the modern world.

In the Greco-Roman world as a whole writing was used for long distance correspondence¹¹ such as ruling an empire. Administrators wrote official letters to their subordinates in various provinces. Again, laws were inscribed on stones and posted in public places like the markets. People were normally sent purposely to orally explain the written laws to the people and thus the inscribed and posted law only reminded the people of

⁸ Joanna Dewey, “Textuality In An Oral Culture: Survey of the Pauline Traditions,” *Semeia* 65, Society of Biblical Literature (1995): 39.

⁹ Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the Art of Persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009), 1.

¹⁰ Shiner, *Proclaiming The Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark*, 12.

¹¹ Dewey, “Textuality In An Oral Culture: Survey of the Pauline Traditions,” 53.

the power and authority of the Emperors were made manifest among the people. Besides this literacy was used in the art industry and served as an indicator of one's social status (a must for the Upper Class).¹²

Several reasons accounted for the inability of many greater portion of the population to read and write among which are: (a) The typographic nature of literature- the ancient texts were written in capital letters without punctuations, spaces between words and the letters ran unbrokenly continuous.¹³ Even where there was a break between words, no syllabic consideration was made. These made their legibility extremely cumbersome to decipher. (b) High cost and availability of writing materials – papyrus which was a bit convenient to write on were very expensive and only the upper class in society could afford it. Hence the less endowed who were literate wrote on broken pots of clay.

The culture in antiquity thus did not depend largely on the written word for communication. Therefore, oral communication was the common form of engaging one another in conversation. Literacy was then used 'to enhance and facilitate orality'.¹⁴

Letters were read aloud to the hearing of all addressees¹⁵ and those to a group of people were orally performed. Public criers, street performers, storytellers, actors and those trained in rhetoric, diffused information orally.

The oral culture thus was also found in the early Christian churches resulting in Paul using letters for the long correspondence. In his Letters Paul follows the official conventions for letter writing in his time.¹⁶ These letters were meant to be performed orally as it was done in the secular society - either in a theatre or in Odeon.

¹² Dewey, "Textuality In An Oral Culture: Survey of the Pauline Traditions," 41.

¹³ Shiner, *Proclaiming The Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark*, 12.

¹⁴ Shiner, *Proclaiming The Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark*, 45.

¹⁵ Stirwalt Jr., *Paul The Letter Writer*, 8.

¹⁶ Stirwalt Jr., *Paul The Letter Writer*, 33.

The performance in the early churches might have been a replica of the Jewish synagogues. The ceremony in the synagogue was nothing short of theatrical display in which the preachers skilfully persuaded the people about the truth they are presenting,¹⁷ thereby attracting applauding and shouting reaction from the audience.¹⁸ Thus, worship in the early Christian churches was also emotionally expressive.¹⁹

Characteristically, the buildings -- the synagogues - allowed the audience only to watch the performances but also to participate in it. "There was ...an open area extending from the front into the centre, a kind of stage where the participants in the liturgy could act"²⁰ indicating a shape of a circumflex. The audience then could discuss, jeer, or even direct their eyes to a particular person/group that may be addressed at a time.

With this nature, a performer could not risk adequate preparation for delivery. The orator had to familiarise himself with the text to be delivered focusing on which parts needs to be stressed. Gestures of the performer were of equal importance to his words.²¹ The performer was to bring the living voice of the writer to bear. Thus, the 'parousia'²² presence of the author of the letter was to be felt during the performance. What all these means is that Christianity begun and developed in a dominantly oral culture.

¹⁷ Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, ed. Riches John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 113-114.

¹⁸ Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul*, 114.

¹⁹ Richard F. Ward, "Pauline Voices and Presence as Strategic Communication," *Semeia* 65 (1995): 98.

²⁰ Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul In Second Corinthians*, 113.

²¹ For an in-depth study of the requirements of Oral performance see Ward, "Pauline Voices and Presence as Strategic Communication," 100. He discusses Quintilian's *Institutes* a valuable resource for historical studies in Oral performance.

²² Bernhard Oestreich, "Letter Reading as Performance: Paul Addressing Distinguishable Groups of the Audience" (Germany, 2009), 1.

Oral Performance in 1 Corinthians 1. 1-3; 10-17

The letter is very interesting when viewed from the perspective of performance criticism. It gives insight to the problem that Paul dealt with at Corinth. Right from the onset Paul, the author, seems to build up his credentials for the authority of writing the letter, giving a reason the why the recipients must read it by saying, “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus...” (1.1a RSV). By the usage of both the adjective κλητὸς and the noun θελήματος his calling is described as something Christ in His own right initiated even against the wish of Paul himself. He then states Sosthenes as his co-sender. In this same pattern of official letters in antiquity, Paul writes from a distance, Ephesus.²³ In this, the reader performs with a deep voice to symbolize the authority of Paul and his letter.

Paul addresses the primary recipient of the letter ἀσπῆ ἐκκλησία (singular) τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ οὔσης²⁴ ἐν Κορίνθῳ. The use of the church in singular and the present participle plus the definite article seem to be a deliberate rhetorical tool challenging the audience to think of themselves as one united body with one foundation.²⁵ For the same intent and purpose, he enlarges the recipients of the letter to include all believers everywhere. The audience may be wondering why Paul brings all believers in to a letter written for them. By this Paul intends to let the factionalized Corinth Church understand that anyone who calls on the name of God no matter the part they play may be all have the same Christ as they have. This followed by the greetings and Praise for the Corinthian church. In all these, the whole church is addressed.

²³ For an extensive discussion on the similarities that exist between Paul's Letter and the Letter formats in the Greco-Roman world see Stirwalt Jr., Paul The Letter Writer, 25.

²⁴ The use of the present Participle plus the definite article means 'the existing one'.

²⁵ Robertson observes that these rhetoric tools are the means Paul uses to indicate from his point of view the church was still united and had not yet been affected by the schisms that had begun among the members. This is a worthy observation. See Charles Kevin Robertson, Conflict in Corinth: Redefining the System (P. Lang, 2001), 117.

In verse 10 Paul introduces the subject of the letter with Παρακαλῶ μᾶς and states his thesis statement “propositio” ‘[...] that you all may say the same thing and not to allow schisms among you’. The mention of this verb could have been done with a passion in the voice of the reader. This would have evoked similar passion in the audience in expectance of what their founder want to ask of them. Paul describes the problem at Corinth as that of communication. All the members are speaking, differently, thinking differently and do not share the same opinion. This seems to indicate that Paul's is very much concerned about the oral communication in the Church. This background will obviously influence the oral performance of the letter. The reader will have to prepare adequately and bring to bear every skill of oration before this yearning audience who seem to seek anchorage in the best oral communication. He should portray the care and concern of Paul in his (the reader) voice.

The verb Παρακαλῶ has been variously translated as “I beg, I appeal or I ask.” However once it is accepted as introducing the central argument of the whole letter then it needs to be understood in terms of being a “strong appeal or request”²⁶ ushering in a deliberative rhetoric.²⁷ The tone of the reader at this point directs the audience to expect an important plea or request from the author. The meaning of *οσχίσματα* on the audience has been much debated. The word may mean a tear in a cloth, a rift, or a split. Mitchell underscores that the word is descriptive of political party with fixed membership.²⁸ Welborn continues that “with this savage irony of the word Paul imprints or paints a picture of a familiar image about self-conceitedness in society which gives rise to partisanship upon the

²⁶ Bauer Walter, “Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,” ed. William Danker Frederick, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 264265.

²⁷ Margaret M. Mitchell, Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 85111.

²⁸ Mitchell, Paul and the Rhetoric, 71.

surface of his letter like a film in the minds of the audience.²⁹ It can thus be said that the use of the word *σχίσματα* though seem too strong for the religious setting of the letter it served as a good metaphor to show the audience the seriousness of the entrenched positions they had taken. Paul seems to offers the audience a solution to the schisms in the church in this same verse by the use of verb *καταρτίζω*. This verb has about four meanings but the ones that may be relevant here are: (a) to restore a former condition and (b) to make complete what one lacks.³⁰ Thus, Paul could be doing two things to the audience with this verb. First, he entreats them to be restored to the same opinion they once held since Christ the cornerstone of the church is neither divided nor their baptism into his body was not into anyone else.³¹ Secondly, he seeks to make perfect his so-called defect in oral delivery through the reader of the letter so that he can be indirectly restored to his previously enjoyed sole preference of the Corinthian Church.

In verse 11, Paul continues to impress upon the audience that not all the members are in support of the divisions among them by revealing his informants “the people of the house of Chloe.” With this the listeners may be wondering why not the church leaders? All eyes may have been directed to them who might definitely be sitting in front. They face the blame and shame for not telling Paul the true state of the church. Perhaps they are also aligned to one side of the parties. He expresses worry over these dissensions among the congregation and thus use the phrase *ἀδελφοί*³² μου – “my brothers” with an emotional string to put them all under the roof of unity. This word has been repeated twice(vs. 10) with similar effect. In verse 12, the reader reaches the climax of the

²⁹ L.L Wellborn, “On the Discord in Corinth: 1Corinthians 1-4 and Ancient Politics,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 1 (85 111AD): 89.

³⁰ For extensive discussion on the various meanings of the verb *καταρτίζω* see—Walter, “Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,” 526527.

³¹ This point is well buttressed with the theological arguments posed through the rhetorical questions in verse thirteen (13).

³² This is repeated only twice but here is the only place where *mou*(my) is added perhaps for an emotional empathy.

performance. The various factions are addressed directly; 'What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ"'(RSV). Paul uses μέν...δέ to compare and contrast the various groups that the members seem to belong. He addresses each group in turns as they might have been seated. In this part, the reader pauses briefly after each question; he reflects and guesses which faction will be next in the revelation. Nevertheless, crescendo in his voice becomes evident as he indicates the ascendancy in the groupings.

Here Paul quotes what the people are thinking in an attempt to reach them individually. This shows parallelism as each group claims their own slogan to be the best thereby making the divisions intense. The writer divides the congregation into four sections. There may have been only two groups but Paul exaggerated the groups to four just to let the audience know how far the list could extend to if such factions are to continue. Again, he cunningly begins from those who follow him in order to have the moral right to address the followers of Apollos, who may be the main target.

Moreover, Paul seems to build a hierarchy to classify himself as the least and Christ as the greatest since they are all laboring in His vineyard. However, this classification can be ironical with the fact that he (Paul) built the foundation only for Apollos to build on what he had done with the same purpose of doing it for Christ. Besides, if it is accepted that Christ is the highest concerning the classification and Christ is the One who willingly called Paul to be His Apostle, then the authority vested in him by Christ automatically puts him beyond any par. This explanation gives significance to the description of his authority in verse 1.

Now that the each party has been addressed in the face, the audience may now be discussing among themselves in the congregation who might have started these factions, hence he point fingers at each other. In verse thirteen (13) Paul addresses two groups. First, he addresses the entire congregation with the first rhetorical question μεμέρισται ὁ Χριστός "Is Christ divided?" Second, he addresses "Paul's party" followers in the

second and third questions regarding crucifixion and baptism. ὑμῶν³³ has been repeated about four times elsewhere³⁴ in the passage until here where it directs the ones being addressed. The followers of Paul's party might have used their being baptized by him either as a reactionary or a solidarity reason in opposition to those who assessed and preferred him to Apollos who was skilled in rhetoric and oral delivery. It is not surprising that Paul spends the next three verses to address this reason of baptism as nothing substantial. The rhetoric questions are indicated by the negative particle *mh* in them. Even though the audience does not answer these questions practically, the negative answer 'no' may be showing on their faces and on their minds. They are therefore persuaded to think through in giving their sole allegiance Christ and subsequently drives home the idea of Christ's prominence, an idea, if well understood and embraced puts him beyond any par, particularly with people of oral/aural competence like Apollo. Again, the use of parallelism as evident in the various names Paul mentions, emphasizes the separate ways each member of the congregation can go and how the parallel structure will endure without an end.

In verse 14, Paul ironically expresses satisfaction that he did not baptize any of the members with the exception of Crispus and Gaius. Most translators add 'God' to εὐχαριστέω to parallel verse 4. This parallelism means that Paul was being grateful to God that he did not permit him to baptize in his missionary endeavors. The audience might have felt the same effect of the word as the first usage. Paul turns to the use of audience specificity.³⁵ Through this, he singles out specific individuals by name. At this point, the performer starts looking out in the audience for Gaius and Crispus to whom baptism may be a relevant message. He tones down after the exclamation of giving thanks about no baptism. Paul thus singles out these people and puts a burden on them to help fix the problem in the church. All attention was directed to them thereby making the scene well dramatized with the involvement of the audience.

³³ “You” here is in the genitive plural.

³⁴ Vs. 4, 11, 13, 14.

³⁵ Shiner, *Proclaiming The Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark*, 2630.

In verse 16, Paul corrects his oversight of the names of the people he baptized. This omission might have led to a discussion among the audience as to why he did not mention the name of Stephanus. This correction could impress three things on the audience. First, to let them understand that being baptized by a particular apostle should not lead to factions. Second, it might have revealed Paul's true weakness in oral performance, because in performance, the orator ought to deliver in coherence without any space to think of what to say next. According to Rhodes even "when hearing the text one cannot stop and reflect and look back as it is in reading, the listener either gets lost or gets carried away by it"³⁶ how much more the performer. Lastly, Paul might have intentionally broken the code of performance to buttress his opinion about it as he mentions in the ensuing verse.

In verse 17, Paul reiterates his authority and defines his mission statement as was given him by Christ. Baptism was not part of his charge therefore even if he did; the beneficiaries must not capitalize on that as their reason to form a party. Concerning the delivery of his message in the missionary commission he was not to use wisdom of speech (learned rhetorical skills as some Corinthians expected of which Apollos was superb) otherwise the message of the cross becomes empty devoid of spiritual fervor. Paul here ends his admonition on factions in the church. Creatively, he leads the audience to show their allegiance only to Christ, which indirectly means their allegiance to him (Paul) whom Christ has sent.

Conclusion

From the discussion of the text above one can clearly notice that the reason for writing the passage under review was to solve the problem of factions in the Corinthian church that might have arisen because of the members' strong admiration for rhetoric and oral performances instead of theological differences. This conclusion is enforced by the socio-cultural setting in which the church of Corinth was situated.

³⁶ Rhoads, "Performance Criticism," 180.

Paul craftily works out how to get his audience to accept and ascribe their allegiance to Christ alone, which consequently leads to their allegiance to him as His dully-called messenger in spite of any flaws he may have in rhetorical skills. Paul adds himself as one of the catalyst for the problem he tries to solve and this puts weight on his persuasive art in the letter.

It can also be concluded that Paul with his probable defect in oral performance was best represented through his letters that might have been performed by skilled orators. Further exploration into the entire chapter or perhaps the entire book will add to the conclusions reached in this paper.

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PROPHETISM AND DIVINATION: AN EXAMINATION OF SOME PRACTICES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND GHANAIAN CHRISTIANITY

JOSEPH GYANVI BLAY¹

Abstract

The diverse forms of divination that occur in the Old Testament (OT) have become a Biblical warrant for the current divination trend in Ghana. The study identifies the prominence of divination in African Religion as a predisposing factor. It finds out that the similarities between African traditional beliefs and the ancient Jewish culture make the OT more appealing to African prophets. Hence the incessant consultation of human intermediaries popularly designated “men of God” by clients to provide ritual solutions to personal misfortunes as it was in the days of Samuel. The concept of divination reveals the meaning of misfortune and prescribes the ritual means to counter their effects. The study recommends that since Jesus is the centre and bearer of the divine full revelation, attention should be directed to relationship with Him and not on the charismatic ministrations by prophets.

Introduction

In African history before the arrival of the missionaries there was the period of slave trade.² According to Kalu there was a racial segregation

¹ Joseph Gyanvi-Blay holds a Master of Arts degree in Religious Studies and Human Values from the University of Cape Coast, 2014. Email: josephgyanviblay69@gmail.com. 0207679715, 0265678531, 0236831575.

² J.D. Fage, *A history of West Africa: An Introductory Survey*, (4thed.),

and exploitation in the colonial period which was not administrative but a psychological instrument to wound and to humiliate the souls of the Africans.³ Asamoah-Gyadu perceives the people to have taken to “double insurance” a situation where people attended the mission churches and also consulted a “Tigare”, an anti-witchcraft cult for protection.⁴ Mwaura says that these churches emphasized charismatic and pneumatic experience, healing, African symbolism, music and instruments and leadership pattern. This situation might have created a desperate need for a deliverer who could find a solution to the situation, hence the emergence of African prophets or prophetesses.⁵ During the ministration of such African prophets and prophetesses, their prayers did not only eradicate problems but also revealed their root causes before their eradication and hence the concept of divination in their ministry came into being.

The Concept of Divination

The concept of divination plays a crucial part not only in revealing the meaning of misfortune but more importantly in prescribing the ritual means to counter their effects.⁶ According to David Burnnett, divination is the means by which a society seeks to determine the origin of a misfortune and then to prescribe the appropriate answer to that. He explains further by using Victor Turner's research on the Ndembu people⁷

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 111.

³ O.U, Kalu, (Ed.), *Africa Christianity: An Africa Story, Perspectives on Christianity* series 5:3 Pretoria: University of Pretoria, publication of Department of Church history, 2005), 274.

⁴ J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill/Africa Christian Press, 2005), 42.

⁵ Philomena Mwaura, N. 'The new religious movement: A Challenge to doing Theology in Africa'. *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*. 13(3) (2003), 1-19.

⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 40.

⁷ David Burnnett, *Unearthly powers: A Christian perspective on primal and folk religion* (Monarch Publication, 1988), 108.

to illustrate how to bring into the open what are hidden or unknown. The *New Bible Dictionary*⁸ also defines divination as the attempt to discern events distant in time or space that consequently cannot be perceived by normal means. The *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* says divination is the attempt to discern future events by such means as trance, vision or physical objects.⁹ The *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, categorizes the types of divination mentioned in the Bible as follows:

- a. Rhabdomancy, throwing sticks or arrows into the air.
- b. Hepatoscopy, examination of the liver of animal.
- c. Teraphim, uses of images.
- d. Necromancy, communicating with the dead.
- e. Astrology, reading of stars.
- f. Hydromancy, divining with water either by noting the reflections or inducing a trance.¹⁰

From Klaus Koch, divination is broadly classified into two forms namely inductive or instrumental divination and intuitive or mediated divination where a human medium passes on direct inspiration through his voice.¹¹ Evans-Pritchard lays emphasis on the technique of uncovering the unknown by saying that it is the methods or techniques of making the discovery of what is unknown, which in normal cases, cannot be known by experiment and logic.¹²

John Mbiti says that the African people feel inadequate sometimes to go before the Supreme God directly and so the people will go before God through either an intermediary man, an oracle, who is a prophet or

⁸ H.I. Mashall, Millard, A.R., Packer, J. I. & Wiseman, D. J. (Eds.), *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 279.

⁹ C.F.Pfeiffer, Howard, Vos, F. & Rea, J. (Eds.), *Wycliffe Bible dictionary* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, 2003), 468.

¹⁰ Pfeiffer, Howard, Vos, and Rea, *Wycliffe Bible dictionary*, 468.

¹¹ Klaus Koch, (1971). *The Prophets. Vol 1 Assyrian period*. London: S.C.M. Press, 1971), 7.

¹² E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azandes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 11.

prophetess or through a lesser deity. With this mentality, as the people pray through the prophets, they accompany their prayers with sacrifices or offerings.¹³ Even though they know that God will not literally eat or make use of the sacrifice, they offer sacrifices to show their humility before God, the seriousness of their problem and perhaps how desperate they are. The sacrifices are also meant to draw the attention of God to their needs. From this, it can be deduced that this African traditional practice is in line with the ancient Jewish tradition of consulting men of God and also going with gifts or offerings as was the case in 1 Samuel 9:1-10:26.¹⁴

In the same vein, Kwasi Dickson has also observed the cultural continuity between Israel and Africa. In others words, the African prophets who arose in the midst of imposition of European Christian values and beliefs related and identified with the Old Testament.¹⁵

Exegesis of 1 Samuel 9:1-10:27

Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe had been reduced to a very small number by the fatal war with Gibeah and there was the need to provide wives for 600 men that were considered to be poor due to their diminished number. Even though the tribe of Benjamin is the smallest and also financially poorest, it was high in dignity¹⁶ before the sight of Yahweh. Kish, the father of Saul is described as *gibborhayil* which means either he belonged to a warrior elite or probably a man of wealth.¹⁷ Saul's father might be a wealthy military general who had a lot of possessions including asses where some of them were missing and had to

¹³ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed., (London: Heinemann Introduction Books, 1991), 66.

¹⁴ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 66.

¹⁵ Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1984), 145 – 167.

¹⁶ Mathew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (U. S. A: Hendrikson Publishers, 2006), 397.

¹⁷ Robert.P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), 112.

send Saul and his servant to go and look for them.

In 1 Samuel 9:7 Saul asked the servant, "... if we go, what can we bring the man"? In the text, Saul was concerned about his ability to provide a local dignitary with an appropriate token of greetings (*tesura*) before requesting for assistance.¹⁸ The term for the gift used here, *tesura*, occurs only here in 1 Samuel 9:1-10:26 in Biblical Hebrew. This stands for a gift of greetings. This can be compared to the Akkadian *tamartu*, gift of greetings which fundamentally refers to an occasion of "seeing one another", which, in other words, may be a gift given upon seeing someone especially a king and hence a tribute.¹⁹ Robert P. Gordon believes that it was customary to take a present when one went to seek the help of a seer (1 Kings 14:3, 2 Kings 5:5, 15, 8:8). The gift, *tesura*, may be derived from the verb meaning "to see", and is therefore, precisely defined as an "interview fee".²⁰

From the *Peake's Commentary*, the word "seer" is mentioned in 1 Samuel 9:9 for the first time and has attracted much discussion. There are two words used here, seer, (*ro'eh*) and prophet (*nabi*). Seer and prophet are virtually identified generally as the same but differ in the way they function. Though here, they are used as synonyms, the words do suggest different characteristics. *Ro'eh* refers to the visionary element in the prophetic phenomenon whereas *nabi*, from the root word which means "to utter" seems to refer to the prophetic utterance of God's word.²¹ It can be deduced that the culture of consulting men of God or prophets concerning the unknown issues existed among the people of Israel. Although it has been stated by H.H. Rowley that "it is ... quite impossible to treat Hebrew prophecy as an isolated phenomenon, it is believed to have grown out of a background of Ancient Near Eastern

¹⁸ P.K. McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980), 176.

¹⁹ McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, 176.

²⁰ Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 113.

²¹ L. H. Brockington, *1 & 2 Samuel: Peakes Commentary on the Bible*. Eds. Black, (Hong Kong: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1977), 322.

prophecy”, and it has its uniqueness.²²

During the period of Samuel, consulting men of God for God's assistance in matters of secrecy in life had become a normal tradition of the people. This was to inquire the mind of God concerning a secret in life. It was as a result of the duty of inquiry that made Samuel so famous that Saul's servant suggested to Saul that they should consult. Furthermore, the gift given to Samuel by Saul seems to suggest that it was an accepted custom to give offerings to the seers for their services.²³ The fact that during the time of Deborah when she functioned as a judge in Israel she used to sit under a palm tree and people came to her for judgment suggests something of the function of the seer.²⁴

According to Hobart E. Freeman, the difference between the two terms lies in the fact that *nabi* stressed the objective or active work of the messenger of the Lord in speaking forth God's word, the seer, *rô'eh* on the other hand emphasized the mode of receiving divine revelation by “seeing”. In other words, the term prophet emphasized the prophetic utterances; the term seer indicated his method of receiving the divine communication.²⁵

In 1 Samuel 9:11-14 the statement, “... make haste: he has come just now from the city because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place...” in the time of Samuel, talks about the high place, *bâmâ* which was a local shrine centered on an artificial mound or a platform in an open space outside the city.²⁶ It was an area where various forms of worship took place.²⁷ From the passage the people of Israel came to

²² Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 18 – 28.

²³ Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, 31.

²⁴ H. Mowley, *Guide to Old Testament Prophecy* (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1979), 12.

²⁵ Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, 28.

²⁶ Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 114.

²⁷ McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, 175.

sacrifice to the Lord and also ate the sacrificial meal. The use of the high place later came under heavy condemnation since worst aspect of “pagan” or non-Israelite ritual was assimilated into its use.²⁸ By no means an exclusive Israelite institution, it nevertheless played a major part in the religion of Israel throughout its history, and even long after completion of Solomon's Temple. Because of the tendency of the religion of the high place to assimilate some worst aspects of “pagan ritual” it came under heavy fire from the prophets of the classical period (Ho 10:8, Am 7:9) and is denounced repeatedly in the books of kings.²⁹

From what has been said so far, it can be deduced that, the people of Israel had the custom of consulting Samuel, the man of God, to inquire of the Lord and as such instituted a high place as a local shrine where the people made sacrifices to God. Quite apart from that, Samuel could also inquire of the Lord on behalf of the people; intercede for the people who will be bringing their problems for directions and solutions even before they come to Samuel. It can also be inferred that apart from the fact that Samuel made sacrifices on behalf of the nation to Yahweh and individuals also made sacrifices there at the high place Samuel might have also had his personal devotion and meditation there and received revelations of people's cases and their solution even well ahead of time before they come. With this in mind, one can argue that it was during Samuel's personal devotion at the high place that he received the revelation in 1 Samuel 9:15 that Saul was going to come to him and consequently had all the information that must be given to Saul even before he came the following day.

In 1 Samuel 9:22-27, Samuel, having the fore knowledge of who Saul was going to be, gave him a special treat and also hosted him and his servant on the rooftop until dawn. When they woke up they went to a street outskirt of the city before sending the servant away from them so that Samuel could make known to Saul the word of God. We read in 1 Samuel 10:1, “Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head

²⁸ Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 114.

²⁹ Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 114.

and kissed him and said 'Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over people of Israel.'" This passage according to McCarter, Jr. indicates that anointment refers to rubbing or smearing with a sweet smelling substance. The practice involved a symbolic transfer of sanctity from the deity to an object or person and this was essentially a sacramental act.³⁰ Saul was anointed to be a prince. The Hebrew word here is *nagid*, which means "one who is raised up", 'elevated', 'made known' or 'singled out'. In this case, it is attributed to a king before he begins to reign. Thus the term regularly refers to the king designate or a crown prince.³¹

One of the signs that was fulfilled was the meeting of the two men near Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah in 10:2 who would tell Saul about the place where the asses can be found and the state of mind of the people in the house. Zelzah is mentioned only here and sometimes thought to conceal an occurrence of the verb *salah*, translated "come mightily upon". This name was probably coined after a memorable occasion of spirit possession there.³² From the above facts, it can be conveniently said that some kind of divinatory practices through a medium or a man of God such as Samuel was in progress and that was complemented by the use of divinatory instruments by authorized or accredited men of God. These practices were normal and accepted by the people of Israel. Divinatory practices, through which the unknown and hidden issues became unveiled continued to exist to the extent that a place like Zelzah, in the territory of Benjamin, could derive its name. In this case, people might have either consulted Samuel or went to Zelzah which was close to Ramah to inquire of the Lord concerning their problems.

In every age the faculties of receiving revelations and of uttering true oracles have been one of the most conspicuous elements in the endowment of men and women of the prophetic inclinations. It was because they possessed this faculty that the prophets of Israel came to be

³⁰ McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, 178.

³¹ McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, 179.

³² Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 117.

respected (even though they were initially despised) and became sought after by their contemporaries.³³ It is stated in 1 Samuel 10:17-27 that, “Now Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah and he said to the people of Israel, thus says the Lord...therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by thousands...the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lots...” Up to this point Saul's appointment has been kept secret in response to the earlier demand of the tribal elders (8:4-22). Samuel convenes a public assembly at which Saul can be presented as God's choice. Since the people are eager and anxious to have a king, a mere appointment by Samuel may not be accepted by the people and hence the process of election by lot which is also a divinatory process is used.³⁴

It is possible to discern the Lord's will to fall in with the wishes of the people. This is done through sacred lot. In this case there is the process of elimination from a larger entity to a smaller entity and finally the individual man. This leads to the discovery of Saul.³⁵ Even though Samuel knew whom God had chosen, he wanted to involve the people in choosing by the use of the lot. Samuel knew that there were people who would not agree to the choice since they had already rejected the sons that were appointed and so Samuel had to give everybody the chance to go through the selection process so that the one chosen can be acceptable to all.³⁶ Casting of lots, in this case, seems to bear numerical connotation and so use more of probability where every clan is presented and given equal chances to be chosen. When the lot fell on Saul, he had then disappeared and so Samuel had to inquire of the Lord once again this time by the use of *urim and thummim*.³⁷

³³ J. Lindblom, *Prophecy ancient in Israel* (London: Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1973), 71.

³⁴ Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 119.

³⁵ H.W. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 88.

³⁶ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 400.

³⁷ D.F. Payne, *New Bible Commentary*, (3rd ed.). Guthrie, D, Motyer, J. A, (Eds.). (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 292.

From the story in the passage, some divinatory practices like night vision or dreams, casting of lot upon the people by presenting them in tribes and families in order to choose Saul, the use of the *urim* and *thummim* to know where Saul was hiding and inducing spirit possession or ecstasy through music in order to be able to speak the mind of God were all sanctioned by Samuel. From these instances, it can be said that both intuitive or mediated divination and instrumental divination (Klaus Koch's classification of divination) were practised.

General Emphases, Teachings, Beliefs and the Practices of Most of the Prophetic Movements

According to Omenyo and Atiemo, Prophet Salifu Amoako, the founder and General Overseer of the Alive Chapel International, administers healing and deliverance to the people with the aid of oil, handkerchief, and honey. The prophet believes these items also are used as aids when praying for the people for the purpose of attaining wealth and prosperity. He however claims these items are administered under divine direction and are not the norm in the Church's ministration.³⁸

Omenyo and Atiemo further explain that in the ministrations of Prophet Apraku, the founder and General Overseer of King Jesus Evangelistic Ministry, the common feature of the Church is the sale of toilet soap, lime, anointing oil, honey, salt and white handkerchief, porridge which are believed to aid prayers during service. This is culminated in the sale of cubes of sugar, toffees, raw eggs and other items at prices that are several times higher than the market value in fund raising exercises.³⁹ All these use of items might be from the background of Klaus Koch's instrumental divination where certain instruments or items are used to uncover the unknown. The process above is also in line with the study of the ministration of Prophet Samuel where he used instrumental divination (*urim and thummim*) to find where Saul was hiding.

³⁸ Cephas N. Omenyo & A. O Abamfo, "Claiming Religious Space: The case of Neo-Prophetism in Ghana", *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, 1(1), (2006), 61.

³⁹ Omenyo, and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space", 62.

From Omenyo and Atiemo, the particular teachings and practices include the concept of the Twi word *ôtamfo* and Nzema word *Kpâvole*(enemy) and the practice of *akwankyerε* (guidance) in the various forms of exorcism and healing. In the teaching and practices of these *Asôfo* (Akan plural word for prophets and the prophetesses, singular is *osôfo*) there is the appropriation of the traditional concept of *ôtamfo* which seems to include not only evil spirits and witches but also human beings that are suspected of envy or jealousy. They go further to explain this concept with the fact that in traditional Akan life and thought *ôtamfo* or *Kpâvole* (enemy) is normally one that is suspected of undermining other people's health, wealth, honour or general well-being through witchcraft, evil, juju or spreading of malicious gossip.⁴⁰ According to Omenyo and Atiemo it is believed among the Akans that a witch or wizard can attack and harm one only if she or he is from one's family or connives with a member of one's family. This is the cause of mistrust, suspicion and tension among family members. This is further explained by the fact that the Akan belief is from the maxim which says:“*seaboa bi bekawoa, na â firiwontoma mu*” (the animal that bites you is hidden in your cloth) meaning that your enemy cannot harm you except he or she is aided by someone from the family.⁴¹ From researcher's observation in ministry, if the family member cannot harm you or help others to harm you, he or she can sell you to the assailants on contract to them. This concept is supported by Micah 7:5,6 which says "... a man's enemies are members of his household".⁴² The exclusive focus of the enemy has given rise to the novel ritual forms of dealing with them, protecting themselves or countering the enemy's diabolical activities.⁴³ Some of such means is the practice of whipping the enemy in prayer, representing the enemies with sticks and tying them with climbing twines to trees whiles praying over them (from researcher's experience and observation in Atwea Mountains in the Ashanti Region).All these ritual way of dealing with the enemy might have been from the Old

⁴⁰ Omenyo, and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space”, 62.

⁴¹ Omenyo, and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space”, 62.

⁴² Omenyo, and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space”, 63.

⁴³ Omenyo, and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space”, 63.

Testament background where God authorized the people of Israel to deal physically with their enemies by going to war with them or totally eliminating the enemies like Prophet Samuel telling Saul in 1 Samuel 15:3 that God had sent him (Samuel) to tell him (Saul) to go and destroy all the Amalekites for what they did to the Israelites some time ago thus eliminating their enemies.

With the coming of Jesus Christ in the New Testament times our enemies are more spiritual and must be dealt with spiritually as 2 Corinthians 10:4 says “for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds” or Ephesians 6 12 ... “for we are not contending against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Hence our enemies contending with us are not human beings and so we must not look for any physical means of addressing them. In this case we are not to use physical weapons against the enemies or look for certain personalities to blame for any bad occurrence in our lives. In the New Testament era we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

On the other hand there are some people who will not actually use ritual means to deal with the enemy but instead do so through symbolic slapping of the enemy by intense clapping of hands.⁴⁴ The worshippers declare their intension by repeating after the leader of the prayer session a declaration such as:

<i>Awuradee,</i>	Lord
<i>Semebô me sâm bô mpaè a</i>	When I clap my hands and pray,
<i>ôtamfobiara, ômma me nnyè yie no</i>	May the enemies, who work
	against me,
<i>apranaa nte ngu no so</i>	Be struck by thunder
<i>anaa car mbômo nku no</i>	Or be killed by a car
<i>seôyè me maame o,</i>	Whether it is my mother

⁴⁴ Omenyo, and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space”, 65.

*sεôye me papa o,
a naa obibiara a ô yâ ma tanfo
mamontetegu.*

Whether it is my father,
Or whoever it is that my enemy is
Let them fall.

Another practice of the prophetic ministry mentioned is the *akwankyerε* which is the prophetic guidance.⁴⁵ The *Asôfo* explain a person's situation and prescribe solutions.⁴⁶ From the researcher's experience, most of these prescriptions are mostly rituals which when performed bring solutions. These *Akwankyerε* or prophetic guidance are either given generally to the congregation during some days of fasting and prayers declared or given in cases of one-on-one basis. In the researchers observation the *Akwankyerε* given generally, is supposed to be done by each member of the congregation with faith for it to be effective.

According to Omenyo and Atiemo the one-on-one ministry session is referred popularly by the *Asôfo* as 'counseling' or guidance session by some scholars.⁴⁷ During this one-on-one counseling, the *osôfo* takes time to vividly describe what is spiritually going on in the life of the worshipper who goes for the counseling and prescribes a detailed ritual (*akwankyerε*) which is to be performed for the problems to be solved. From the researcher's observation, worshippers going for counseling are also known to go for consultation and there are some of the *Asôfo* who take a fee from the worshipper who comes to him or her for consultation like it is done in the hospital. The researcher's observation is that some of the *akwankyerε* might be as a result of breaking a taboo of some of spirits. This can be substantiated from the fact that the researcher was in a prophetic meeting where the *osôfo* was heard saying that *mede n' akyiwadeε beka no* meaning that he will touch the spirit with the taboo or prohibition. In doing so if the *ôsofo* knows what the evil spirit hates he or she will just do what is prohibited and since the spirit is repulsive to the prohibition the evil spirit will be compelled to leave. This fact might have the traditional background where the researcher observed with the

⁴⁵ Omenyo, and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space", 64.

⁴⁶ Omenyo, and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space", 65.

⁴⁷ Omenyo, and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space", 65.

Twelve Apostles' Church's major principle and theology of casting out evil spirits (exorcism). He further observed that, the *ôŝôfo* tries to go into negotiations with the spirit. In this negotiation the spirit will have to indicate its price or tell the *ôŝôfo* what it is going to take for it to leave the worshipper or client alone indicating what to accept may also include a prohibition to repel the spirit.

Relating the Modern Day Prophetic Ministry to the Prophetic Ministry of Samuel

Modern Charismatic prophetic ministry has a lot of similarities with that of Samuel's ministry. From Omenyo and Atiemo's research the prophetic ministries revolve mainly around the prophetic charisma and project themselves of having great spiritual power and capable of performing extraordinary feats and regarded by their clients as people 'who see'.⁴⁸ This is in line with the biblical scholar who also shares the same view about the man of God Samuel.⁴⁹ McCarter Jr., goes on to explain that it was this ability that made Samuel a man sought after by many people, example Saul and his servant when in search for the father's ass.⁵⁰ Saul and his servant in this modern day could have been said to have gone for consultation. In Samuel's time there was *tesura* which was a fee or gift for the *ôŝôfo* and hence some *Asôfo* charging consultation fee.⁵¹

From the researcher's experience, the modern Charismatic *Asôfo* see themselves as the intermediaries between God and the people just like what Mbiti says about the Jewish culture in the case of Prophet Samuel where the people have to accompany their prayers with sacrifices.⁵² This is seen when some of the worshippers who are already in financial crisis could be asked by some of the *Asôfo* to 'sow a seed' before they could have God's intervention.

⁴⁸ Omenyo, and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space", 66.

⁴⁹ McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, 176.

⁵⁰ McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, 176.

⁵¹ McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, 176.

⁵² Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 66.

This is in line with Breidenbach's who says that “Nyame (God) himself, who is the all-powerful is there but he has attendants...”.⁵³ From the full statement made in that text, God sees everything that is happening and through angels, reveals everything to these intermediaries. These intermediaries are the *Asôfo* who are able to bring solution to the people's problems through God's power.⁵⁴

This mentality above could be further substantiated by the kind of titles used by the *Asôfo* themselves and also by the worshippers for the *Asôfo*. Some of the titles like 'Oracle of God' which to the Traditional African has the understanding of an intermediary and the use of the title 'Man of God'. In my opinion, the Akan equivalent for the Man of God, *Nyamenipa* gives a vivid picture. To the Akan that title means a man who is God to the people. This is seen whenever the *ôsofo* is introduced at the pulpit and the worshippers shout words like *odiyifoô*. (prophet or prophetess) or *ôdi*, for short. During prophetic ministrations of the *Asôfo*, the ministrations are sometimes interjected by the shouts from the worshippers: *ôdiyifoô ,hye me nkôm!*”(prophet or prophetess prophesy onto me!) when the ministration excites the person.

Hobart E. Freeman (1971) says Prophet Samuel was called the seer, *rô'eh* which emphasized the mode of receiving divine revelation by “seeing” (pp. 18-28). In every age the faculties of receiving revelations and of uttering true oracles have been one of the most conspicuous elements in the endowment of men and women of the prophetic inclinations. It was because they possessed this faculty that the prophets of Israel came to be respected (even though they were initially despised) and became sought after by their contemporaries.⁵⁵ From all that has been discussed so far, Prophet Samuel in the Old Testament and the Charismatic *Asôfo* have

⁵³ P.S. Breidenbach, “*Sunsum Edwuma*”: *The spiritual work: forms of symbolic Communication in Ghanaian healing movement*. (PhD Thesis) Illinois: Northwestern University, 1962, 189.

⁵⁴ Breidenbach, “*SunsumEdwuma*”, 189 – 190.

⁵⁵ Lindblom, *Prophecy ancient in Israel*, 71.

become the center of divine revelation in both the biblical times and the modern times respectively.

According to Paul Tillich revelation is defined as removing the veil or the manifestation of something hidden which cannot be approached through ordinary ways of gaining knowledge.⁵⁶ This agrees in principle with Nukunya's definition of Divination which is the discovery of the unknown.⁵⁷

As Christians, we believe that the Old Testament records the early revelations of God by which he prepared the way for the Jews to understand and accept the coming of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ while the New Testament is the record of what people remembered Jesus doing and saying during his earthly ministry and how people responded and also the beginning of the Church and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹ David Hinson further explains that to Christians the full revelation of God is to be seen in the person of Jesus Christ and experienced through our relationship with him.⁶⁰

From the above discussions, Jesus is the full revelation and so every form of ministry that took place in Prophet Samuel's time was incomplete but was in preparation towards the coming of a complete revelation which is the coming of Jesus Christ and hence every Christian ministry much emphasize the teaching of the word of God and the relationship with Jesus Christ instead of the Charismatic ministrations. As Christians emphasize the former (the teaching of the word of God and the relationship with Jesus Christ) and then the latter (Charismatic

⁵⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (London: James Nisbet & Co Ltd., 1965), 120.

⁵⁷ G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology*, (2nd ed.). (Accra: Ghana University Press, 2003), 285.

⁵⁸ David F. Hinson, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1976), 1.

⁵⁹ Hinson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 3.

⁶⁰ Hinson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 3.

ministrations) will automatically manifest. In this case the best *akwankyerε* that could be recommended for every Christian is living strictly by the word of God.

The unfortunate or the sinful aspect of the prophetic ministry in these modern times that ministers must be cautious of every time is what Jesus may say to some people in Matthew 7:23 which says “And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from me, you evil doers'”. This does not mean those people actually sinned against God but because those people or the *Asōfo* who prophesied with Jesus' name could not direct people's focus and attention to Christ who is the bearer of revelation but allowed people's attention to be focused on their prophetic charisma as it was in the days of Prophet Samuel in the Old Testament.

Conclusion

Comparing the modern prophetic ministrations to that of Samuel, there is the tradition of consultation of men of God during counseling sessions. During this time the *ōtamfo* in life is identified and *akwankyerε* is prescribed for solution. During counseling or consultation some of the *Asōfo* take consultation fees which is in line with the *tesura*.

The modern Charismatic *Asōfo* see themselves as the intermediaries between God and the people. Production of ecstasy through music plays very important role in modern prophetic ministry. This is seen in the emphasis that the Charismatic Ministries place on music and loud public address systems. From the study it can be concluded that to Christians, since Jesus is the centre and bearer of the divine full revelation, attention must be directed to relationship with Him and not on the charismatic ministration of prophets.

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PRESENTING JESUS CHRIST TO AFRICA

KWAME YEBOAH¹

Abstract

Since the expansion of contemporary Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa a little over two centuries ago, witnessing to Jesus Christ has always been a challenge on account of several factors. Christianity still struggle to completely attract practitioners of African Religion (AR) and Islam. Many African religionists tenaciously hold on to their indigenous culture and worldviews, making it hard to get a positive response to the gospel from them. Muslims continue to find the fundamental teachings of the death, sonship and divinity of Christ challenging. In some parts of Africa, these sharp differences have led to conflicts and violence. Christianity is still seen by some Africans as imperialistic and insensitive to their culture and spirituality. The lack of knowledge and reluctance to contextualize the message of the gospel to make it more understandable and acceptable, and the struggle with postmodern influences are other major factors that pose a challenge to our witness to Jesus Christ in Africa today. Christian mission in Africa can become more productive if Christians are sensitive to the spiritual and social contexts of the indigenes. The Church has a duty to study the elements and cultures of other religious traditions to effectively witness Jesus Christ today.

¹ Kwame Yeboah holds a Master of Theological Studies from Tyndale Theological Seminary in Toronto Canada. He is the Dean of Academics at All Nations Bible College, Toronto Canada. email: ykwame@hotmail.com mobile: 001 416 302 0945

Introduction

Africa is a continent of diversity - ethnically, religiously and economically. One of its major enemy is the lack of unity with mutual understanding and respect. The past two centuries “were full of strife, either self-inflicted or imposed by others as a means of domination. In this century of globalization where the world becomes one big village”, religion has a duty to make the world a place of solace and worth living, first of all by preaching love and peace to all peoples.²

The expansion of contemporary Christianity in Africa has been attributed to the arrival of freed Christian slaves in Sierra Leone, West Africa at the end of the eighteenth century. Sierra Leone, the country I came from, “was the first Protestant mission field in tropical Africa,”³ and hence a Protestant stronghold. The major Christian advance into West Africa emanated from Sierra Leone.⁴

This paper will focus on some of the crucial issues that continue to impact our witness to Jesus Christ in Africa today, vis-à-vis: Other Religions, Christianity is Imperialistic and Insensitive, Contextualization and Postmodernism.

Other Religions - AR and Islam

Africa's three major religions are African Religion (AR), Christianity and Islam. AR and Islam are considered indigenous to Africa. AR is the oldest, and the fishing ground of the other two religious groups. Islam has been in touch with Africa for more than a century. In fact, in some countries of the Sahara Islam is the indigenous religion. Over the last

² Method Kilaini, “Ecumenism in a Multi-Religious Context.” *Ecumenical Review* 1 (2001): 1

³ Gilbert W. Olson, *Church Growth in Sierra Leone*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 15.

⁴ J. Hildebrant, *History of the Church in Africa: A Survey* (Denver, CO: International Academic publishers Ltd, 1990), 97.

century, it has had a steady growth (though mostly in consolidating Muslim areas rather than Islamizing new areas). In 1900 Muslims constituted 32 % of Africa's population; in 1950 they had increased to 37.3 percent and in the year 2000 they were 40.3 percent of the population. With the exception of North Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia most of Africa was effectively evangelized by Christianity about two hundred years ago. Christianity has grown rapidly in Africa. In 1900 Christians constituted about 9.21 percent of the population, by 1950 they had grown to 24.79% and in year 2000 they are estimated to be 46.59 percent and the major religious belief on the continent.⁵

For many Africans, Christianity is still considered an immigrant religion by both Traditionalists and Muslims; as such it continues to struggle to gain converts that are 100 percent committed to the message of the gospel. Many Christians in Africa are dualists who practice Christianity and Traditional Religion.

Since the advent of Christianity in Africa, relaying the gospel of Christ to African Traditionalists has been a challenge. For many Traditionalists, religion is a way of life. There is no sharp dividing line between religion and culture. More importantly, African Traditionalists believe that their religion and culture originated from God, and cannot be parted with or replaced.⁶ AR is the heritage into which the traditionalists were born. It continues to be maintained by God and influenced by the ancestors. African Religion “emerged from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present generation” and is “being practised today in various forms and intensities”⁷ in African homelands and settlements.

⁵ Kilaini, “Ecumenism in a Multi-Religious Context,” 2.

⁶ Cf. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London, Heinemann, 1989), 1-2; Vincent Mulago, “African Traditional Religion and Christianity,” in *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1991), 127; Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 4-14.

⁷ J. Omosade Awolalu, “The Encounter Between African Traditional Religion and Other Religions in Nigeria,” in *African Traditional Religion in*

For these reasons, to completely give up their God-given heritage in favour of a foreign culture, as the church requires, seems a very difficult task, and is tantamount to losing their entire heritage, identity, and place, both spiritually and physically within their religio-cultural community. Even long after their conversion to Christianity; the African traditional worldview persists in the lives of Christian converts. This is why African Christians “do not always adhere to religious and ritual demands that are formulated and expressed by the leaders of their churches.”⁸ It is believed that Islam is making more gains than Christianity in Africa. Since its advent in Sub-Saharan Africa, Islam was favoured by the masses because it was brought by other Africans, and was presented by its forebears as an African religion which resulted in an accommodating brand of Islam that still exists. Muslims accepted and adapted African indigenous religiosity and culture, with an overlay of Islamic belief and practice. This syncretistic approach and lesser demand on the indigenes attracted many people to Islam, and continues to do so today.

Islam strongly opposes Christianity on the fundamental teachings of the sonship and divinity of Christ. In some countries the differences in worldviews and teachings have resulted in violence. It was reported that:

Several countries including Nigeria have seen intractable inter-religious conflicts. Hostilities continue in some of these countries to this day. Religious tension can cut both ways-both Nigerian Christians and Nigerian Muslims have the same line of thought: that they are under attack and need to preserve their autonomy. Both Christians and Muslims feel that they represent the one true God and are obligated to convert others. In September 2001, over 2,000 people were killed in inter-religious rioting in Jos.⁹

Contemporary Society, edited by Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1991), 111.

⁸ Magesa, *African Religion*, 7.

⁹ Angela Karuiki, “Violence Begets Violence: Nigeria's Deathly Religious

It was also reported that:

In October 2001, hundreds were killed and thousands displaced in communal violence that spread across the Middle-Belt states of Benue, Taraba, and Nasarawa. Muslim-Christian battles killed up to 700 people in 2004. More than 300 residents died during a similar uprising in 2008. More recently, a renewed spate of Christian-Muslim violence in central Nigeria has claimed the lives of hundreds of people, many of them women and children, just months after religious violence left hundreds dead in Jos. At least 10,000 Nigerians have died during Christian-Muslim riots and ethnic violence during the past decade. It is really irrational to assert one's faith in a manner that engenders conflict and violence. Rather, tolerance, constitutionality, decency, and good neighborliness must be enthroned.¹⁰

AR and Islam are religions to reckon with in Africa; as such if the Christian message is going to be effective, we have to study and understand the worldviews of these religious traditions.

Christianity is Imperialistic and Insensitive

Christianity is still considered the “white man's religion” that brought “new teachings and a new way of life” and attempted to “deliberately destroy” African culture. This concept continues to plague Christianity in Africa.¹¹ Even now “that the age of foreign missions in Africa”¹² is

History” <http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php> , 3 (Accessed March 2015).

¹⁰ Jon Gambrel, “Religious Violence Erupts again in Nigeria” (Associated Press 2010), 1.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 212.

¹² John Mbiti, *The Crisis of Mission in Africa* (Mukono: Uganda Church Press 1971), 1.

over, Christianity is still “stigmatised throughout Africa as the white man's religion.”¹³

Byang H. Kato has argued that “although missionaries from Europe and North America brought the gospel to Black Africa in modern times, they are not the first messengers of the gospel to our continent.”¹⁴ He tried to prove that the advent of the gospel in Africa predates the coming of western missionaries, by tracing the history of Christianity in Africa to its Biblical roots, citing Africa's relationship with Palestine in Old Testament times and Acts 13:1 in the New Testament. Therefore, Kato argued, “to claim that Christianity is a white man's religion only because white missionaries brought the gospel two hundred years ago is not historically accurate”¹⁵

As much as Kato's argument is solid, the bringing of the gospel to modern Africa by western missionaries is not the main reason why, Christianity is still been dubbed the 'white man's religion'. Christian missionaries to Africa are still blamed for their cultural insensitivity to African values which resulted in the transplantation of “an ethnocentric form of Christianity.”¹⁶ They are accused of attacking African culture, and requiring a complete abandonment of African culture and practices.¹⁷ Christ was “presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that a Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom.”¹⁸ Attempts were not made to answer the

¹³ Dick France, “Questions Concerning the Future of African Christianity.” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 3 no.1 (1979):34.

¹⁴ Byang H. Kato, “Christianity as an African Religion.” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 4 no. 1 (1980): 83; See MBITI, 1986, pp.1-2 also for a discussion on the advent of the gospel before missionaries.

¹⁵ Kato, “Christianity as an African Religion,” 35.

¹⁶ Keith E. Eitel, “Contextualization: Contrasting African Voices.” *Criswell Theological Review* 2 no. 2 (1988):324.

¹⁷ Olson, *Church Growth in Sierra Leone*, 192.

¹⁸ J.V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London:SCM Press 1963), 16.

needs of Africans yet the missionaries enforced on Christian converts, a complete break from the African beliefs and culture that met those needs. For example, the AOG missionaries to West Africa enforced “a complete break with the past through the burning of medicine and charms... a symbol of complete rejection of the old way and of complete dependence upon God through Christ and the Holy Spirit... members were prohibited from using charms or making sacrifices.”¹⁹ Although the destruction of religious artefacts is found in the Bible (e.g., Acts 19:18-19a), the African traditionalists believe it emanated from the white man.²⁰

Cultural insensitivity is also displayed in the production of religious pictures, and films that are found almost everywhere in Africa portraying Jesus as a white man, from a white mother, and as the leader of white disciples.²¹ Insensitivity to African culture and worldview was not unique to Euro-American missionaries. They were not alone in their condemnation of traditional practices as heathenism or Satanism. As far back as the nineteenth century in West Africa, Samuel Ajai Crowther an African clergyman whose parents were traditionalists and who himself at times assisted the Ifa priest in his village in seeking guidance from the oracles,²² was prominent in the attempt to eradicate traditional religion from the inhabitants of Sierra Leone and Nigeria through his preaching, teaching and evangelization strategies. Evidence of his “complex attitude to other faiths, drawn from his own writings extending over half a century and more” is available in the work of McKenzie.²³ His inter-religious encounters with early settlers provide us with information about the tension between traditional African worldview and Christianity.²⁴

¹⁹ Olson, *Church Growth in Sierra Leone*, 192.

²⁰ Awolalu, "The Encounter," 113.

²¹ Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 13.

²² P.R. McKenzie, *Inter-religious Encounters in West Africa* (Leicester: University of Leicester, 1976), 14.

²³ McKenzie, *Inter-religious Encounters*.

²⁴ McKenzie, *Inter-religious Encounters & Lamin Sanneh, West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 83-89.

Contextualization

The observation of Idowu²⁵ about Nigerian Christians several decades ago, that after many years of independent Christianity, the church has still been unable to develop a theology which bears the distinctive stamp of African thought and meditation, remains true in many places in Africa. The theology of these churches is “book theology”²⁶ - the church reads and accepts Euro-American theologies and do not try to contextualize them to fit the language and worldview of the African. This approach demonstrates that some Christian Africans “have not yet begun to do their own thinking and to grapple spiritually and intellectually with questions relating to the Christian faith.”²⁷ Most churches are still enslaved to Euro-American cosmology. It is right to say, “African Christians” continue to “struggle not so much against European domination as against that of Europeanised Africans.”²⁸

The mission of the gospel has always been built within the context of various cultures. The gospel “has been transmitted and flourished within different cultures.”²⁹ It was first revealed and proclaimed in the Jewish culture and later in the Greek and Roman cultures as well as the cultures of the peoples amongst whom it spread.³⁰ There has always been some correlation between Christianity and the culture of the peoples it encountered. The gospel is intended for people of all nations (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Therefore, it must be contextualized to make it intelligible to the people of the cultures it encounters. In other words:

The gospel, which is always expressed within the limits of

²⁵ E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an indigenous Church* (London: OUP, 1965), 22.

²⁶ Idowu, *Towards an indigenous Church*, 22.

²⁷ Idowu, *Towards an indigenous Church*, 22.

²⁸ Kraft, Charles H. “Christianity and Culture in Africa.” *Facing the New Challenges*. 1.7 (1978):288.

²⁹ Eunice Kamaara, “The Influence of Christianity on the African Society’s Concept of God.” *AFER* 40 no 1 (1998): 45.

³⁰ Kamaara, “The Influence of Christianity,” 45; John Mbiti, “Christianity African Culture,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 1 (1977):29.

a particular culture, is intended for people of all cultures and must be communicated not only in categories that would make it intelligible to the people but also in ways that would make it relevant to their social-cultural contexts.³¹

As we express “a variety of perspectives from human life,” the gospel “can be seen to arise from the life-situation of the people... therefore, the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be separated from the cultural and religious heritage of the people.”³² Jesus related to the culture of his time by contextualizing his messages. He used the traditions and thoughts of the people of his time. Although we are told that Jesus explained the meaning of his parables “in private to his disciples” (Mark 4:34), the parables were told as an attempt to contextualize his message. He touched on life situations that were familiar to the audience. At the last supper, he took an age-old tradition of his people and transformed it into something new. He used bread, staple food of his land, and he used wine, common drink of his people (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Later, Paul in his Areopagus address to the Athenians (Acts 17:16-33) attempted to “find common ground with his audience in his language and thought.”³³ Paul’s Areopagus speech has been called “the greatest missionary document in the New Testament.”³⁴

The speech invites us to learn: “(1) how to relate biblical truth in culturally relevant ways (i.e., contextualization), and (2) how to formulate a cultural apologetic that retains its theological integrity in the midst of a culture of compromise.”³⁵ The speech echoes “Acts 1:8a: ‘You

³¹ Emmanuel Asante, “The Gospel in Context: An African Perspective,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 55 no.4 (2001):362.

³² Johnson S. Samuel, “Paul on the Areopagus: A Mission Perspective,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 28.1 (1986):17.

³³ John J. Kilgallen, “Acts 17:22-31: An Example of Interreligious Dialogue,” *Studia Missionalia* 43 (1994):57.

³⁴ Adolph Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient Near East* (New York, H. Doran, 1927), 384.

³⁵ Daryl J. Charles, “Engaging the (Neo) Pagan Mind: Paul’s Encounter With

shall be my witnesses... ' in the sense of how a Christian should be a witness to the Gospel in a religious plural world."³⁶ Paul contextualized his message by quoting Greeks poets (Arius and/or Cleanthes)³⁷ that were familiar to his audience.

Jesus and Paul were able to contextualize their messages because they were familiar with the cultures of their time, and with Biblical theology. This should be borne in mind as Christians interact with other religions. We cannot effectively address what we do not understand. We must endeavor to "understand the culture" in which we have "been placed by the Sovereign Lord."³⁸ It is a lack of understanding and ability to contextualize that makes Traditionalists accuse Christians of being insensitive and apathetic to their beliefs and culture. This attitude accounts for the dual religious practices of the many African Christians who are reluctant to give up their religious heritage for a religion they do not understand, and which they perceive to condemn them.

We need not overemphasize the fact that, for a successful dialogue with the African Traditionalists, we have to contextualize the message, and communicate it in the language and understanding of the Africans to make it intelligible to their culture.

In some churches, the Bible is still read in English, a language which most of the congregants do not understand. Churches where a majority of the congregants are non-literate, they feel marginalised, left out and unwelcome in the church. Therefore they continue to criticize the church for painstakingly aping the mannerisms of western culture.

Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics (Acts 17:16-34)." *Trinity Journal* 16 (1995):60.

³⁶ Samuel, "Paul on the Areopagus," 18.

³⁷ Prince Sorie Conteh, *An Exegesis of Paul's Use of Deisidaimon ("Religious") in Acts 17* (Koforidua, Ghana: Flash Image, 2012), 63-64.

³⁸ Charles, "Engaging the (Neo) Pagan Mind," 60.

Postmodernism

Post-modern ideology has promoted the freedom of personal expression of opinions that view religion differently from the long established norms. The expression of personal opinion is common among the young and the educated elite. In similar vein, all modern peoples may hold beliefs very different from those of their forebears. Within this climate, it does not matter how logical or rational the view is, every opinion should be respected and accepted. Long held Christian positions on sexuality, marriage, pregnancy, and abortion are now being challenged and outlawed by the educated and the westernized.

Conclusion

To witness Jesus today, I personally believe there has to be some interaction with members of other faiths. It is one thing to have and to know the message (the Gospel), but it is another thing to know the world in which the message must be communicated. Some kind of encounter, even dialogue, is unavoidable for any effective witness for Christ today. And, even where there may be no clear and distinct ideas as the case may be with some primal religions like the AR, which has no books, theologians, hierarchy, or institutions, that is no reason to avoid facilitating interreligious encounters, else any other approach would be seen as another subtle form of religious imperialism. Reaching others today with the Gospel requires sensitive, balanced contextualization of missiological methods. Ignoring people's undergirding religious perceptions would only retard effective reception of the gospel and even threaten the incipient Church's social and cultural relevance, because traditional religious beliefs are deeply rooted in cultural identity. It cannot be denied that resistance to the Christianity today in many societies is due in part to the historical legacy of highly negative encounters between Christianity and indigenous religions particularly through the experience of colonialism. The belief that other religions are simply domains of darkness and demonic oppression, and thus there is little value in studying them has to be dropped. Taking other religions seriously and trying to understand them accurately is essential for

Christian ministry in this 21st century. There is no way we can understand the world in which we live and witness without understanding something of the religions we find in this world. Reductionistic and simplistic generalizations must be avoided as we give attention to the enormous variety among and within religions. We must not fail to admit elements of truth or genuine insights in other religious traditions, and make use of every opportunity to meet and interact with followers of other religious traditions.

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