

Essays in the Old Testament & African Life and Thought

Isaac Boaheng &
Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Jnr

Foreword by Prince Sorie Conteh

 Noyam



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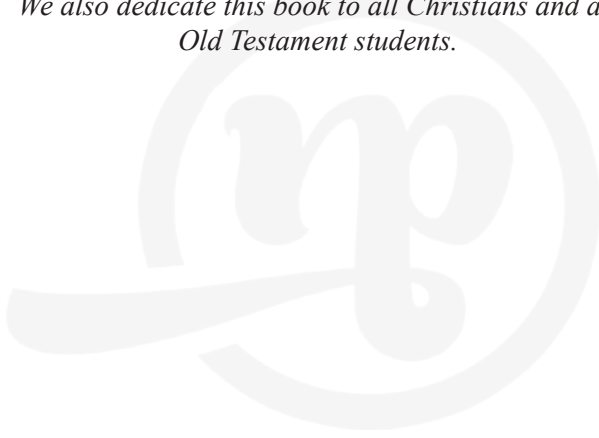
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*The book is first of all dedicated to our families.
We also dedicate this book to all Christians and all
Old Testament students.*



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Foreword

Aloo O. Mojola has asserted that the Old Testament is much loved in Africa; this is perhaps so because of its close cultural and religious affinities with traditional African culture and ethnic religions.¹ T.J Mafico has also stated that “the Old Testament has striking similarities with traditional African culture. If African Christians understood its importance more, the process of indigenization would be made easier.”² On that note, one could rightly say that is why there are many written works in extant on the subject matter. Olena Prokhorenko Ogiozee in his (2009) MA Thesis, “The Value of the Continuity between African and Old Testament Worldviews,” provided the proper foundation for *comparing the Old Testament and African thoughts*.

Isaac Boaheng and Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Jnr., the authors of this book, have joined other scholars interested in the study of Old Testament and African culture, by making their modest contribution in some areas of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and African life and culture, focusing on the Ghanaian culture.

In citing L. E. Ugwueye and I. L. Umeanolue; Boaheng and Asibu-Dadzie Jnr. in their Introduction (p.1) stated that “the Hebrew Bible (or the Old Testament) can be said to be coterminous with African culture. *African life and thought* share in many ways the life and thought of ancient Israel.

Hence, the African culture can serve as a springboard for the internalization of Old Testament values and vice versa.”

Through a comparative approach, Boaheng and Asibu-Dadzie Jnr. have indeed demonstrated that Africans can better understand the Old Testament by using their own culture as a paradigm for interpretation, whilst guarding against syncretism. The first chapter focuses on the Old Testament concepts of God’s names and meanings and his intrinsic attributes. The following chapter discusses the African concept of God. The authors in the Preface have advised that “these two chapters are to be read together to appreciate the areas of continuity and

¹ Aloo O. Mojola, “The Old Testament or Hebrew Bible in Africa: Challenges and prospects for interpretation and translation,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35. No.3 (2014), 1.

² T. J. Mafico, “Jewish Tradition and African Religion,” (2010) (online publication).

discontinuity between the African and Old Testament concepts of God.”

Chapter Three is about Creation in the Old Testament which is followed by Creation in African Thought in Chapter Four. Both chapters deal with cultural and religious concepts of creation. The closing chapters are comparisons and contrasts between Old Testament and African culture. One of the importance of this book is that the authors concluded every chapter with a Review Exercise which adds to its relevance for students.

The book is well-written, organized and straightforward. The authors are Old Testament scholars and are culturally Ghanaians. As this study is based on the Old Testament and Ghanaian culture, these two factors qualify Boaheng and Asibu-Dadzie Jnr to undertake this work.

I highly recommend this book to academic institutions, church adult school, and to all Christians and Jews. I learned a lot reading it and I believe you too will gain from reading this well-written study.

Prince Sorie Conteh

Professor and Dean, Faculty of Religious & Interfaith Studies

Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science & Technology, Sierra Leone

Preface

The seven-chapter book, *Essays in The Old Testament and African Life and Thought*, has been published as an attempt to show some areas of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and African life and culture. Throughout the book the authors demonstrate that Africans can better understand the Old Testament if they use their own culture as a framework for interpretation while guarding against any tendencies of syncretism.

After a brief introduction of the entire work comes to the first chapter of the book which deals with the Old Testament concept of God. This is followed by the African concept of God. These two chapters are to be read together to appreciate the areas of continuity and discontinuity between the African and Old Testament concepts of God.

The next two chapters focus on creation. The biblical account of creation as the result of God's plan and command is catered for in chapter three while some African stories regarding creation are dealt with in the fourth chapter. Issues of death, funeral rites and life after death as taught in the Old Testament and the African culture are covered in chapters 5 and 6 whilst chapter 7 examines how the African concept of kingship compares and contrasts with that of the Old Testament.

Though the Ghanaian context dominates most discussions in the book, the study is also relevant to other Old Testament students and Christians from other parts of Africa. The authors' desire and hope is that this publication will not only serve the need of Christians who want to understand God's word but also prompt similar works in Old Testament studies.

Introduction

According to L. E. Ugwueye and I. L. Umeanolue, The Hebrew Bible or “the Old Testament can be said to be coterminous with African culture.”³ *African life and thought* share in many ways the life and thought of ancient Israel. Hence, the African culture can serve as a springboard for the internalization of Old Testament values and vice versa.⁴ This makes the study of the Old Testament crucial to African Christianity. Researches in areas that make Africans appreciate the message of the Old Testament in the own cultural framework therefore constitute a key tool in enhancing the growth of the Church in Africa.

The need for developing Old Testament Studies in Africa has led to many publications by many African scholars. Yet, many areas still need to be attended to. It is against this backdrop that *Essays in The Old Testament and African Life and Thought* has been published as a modest attempt to show some areas of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and African life and culture.

The nature of the work made the comparative approach a suitable methodology. In using this approach the authors applied most of the following principles outlined by John H. Walton: (1) a comparative study involves a consideration of both similarities and differences; (2) not all similarities are the result of borrowing; similarity may be the result of a common cultural environment; (3) it is common to find similarities at the surface and differences at the conceptual level (or vice versa); (4) a comparative study must be preceded by contextual study; (5) factors such as proximity of time, geographical location and cultural spheres have higher potential of fostering interactions that leads to influence; (6) a case of literary borrowing needs to be investigated for possible and likely modes of transmission; (7) literary works of different genres usually have lesser tendency of showing similarities than those of the same genre; (8) different genres may perform similar functions in different cultural contexts; (9) borrowed literary or cultural elements may be transformed into something quite different from what was

³ L. E. Ugwueye and I. L. Umeanolue, “Old Testament scholarship in Africa” *Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 1 (3) (2010): 190-207, 190.

⁴ Ugwueye and Umeanolue, “Old Testament scholarship in Africa”, 190.

borrowed, and (10) a single culture usually has many sub-cultures.⁵

The continent of Africa is a mixed bag with different groups of different cultural values. However, there are similar cultural values held in almost all African societies. In preparing this book the authors made use of common contextual issues where possible and where this was not possible a particular African society was named and used. The main thesis of this study is that Africans can better understand the Old Testament if they use their own culture as a framework for interpretation while guarding against any tendencies of syncretism.



⁵ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 27.

CHAPTER 1

God in the Old Testament

Names of God

The Old Testament records several names by which God revealed Himself to His people. Yet, at the same time, it speaks of the name of God in the singular: “Thou shalt not take the **name** of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exod. 20:7); “How excellent is thy **name** in all the earth” (Ps. 8:1); “As is thy **name**, O God, so is thy praise” (Ps. 48:10); “His **name** is great in Israel” (Ps. 76:2); “The **name** of Jehovah is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe” (Prov. 18:10).

The context of each of the above passages shows that “the name” refers to the whole manifestation of God in His relation to His people. Thus, in the above usage, the name of God is “His self-revelation... a designation of Him, not as He exists in the depths of His divine Being, but as He reveals Himself especially in His relations to man [that is the totality of God’s personhood (that is all that God is)].”⁶ In this connection, Keith Sherlin observes that in the Ancient Near East, “names were thought of as disclosing the attributes and characteristics of a person.”⁷ They reveal a person’s nature and character. Thus, in scripture, a name and the character it represents are one. In oriental thought, a name was regarded as an expression of the nature of the thing designated. That is, in the Ancient Near East, a person’s name was regarded as revealing his/her nature, thought, life and character.⁸ Accordingly, the name of God was considered to be the manifestation of His being; by invoking it a person could obtain some of His power; and the place where that name was called became the seat of God’s presence.

Since God’s “name” equals to all that the Bible and creation tell us about Him, what we find in the Old Testament as several names of God is the one general name of God split up into many names, expressive of the many-sided Being of God. Most of these names are taken from human experience or emotions to describe aspects of God’s character. Others are taken from the rest of the natural creation. These names, though borrowed from human language, and derived from human and earthly relations, are not of human invention but of divine origin.

⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 2000), 47.

⁷ Keith Sherlin, *Evangelical Bible Doctrine: Articles in Honor of Dr. Mal Couch Couch* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015), np.

⁸ Ronald F. Youngblood (ed.), *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 503.

Names and titles given to God in the Old Testament and in Scriptures in general reveal much about His character, including who He is, what He is like and what He does. In what follows we give an outline of some major names of God in the Old Testament.

El

El is the simplest name by which God is designated in the Old Testament. It is mentioned about 250 times in the Old Testament and is derived from *ul* which means power, strength or might.⁹ *El* therefore carries the sense of being first or lord in strength, power or might. *El* was not a name peculiar to ancient Israel but one that was widely used in ancient eastern cultures who had similar languages as Hebrew. By itself, *el* refers to god in the most general sense. In a polytheistic society, it is a generic word for anyone belonging to the divine species just as man refers generally to those who belong to the species sapiens.¹⁰ The chief god of the Canaanite pantheon was *el*, whose son was Baal.¹¹ However, the Jews used this name to designate their God, Yahweh. That being the case, *El* may refer to the true God or to false gods. It combines with other titles. *El Olam*, everlasting God, God of ancient of Days (Gen. 21:33; Is. 40:38); *El Shaddai*, God Almighty (Gen. 17:1; Exod. 6:3); *El Ro'eh*, the God of seeing or the God who sees (Gen. 16:13) etc.

Elohim

The name *Elohim* (sing. *el*) is plural in form but singular in meaning. The plural is to be understood as an abstract plural of intensive or of majesty, and therefore serves to indicate a fullness of God's power and pre-eminence.¹² *Elohim* denoted originally the godhead as divided into several gods or godly beings, that is, polytheism. However, when it was applied to the true God of humankind in general, of Israel in particular and of the universe, it was generally construed as a unity, referring to one undivided Godhead. In the Pentateuch, the name *elohim* connotes a general sense concept of God as the transcendent being who created all things. Here, *elohim* does not connote the more personal and palpable concepts imbedded in Yahweh. It can be used in reference to false gods (Exod. 23:24; Deut. 7:14; Josh. 24:20; Dan. 5:23), judges and kings as well.

⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 48.

¹⁰ John L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought" in *The New Biblical Jerome Commentary* edited by Raymond E. Brown et al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2011), 1285.

¹¹ Youngblood (ed), *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 504.

¹² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 48.

Elyon

The *elyon* is an adjective meaning “high” which is derived from *alah*, to go up, to be elevated.¹³ It is used to describe the height of objects (2 Kings 15:35; Ezek. 41:7), the prominence of persons (Ps. 89:27) as well as the prominence of the nation Israel (Deut. 26:19; 28:1).¹⁴ In relation to God, however, *elyon* designates God as the high and exalted One (Gen. 14:19, 20; Num. 24:16; Isa. 14:14). It combines with the name *el* to form *el elyon*, the Most-High God, which occurs in Gen. 14:18-19 and Ps. 78:35. *El-Elyon* refers to God as the strongest One.

Adonai

This name is related in meaning to the preceding ones. It is derived from either *dun* (*din*) or *adan*, both of which mean to judge, to rule, and thus points to God as the almighty Ruler, to whom everything is subject, and to whom man is related as a servant.¹⁵ In earlier times it was the usual name by which the people of Israel addressed God. Later on, it was largely supplanted by the name Jehovah (*Yahweh*).¹⁶ The first appearance of the name “Adonai” is in Genesis 15:2, “Then Abram said, Lord GOD.” In the text, “Adonai” appears with the name GOD (Jehovah).

Shaddai and 'el-shaddai

The name *Shaddai* is derived from the Akkadian word *shadad*, to be powerful or to devastate. This name points to God as the supreme Ruler over the celestial powers (all power in heaven and on earth) and hence it stresses the greatness of God.¹⁷ It portrays God as subjecting all the powers of nature and making them submissive to the work of divine grace. Berkhof concludes that “While portraying God as a great One, *Shaddai* does not represent Him as an object of fear and terror, but as a source of blessing and comfort.”¹⁸

YHWH, Yahweh or Jehovah

Yahweh, the personal name of the God of Israel, is inseparably connected with the religious development of Judaism in all its loftiness and depth. Biblical scholars consider it as one of the most important names in the Old Testament and the most sacred and the most distinctive name which God does not share with anyone.¹⁹ The

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Walter A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 506.

¹⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 48.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 49.

¹⁹ Ibid.

real derivation of the name, its original pronunciation and meaning are not known for certain. What is clear, however, is that in the Pentateuch this name is connected with the Hebrew verb *hayah*, to be (Exod. 3:13-14) and interpreted “I am that I am,” or “I shall be what I shall be.”

Out of superstitious dread of using it based on Lev. 24:16 as follows: “He that nameth the name of *Yahweh* shall surely be put to death” the Jews did not like pronouncing this name. Therefore, during the period of the Second Temple this name was declared too sacred for utterance, except by the priests in certain parts of the service, and for mysterious use by specially initiated saints. In reading the Scriptures the Jews substituted for *Yahweh* either ‘*Adonai*’ or ‘*Elohim*’; and the Massorettes, while leaving the consonants intact, attached to them the vowels of ‘*Adonai*’.²⁰

The theological significance of this name is overwhelming. First, the name *YHWH* points to God’s sovereignty. God, revealing Himself through the Hebrew culture, alluded to His sovereignty by referring to Himself as *YHWH* (Exod. 3:13-15). Two Ghanaian scholars, Emmanuel Asante and Atta Edu-Bekoe have these opinions.

Asante explains God’s sovereignty as “God will be what He will be” and hence no one can “compel God to do anything.”²¹ He explains further, saying, “... when God said to Moses ‘I will be who I will be’ He was referring to His sovereignty. ‘I will be who I will be’, that is ‘I am not compelled by anything.’”²² It establishes an important characteristic of God, namely, He is, He has always been, He will forever be the unchangeable God, Who is from everlasting to everlasting. Thus interpreted, the name points to God’s immutability (or unchangeableness), especially the unchangeableness of His relation to His people.

The context within which this name was revealed is important in the present discussion. Moses’ question about God’s identity, in the text, had some cultural underpinnings. Moses was particular about the Name of this God who was sending him to the Israelites. He knew the people would ask “What is your name?” because they would then associate the name of the sender with His character. It is under this circumstance that the Lord revealed to Moses that He is the “I am that I am.” Because the Hebrews were in bondage under the rule of the powerful Egyptian king, Pharaoh, it follows that anyone who could deliver them had to be mightier than Pharaoh. This situation made it appropriate for God to reveal,

²⁰ John L. McKenzie, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought” in *The New Biblical Jerome Commentary*, 1286.

²¹ Isaac Boaheng, *Exploring the Relationship Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Relation to God’s Plan of Salvation* (Master of Divinity Thesis, Trinity Theological Seminary, 2016), 93.

²² Boaheng, *Exploring the Relationship Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 93.

through His personal Name, that He is sovereign over all powers. The following quote from Jonathan S. Nkhoma aptly summarizes the discussion so far:

We have to note that once God revealed [H]imself as a Personal God of the Israelite community (Exodus 3:13-15), [H]e announced [H]is divine freedom to act as [H]e wills. Though [H]e is their personal God, [H]e is not subject to human control or manipulation. This attribute of sovereignty is clearly stated in the context in which Moses demands the presence of God to accompany Israel (Exodus 33:12-23). While God promises [H]is presence to accompany Israel, [H]e announces:

‘I will be gracious to who I will be gracious and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’ (Exodus 33:19).

In line with [H]is divine sovereign character, God also warns Israel against any disrespectful use of [H]is name and makes the point part of the ‘Ten Words’ (Ten Commandments) given to Israel as a regulating factor for the newly established covenant relationship between [H]im and Israel (Exodus 20:1-17).²³

Thus, at the center of His Being according to Israel’s understanding was His sovereign character in holiness, in righteousness, in faithfulness, in power, in wisdom, and in the rest of His attributes. This name stresses existence: I AM the One who always is. All life is contained in God and comes from God, so we call Him “the self-existent one.”²⁴ He always was what He is—and what He is, He always was—and He will always be what He was and is! Because He “is,” Yahweh is the God Who is always present and always near. He is not a God that is far off or a God of past history. He is a God Who is present and acts in the “now.” Whatever our situation, whatever our need, Yahweh is the God who always is and who is always present.

Attributes of God in the Old Testament

Earlier we discussed various attributes Africans give to God. These attributes are the manifestations of God’s essence and His nature. The attributes of God are categorized into the Communicable and the Incommunicable attributes. Communicable attributes are those attributes that God shares with human beings and incommunicable attributes are those that He shares with nobody. In this section, we shall discover how God revealed these attributes in the Old Testament.

²³ Jonathan S. Nkhoma, *Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Essays: Biblical and Early Christianity Studies from Malawi* (Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2013), 165.

<https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=o6dbnmzzaUkC&pg=PA165&lpq=PA165&dq>

²⁴ Nkhoma, *Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Essays*, 166.

The Self-Existence or Independence of God

By self-existence or independence we mean He has the ground of His existence in Himself. According to Wayne A. Grudem God's independence means "God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy."²⁵ Humankind, on the other hand, does not exist necessarily, and has the cause of his existence outside of himself. As the self-existent God, He is not only independent in Himself, but also causes everything to depend on Him.²⁶ This self-existence of God finds expression in the name Yahweh. This attribute gives us the assurance that God will remain eternally the same in relation to creation.

The Old Testament, in several places, teaches God's self-existence. God asks Job, "Who has given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine" (Job 41:11). No one has ever contributed to God anything that did not first come from God who created all things. Similarly, we read God's word in Psalm 50, "every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine" (Ps. 50:10–12).

The Unchangeableness or Immutability of God

The Immutability of God refers to the fact that God is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and His purposes and promises. For Grudem, it means "God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations."²⁷ God's immutability, which stems from His aseity, implies that He is exalted above all becoming, and is free from all accession or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same. There can be no change in God because He is the absolute Perfection in whom neither improvement nor deterioration is impossible.

This immutability of God is clearly taught in such passages of Scripture as Exod. 3:14; Ps. 102:26–28; Isa. 41:4; 48:12; Mal. 3:6. In Psalm 102 we find a contrast between things that we may think to be permanent such as the earth or the heavens, on the one hand, and God, on the other hand. The psalmist says: Of old, you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change

²⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 160.

²⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 58.

²⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 163.

them like raiment, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end (Ps. 102:25–27). Referring to his own qualities of patience, long-suffering, and mercy, God says, “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6).

The Eternity or Infinity of God

The Eternity or Infinity of God refers to the fact that “God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.”²⁸ It means God is elevated above all temporal limitations and all succession of moments and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present. The fact that God has no beginning or end is seen in Psalm 90:2: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (see also Ps. 102:12).

The Omniscience of God

God, in a unique manner, knows Himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal and most simple act. The Old Testament testifies to the knowledge of God abundantly (1Sam. 2:3; Job 12:13; Ps. 94:9; 147:4; Isa. 29:15; 40:27, 28). The omniscience of God is taught in several passages of the Old Testament. He is perfect in knowledge (Job 37:16), He knows the hidden essence of things, to which the knowledge of man cannot penetrate (1Sam. 16:7; I Chron. 28:9, 17; Ps. 139:1-4; Jer. 17:10), observes the ways of men, (Deut. 2:7; Job 23:10; 24:23; 31:4; Ps. 1:6; 119:168), knows the place of their habitation (Ps. 33:13) and the days of their life, (Ps. 37:18).

The knowledge of God differs in some important points from that of humans. First, God knows the universe as it exists in His own eternal idea previous to its existence as a finite reality in time and space. Therefore, unlike human beings, God’s knowledge about the universe is not from obtained from without (that is from observation or from a process of reasoning). God’s knowledge is intuitive rather than demonstrative or discursive. Second, God is simultaneous, not successive, so that He sees things at once in their totality, and not piecemeal one after another.

The Omnipresence of God

God’s omnipresence may be defined as follows: “God does not have a size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet

²⁸ Ibid., 168.

God acts differently in different places.”²⁹ Gen. 1:1. Declaring that God created the heaven and the earth, implies that God is Lord of space and cannot be limited by space is evident first from the fact that he created it, for the creation of the material world (Gen. 1:1). The same truth is taught in Deut. 10:14 “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.”

This attribute implies that God is not limited by space but occupies everywhere with His whole being at the same time. He is not stuck in some spot so that He misses things going on elsewhere. This attribute of God points to the presence of God in every place and every person. God is present in the whole universe. For this reason, Isaiah 66:1, speaking of God, says, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.” This tells us that the presence of God fills everywhere. God is not limited spatially and occupies all space with the entirety of His being.

The Wisdom of God

God’s wisdom means that “God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals.”³⁰ This definition goes beyond the idea of God knowing all things and specifies that God’s decisions about what He will do are always wise decisions, that is, they always will bring about the best results, and they will bring about those results through the best possible means.³¹ God applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most. In this sense, God’s wisdom may be considered as a particular aspect of His knowledge.

The Veracity/ Truthfulness (and Faithfulness) of God

God’s truthfulness means that “He is the true God, and that all his knowledge and words are both true and the final standard of truth.”³² By virtue of this attribute, “God fully answers to the idea of the Godhead, is perfectly reliable in His revelation, and sees things as they really are.”³³ This means that the God revealed in Scripture is the true or real God and that all other so-called gods are idols, which are called vanity and lies (Ps. 96:5; 97:7; 115:4-8; Isa. 44:9, 10). In the Old Testament the word for veracity is *'emeth*, *'amunah*, and *'amen* which points to such ideas as truth, truthfulness, and faithfulness.

He is also the source of all truth, not only in the sphere of morals and religion, but also in every field of scientific endeavour. Scripture is very emphatic

²⁹ Ibid., 173.

³⁰ Ibid., 193.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 195.

³³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 69.

in its references to God as the truth: “The LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King....The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens” (Jer. 10:10–11 see also Exod. 34:6; Num. 23:19; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 25:10; 31:6; Isa. 65:16).

Ethical Sovereignty (Holiness of God)

Grudem wrote, “God’s holiness means that He is separated from sin and devoted to seeking His own honour.”³⁴ Holiness is one of the essential elements of God’s nature required of His people. The word holy comes from the Hebrew word *qodesh* (from the root *qad*) which denote that which is consecrated”, “set apart”, “cut off” or “sanctified.” The holiness of God may be defined as that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in his moral creatures.

The Scriptural idea of the holiness of God is twofold. In its original sense it denotes that He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. So understood, the holiness of God is one of His transcendental attributes, and is sometimes spoken of as His central and supreme perfection. He is holy in everything that reveals Him, in His goodness and grace as well as in His justice and wrath. Being holy, God cannot allow sin into His presence (Hab. 1:13; Ps. 15). The holiness of God is a unique quality of His character (Exo. 15:11; 1 Sam. 2:2; Pss. 29:2; 89:35; Isa. 57:15; Jer. 23:9; Hos. 11:9; Mal. 2:11).³⁵

The ethical aspect of the holiness of God is revealed in the moral law, implanted in man’s heart, and speaking through the conscience, and more particularly in God’s special revelation. In this wise, it must be stated that the law was given to Israel to teach them about the holiness of God, and to urge upon the people the necessity of leading a holy life. As Frederick M. Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng observe God’s holiness is a standard for all believer and so all believers must be holy, because God is holy (Lev. 11:45).³⁶ Holiness throughout the Old Testament is primarily associated with God Himself and only secondary (by His instruction) with objects and places (Exo. 15:11; Isa. 40:25). When God’s presence is associated with an object or a place, it becomes holy or consecrated (1 Sam. 6:19).

³⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 202.

³⁵ Stephen D. Renn (Ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Word: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2014), 494.

³⁶ Frederick M. Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, “Analysis of Law and Gospel in God’s Salvific Plan” in in *ERATS* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2016): 188-212.

Beneficial Sovereignty (Righteousness of God)

Closely related to the holiness of God,³⁷ the righteousness of God indicates His perfection in all moral dimensions. Righteousness therefore is holiness in action. “God’s righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is Himself the final standard of what is right.”³⁸ Deuteronomy 32:4 tells of God as being perfect, just, faithful and an upright God who does no wrong. God maintains Himself as the Holy One over against every violation of His holiness. The inherent righteousness of God is naturally basic to the righteousness which He reveals in dealing with His creatures. The Hebrew terms for “righteous” and “righteousness” are *tsaddik*, *tsedhek*, and *tsedhakah*. The fundamental idea of righteousness is that of strict adherence to the law. Among men it presupposes that there is a law to which they must conform.

A righteous person is one who leads a holy life in accordance with God’s standards (for example, Noah Gen. 6:9).³⁹ God’s righteousness is taught in several passages (including Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:8; Ps. 119:137; 145:17; Jer. 12:1; Lam. 1:18; Dan. 9:14; John 17:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; I John 2:29; 3:7; Rev. 16:5).

Benevolence Sovereignty (The Goodness of God)

The goodness of God refers to “the perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully with and kindly with all His creatures.”⁴⁰ By the goodness of God is meant God is in every way all that He as God should be, and therefore answers perfectly to the ideal expressed in the word “God.” All the good things which the creatures enjoy in the present and expect in the future, flow to them out of this inexhaustible fountain. God considered as the *summum bonum*, the highest good, for all His creatures, though in different degrees and according to the measure in which they answer to the purpose of their existence.

God is good towards His creatures in general and this prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all His creatures.⁴¹ It is the affection which the Creator feels towards His sentient creatures as such. The Psalmist captures God’s goodness aptly: “Jehovah is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works. . . . The eyes of all wait for thee; and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Ps. 145:9, 15, 16). The goodness of God exercised towards His rational creatures assumes a higher character of love which may be defined as “that perfection of God by which He is

³⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 74.

³⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 204.

³⁹ Renn (Ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Word*, 826.

⁴⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

eternally moved to self-communication.”⁴²

Another aspect of God’s goodness is His “grace” (from Heb. *Chanan*) which refers to His favor upon humankind. God’s mercy or tender compassion (from Heb. *Chesed*) also expresses some aspect of God’s goodness which may be defined as “the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts.”⁴³ God, in His mercy, reveals His compassion and hence pities those who are in misery and is ever ready to relieve their distress (see Deut. 5:10; Pss. 57:10; 86:5).⁴⁴

The final aspect of God’s goodness is His longsuffering of God. From the Hebrew expression *'erek 'aph*, which means literally means “slow to anger” the longsuffering of God refers to that “aspect of the goodness or love of God in virtue of which He bears with the forward and evil in spite of their long continued disobedience.”⁴⁵ This attribute is revealed in passages like Exodus 34:6 and Psalm 86:15.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with various aspects of the Old Testament concept of God. In the next chapter, the study takes a look at how God is perceived in traditional African societies. The reader is encouraged to locate key areas of continuity and discontinuity between the African and the biblical concepts of God. Therefore, it is advisable for the reader to take these two chapters together.

⁴² Ibid., 71.

⁴³ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Review Exercises

1. Describe the purpose and process of creation as taught in any Ghanaian ethnic group.
2. Discuss the care of creation in African traditional thought.
3. Critically examine the concept of Supreme Deity (God) as the Creator in African traditional religion.
4. Compare the concept of God among the Yoruba, Igbo and Akan.
5. Discuss the attributes of God in African belief.
6. What are the sources from which indigenous Africans had knowledge about God?
7. Are traditional Africans monotheistic? Explain your answer.
8. Is Onyame the same as the Yahweh? Explain your view.



CHAPTER 2

God in African Thought

The concept of God, divinities and spirits in African traditional religious ontology has been so misconstrued by many scholars to the point of seeing Africans as people who did not know the Supreme Being nor worship Him before their contact with Western culture. Unfortunately, early European missionaries misconceived the traditions and cultures of Africans and concluded that Africans knew nothing about the true God. To the early missionaries, Africa was a continent with no philosophy and religion; hence they regarded everything African as dark. Contrary to this notion, this chapter demonstrates that the concept of God has been among Africans since time immemorial. In fact, Africans have always shown evidences of God's revelation to them through their daily expressions, cultural artefacts, symbolisms and through many other means.

The Origin of Belief in God in Africa

The belief in the Supreme Being has been with Africans from time immemorial. Africans have had the knowledge of the Supreme Being and have interacted with an Omnipotent, Omniscience, and Omnipresent God long before their contact with foreign cultures. This fact raises the question: where did the knowledge of God come from? The source of Africans' belief in God is difficult to trace. However, John S. Mbiti traces it to three main sources.⁴⁶ First, African belief in God might have originated from people's reflections on the complexity of the universe.

Africans do not subscribe to the theory of evolution. They believe that the universe was created and this belief presupposes that there is a Creator. Reflections on the wonderful nature of the universe made Africans come to the conclusion that there is a Supreme Being by whose power it exists and holds together. Even though they could not see this Creator, they began to worship and adore Him. As Mbiti rightly points out, the process of formulating this belief must have taken a long

⁴⁶ What follows in this section has been gleaned from, J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Oxford: Heinemann Publishers Ltd, 1991), 45-47.

time “and there must have been many myths and ideas which tried to explain these mysteries of the world.”⁴⁷

The second possible source of African belief in God is the African recognition and understanding of their own limitations. Challenges of life make people realize that they have no control over certain things. From time to time, Africans came to terms with the fact that they were limited and weak in many respects, including knowledge and power, particularly in the face of death, calamity and forces of nature (which include thunderstorms, earthquakes, mighty rivers and great forests). The reality of human limitation and powerlessness might have prompted ancient Africans to think that a greater Being exists whose power supersedes and controls these other powers.

This idea might have taken a long time to develop. Probably, the people initially thought that there were many different forces that exercise control in the universe, only to later reason later that “above those powers there must have been one who was or is God.”⁴⁸ Africans therefore felt this Supreme Being could help them in their experiences of limitations and powerlessness if they worshipped and adored Him. Hence, people decided to worship and depend on the one who had these mighty powers, God.

Finally, Africans, by observing the heavenly forces, came to believe in God. The vast nature of the universe makes it visible from any part of the world. From time immemorial heavenly forces have drawn people’s attention as they depend on them for light, warmth, rain among others. Though wide enough to be seen by all and visible from all parts of the earth, Africans realised that they could not reach the heavens. As Africans looked at the weather, storms, thunder and lightning, and other phenomena such as day and night, the firmament, the sun, moon and stars, seeing their enormous benefit to man, yet unreachable, they associated the sky with a great God who is very close to man, supplying man’s needs such as rain for his land to produce abundant fruit. Looking at these forces with awe and reverence, Africans began to perceive them as having one supernatural power or another. This is the reason for which “God is so much associated with the sky and the heavens.”⁴⁹ Mbiti argues further that:

It is very likely that ... [Africans] came to believe in God’s existence through such a link between heaven and earth. Man was at the centre of the universe, standing on the earth but looking up to the heavens as well. In looking towards the sky, he formed his belief in God, and that belief began to make sense and fit into man’s continued attempts to understand

⁴⁷ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

and explain the visible and the invisible universe, the earthly and heavenly worlds of which man is the centre.⁵⁰

Evidences of African Belief in God before Encountering other Cultures

Africans expressed their belief through their daily expressions, cultural artefacts, symbolisms and through many other means. This section outlines some of these evidences.

Evidence from Proverbs

Proverbs are philosophical thoughts in Africa and are common ways of expressing religious ideas and feelings. Proverbs, idioms and other wise sayings form a major component of African language. They ensure that wisdom of the land is passed from one generation to another. In most of these proverbs and idioms, Africans express their idea and belief in the Supreme Being. These sayings usually originate from individuals with acute speculative intellects. African proverbs “generally do not have identifiable authors, though this fact does not detract from the value of the ideas they contain.”⁵¹

That the concept of God is a very pervasive one and is fundamental to the religious beliefs of the Akan people of Ghana is expressed in the proverb *obi nkyere abɔfra Nyame* meaning “No one points out God to the child.” This proverb underscores that fact that God’s existence is self-evident, even to a child. Another proverb, “if you want to say something to *Onyame*, say it to the wind” indicates that God is spirit and everywhere. The proverbs “it is God who drives flies from the tailless animal” and “it is *Onyame* who pounds the *fufu* for the one-armed man” indicate that Africans perceive God as caring. Other examples are: “all men are *Onyame*’s children, none is the earth’s child”, signifying that God is the Creator and Father of humanity.

Still more examples are “if *Onyame* gives you sickness, He also gives you medicine”; “The Earth is wide, but *Nyame* is chief”; “When a fowl drinks water, it shows it to *Nyame*”; “The order *Nyame* has settled, living people cannot subvert”; “When a fowl drinks water, it shows it to *Nyame*”; “Says the hawk, ‘All *Onyame* did is good’”; “The earth is wide and *Onyame* is chief”; “There is no by-pass to *Nyame*’s destiny” and “there is no by-pass to *Nyame*’s destiny.” Finally, we have the Nupe people of West Africa expressing their belief that God’s being is without end in the proverb “God will outlive eternity.”

⁵⁰ Ibid., 46 - 47.

⁵¹ Kwame Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 21.

Evidence from Myths and Legends

The African oral tradition, with its myths, legends, stories, and proverbs, instills the important elements of religion and culture in the minds and hearts of the African people in all parts of the continent. The stories, myths, and tales that are heard and repeated from early childhood teach people about the ethics, beliefs, and traditions of their community. Many of these myths express belief about the Supreme Being. The Dinka people, for example, believe that once a rope hung down from heaven for people to climb up when they wanted to talk to their God. But an old woman pounding yam *fufu* kept hitting the underside of heaven with her pestle. God decided to pull up the rope and withdrew the heavens to a higher plane because he was fed up with noise.⁵²

The Margi of Nigeria also have a myth that, originally God was living very close to the earth and human beings were fed by God. On one occasion a woman went to God with a dirty calabash for her food. Unfortunately, the finger of one of the children of the sky became infested. God became annoyed and withdrew from humans. Clearly, these myths point to the existence of God. These myths teach one thing about God or the other.

Evidence from the Chieftaincy Institution

African religious ideas are expressed in the chieftaincy institution. The chief is regarded as the representative of the Supreme Being. Also, the hierarchical system of the chieftaincy institution is thought as comparable to that of the Supreme Being and the lesser divinities as believed by Africans.

Evidence from Traditional Rites and Ceremonies

African traditional rites and ceremonies also inform mankind about African conception of God. Africans normally mention God's name during events such as outdooing, funerals, marriage, festivals and puberty. For example, during naming ceremony, the Akan says "*Nyame mpe bɔne, nti na ɔmaa obia din*" meaning, because God hates sin, He gives names to people.

Another practise that portrays the African belief in God is libation. Libation prayers and singing of songs are religious activities containing a lot of information on religious beliefs. Prayers in Africa are usually made to God, the deities and the ancestors. Through prayers human dependence on God and the belief that God has the ability to meet man's need being become evident. In Akan, libation prayer is offered to *Onyame*, and the ancestors and *abosom* (deities) who are believed to be His ministers. According to K.A. Busia, libation may be poured

⁵² Aloysius M. Lugira, *World Religions: African Traditional Religion*, 3rd ed. edited by Joanne O'Brien and Martin Palmer (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 30.

for a sick person to get healed; or for good harvest and wealth; or on the death of a person. The outcome of libation however depends on *Nyame*. Busia records a prayer said by a traditional healer who wanted to use the bark of a tree to treat a patient:

O *Nyame*, the dependable One, here is drink. O Earth (*Asaase Yaa*), here is drink. Mighty Odum (iroko) tree, here is drink. It is for no evil cause that I call on you; it is ... who is ill, and I have come to scrape off a piece of your bark to make medicine for this patient. Stand by me that he may be restored. Here is drink; here is drink; here is drink.⁵³

In the above prayer, the priest first acknowledges *Nyame*, then *Asaase Yaa* and the *Odum* tree who are believed to be deities. God's name is mentioned as recognition of the fact that God is the controller of Destiny, and that things happen according to his wishes.

Another common libation prayer goes like this: "*Tweduampɔn Kwame, Ototobonsu a ɔbo nsuo ne awia*" (God Almighty, the giver of rain and sunshine). There are cases where God's name is not mentioned. In this case it is assumed that He receives the prayer and offerings through the lesser divinities who act as intermediaries.

Evidence from Artistic (Adinkra) Symbols

The word Adinkra is made up of *di*, to make use of, and *nkra*, message. These are joined to get *di nkra* and then prefixed by an infinitive, "A" to get Adinkra. Adinkra symbols are stamped in mourning cloths worn on the occasion of a funeral. Kofi Amoateng has provided convincingly evidence to show that Adinkra symbols originated from Gyaman, a former kingdom in present-day Côte D'Ivoire and named after Nana Kofi Adinkra (a king of the Gyaman/Suma).⁵⁴

These symbols represent concepts or aphorisms, and are extensively used in fabrics, pottery, logos and advertising. Names of some of these symbols reveal Akan belief in God before their contact with the foreign missionaries.

One Adinkra symbol is called *Gye Nyame*, except God. "Except God" is an end of a proverb that goes, "No one saw the beginning, none shall see the end, except God."⁵⁵ That is to say it is only God who saw the beginning of creation, and will see its end. It therefore signifies "The Omniscience of God," referring to God's quality of omniscience, or knowing all things. It also points to the eternity

⁵³ K.A. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1962), 16.

⁵⁴ Kofi Amoateng, *The Creedal Symbols of my Great Grandparents: The Adinkra Symbols Reveal the Theology of the Akan People of Ghana* (PhD Dissertation: Asbury Theological Seminary, 2018), 69-70. See also http://www.stlawu.edu/gallery/education/f/09textiles/adinkra_symbols.pdf (Accessed on 20th March, 2017)

⁵⁵ Lugira, *World Religions*, 36.

and immortality of God. Another Adinkra symbol is named *Nyame nnwu na m'awu* or *Nyame bewu na mawu*, as long as God is not dead, I shall not die or God never dies; therefore, I shall not die. This symbol points to God's immortality and the perpetual existence of the human spirit. It expresses the idea that the human soul is part of God's spirit and hence since God does not die, the human soul does not die too. *Nyame aniwa*, God's eye is the short form of *Onyankopɔn aniwa hu asuma asem biara*, meaning God's eye sees all secrets. It points to the omnipresence and omniscience of God. Another symbol is called *Nyame nti*, (Since God exist, for God's sake or by God's grace), a shortened version of *Nyame nti mi nnwe wura* meaning by god's grace, I will not eat leaves to survive. It signifies the Akan awareness of God's grace or God's faithfulness. *Biribi wɔ soro* is the shortened version of *Nyame, biribi wɔ soro, na ma emeka me nsa*, meaning God, there is something in heaven, let it get to me. It points to the hope, reliance on God for inspiration.

Evidence from Drumming and Dancing

Every palace in African traditional set up has a set of drums as part of the state regalia. Africans use talking drums to send information to the people. Talking drums in Africa portray the African believe in God. Drums are played to invoke the presence of the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the gods. Thus, drumming reveal the nature of the Supreme Being and His relationship with the lesser. The art of drumming is considered divine for which reason the *Okyerema* or *Onyanfo* (drummer) occupies an important position in the African traditional setup.

According to Busia, on the death of a person, the drummer in announcing it to the community first calls on the Creator, *ɔdomankoma Nyankopɔn*. The drummer gives the appellations of *Onyankopɔn* and says on the drum, "The Creator, infinite and eternal, who Created death..."⁵⁶ Without belief in God, Africans can not invoke His name.

Traditional dance also signifies the African belief in the Supreme Being. For example, before one dances *Kente*, a traditional Akan dance, he/she seeks permission from *Onyame, Asaase Yaa* and *Nananom*.

Evidence from Theophorous Names

Another significant source of African ideas about God comes from Theophorous names. Theophorous names are names of persons and objects that are derived from the nature of God. E. B. Idowu underscores the importance of these Theophorous names as expression of the African's view of God when he writes: "The Theophorous

⁵⁶ Busia, *The Challenge of Africa*, 12.

proper names that people bear all over Africa are a further evidence of how real God is to the Africans.⁵⁷ Examples of Fafra Theophorous names are *Ayinongre*, God's love; *Ayinbora/Ayindesum*, God is love; *Ayinbono*, God's property and *Ayingagya*, God is above all.

Ancient Akan named a certain tree, *Nyame dua*, (God's tree, *Alstonia boonei*) as a symbol of human dependence on God. This tree was usually planted in the palaces, shrines and houses, or a stump of it with a forked branch was placed at the entrances to these places.

A pot containing rain water was placed on the tree or stump and was named *Nyankonsu*, (God's water). Periodically the water was used to bless the inmates of the house and any other persons who needed *Onyame's* blessings. The logo of the Methodist Church of Ghana has a cross at the centre of the map of Ghana. This cross according to the church's tradition is made of *Nyame dua*. The choice of "Nyame dua cross" according to the church is to remind members that before the advent of missionaries, the concept of God was already known in Ghana (and for that matter Africa).

Indigenous Akan gave the name *Nyamekye* (God's gift) to a child finally born after years of childlessness. The name *Nyame Dɔnkɔ* (usually shortened *Dɔnkɔ*) was given to a child who finally survived after series of infant deaths. Other Akan Theophorous names are *Nyameama*, God's given and *Nyamedɔ*, God's love. The rainbow is known by the Akan, as 'Nyankontɔn', God's bow.⁵⁸ The Ewe name *Mawunyo*, "God is kind", *Mawusi*, in God's hands, an affirmation of God's supreme protection,⁵⁹ *Mawunyega*, God is the greatest, *Mawuto*, God's gift, *Mawuli*, God exists continually. The Gas have the name *Nyonmo baatsoo*, meaning God will provide. Igbo names such as *Chibuzor* (God first), *Chukwuka* (God is greater), *Chukwudi* (God exists) and Yoruba names such as *Oloruntobi* (God is great); *Olorunkoya* (God decries oppression) are other examples of Theophorous names pointing to the existence of God.

Evidence from Everyday Speech

Africans express their belief in God in everyday speech. When something mysteriously happened in an Akan's favour, he/she would say "this is *Nyame akwan* (God's way)." When someone is in trouble he/she may say *Nyamebekyerɛ*, God will provide or God will show the way. The Akan frequently use the expression "se *Onyame pɛ a ...*" ("if God wills ..." or "if God permits...") to show that the only condition for success is God's permission. If someone narrowly escapes an

⁵⁷ E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion. A Definition* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1973), 150.

⁵⁸ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 118.

⁵⁹ Boaheng, *Exploring the Relationship Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 57.

accident he or she may say, “If God had not intervened...” (*se Onyame ampata a...*). The Akan may pass a comment like, *Onyame mpe bone* (“God dislikes evil”). Salutations and words of farewell are couched in the form of prayer to *Onyame*. For instance, “May you go in the company of God” (*wone Nyame nko*); “I leave you in the hands of Onyame” (*mede Nyame gya wo*). The statement *Nyame nnaee*, God is not asleep portrays the Akan belief that God is watching over all things.

The advice “*fa ma Nyame*”, meaning “leave it/everything to God”, also shows that Akans believe in the existence of the Supreme Being who can take care of every situation. The Frafra, wishing someone a good night, would say *yine ga-re ho* which means may God bless your sleep.⁶⁰

Names of God in Africa

Ancient Africans attached much importance to names, for to them the name of a thing indicated its nature, and through the name one could obtain mastery over the thing or person named. African societies have different names given to God based on their conception about the Supreme Being and the attributes they give to Him.⁶¹ The principal Akan name for God, *Onyame* (shortened *Nyame*). *Nya* means “to get” *mee* means “to be satisfied.” *Nyame* therefore means “if one possesses or gets Him, he/she is satisfied” or “the one who satisfies whoever possesses Him.” This name is an expression of the Akan belief of God’s ability to satisfy all human needs, whether physical or spiritual.

Akans also points to God’s sovereignty, the only great One, by calling him *Onyankopon*. In “The Akan Day Names and Their Embedded Ancient Symbolism”, Vanessa Danso traces the root of this word to a five syllable word “OIAMKOPON” and gives the following insights.⁶²

The first syllable, “O”, refers to the basic name of God (a being who is capable of doing and achieving something), The second syllable which is “IA” transformed into “NYA,” stands for a being that possesses wisdom as found in the word *Nyansa*, meaning wisdom. Then the next syllable is “ME” which stands for self-consciousness and satisfaction as found in the expression “*ma mee*” meaning “I am satisfied.” The fourth, “KO” means life as in *Kosua*, meaning egg (life seed). The last, *PON*, stands for the greatness, dependability and sovereignty of God as in *Obrempon*. The above observation resonates with Kwame Gyekye’s assertion that

⁶⁰ Atinga “Death and Dying”, 7.

⁶¹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 47.

⁶² Gleaned from Vanessa Danso, “The Akan Day Names and Their Embedded Ancient Symbolism” assessed at <https://www.modernghana.com/lifestyle/8691/the-akan-day-names-and-their-embedded-ancient-symbolism.html> (Accessed on 23/2/16).

Onyankopon means, “Alone, the Great One”⁶³, the Being that is Alone Great⁶⁴ or the Supreme and dependable One.

Still another name for God is *Ɔdomankoma*. Analysed into its parts, *Ɔdomankoma* would read *Ɔdom-anko-ma*. *Ɔdom* have two possible meanings: multitude and grace. Similarly, *ma* may mean full or give. From these two possible meanings of *Ɔdomankoma* emerge: “multitude-alone-full or give”⁶⁵ and “the One who is uninterruptedly, infinitely and exclusively full of grace.” Either meaning portrays the sovereignty of *Ɔdomankoma*.

The Frafra of northern Ghana refer to the Supreme Being as *Yinε*.⁶⁶ The root word for *Yinε* is *ayina* which means one/alone or only. *Yinε* therefore refer to the Only One, one who is alone and above all. *Yinε* is often prefixed with *na-a*, thus *Na-ayinε* which implies chief. The *na-a* is a derivative of chief – *naba*. Therefore *Na-anyinε* means the only Supreme Chief.⁶⁷

The Ewes⁶⁸ of Ghana refer to God as *Mawu* which literally means the Supreme Being or God, the sovereign Being. According to Vensus A. George, the Ewes perceive *Mawu* as “the one reality behind the multiplicity that is experienced in the world.”⁶⁹ This name depicts the Ewe belief that God is depended upon for everything and will provide them of their need. The Ewe and Fon people of Dahomey call God Nana Buluku which means the great ancient Deity. The Gas of Ghana perceive God as both masculine and feminine and so they call Him *Atta Naa Nyommo*, Father-mother God. In the northern part of Ghana, the Mamprusis call Him *JNawuni*, the Frafras *Naayine* and the Gonjas *Eboore*.

The Yuroba of Nigeria call God *Olodumare* meaning Almighty or Supreme.⁷⁰ Linguistically, *Olodumare* is made up of three clear words: *Olo*, *Odu*

⁶³ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, revised ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 70-71.

⁶⁴ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 46.

⁶⁵ E.J. Brill, *Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: n.p, 1959), 142. See J.B. Dankwa, *Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass and Co Ltd, 1968), 58-61. The choice between “full” or “give” depends on the meaning one makes out of the word *ma*. In Akan, *ma* means “full” or “to give.” However, the authors believe that in the current context *ma* should be taken as “to give.”

⁶⁶ Samuel Ayinbora Atinga, *Death and Dying: A Study of the Mortuary Rites of the Frafra of Northern Ghana in the Light of the Christian Funeral Liturgy, An Attempt at Inculturation* (Doctor’s Degree in Theology Dissertation: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2006), 7.

⁶⁷ Atinga, *Death and Dying*, 7.

⁶⁸ The Ewes are a group of people occupying south-eastern Ghana and the southern parts of neighboring Togo and Benin.

⁶⁹ Vensus A. George, *Paths to the Divine: Ancient and Indian* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 13.
<https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=VYaRePV92YwC&pg=PA13&lpg=PA13&dq>

⁷⁰ Edwin Anaegboka Udoe, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts Between Christianity and*

and *Are*. *Olo* means “owner” or “Lord of something.” *Odu* can mean either of two things: main heading or chief or principal heading. The combination of these two words would then mean “he one who owns the principal thing.” “*mare*” means “do not go”, indicating the unchangeableness of God. *Olodumare* means “The King or Chief unique who holds the sceptre, wields authority and has the quality which is superlative in worth, and he is at the same time permanent, unchanging and reliable.”⁷¹ That is, God is the Lord and Supreme Owner of everything including all power and authority.

Another Yuroba name for God is *Olorun* which means “the owner of heaven” or “the Lord of heaven”. *Olorun* therefore points to God’s ownership of all things whether visible or invisible.⁷²

Also, another name for God is *Chineke*. The word *Chi* means God or Source Being and *Eke* means “to create”. Put together, *Chineke* means the God or Source Being Who creates all things.⁷³

The Igbo also refer to God as *Chukwu*, which means “Great God from whom being originates”, that is the greatest of all other gods.⁷⁴ By interpretation, the name *Chukwu* suggests two things *Chi-Ukwu* (Great God) and *Chi-nta* (small god). Also, *Chuukwu* is a combination of ‘*Chi*’ and ‘*ukwu*’, which will literally mean the Great Source Being. Among the *Nupe* of Nigeria God is called *Soko* which means “the creator or supreme deity that resides in heaven.”⁷⁵

The Edo of Nigeria know God as *Osanobua* or *Osanobwa* which means “the source of all beings who carries and sustains the world or universe.” Among the Mende people of Sierra-Leone God is called *Ngewo* which means “the eternal one who rules from above.”⁷⁶

The theological significance of these names, in the view of Isaac Boaheng, is that they are expressive of various aspects of the attributes of God.⁷⁷ He states further that through these names one comes to term with the “ontological dimension and characteristic attributes which depict the nature of God in African thought.”⁷⁸ Mbiti expresses this ontology in the following words: In African thought, expressed through names/appellations given to God, “God is the origin and sustenance of

African (Igbo) Traditional Religion Through Inculturation (Zurich: Lit Verlag Münster & Co, 2011), 36. <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=CX4moSf0fmsC&pg=PA36&lpg=PA36&dq=>

⁷¹ Emeka C. Ekeke and Chike A. Ekeopara, “God, divinities and spirits in African traditional religious ontology” *American Journal Of Social And Management Sciences* 2010, 1(2): 209-218, 211.

⁷² Ekeke and Ekeopara, “God, divinities and spirits in African traditional religious ontology”, 211.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Udoye, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts Between Christianity and African*, 35.

⁷⁵ Ekeke and Ekeopara, “God, divinities and spirits in African traditional religious ontology”, 211.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Boaheng, *Exploring the Relationship Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 58.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

all things...He is outside and beyond His creation. He is personally involved in His creation, so that it is not outside of Him or His reach. God is simultaneously transcendent and immanent, and a balanced understanding of the two extremes is necessary in our discussion of African conception of God.”⁷⁹ In this development Mercy Amba Oduyoye has noted that “in names we encounter the African ontology that is centered on God who is the source of life and cohesion, whose sovereignty over all cannot be questioned.”⁸⁰ In as spirit of agreement with Boaheng’s assertion stated earlier, Oduyoye concludes that these names are descriptive of God’s nature, expression of his sovereignty and superiority over the affairs of humankind.⁸¹

Following are other names of God given by respective ethnic groups in Africa and their meanings.⁸²

Country	Ethnicity	Name	Meaning
Burundi	Burundi	Imana	The Creator of everything
Cameroon	Bamum	Njinyi	He who is everywhere He who sees and hears everything
Gabon	Fang	Nyame	Creator
Congo (Brazzaville)	Vili	Nzambi	Creator and ultimate source of power
Burkina Faso	Tallensi	Wene	Sky God
Gambia	Serer	Rog	Creator
Ghana	Akan	Onyankopon	Alone, the Great One
Senegal	Serer	Rog	Creator
Sierra Leone	Kono	Yataa	The One you meet everywhere

Attributes of the Supreme Being in African Thought

Africans frequently associate the Supreme Being with certain basic attributes. In this section, we shall briefly outline some of these attributes.

God is Spirit

In spite of the anthropomorphic description of God, Africans consider God as a spiritual being, a being who is invisible to humankind but omnipresent. The invisible nature of God is usually expressed in concrete terms. He is likened to

⁷⁹ As cited by Udoye, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts Between Christianity and African*, 36.

⁸⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *The African Experience Of God Through The Eyes Of An Akan Woman Crosscurrents* Vol. 47, No. 4, Ko Amar Ha Rachaman (Winter 1997/1998), pp. 493-504, 497.

⁸¹ Udoye, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts Between Christianity and African*, 36.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 43

the wind, which is also invisible and everywhere. The Akan maxim, “if you want to speak to God, talk to the wind”, points to God as spirit. As spirit, God is not represented in the form of physical images. Africans therefore do not consider God to be physical despite the use of physical metaphors to describe Him.⁸³ As spirit, God cannot be confined to space and time and hence can be worshipped everywhere or called upon anywhere. This attribute makes *Onyame* distinct from the *abosom* or *jemanwojii* (lesser divinities) who are limited to space and time.

God is real

Africans do not perceive God as an abstract entity whose existence is in the mind. God is experienced as an all-pervading reality. God is a constant participant in the affairs of human beings, judging by the everyday language of West Africans of my experience. He is seen and perceived as a real personal entity whose help is sought in times of trouble and who is believed to be the protector of the people. The meanings of names given to God in various African societies attest to this.

Not only are these names descriptive of God’s nature, they also depict the experiences Africans have had with God. The names by which God is called in Africa describe His being and character and portray God as a real concept rather than an abstract one. In this wise, Africans believe that God is a living reality. The Igbo expression *Chukwu di ndu* meaning “one who is ever-present, ever-active, and ever-acting in the world”⁸⁴ makes this point evident. God’s influence is felt everywhere and so He is addressed as *Nna anyi*, meaning our father. The Igbos therefore relate to God in the sense of a father/children relation just as Christians believe.

God is Creator and Originator

African myths of creation strongly reveal that all Africans at all times from prehistory to the present-day have recognized a Supreme Being as the Creator of all things (see chapter four). The Banyarwanda of Rwanda in Central Africa believe that “[t]here was nothing before God created the world.”⁸⁵ The Baila of Zambia perceive God as the Originator or the Creator of all things. The name given to God is derived from the verb that means “to make, to originate, to be the first to do anything.”⁸⁶ Similarly, the Ngoni people of Southern Africa perceive God as Creator “the Original Source,” while the Zulu of South Africa believe that God

⁸³ J. S. Mbiti, *The Concept of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1982), 23.

⁸⁴ Anthony Onyekwe, *Marriage and Life after Death: A Model of Regenerative Inculturation* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2015), np.

⁸⁵ Lugira, *World Religions*, 40.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

“made all things.”⁸⁷ The Banyankore of Uganda in eastern Africa refer to God as “the Creator who sets things in order, creates everything and gives new life.”⁸⁸ Besides, the names by God is called in Africa express the idea of God as the “Originator,” Creator of everything. For the Akan, *Onyame* is the Creator, *Bɔrebɔre* (“One who creates all things”) the derivation of *ɔbɔ ade*, *ɔbɔ ade* (create things, make things). He is *Ananse Kokroko* (The Great Spider; The Great Designer). Thus, God is known as the only source of every (good) thing. He is also referred to as *Amaomee* (Giver of Plenitude).

God is Omnipresent

Africans believe that God is everywhere at the same time. The Akans refer to God as *Ohuntahunu*, One who is not seen but sees everything. God is again referred to as *Brekirihunuadee*, meaning He who knows or sees all whether the thing known is facing Him or behind Him. He sees everything because He is present everywhere. It is believed that wherever the air blows God is present. He is *enyiasombea*, Omnipresent, all-pervading.⁸⁹ The fact that *Onyame* is everywhere at the same time with His full being and consciousness gives rise to the Akan proverb: *wope asem aka akyere Onyame a, ka kyere mframa* (if you want to say something to *Onyame*, say it to the wind). This also throws light on the Akan belief that *Onyame* is invisible and intangible.

God is the Absolute Controller and Sustainer of the Universe

African tradition holds that God has absolute control of the universe and all that it contains and therefore all other beings owe their existence to Him. As Originator of the universe, God has the ultimate power of all-natural rules for orderly existence. This belief is expressed differently by different people. The Akan, for instance, refer to the Supreme Being as *Tweduampɔn* meaning the “Supreme Being, upon whom men lean and do not fall.” They look up to God for rains, good weather, daily bread etc.

For the Nandi of Kenya God “is the far off driving force behind everything, the balance of nature.”⁹⁰ The Bambuti of Congo also portray their belief in God’s control and sustenance of God in the saying “If God should die, the world would also collapse.”⁹¹ Similarly, the Zulu express their belief in God as the reason for their existence in the saying: God “made us, and is, as it were, in us his work. We

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 55.

⁹⁰ Lugira, *World Religions*, 40.

⁹¹ Ibid.

exist because He existed.”⁹²

God is Omnipotent

Africans believe that God has power above all; no power supersedes God’s power. It is God who gave power even to those who had. All are powerless without God. God, according to Africans, is the owner of all powers. All the *abosom* are under the power of *Onyame*. The Akan name *Otumfoɔ* points to God’s might.

Africans believe that “God is the absolute being and the ultimate ground of being—the Supreme Being— [Who] constitutes the controlling principle in the world.”⁹³ As the sovereign God, Africans perceive Him as so powerful that He is the controller of one’s destiny. “God is generally regarded as the Overlord of Society and the Final Authority in all matters. He has power over life and death.”⁹⁴

God, the Supreme Being is One

There is an on-going debate as to whether the African concept of God is monotheism or polytheism. Many western scholars have described traditional African belief about God as polytheistic. Such conclusions come from a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Supreme Being and the lesser divinities as taught by African tradition. The Author’s wish to state at the onset that to qualify for polytheism there has to be the existence of co-eternal and co-powerful gods that does not describe the African situation. Based on this premise this book shall proceed to demonstrate that Ancient Africans had a monotheistic idea about God.

First, African monotheistic mind-set is evident in the names given to God. In African languages, the names of God are uniquely singular. For example, linguistically, the Akan word “*Onyame*” originally had no plural.⁹⁵ *Onyame* is singular and does not in any sense express a divine assembly.⁹⁶ There was nothing like *anyame*. *Onyame* is in His own category with no co-equal. The introduction of “*anyame*” is believed to be an invention from a misreading of the spiritual realities of the Akan.⁹⁷ The missionaries who did the first translation of the Bible into the Akan language were influenced by the misconception that Africans are polytheistic. Similarly, *Nyommo* is strictly a singular word without any plural form.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Molefi K. Asante and Abu Shardow Abarry, *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 301.

⁹⁴ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), 153.

⁹⁵ P. J. Ryan, “‘Arise, O God’ The problem of ‘Gods’ in West Africa”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 11(3), (1980):161-170, 162.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁹⁷ J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968), 29.

Second, Africans do not put God and the lesser divinities into the same category. The Akan word for gods or lesser divinities is *abosom*. Indigenous Akan religious tradition believes that *Onyame* manifests himself through his agents or messengers, the *Abosom*. The worship (*som*) of the deities (*abosom*) is called *abosomsom*. *Abosomsom* is the rituals and practices conducted in honor of the deities according to custom, either in private or in communion. The *obosom* (lesser divinity) or *abosom* (lesser divinities) are never referred to as *Onyame* or *anyame*. Neither has *Onyame* ever been put in the category of the *abosom*. The divinities are believed to have been brought into being by God.

For example, *Orisanla* also called *Obatala* in Yoruba pantheon is thought of as the son or deputy of *Olodumare*. In Ghana, all Akan lesser divinities are also regarded as *Onyame's* sons. This is what qualifies them to be called divinities. This means that the divinities owe their existence to God. Unlike, God the lesser divinities have no independent existence of their own and can do nothing apart from God. Therefore, to put *Onyame* and *abosom* in the same class and refer to them as God and gods as if they have the same personality is unacceptable in African thought.

More so, there are no temples for the Supreme Being. Africans do not regard shrines and temple and feast days as necessary in the proper worship of God. The non-existence of shrines, temples and the feast days specifically devoted to *Onyame* among Akans is rooted in the belief that *Onyame* is not geographically bound but lives everywhere.

In addition, Akans believe that there is no priest or priestess who alone has access to *Onyame* as is the case with the lesser divinities. He is accessible to all and does not need priests or mediums. By virtue of the *akra* (soul) given by *Onyame* at conception everybody has equal access to Him. Therefore, there are no priests or priestesses specifically appointed to the worship of God. Communal prayers to Him are rather rare, but this could be an expression of the belief that everyone has a direct access to *Onyame*.

The *abosom* due to the geographical restriction and limitation of powers have priests and priestess through whom they are consulted. Specific *abosom* have specific power which may be efficient always or at particular times or days. For example, the sea god is known to be active on Tuesdays. The name given to these divinities are usually descriptive of the functions allotted to them or the natural phenomenon to which it is associated. There are gods associated with the Sun, moon, stars, rivers and so on. *Jakuta* and *Sokogba* are respectively the Yoruba and Nupe gods associated with God's wrath. The divinities are therefore like ministers with their own department as overseers and thus act as intermediaries between

human beings and God with reference to their specific portfolio.

The foregoing makes African monotheism evident. We however concede that “African concept of monotheism is one of a hierarchy with a Supreme Being at its head.”⁹⁸ For example, among the Yoruba and the Edo of Nigeria and the Akan of Ghana, where the society is highly graded and hierarchical, God is thought of as the Supreme King over a theoretic world while among the Igbos, where the society is not all that graded and complex, the ministerial system is less striking.⁹⁹ Among the Birom and Tiv such ministerial system is absent.

In addition, in the matriarchal societies of Africa like the Ewe, God is thought of in feminine terms whereas the masculine concept is widespread.

As the supreme One, *Onyame* occupies the apex of the ontological hierarchy and he is followed by a multiplicity of deities (*abosom*) and then an array of ancestral spirits (*nsamanfo*).¹⁰⁰ The Supreme Being is believed to be the ruler over a large number of divinities who are considered to be His associates. The divinities were brought into being as functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe. “African understanding of the structure of the heavenly kingdom might be compared to the Christian concept of God ruling over the saints and angels.”¹⁰¹ In this wise, Bolaji Idowu has described the belief system as “diffused monotheism” because “here we have a monotheism in which there exist other powers which derive from Deity such being and authority that they can be treated, for practical purposes, almost as ends in themselves.”¹⁰² The Author’s propose from the foregoing that the word *abosom* be used as the rendition of gods in the Bible instead of *anyame*.

God is Transcendent and Immanent

Africans believe that God is far away and even some of His shrines are believed to be beyond human reach. Mbiti clarifies the transcendence of God in African context when he points out that, “for most of their life, African people placed God in the transcendental plane, making it seem as if he is remote from their daily affairs. This transcendence of God among Meru people seemed to be like a theory. We say this because they knew very well that even if God was far, he was also so near. Mbiti observes that, “in theory God is transcendent but in practice he is immanent.”¹⁰³ Though God is considered as being far from humanity He is believed

⁹⁸ Lugira, *World Religions*, 38.

⁹⁹ Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Elvis Imafidon, “The Concept of Person in an African Culture and its Implication for Social Order” in *LUMINA*, Vol. 23, No.2, (1997), 3.

¹⁰¹ Lugira, *World Religions*, 38.

¹⁰² E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962), 202f.

¹⁰³ Mbiti, *The Concept of God Africa*, 11

to involve Himself in human affairs. It is for this reason that Africans pray for God's intervention in their situations. The immanence of God in African thought is manifested in natural objects and phenomena.

God is Eternal and Immortal

God has ever been living and he will ever live. Africans do not see the Supreme Being as One who will one day cease to be or one who will eventually die. They rather perceive Him eternal and immortal, One who lives forever to satisfy the human soul. J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu have stated that in

African thought "the Supreme Deity is the Ever-living Reality Whose Being stretches to eternity."¹⁰⁴ As *Tetekwaframua and Odomankoma*, God transcends time and is thus free from the limitations of time, an eternity without beginning, without an end.

The Adinkra symbol *Nyame nnu na m'awu or Nyame bewu na mawu*, as long as God is not dead, I shall not die or God never dies; therefore, I shall not die points to God's immortality and the perpetual existence of the human spirit. The Kono of Sierra Leone refer to God as *Meketa* implying "the Everlasting One." Therefore, unlike human beings who live, die and become living dead and are forgotten afterwards, God lives forever.

God is a Just Judge

Africans believe that God is a just Judge of the society including the helpless and defenceless. The Akan is usually found of saying *mede m'asem ama Nyame* (I have handed my case to God). He is all knowing and sees the secret deeds of the members of the community. Since nothing is hidden from Him his judgment is fair. His power to judge and His interest in the moral affairs of the people goes beyond the grave. Indeed, God is said to be the source of all morality and it is the responsibility of the spiritual forces, especially the gods, who act as God's representatives, to make sure that these laws are enforced. God's justice and fairness is portrayed in the maxim "since God does not like wickedness, He gave each creature a name." His unfailing providence is enshrined in the maxim "if God gives you a cup of wine and an evil-minded person kicks it over, he fills it up again."

Unchangeableness

Africans believe that God is unchangeable and dependable. For this reason, Akan refer to Him as *Obotantim* or *Tetebotan* (literally the Rock of Ages). From *Obotan* meaning rock and *tim* meaning being firm and immovable, *Obotantim* means the

¹⁰⁴ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1979), 52.

immovable rock. As *Obotantim Nyame* nothing can make God change His position apart from His sovereign will.

Conclusion

Clearly Africans had some concept about God before their contact with European missionaries. However, Africa's observational knowledge about God differs from the biblical concept of God in some respects. Yet, it cannot be said that it was the foreign missionaries who visited the continent who brought God to Africa. God had already revealed himself to Africans. What the missionaries did was to introduce Africans to some aspects of the biblical revelation about God which was not known to Africans.

Africans exhibit a multi-sided concept of God which comes from the basic fact that in each locality, the concept of God is derived from the sociological structure as well as the climate of the area. African people whose cultures are organized as monarchies with a king at the head usually conceive of their God as the supreme king. As there can be only one supreme king in a community, Africans have traditionally concluded that there can be only one Supreme Being for the entire human race. The reader is encouraged to give a deeper reflection on the issues raised and to apply the knowledge gained to other similar occurrences.

Review Exercises

1. Did Africans know God before the arrival of Christian missionaries?
2. Explain your answer with relevant examples.
3. In what sense can it be said that the coming of Christian missionaries to Africa was God's plan to make himself better known to Africans?
4. How do Africans exhibit their knowledge about God in the traditional ceremonies?
5. Explain five attributes of God in African thought.

CHAPTER 3

Creation in the Old Testament

The doctrine of creation may be defined as follows: “God created the entire universe out of nothing; it was originally very good; and he created it to glorify himself.”¹⁰⁵ God was not compelled to create anything; He created everything out of His free will to reveal His own glory. Creation basically means bringing into existence from that which had no existence or to make something out of nothing. In this chapter, the study considers the doctrine of creation from this perspective. The Old Testament begins with the statement: “In the beginning God created [*bārā*] the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). This verse confronts the reader with the timeless and transcendent God who is there. It also affirms that the universe is created and temporal, not uncreated and eternal. The Genesis account confesses God as Creator and the Originator of all that exists.

Activities in the Creation Week

According to the Old Testament, creation was done in six days (which may be literal or non-literal days). It begins with the creation of the universe (*ex nihilo*, out of nothing) by God on the first day and concluded with the creation of man and woman on the sixth day (*ex creatio*, from God’s creation— that is from clay). In what follows, the study outlines the activities in each “day” of creation.

First day

The first days involved activating and energizing the newly created physical universe (Gen. 1:1–5). The main activity of the first day was the creation of light. This light was gathered on day four to create celestial bodies.

¹⁰⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 264.

Second day

On the second day God created two matters. First, He created the firmament (that is, the atmosphere) to form the great hydrosphere of the earth. The second activity of the second day was the division of the waters into two great water masses, one above and one below the atmosphere or the firmament (Gen. 1:6–8). The waters above the firmament, however, are the clouds, some of which float higher than others.

Third day

On the third day God created the lithosphere and plant biosphere of the earth (Gen. 1:9–13). First, God separated the lower waters of the earth. At various places He made cavities in which the flowing waters would collect so that dry land would appear everywhere and would be a suitable dwelling place for humanity and beast. He called the water He gathered together seas and established definite boundaries for it. God's second activity on this day was the ordering of the dry land to produce trees and every imaginable type of vegetation (grasses, herbs, and trees etc.).

Fourth day

On the fourth day God made sun, moon, and stars and placed them in the infinite space of heaven that had been created on day 1. The luminaries were made to serve at least three purposes: (1) to divide day and night (v. 14), (2) for signs, for seasons, for days, and for years (v. 14), and (3) to provide energy for the entire earth (v. 15).

Fifth day

On the fifth day, God began the creation of living animals: the fishes and the birds. The fish were brought forth from the water, and the birds perhaps partly from the water (Gen 1:20) and partly from the earth (Gen 2:19). The amphibians, which live both on land and in the water, apparently were brought forth out of both.

Sixth day

In a sixth “day” of creation (Gen. 1:24—31), God continued the work of filling the earth by creating domesticated animals, small creatures, and game, all “according to their kinds.” More importantly, God made human beings in His image and then placed in dominion over all the rest of the works of God made in the six days. God created human beings to show His glory (Isa. 43:7).

Seventh day

Acknowledging the completion of His work in creating and making all things,

God rested, blessed, and “sanctified the seventh day in commemoration thereof (Gen. 2:1–4). The divine rest involved a cessation of creative activity, not complete inactivity, for God continues his work of preservation, providence, and spiritual recreation, and one day he will fashion the universe anew. The absence of any reference to “evening” and “morning” suggests that the Sabbath of God continues to the present.

It is important to observe the following about each day of creation: (1) There is a command: Let there be ...; (2) there is a chronological equation: And there was...; (3) there is approbation: “It was good”; (4) there is a definition of purpose, and (5) there is a blessing.

Also, three matters must be considered in the creation of each thing: (1) Its generation, whereby it came into existence; (2) its formation, identifying it as a specific creation; and (3) its adornment, making it both beautiful and pleasant. The doctrine of creation informs us that the world is neither divine (thus avoiding idolatry) nor illusory (avoiding despair) and that people are neither demigods (negating idolatry) nor meaningless accidents (negating nihilism).

The entire creation is intended to show God’s glory. Even the inanimate creation, the stars and sun and moon and sky, testify to God’s greatness (Ps. 19:1–2). Primarily creation shows God’s immense power and wisdom which surpasses anything that anybody could imagine (Jer. 10:12).

Old Testament Account of the Creation of Humankind

Four passages in Genesis account for the creation of humankind. The first passage deals with the creation of both male and female in the images of God (Gen. 1:26–28). The second passage gives a detailed account of the creation of Adam only (Gen. 2:7). The third passage accounts for the creation of the woman, whom Adam at that time called *Isha* (woman), because she was taken out of man (*Ish*) (Gen. 2:18–23). The fourth passage states that God called them Adam (Gen. 5:1, 2). There are allusions to the statements thus made in two other places in this book, namely, 3:19, 23 and 9:6, 7.

It can be deduced from the above passages that (1) humankind was created by God as to his body, from earthy material, and as to his soul, by direct creation; (2) humankind was made male and female; (3) Adam was the progenitor of all human race; (4) they have been made in the image after the likeness of God as equal with variety. This makes humans different from animals.

The Essential Nature of Man

The creation account in Gen. 2:7 shows that humankind is made up of material/

physical and immaterial/spiritual components. Materially, God formed humankind's (Adam's) body "from the dust of the ground" ('**āpār minhā'adāmāh**). Concerning the immaterial dimension, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (*nišmat hayyīm*). The constitution of humankind is described with components of soul, spirit, flesh, heart and blood.

Soul (*nephesh*)

The Hebrew word for soul, *nephesh*, occurs about 750 times in the Old Testament with variety of meanings and contexts. It can refer to "soul" (Gen. 2:7), "living creature" (Gen. 1:20, 21, 24), "the life of an individual" (Gen. 12:13; Exo. 4:19, 2 Sam. 1:9; Ps. 23:3), "a person" or "an individual" (Gen. 12:5; 46:18ff); "corpse" or "dead body" (Num. 5:2; 6:6; 9:10ff; Lev. 11:46).¹⁰⁶ The soul is found in both humans and animals but not in plants.¹⁰⁷ The soul is a spiritual, incorporeal, invisible, intangible, and personal entity adorned with intellect, affections, emotions and will. In union with the body it constitutes a human being and by virtue of its inherent propensity is inclined to be and remain united with the body. The soul comes from God and therefore needs to be refreshed constantly (Ps. 42:1). It serves as the principle of life (1 Kgs. 17:21-23; Ps. 35:4), the centre of significant emotional attachment or awareness (Deut. 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13 1 Sam. 1:15; Ps. 119:167; 146:1) and the divine-relate part of a person (Ps. 19:7; Is. 26:9 and Matt. 10:28).

Spirit (*rauch*)

Appearing about 389 times, the word *rauch* translated "spirit" is applied to God (136 times) and to persons or animals (129 times). Its basic meaning is "wind" or "breath." By extension the word comes to mean the vital powers—"strength" when it refers to a person. It can sustain a person in infirmity (Prov. 18:14). It is the breath which the Lord gives to people (Is. 42:5). Beasts too have *rauch* from God (Ps. 104:29-30) but it comes into being simply as the earth brings them forth (Gen. 1:24). Like soul, the spirit is divine-related (Is. 26:9). *Nephesh* and *rauch* refers in general to the life principle of human person with *nephesh* stressing on particularity or life and spirit focusing on the idea of a supernatural power above or within the individual.

Flesh (*basar*)

Basar occurs about 250 times in the Old Testament in both literal and metaphorical senses.¹⁰⁸ The dominant literal sense of the word refers to human flesh--that is

¹⁰⁶ Renn (ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Word*, 918.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 391.

physical body; body tissue--(Gen. 2:21; Exo. 4:7; Lev. 13:2ff; 2 Kgs. 4:34; 5:10; Ps. 16:9; Ezek. 11:3; Dan. 1:15).¹⁰⁹ It also means “flesh” in the sense of blood relationship. It was in this sense that Eve was described as the flesh” of Adam (Gen. 2:23; cf. Gen. 37:27). It also refers to meat or animal flesh in general (eg. Exod. 16:8; 29:31ff; Lev. 4:11; Deut. 12:15; 1 Kgs. 17:6).¹¹⁰ Metaphorically, *basar* may be used as a symbol for humanity or mortality (Gen. 7:21; 9:11; Is. 40:6, 22; 66:16, 23; Jer. 25:31; 45:5; Joel 2:28). More so, flesh refers to one’s personhood or being (Pss. 63:1; 84:2; 119:120; Eccl. 5:6), a symbol for all animal life (Gen. 6:19; 7:15; 9:4) or “heart of flesh”, signifying a spiritual sensitivity towards God, resulting in an attitude of love and devotion towards Him (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26).¹¹¹

Heart (*leb, lebab*)

Together, the two synonymous terms *leb* and *lebab* each meaning heart, occurs about 850 times in the Old Testament. Heart is used not to refer to the physical organ but to the inner self that thinks, feels and decides and serves as the seat of deep emotions (Ps. 38:10; 126:2). It also lies at the deepest level of feelings and registered the most profound responses to life. It may refer to “one’s own mind” or “oneself” (Ps. 14:1; Eccl. 3:18; Ezek. 14:4). It is the focus of the personal life--the reasoning, responding, deciding self. It is part of the person that only God can see (Prov. 24:12; 1 Sam. 16:7) the decisions of the will from the heart.¹¹² In majority of cases, the intellectual and rational functions of a person are ascribed to the heart.

Blood (*dam*)

Dam is the standard word for blood in the Old Testament, occurring a little over 300 times. Literally it refers to the red fluid circulating in the body of an animal or a person (Gen. 37:31, 1 Kgs. 22:35). It refers to the life of a person (Prov. 1:16, 18; Ps. 72:13-14) and by extension the means of compensating for life (Lev. 4).

Conclusion

From the Old Testament, creation is the result of God’s own plan and actions. Creation is therefore not eternal. This chapter and the next chapter are to be studied together in order to appreciate the comparison between the Old Testament and the African concepts of creation.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 391-92.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 392.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Youngblood (ed), *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 549.

Review Exercises

1. “The universe is an emanation from the being of God.” Discuss this assertion from traditional African perspective.
2. Critically examine the creation account as given by stories from your community. How does it compare or contrast the creation account of the OT?
3. If God created the universe, as the Old Testament claims, did He create all things in six solar days? Explain your answer.
4. State and explain the main component of the human person as taught by the Old Testament.



CHAPTER 4

Creation in African Thought

The doctrine of creation is not lacking in traditional African beliefs. Having dealt with the Old Testament view on creation in the previous chapter, the present chapter considers the concept of creation from the African perspective. The creation stories of the Old Testament and traditional African Religion point to God as the Creator and sustainer of the universe. However, the creation account in the Old Testament unlike African creation myth was done *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.

Creation in African Myths

Most creation stories in African traditional societies usually depict creation as taking place in three stages, namely, pre-creation setting, the act of creation and post-creation setting. The pre-creation setting includes the watery expanse, darkness. This is followed by the actual act of creation by God and finally a post-creation setting usually involving the violation of divine prescriptions and the separation of God from humanity. Unlike the biblical concept of creation, the African idea about creation is not that of *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing).

The Vugusu myth of creation as recorded by Mbiti summarizes as follows.¹¹³

- i. God created the heavens using two days.
- ii. He created two assistants, then he created the moon, sun and the clouds as well as two bright stars.
- iii. He created the rains and put it in the clouds, controlled by two rainbows.
- iv. He created the earth and filled it with mountains and valleys.
- v. He created man first and a woman so that the man could have a

¹¹³ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 81

companion.

- vi. He then created the plants, animals, birds and other creatures which live in the water, on land and in the soil.
- vii. The work of creation was completed in six days and the Lord rested on the seventh day.

The Asante creation myth has it that God first created the sky, followed by the earth, rivers, waters, plants and trees. After this He created humankind and then animals for the consumption of man. Plants were then created for the survival of animals and human. This was followed by the creation of spirits of water bodies, forests and rocks to protect humankind.

The Origin and Nature of Humanity in African Thought

Africans, since time immemorial, have asked questions about their existence. They ask: Who are we? How did we come to be here? Attempts to answer these and other questions have given rise to varied myths about creation. Different African societies have their own version of how humankind was created. We can however put together these ideas and construct a general picture which emerges from a consideration of these myths and beliefs about the origin of man.¹¹⁴ Though varied, Africans myths about creation share the common feature that they usually centre on a Supreme Being who, according to African oral tradition, created the world and all that is in it. Thus, Africans recognize the Supreme Being as the Creator of humankind. Africans believe that the humanity is the centre of creation. Yet, the exact time of this work of creation is not known.¹¹⁵

Mbiti has collected various creation myths in African traditional religion. All these myths have three things in common: First, humankind was created by God. Second, God created humans in pairs (probably husband and wife). Third, humankind was created close to the end of God's creative activities. We present a summary of these myths.¹¹⁶

Among the Zambians, Ugandas, Sudans, Kenyans, and Nigerians, there are myths that two human beings were created as husband and wife and were lowered to the ground from heaven. Some versions of this myth have it that these two people were thrown down from heaven to the earth because they sinned. Their coming to the earth was therefore seen as punishment for their sin. Yet, other versions say they were created and brought to the earth to occupy and control other

¹¹⁴ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1991), 82.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

creation.

Contrary to the idea that humanity was first created in heaven and brought to the earth, there are myths that say that the creation of the first humans took place on earth. The prevalent view is that God created two people, husband and wife, from clay. The process of creation usually entails the delegation of power by God to the divinities. For example, the Yoruba creation myth has it that the Supreme Being, *Olodumare*, created the world out of “magic earth” through the help of *Orisha Nla* (“the Great God”).¹¹⁷ *Orisha Nla* was given power to form human beings out of clay and afterwards *Olodumare* gave life to the body formed.¹¹⁸ The Igbo believe that *Chineke* sent *Nri* (the first man) to earth to marry and multiply on earth.

Another version of this myth is that God created the first humans in water or marshes and pulled them out to walk to the dry ground. A similarly version is that God made them inside the ground and let them out of a hole in the ground or in a rock. These myths are common in eastern and southern Africa.

Still in some places (especially central Africa) the first humans are believed to have fallen like a fruit from “the tree of life.” A similar myth holds that God made the first humans and placed them in a vessel which burst open or was opened by other creatures to allow them come out.

The reason God created male and female, according to Africans, was that they will give birth and populate the earth. The relationship between God and humanity was like that of a father and his children. God supplied them with their needs and thought them about how to survive on the earth. Africans believe that the first humans were made to live forever. For this reason, they were given one or more of these: immortality, they could become young again after growing old and even if they died, they could rise up again.

The sustenance and control of the universe is the sole preserve of God. However, the care of creation including human beings, forests, grooves, water bodies, mountains, animals, birds and the seasons demands both divine and human contributions. Having cared for the environment, humans leave it up to God to bring about change in seasons. Humans are expected not only to maintain their health through good nutrition, exercise, adequate sleep and a moderate life, is the responsibility of individuals, also to care for trees, grooves, rivers and mountains are countenanced in African traditional religion through ritual prescriptions. For instance, there are rules that forbid people from hunting in some forests to preserve the animal species there and fishing is forbidden in certain in certain rivers.

¹¹⁷ Lugira, *World Religions*, 30.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The Concept of Person in African Thought

By concept of a person we mean a collection of views about what constitute a human being, what makes human beings work, what they need for survival. This section explores African traditional thought about who is a person, and what are the make-up or constituent parts, character, conduct and personal idiosyncrasies. African concept about the constituents of the person varies from one community to another. Every society has at least one collection of ideas that can be called their concept or theory of a person. There is, however, the general consensus among almost all Africans that the human body is made up of both the material (the body), which is tangible and visible, and the immaterial parts. We shall use the Akan and Yoruba concepts of Personhood as case studies.

The Frafra Concept of the Person

Like other Africans, the Frafra express their belief system through their daily conversation in the form of stories, legends and folklore. What we present below about the Frafra concept of the human person is a summary of Atinga's work.¹¹⁹ The Frafra, like the Dagaabas, hold the view that the person is composite and unitary comprising several parts. In Frafra thought, the human person is made up of four undifferentiated parts, namely *inŋa* (body), *sia* (soul, spirit), *deyro* (dirt – mystical), and *vo-osum* (breath).

Nera/Nerisaala (Person/Human Being)

The Frafra distinguish between *nera* (person) and *nerisaala* (human being). *Nera* refers to the totality of the person including body, soul, breath etc. *Nerisaala* is used as a generic to a human being with all the characteristics that distinguish the human person from an animal – *dunja*. Though this distinction exists in intellectually the two terms are commonly used to refer to one and the same thing (the person). Both the Frafra and the Dagaaba use *nerisal* or *ninsaala* respectively to designate “‘man’ and any of the elements of mankind. It points to the intellectual, spiritual, moral humane aspect of man... *Ninsaala* thus implies the idea of reason, of humanity as opposed to animal.”¹²⁰ On the other hand, *nera* or *nir* is this “concept incarnate and actualized.

It points to man in his existential complex, man as concretely and physically describable, a complex being as a social being, man in his diverse activities and social relationships.”¹²¹ It can therefore be deduced that *nera* refers to the human person as a self-conscious being who can integrate socially to a certain degree.

¹¹⁹ What follows has been gleaned from Atinga “Death and Dying”, 13-21.

¹²⁰ E. Kuukure as cited in Atinga “Death and Dying”, 14.

¹²¹ Atinga “Death and Dying”, 14-15.

***Inja* (Body)**

In Frafra thought the *inja* refers to the physical and physiological features of the person including such components as the skin of the person (*ingane*). The *inja* is also associated with one's reason/intelligence (*yem*). The Dagaabas hold a similar thought. As Kuukure explains, the Dagaabas believe that the “*nir*, (person) is contained in a body, *yang* or *yanggan* (literally body - skin) which is inseparably united to his *yan* (reason, intelligence or even spirit) and is considered as the cover of the other constituents of the person.¹²² The components of the *yan* include all physically tangible constituents such as the different parts of the physical body, the bones, blood and all other tangible compositions of the person.

***Sia* (Soul/Spirit)**

The term *sia*¹²³ in Frafra refers to the intangible and imperceptible parts of the body. According to the Frafra the *sia* may refer to a copy or double of the individual that accompanies him rather than being integral of him. In this sense, the *sia* may roam about leaving its embodiment behind in sleep and appear in dreams to someone else. Unlike *kuko*, a ghost, which is associated with a dead person, the *sia* is a constituent part of a living person only. It is that part of the person that can be harmed or even killed by witches, sorcerers and evil medicine men.

This same belief is expressed by the Dagaaba in the following quote: “during a man's life the soul is capable of leaving its material support. During its peregrinations the body remains immobile until it returns and reintegrates with its body. These roving souls are the ones either eaten by witches or are themselves witches who eat other souls. But it is supposed to be the flesh of those souls that are eaten, an act, which precipitates the death of the person. The soul itself remains intact.”¹²⁴

The *sia* expresses one's identity and belongings including normal clothing, a man's bow and arrows a hoe, an axe and a woman's personal ornaments such as brass, amulets and beadwork. In effect the *sia* is one's personal identity that is objectified in his/her personal possessions. The *sia* goes to the ancestral world after death while the *inja* (body) decomposes.

We conclude this section with Fortes' summary definition of *sia*:

The *sia* is the representation and objectification of the unity and continuity of the individual as he experiences his waking and sleeping, in his relationships with others, in his feelings about his most personal

¹²² Kuukure as cited in Atinga “Death and Dying”, 15.

¹²³ According to Atinga the Tallensi and Nabdan call it *sii*. The Tallensi and the Nabdan are also Frafra. See Atinga “Death and Dying”, 16

¹²⁴ Kuukure as cited by Atinga “Death and Dying”, 16.

private possessions, in his image of his connection with his forbears and with his expected posterity. As an individual he is identified to himself and to other most commonly by his name or titles and often also by particular ritual observances relating to food and clothing or permitted and prohibited activities that he does not share with others.¹²⁵

***Denyro* (Mystical Dirt)**

The notion of the *denyro*, mystical dirt, “goes beyond the physical mundane dirt associated with cleanliness and hygiene.”¹²⁶ Unlike physical mundane dirt, the mystical dirt is connected to the most personal and intimate things of the person which include intimate, private, bodily exudations such as sweat, sexual fluid, and body odour as well as one’s intimate personal belongings. That the concept of the mystical dirt is different from our ordinary and mundane understanding of the word dirt is underscored by the following quote by Fortes: “other secretions such as saliva, tears, nasal mucus are not dirt in this sense. The excretory products (urine and faeces) are ‘dirt’ in a mundane and profane sense only comparable to the commonplace sense of the English word dirt.”¹²⁷ The sexual intimacy between husband and wife leads to the sharing of the ‘mystical dirt’ through the contact of their sexual organs, and through the sharing of their sexual secretions and sweat. Ideally mystical dirt is not to be shared with any person than the spouse. When a person dies all those who have had relations with him or her have to undergo some purification from this ‘dirt’ before the deceased can join the ancestors in the life hereafter.

“Another aspect of the *denyro* according to Frafra mentality is the fact that it is a very powerful symbol of the mystical presence of the person, especially a deceased person. It is this belief that makes the presence of an effigy at funerals meaningful. Effigies are used mostly during dry funerals when the body has already been buried. These effigies are made of the loincloth (triangular pant) together with a dry piece of wood. This is laid in state to represent the person as a substitute for his/her physical absence. Full respect is accorded to it as if it was the body of the person present. Often the effigy is referred to as the person’s *denyro*. It symbolises the person in a very mysterious way. Secondly, when somebody dies far away from home, parts of his/her dress together with some earth from his grave will be brought home for formal burial. This is also considered as representing the person him/herself. We realise then that the *denyro* is closely connected to the *inja* – body

¹²⁵ Fortes as cited in Atinga “Death and Dying”, 18.

¹²⁶ Atinga “Death and Dying”, 18.

¹²⁷ Fortes as cited in Atinga “Death and Dying”, 18-19.

and *sia* – soul of the person.”¹²⁸

***Vo-Osum* (Vital Breath)**

The *Vo-osum* (breath) is that through which the life of a person is adequately sustained is also connected to the identity of the person. A cessation of the *vo-osum* means life is terminated. *Vo-osum* is always distinguished from *nyunvori* (life) which is in a certain sense is connected with nostrils. The Frafra call the nostrils *nyuure*, which can also refer to life. This is evident in the expression *yine bo ho nyun woko*, meaning may God give you long nostrils (life). The connection, however, between *vo-osum* and *nyunvori* is the fact that humans breathe through the nostrils which is symbolic of the life of the person. Therefore, to live long is to have a long period of breath. In Frafra thought it is the person’s that sustains him/her during sleep, when the soul leaves the body and goes out. Without the sustaining power of the breath there is no way the soul can come back into the body. This means that the *sia* (soul) depends on the *vo-osum* to remain part of the whole system of the person.

We conclude our discussion of the Frafra concept of the person with Kuukure’s assertion concerning the Dagaaba concept which also holds true for the Frafra. According to Kuukure,

Although their approach is unitary, the Dagaaba seem to be so impressed by the constituents of man seen analytically that they speak of these constituents in a way hardly reconcilable with their unitary approach. For lack of strict and developed philosophical terminology, they clumsily express their vision of man as a being, a person, having, *yangan* (body), *yan* (intelligence, reason or spirit), *vuuro* (vital breath), *sie* (soul), *dasule* (shadow), and *deor* (impurity)...Man is all these constituents together, and they manifest and expose him. They are aspects of the self and which are united among themselves, even when they are dispersed in time and space...¹²⁹

Akan Concept of the Person

The Akan word for person or human being is *onipa*. Most Akan subscribe to a tripartite composition of *onipa*.¹³⁰ In what follows, we outline these constituents.

¹²⁸ Atinga “Death and Dying”, 20.

¹²⁹ Kuukure as cited by Atinga “Death and Dying”, 22.

¹³⁰ See K. A. Appiah, “Akan and Euro-American Concepts of the Person” in Lee M. Brown (ed), *African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28.

Honam/ nipadua

The first part is the *honam/nipadua* which is made from the *mogya*, blood, of the mother. This might probably be the reason for which “there is a closer physiological bond with the mother than with the father.”¹³¹ This is the tangible part of the human person.

Sunsum

The second part is the *sunsum*, an individual spirit, which bears one’s personality. It is generally held that (1) the *sunsum* derives from the father at conception¹³² (2) the *sunsum* is not divine and (3) the *sunsum* perishes when the *honhom* is disintegrated.¹³³ More so, the *sunsum* is believed to be the part that determines one’s distinctive personality, character, suppositions and behavioural or psychological attributes. Since the *sunsum* dies when a person dies, it is not spiritual (non-physical) because spiritual things continue to live after a person’s death.

Okra

The third entity is the *okra*, (the soul) the bearer of ones *nkrabea*, or destiny. The Akan believe that the *okra* comes from Nyame, God. This belief is betrayed in the proverb “*Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obiara nyɛ Asaase ba*”, “All mean are the children of God’ no one is a child of the Earth.” The *okra* is the very inner self which provides the principle and source of life, energy and vital force for the person. The lower animals have *sasa*. At death a person is said to have lost his/her *okra*. The *okra* is lost only to the dead person but believed to continue to live in the in another realm.

The *sunsum* differs from the *okra* in the sense that the former may leave the body during life and does so, for example, in sleep, while the latter only leaves the body only at the last breath. Therefore, the presence of *okra* in the *honam* means that this thing is alive and the loss of it means death. In a dream, it is the *sunsum* that acts and not the *honam*, body. The soul is immaterial, the spirit is immaterial, but the body is material.

Closely related to the concept of *okra* is the term *honhom*, breath. *Honhom* is the noun form of the word *home*, “to breath”. At death the breath of a person is gone and so the Akan will say “*ne honhom kɔ*” (his breath is gone). This is the same as saying *w’ahwere ne kra* or *ne kra afiri ne mu*, his soul has departed from his body. Thus, both the departure of the soul from the body and the cessation

¹³¹ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown et. al (eds), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London/ New York/Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), 264.

¹³² Radcliffe-Brown et. al (eds), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, 266.

¹³³ These features have been subject to debates.

of breathe refer to the death of a person. This fact does not however mean that the *honhom* and the *ɔkra* are the same. Rather, the *honhom* is the evidence of the activity of the *ɔkra*. There is another usage of the word *honhom* to refer to the *sunsum*. This is evidence in Bible translators' rendition of the Greek *pneuma* or Hebrew *rauch* as the Akan *honhom* (See Gen. 1:2, 1 Sam. 14, 15, 1 Cor. 3:16).

Aside the popular tripartite view of human, as outline above, is the pentachotomistic view which contends that the human person is made up of the *ɔkra* (the life principle and source of human dignity and destiny), *sunsum* (the personality or charisma principle), *mogya* (the blood or kinship principle) and *nipadua* (the physical body) and the *ntorɔ* that which comes from the father and is responsible for the cast of personality (the semen). The *ntorɔ* is the basis of membership of a patrilineal group while the *mogya* from the mother determines clan identity. *Mogya*, which enters at conception, is the same type of blood as the mother that controls the lineage.

The Yoruba Concept of Personhood

The Yoruba concept of personhood is one that is also tripartite. The three elements are *ara* (body), *emi* (vital principle) and *ori* (destiny).¹³⁴ The *ara* represents all the material components of a person most important including *Opolo* (the brain), *Okan* (the heart) and *Ifun* (the intestine). It is formed by the arch-divinity, *Orisanla*, ceases to exist when a person dies and returns to the ground from where it came.¹³⁵ The *emi* is the spiritual and divine part of a person and it is the life-giving entity. Without this component, a person is lifeless. The *emi* is given to the body formed by *Orisanla* as a breath from *Olorun*. At death, the *emi* returns to its owner, *Elemi*—God—to give account of his deeds on earth, an account which will eventually determine his fate.¹³⁶

The *ori* is the force or principle that rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of the person.¹³⁷ This entity is derived from *Olodumare* or *Olorun* (Supreme Being) and as such man is bound to *Olodumare*, and without Him, the human being cannot exist. It is the bearer of a person's destiny and that which ensures the fulfilment of whatever a person has come to do on earth.

How God seperated from Human

The reason for withdrawal of God from humankind has been depicted in different myths. The Akan have this to say. Long ago, God lived in the sky near to human. At

¹³⁴ Elvis Imafidon, , "The Concept of Person in an African Culture and its Implication For Social Order" in *LUMINA*, Vol. 23, No.2. 5.

¹³⁵ Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 103.

¹³⁶ Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 103.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

the same time, there was an old woman who used to pound fufu (mashed plantain and cassava) in a wooden mortar with a long wooden pestle. Whenever she did so, the pestle hit the sky believed to be the dwelling place for God. To avoid the disturbances, God decided to move away from human and live far away where human cannot reach Him. So, He went up and up till men could no longer reach Him.

The woman then made an attempt to reach God by climbing skyward on a pile of mortar and failed.¹³⁸ After piling heaps of mortar upon others, she realised that she needed just one more mortar to add to the pile to reach up to God. Without finding one mortar to add, she asked that one mortar be taken from the bottom and put it on the top. Attempt to do this made all other mortars roll and fall to the ground resulting in a failure to reach God.

This myth, according to Busia, teaches that “it is not possible for human beings to reach up to God; it is not possible for human mind to grasp totally the nature and dimensions of God.”¹³⁹ Williamson on the other hand says that “the myth is an indication of a well-founded, thoughtful belief in the Supreme Being.”¹⁴⁰ For the Akan, even though God has parted with them He continues to answer their call.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined creation in African thought. The importance of humans in creation made us concentrate on the creation of humans in selected ethnic groups. The reader is encouraged to consider how the Old Testament concept of creation differs from what traditional African societies belief about creation.

Review Exercises

1. Explain the concept of personhood in your community.
2. Critically examine the concept of personhood in a tribe other than your own tribe.
3. In Akan the part of the human that gives personality is *sunsum* and this derives from the father at conception. How is this Akan understanding relevant to the concept of Jesus’ incarnation?
4. Give a creation account you know from your society and explain how it compares or contrasts with that of another community.

¹³⁸ See also Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs*, 20-21; Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Mary knoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 52 .

¹³⁹ Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 88.

CHAPTER 5

Death and Funeral Rites in Ancient Isreal

In this chapter, the study looks at funeral practices among ancient Israel particularly as depicted by the death and burial of Jacob in Genesis 49:29-50:15. The discussion is divided into three stages, namely pre-burial, burial and post-burial stages.

Jacob's Last Words and Death

The context of the passage is as follows. From Genesis 48:1ff, we find the old and sick Jacob on his bed. He called for Joseph's sons (Manasseh and Ephraim) and blessed them. Later he blessed all his twelve children. It is within this context that we find the accounts of Jacob's death. In the passage, we first notice that in ancient Israel, it was the norm for one who sees his imminent death to gather his/her relatives to bless them and give them the last instruction. Jacob begins by announcing to them that it was time for him to be gathered to his people. He then gives instruction concerning where he is to be buried.

In Genesis 23:11-20 we find that Abraham bought a plot of land from Ephron to be used as the cemetery for his lineage. At the time Jacob was about to die, Abraham, Sarah, Leah, Isaac and Rebekah had been buried there. He therefore instructed his sons to bury him in that field. Scholars believe that Jacob spoke about his burial-place, from a principle of faith in the promise of God, that Canaan should be the inheritance of his seed in due time.

When he had finished both his blessing and his charge, and so had finished his testimony, he breathed his last and was gathered to his people. In this account, it is very clear that the death of relatives brings great sorrow. Though Jacob had lived to a good old age (147 years) and Joseph laments for the loss by weeping and kissing the dead father (50:1) to say farewell to him, as friends used to do, when parting and going a long journey, as death is. This was practised by Heathens, who had a notion that the soul went out of the body by the mouth, and they in this way received it into themselves. Joseph no doubt at this time closed the eyes of his father also, as it is said he should, and as was usual (Gen. 46:4). Jews like Africans

adore their dead. For this reason, Joseph and his family did not consider the corpse as a worthless “shell” which could be treated anyhow. Jacob’s body was considered precious and accorded the necessary respect.

Pre-Burial Rituals: Jacob’s Embalmmnt

After the natural outburst of sorrow for his deceased father, Joseph gave orders to embalm the body, according to the custom of Egypt. Embalmmnt is the process by which dead bodies are preserved from putrefaction and decay. During the embalming process the embalmers washed the corpse and swathed it in bandages of linen, cut in strips and smeared with gum after the seventy days had elapsed. The body was then given to the relatives of the deceased, who provided for it a wooden case, made in the shape of a man, in which the dead was placed, and deposited in an erect position against the wall of the sepulchral chamber. The embalming process took place over a period of forty days while seventy days (including the forty days) were devoted to mourning for the dead. Possibly, the actual process was continued for forty days, and that the body lay in state for the remaining thirty days of mourning.

There are at least two possible reasons for the embalmmnt. The first is that it was the standard custom of the Egyptians.¹⁴¹ Jacob might have therefore considered the need to follow the customs of the land in which he lived. The second reason was to preserve the body for the transportation of the body from Egypt to Canaan in fulfilment of Joseph’s promise to his father (Jacob). Against the backdrop of the argument that embalmmnt in ancient Egypt expressed the hope of eternal life Jacob embalmmnt can be regarded as a process of preserving the heavenly qualities which were present in Jacob. The embalming of Jacob and Joseph were temporary measures in anticipation of their eternal state, not expected solutions to it (cf. 2 Chron. 16:14).

Mourning

Joseph’s status as a multi-millionaire and one of the most famous men in the world did not affect his love for his father. He grieved because it was a real parting. He wept that he would not see his father ever again in this world, and hear his voice and know his face lighting up with delight at seeing him. Common secular motivations for funerals include mourning the deceased, celebrating their life, and offering support and sympathy to the bereaved. Additionally, funerals often have religious aspects which are intended to help the soul of the deceased reach the

¹⁴¹ James Brent Bates, *Resignation, Denial, and Hope: Shifting Attitudes and Practices in protestant funeral liturgy and pastoral care in the United States 199-1959* (PhD Dissertation, Drew University, 2008), 27.

afterlife, resurrection or reincarnation. There is grief at the death of a loved one. Joseph was a godly man. His father's death was not unexpected. Yet when Jacob died, Joseph fell on his father's face and wept (50:1). Then he observed 70 days of mourning (50:3), plus seven more days after the funeral procession arrived at the borders of Canaan.

Funeral Procession to the land of Canaan

After seventy days of mourning Joseph sent messengers to seek permission to go to Canaan to bury his father. Joseph approached Pharaoh indirectly probably because he was unclean due to his father's death. Joseph, together with a large retinue of men, servants of Pharaoh, all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph, Jacob's household, chariots and horsemen took his father's body from Egypt to Canaan for burial (Gen. 50:7-9). Clearly, the burial ceremony was a social event, not a private one.

For this reason, all efforts are geared towards making funerals well attended and lavish or flamboyant. Catering for such a large crowd definitely requires the provision of food, drinks, music and dance. "Ghanaians spare no [funeral] expense because [they] care more about the dead than the living."¹⁴² As a matter of fact, funerals have become a big drain on bereaved families.¹⁴³ Many bereaved families are not able to meet funeral cost with the contributions from family members and sympathizers.¹⁴⁴ They resort to borrowing money from individuals and financial institutions. That funeral cost is becoming unbearable has been observed by many business experts. Roberta Bonetti states that a typical contemporary Akan funeral can cost almost as much as one Ghanaian's yearly income.¹⁴⁵ Akorno further opines that "People believe that without a befitting burial, the dead cannot rest in peace and may even come back to punish the family for failing to bid it farewell in a proper manner."¹⁴⁶ Kumi states that Ghanaians believe that the crowd at one's funeral translates to the crowd that will meet him/her at the entrance to the world of the spirit.¹⁴⁷

The crowd that accompanied the corpse was so large that when the Canaanites who saw the procession, they became very impressed and called the field where the final funeral occurred, "the mourning of the Egyptians." The Egyptians mourned officially as men without gospel hope, but Joseph and his brothers knew that they would meet in a better place one day, but then all of them eternal brothers.

¹⁴² Bax, "In Ghana, Funerals Have Become Big Business"

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Roberta Bonetti, "Alternate Histories of the Abebuu Adekai," *African Arts* 43.3 (2010): 14-33, 25.

¹⁴⁶ Mensah, "When death takes away everything"

¹⁴⁷ Kumi, Interview.

The transportation of a corpse from one place to another for burial is not peculiar to the Jews. It is a common practice in Ghana for people to determine where they should be buried. Some people even go to the extent of marking out a space at the cemetery and instruct that they should be buried there. Under normal circumstance, the Akan bury their corpse in the mother's hometown.

Burial places were often located outside a city's boundary, so the deceased had to be carried from their home to the burial site. Often, the dead were carried on a bier, which may have been a wooden slab. Much like modern day pallbearers, it was family members and friends who carried the bier. Women led the funeral procession, and often hired mourners and musicians accompanied the procession and made a demonstrative presentation of grief. At the tomb, an oration would be delivered, and the body would be laid to rest. Kumi states that Ghanaians believe that the crowd at one's funeral translates to the crowd that will meet him/her at the entrance to the world of the spirit.¹⁴⁸

On their way, they stopped and mourned for seven days at the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan (vs. 10). There is a similar practise among Africans. For example, in Akan, before a corpse could be buried in a town other than the place of his/her death, the village chief needs to be consulted. People are sent to the chief with drinks and other items. Recently, one of the co-authors witnessed a situation where after conducting the burial service, the corpse was expected to be buried at another town called Taforo (near Dormaa-Ahenkro in Ghana). On their way to the town it was realized that the one assigned to take the drinks to the chief of Taforo had delayed. This situation necessitated that the minister and the family members stop on the way (for about 45 minutes) until the necessary rites were performed at the palace. This was necessary because without it the body could not enter the village. At the palace, the chief pours libation to inform the ancestors of the "coming" deceased relative and asks that they accept him/her as part of them. Without it the body, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased cannot be accepted by the ancestors.

The Burial of Jacob

Next in the story is Jacob's burial. When they got to Canaan, they buried him where he commanded (vs. 13). The accounts of Jacob's burial betray that in ancient Israel, corpses were buried rather than cremated. Sarah's burial in the Cave of Machpelah in the field of Mamre was the first Jewish burial recorded in the Bible (Gen. 23:19). The Jews considered burial as a final act of respect for the dead---an unburied corpse is regarded as naked and humiliated.

¹⁴⁸ Kumi, Interview

In Biblical times, tombs were often caves or hollowed-out hovels in the earth that were meant to house eight bodies or more. The entrance to a tomb was usually sealed with a door or large stone. Many times, where a body was buried depended greatly on who the deceased's family was. Cave burial in private plots became common practice in Judea. The land Abraham bought after burying his wife in the field of Mamre (Gen. 23:19) became Abraham's family. Abraham himself was buried in this site, likewise his son, Isaac and now, Isaac's son, Jacob. We therefore learn that ancient Jews had family burial sites. In Israel, people are often not buried in coffins unless the body is severely injured so as to facilitate quick return to the soil. There are references in Scripture to individuals who were buried alone, but this was often due to the fact that they died suddenly and in a place that was far away from their ancestral tomb.

In Africa, even though the cemetery does not belong to one family (except in the case of a royal family), people prefer to be buried closed to their dead relatives. However, the practice of cave burial is absent in Africa as well as the practice of burying more than one person in a tomb.

The most important features of ancient Israelite burial are reflected in the interment of Samson in the tomb of his father. Other individuals are specified to have been buried in their fathers' tombs including Gideon (Judg. 8: 32) Asahel (2 Sam. 2: 32) and Ahithophel (2 Sam. 17:23). The first such burial noted in Scripture is that of Abraham, interred in the tomb of Sarah, his wife, later followed by their children and grandchildren. The building of tombs is undertaken by architects who are artists.

Post-Burial Activities

The people return to their destination. An assurance was given to Joseph's brothers that Joseph will not treat them badly. This is a sign of reconciliation. Though the Bible does not tell us, it is likely that the people sat down for a retrospective reflection of the funeral.

Theological Reflections

It seems safe to conclude that at death the soul is taken into glory to be united with the faithful patriarchs in paradise (Ps. 73:24). In this sense, the Old Testament concept of Sheol is intended to convey the idea that there is personal existence in the realm of the death after death. The following theological reflections can be made. First, Jacob did not see death as annihilation. Jacob's statement that "I am about to be gathered to my people" (Gen. 49:33), was a common saying in the old time. The phrase "gathered to my people [or my fathers]" signifies a community of existence

after death that no individual grave or tomb could provide. The phrase “gathered to” most likely means “a get-together of spirits, not merely a disintegration of the body. This is different from going to the grave.

Conclusion

The study of the concepts of life, death, funeral and afterlife in this chapter has deepened our understanding of the continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and African world views. Clearly, Africans and Jews have similar practices and beliefs.

Review Exercise

1. Is the doctrine of annihilation supported by the Old Testament?
Explain your answer.
2. How can you explain death to a lay person?
3. To what extent do you agree that Jacob qualifies to be an African ancestor?
4. What metaphors or euphemisms are used in your society for death?
Compare your answer with the Old Testament.
5. Is the preservation of corpse important? Explain your answer.

CHAPTER 6

Death and Funeral Rites

African Thought

Issues about life, death, funeral rites and afterlife are of utmost importance to all religions. People search constantly for the meaning of life but most find no satisfactory. Death has remained a mystery to humanity and people seem not to have a proper understanding of it. This chapter takes a look at the concepts of death, funeral rites and afterlife as depicted in African and Old Testament worldviews.

Life in African Thought

The African concept of life can be summarized as follows.¹⁴⁹ In the first place, Africans believe that God is the originator of life, the creator and sustainer of all creation. Secondly, an African's life is communal in nature and ancestors are considered a part of the life of the society. The dead may reveal themselves in dreams or appear to their living relatives to guide or correct them.¹⁵⁰ The living must ensure that their relationship with the dead is maintained. Thirdly, life is meaningless without land and all other properties that make life worth living. Fourthly, Africans hold the view that life involves the relationship and communion between human, God, ancestors, divinities, other humans and the land.

More so, Africans consider life as a rhythm or cycle made up of birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed and finally entry into the company of the spirits.¹⁵¹

The cycle of life may be compared to the four stages the sun: “rising (birth, beginning, or re-growth), ascendancy (maturity and responsibility), setting (death and transformation), and midnight (existence in the other world and eventual rebirth).”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Francis O.C. Njoku, *Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology* (Owerri: Clacom, 2002), 167–168.

¹⁵⁰ K. A. Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Lagos: F.E. P., 1978), 137.

¹⁵¹ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1980), 24.

¹⁵² As cited by Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* second edition, edited by Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 166.

Death in African Thought

Death is a common occurrence in all human societies. The inevitability of death is betrayed by the Akan saying, *owuo atwedee ɔbaako nforo*, meaning, “everyone will climb the ladder of death” or “death is inevitable” or the Urhobo saying that *ats’ akpo re je kpo-o*, meaning, “man has not come to life to live for ever.” A person has come to live on earth as a sojourner and hence must go back to his original home after fulfilling the task which he/she set for him/herself during the process of predestination.¹⁵³ Therefore Africans understand death as a preparation for the spirit of the dead for a smooth transition to the spirit world.

In African thought death occurs when the soul leaves the body or when the soul separates from the body. African mythology allots a great deal of space to the subject of death. Usually the same myths of creation that trace the origin of human beings include the origin of death. In these myths death often comes to the world because of human misdeeds. Although African people accept death as a natural part of the life cycle they generally feel that each individual death always has a cause associated with supernatural powers. These include mystical powers like magic, witchcraft, and sorcery.

The understanding of death brings with it the realization that a person’s body and soul are no longer one. Therefore, the Akan will say “*wahwere ne kra*”, “he/she has lost his/her soul” or “*ne kra afiri ne mu*”, his soul has departed from his body. However, since the *okra* can subsist or survive in a disembodied state, it is believed that the dead continues to live. Death therefore affects the physical body and not the immaterial *okra*. In dying, the individual has joined the world of the departed. As we shall later discuss, the death of a person brings with it a spiritual period of mourning in which funeral rites are performed.

In Africa, the dissemination of the message about one’s death is done using proverbs and idioms that reflect the African belief that the dead continues to live. The demise of the person is described using terms such as returning home, going away, answering the summons, saying ‘yes’ to death, going to the village, disappearing, departing, ceasing to eat and ceasing to breathe. Others are fighting a losing battle, sleeping on the left side, refusing food, turning the eyes to the wall, rejecting people, sleeping, taking one way, saying good-bye, shutting the eye, being called away, joining the forefathers and becoming God’s property.

Concept of “Good Death” and “Bad Death” in African and Jewish Thought

Klaas Spronk has outlined ancient Jewish concept of good and bad death.¹⁵⁴ Death

¹⁵³ Paul Adu-Gyamfi, *Observable Artistic Changes in the Funerals of Adanse Traditional Area* (Master of Arts in African Art and Culture: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2010), 11

¹⁵⁴ Klaas Spronk, “Good Death and Bad Death in Ancient Israel According to Biblical

is considered good or at least acceptable if it comes (1) after a long life, (2) a person dies in peace, (3) there is continuity in the relation with the ancestors and the heirs, and (4) one will be buried in one's own land. Death is regarded as bad if (1) it is premature, (2) it is violent, especially when it is shameful (e.g., when a man is killed by a woman, when one commits suicide), (3) a person does not have an heir at death, and (4) one does not receive a proper burial.

Africans, like ancient Israel, classify death into two "good death" and "bad death."¹⁵⁵ An individual who lived a descent life and died naturally at a ripped age is said to have had a good death, *owupa*, while the one who died through an unnatural cause such as accidents, suicide or a woman who dies during childbirth is considered to have had a bad death, *atofo wuo*. C. Seale & S. van der Geest say more about good death: Good death is "a death occurring after a long and successful life, at home, without violence or pain, with the dying person being at peace with his environment and having at least some control over events."¹⁵⁶ Dying a good death is a requirement for one to qualify as an ancestor. Though death is inevitable no Ghanaian wants to experience a bad death.

Funeral

Funeral rites have been with humanity since sin introduced death into the human race (Gen. 3). The mourning or grieving process cannot therefore be linked or limited to some time span in a discrete sense. It is for this reason that Africans take time off from work when their loved ones are dead, to perform rituals that eternally connect them to the deceased.

The word funeral comes from the Latin *funus*, which has a variety of meanings, including the corpse and the funerary rites themselves. For the purpose of this study we define funeral as a ceremony for honouring, respecting or sanctifying the life of a person who has died, and usually involves arrangements for the burial or cremation of their corpse. Funeral practices comprise the complex of beliefs and practices used by a culture to remember the dead, from interment itself, to various monuments, prayers, and rituals undertaken in their honour.

In Akan, *ayie* or *ayivɔ* (a funeral rite) is performed for those who die naturally. Those who die unnaturally, *atofo wuo* (for example dying through suicide or accident), do not usually have any proper funeral rites performed for them. Moreover, funerals are not organised for babies and first-born children.

Lore" in *Social Science & Medicine* 58 (2004) 987–995: 987.

¹⁵⁵ K. Agyemang, "The Impact of new medical technology upon attitudes towards euthanasia among Akans, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change" http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-5/chapter_ix.htm (Accessed on 23/2/17)

¹⁵⁶ C. Seale & S. van der Geest, "Good and Bad Death: Introduction" in *Social Science & Medicine* (2004) 59 (5): 883-86:885.

Nana Agyei-Kodie Anane-Agyei relates this practise to the belief is that organizing a funeral for first born-children may result in the death of other children of the parents.¹⁵⁷ A similar observation can be made from the Old Testament. When David's first son with Bathsheba died as an infant, there was no funeral rites recorded for the child (2 Sam. 12:14-31).

It is important to say at this point that the responsibility deceased's body naturally and legally belongs to the bereaved family or relatives rather than the church. Unless the deceased made a will which states otherwise, the family or relatives reserve the right to decide where and how a corpse is buried. It is the family's responsibility to find a place to bury their dead relative.

Akan Death Rituals

Rites and rituals connected with death are not the same in all societies and cultures. According to Emmanuel Asante, "mourning understood as grief over the death of someone, finds expression through the varieties of funeral customs which are defined and informed by the beliefs and traditions in memory of the dead."¹⁵⁸ We shall use the Akan funeral rites as case study.

Pre-Death

Usually when an old person is on the death-bed, relatives visit him/her regularly. In most cases prior to death the sick person pronounces his/her last will to a trusted individual, mostly a loved one or a family member by leaving behind certain vital information. He/she may also say confess sins, appreciate his/her family's effort, share his/her property, give instructions about his/her burial and funeral. It is believed that if the one who receives the information does not disseminate it or act upon it he/she will be summoned by the dead.

The Act of Dying

According to Akan tradition, it is a taboo for someone to die without anybody present. At the point of dying people feel very uncomfortable and restless. This restless mood is referred to as "gyam." When death is imminent, an elderly female relative or any of people around is required to pour a little water down the throat of the dying person. This act is accompanied by words such as these: "*Asumasi gye nsuo yi nom. Worekɔyi, emma asem bɔne biara ento abusua yi*", meaning "[The dying person's name] receive this water and drink. As you depart from us, do

¹⁵⁷ Nana Agyei-Kodie Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World* (Accra: Abibrem Communications, 2015), 156.

¹⁵⁸ Emmanuel Asante, *Theology and Society in Context: A Theologist's Reflections of Selected Topics* (Accra: SonLife Press. 2014), 32.

not permit anything evil to come upon this family.” The process of giving him or her water is called “*wo gu n’ano nsuo*.” Samuel Ofori attributes the act of giving water to the dying person to the Akan belief that there is a steep mountain that the person needs to climb before arriving at the land of the ghosts/dead, *Asamando*.¹⁵⁹ Therefore the Akan think of the dying person panting for breath as climbing a hill. The journey is facilitated when water is given to refresh him/her for the journey. Surprising as it may seem, in most cases immediately this water is given to the dying person, he or she peacefully gives up the spirit to signify that the water has enhanced the journey.

The foregoing serves as the reason for which Akan dread dying thirsty, that is “dying alone without someone present to perform this rite.”¹⁶⁰ Again, it explains why an elderly Akan would not go out, even on a short journey, if no attendant is present.¹⁶¹

Funeral Publicity/Announcement

Akan customs have certain rites that need to be performed before the dead person can be mourned. The village chief is expected to know about a person’s death before any mourning or public wailing begins.¹⁶² When death occurs the deceased family is expected to send drinks to the chief to inform him about the demise of their relative. Messengers are also sent to convey the sad news to the head of maternal lineage and other members of the maternal family, wherever they may be. Information is also sent to the father of the deceased or his successor, who in turn informs his lineage members.

The public eventually gets to know of the event through drumming, wailing, the shooting of guns, musketry firing and so on. This practice contrasts the contemporary practice of publicizing funerals through the use of the electronic and print media, including broadcast on radios and on television, Newspapers, invitation cards and phone calls. Immediately after the death has been announced, a tent is pitched in the homestead of the deceased where neighbours and relatives, church members and the community members gather for prayers or pouring of libation.

Preservation of the Corpse

Traditionally it is the responsibility of the *abusuapanin* (the head of the lineage) to ensure that the body is prepared and kept until it was buried. Ghanaians embalm

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Ofori, *Christianity and African Culture: The Gospel in Asante Funeral Rites* (Nc: Pentecost Press Ltd., 2014). 33.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 34.

their dead to prevent them from decomposing before burial. Akans refer to this act as *son no*. Traditional modes of corpse preservation include the following. One method is to position the corpse upside down to drain out completely the fluid in the system through the nose or mouth. Another method is to sit the corpse down with a bowl beneath him/her so that body fluid will drain through the anus and sex organs. A third method is to place the body on the bare cement floor and cover it completely with fresh and green *Akyeampon* leaves (Siam weed, *Chromolaena odorata*).¹⁶³ Finally, liquids such as the mixture of the ashes of a roasted plantain and water, cement solution, lime solution, schnapps could be forced down the throat of the dead person to serve as preservatives.¹⁶⁴

One Week Celebration

The Akan celebrate one week, fortieth day and one year anniversary of the dead. On the eighth day after the dead¹⁶⁵ all the members of the deceased family meet at the family house to remember the dead. The blood relation of the deceased, called *etire ho nam*, meet to determine the date for the burial and final funeral rites and convey their decision to the public. This event of planning the funeral rites is referred to by the expression “*wo toto ayie no ho akwan*” or “*wɔ yɛ ayie no ho ntotoɛ*.” After the decision has been taken, drinks are sent to the chief to inform him about the funeral arrangements. Another decision taken at this gathering is who the successor of the dead will be.

During the period of mourning the relatives of the deceased abstain from their staple food and resume their normal eating style only after the funeral rites have been performed.¹⁶⁶ The act of abstaining from food is called *mmuada die*.¹⁶⁷ This practise serves as a sign of their grief and respect for the dead. The death of their relative has extinguished the fire in their kitchen (*efie gya adum*).

The main food eaten during *mmuada die* is cola nuts and usually a bit of it is displayed on the lips like lip-gloss as a way of communicating to the public that they are in a state of mourning.¹⁶⁸ This practice makes the Akan use the expression “*y’ato abese no*”, “we have painted our lips with cola” to speak of their state as mourners. This practise is expressed in the funeral dirge “If you decide to send me

¹⁶³ Noah Gyamfi Kumi, Interview by co- author (Isaac Boaheng) on 22nd December, 2016 at Asikasu No. 1, Dormaa-Ahenkro.

¹⁶⁴ E. T. Barima, Interview by co- author (Isaac Boaheng) on 22nd December, 2016 at Asikasu No. 1, Dormaa-Ahenkro.

¹⁶⁵ According to the Akan calendar one week is made up of eight days.

¹⁶⁶ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana’s Brong Ahafo Region*, 156.

¹⁶⁷ Strictly speaking, during the *mmuada die* people may eat but not in the normal way. Those who have fufu as their staple food may eat kenkey and vice versa. The period of mourning in most Akan communities lasts for at least nine days after the death of a person.

¹⁶⁸ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana’s Brong Ahafo Region*, 156.

a gift, please send me a special cola nut, *denkyem brɛboɔ*), which I can eat raw and uncooked. (*‘Se wo mane a, mane me denkyem brɛboɔ, na se mannya egya a, mawe no mono*).’¹⁶⁹ This dirge also points to the fact that cooking is not done during the mourning period. Grandchildren of a dead person are not part of the *mmuada die*. They chant this song to demand food and money from the chief mourners: “‘Grandparent is dead, we, as grandchildren, do not go without food’ (*‘Nana awu o, yɛremmu nna o’*).”¹⁷⁰ While chanting the song they also stomp the ground with sticks as if they are pounding *fufu*, implying that they always depended on the deceased grandparent for their food, *fufu*. When they grandparent was alive he/she reserved food for them and treated them tenderly, but now that he/she is gone they will go without food if they do not demand it aggressively in the way they chant the song.¹⁷¹ The significance of this act is to pay tribute to the grandparent who has been taken away by death.

As part of the eighth day rites, the *ɛtire ho nam* slaughter a sheep for preparation of food. This feast is believed to have a cleansing effect and so the expression used is “*wɔ tu funya*”, meaning cleansing from all evil and dirt. The cleansing effect of this feast is necessary because in traditional African societies a deceased family is usually regarded as contaminated or polluted through contact with the dead. The removal of this pollution is necessary to enhance reunion with the society.

Palm wine and locally brewed alcohol, *akpeteshie*, are the main drinks served during mourning.¹⁷² In recent times, however, one week celebration has become more or less a formal funeral rite which draws large crowd and requires elaborate publicity, hiring of canopies, video coverage, distribution of food and drinks, manual or electronic display of pictures just as the final funeral celebration.¹⁷³

The Church and One Week Celebration

The one week celebration used to be purely a secular event. However, in recent times the church has shown interest in it to ensure that it is done in a Christian manner. The result of this is that today Christian families either request for the event to be held in the chapel or to be held outside the chapel but in the presence of a pastor and church members. The minister is expected to pray before the occasion can officially commence. This is done to ensure that God takes control of all the

¹⁶⁹ Asante, *Theology and Society in Context*, 41.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Kumi, Interview

¹⁷³ Evangelist Abraham Adoma, Interview by co- author (Isaac Boaheng) on 15th December, 2016 at Asikasu No. 1, Dormaa-Ahenkro.

activities in the day and beyond. One of the co-authors¹⁷⁴ once witnessed a one week celebration which delayed due to the insistence of the family members to wait for their pastors to come from a distant place to pray before the event could begin.

The Methodist Church of Ghana, having recognized the need for the church to involve herself in the one week celebration, has included in her Liturgy and Book of Worship, an order of service for one week celebration of the dead. Part of the introductory issues reads:

It may be celebrated in the Church with due information to, and the consent of the Minister if the deceased was a full member of the Church. If circumstances would not permit its celebration in the Chapel, at the discretion of the Minister and in consultation with the family members, it may be celebrated the family house or any suitable place.

The family members, the children of the deceased and all stakeholders must first consult the Church and the Minister, and agree on a suitable date and day for the celebration of the final funeral rites before its announcement at the One Week celebration.¹⁷⁵

The order of service for the celebration as prescribed by the Methodist Church Ghana is as follows:¹⁷⁶

1. Hymn
2. Prayer
3. Welcome and Purpose of Gathering
4. Choruses
5. Bible Reading
6. Brief Exhortation
7. Offering
8. Announcement
9. Hymn or Choruses
10. Benediction

¹⁷⁴ Isaac Boaheng witnessed this situation at Kuren near Dormaa-Ahenkro in the Brong-Ahafo Region on 23rd November, 2016.

¹⁷⁵ The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Methodist Liturgy and Book of Worship* (Cape Coast: NYAKOD Printing Works, 2014), 230.

¹⁷⁶ The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Methodist Liturgy and Book of Worship*, 230-31.

Preparation of Burial Site

Earth burial is the common practise in Africa. Unlike ancient Israel who buried their dead in caves, Africans bury their dead in the earth. Each community has a burial site most of which are usually located outside the residential area. Chiefs and royals are buried at *Amanfoo* or *Banso kɔkoransan* while non-royals are buried at the clan's cemetery called *nsaman pɔw mu* or *nsama pɔ mu* ("thicket of ghosts"). Usually the grave is prepared before the day of burial. Digging of graves is done by the *mmamma* (the youth whose paternal parents hail from the deceased's family). The grave diggers pour libation at the cemetery to seek permission from the ancestors before digging begins.

Preparation (Bathing) of Corpse

The preparation of the body also includes bathing. The washers and dressers of the corpse are given wine which is traditionally referred to as *nsa a yede yi no adwaree* (the wine which is used to bath him [the corpse]). The spouse of the deceased is expected to provide materials for preparing the corpse, which usually include a new mat, a new sponge, a new towel, a bathing pot (presently an enamel bucket called *bɔbrapa*), sweet scented soap, lemon, pomade, powder, chewing sponge, white body clay, razor for shaving and lavender.¹⁷⁷ Normally, the bathing is done by elderly women from the dead person's father's family using her left hand. Very hot water is used to bath the corpse so that if he is not really dead he/she will react to the high temperature. It also serves as disinfectant. In some communities the core stem of a plantain tree (*baha*) is used as a sponge.

Before the bathing activity begins, libation is poured and permission is sought from the corpse. The elders among the group use the sponge in touching the back of the body three times. In some communities such as Effutu, the eldest woman again uses the sponge again to touch the lips of the deceased person three times as symbolic way of telling him/her to be quiet about everything that he/she saw on earth. The belief is that the dead will be interrogated by the ancestors on the way before the spirit reaches its destination. The deceased is bathed three times due to the belief and practice that the oracle is always consulted three times, "Obosom anim yekɔ no mprensa."

The finger nails and hair of the deceased are trimmed. The cut finger and toe nails are used to prepare medicine to ward off the spirit of the deceased from visiting the orphanage.¹⁷⁸ In some cases, these body parts are buried with the corpse as a way of expressing belief in reincarnation.

¹⁷⁷ Adu-Gyamfi, *Observable Artistic Changes in the Funerals of Adanse Traditional Area*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

The idea is that the deceased needs the nails in order to reincarnate as a full human being.¹⁷⁹ The head is shaved and marked with alternate red, white and black stripes, made respectively with *esono* (red dye), *nete fitaa* (white clay), and *bidie* (charcoal). This is done for proper recognition in *Asamando* the land of the dead and also to ensure that he/she can be readily recognised if he/she comes around as *saman* (a ghost). Spices and sweet scented perfumes are applied to the body after the last bath.¹⁸⁰

The wife of the deceased, if any, is expected to be present at the place where the bath takes place. The eldest son has the responsibility of dressing his deceased father with the traditional panties, *danta*. In the case of the death of a married woman, the eldest daughter does it. A deceased married woman is dressed in a slit and blouse (*kaba*). In the case of a deceased young lady, the hair is plaited with thread.

The items used for bathing are parcelled and buried with the corpse because of the belief that those bathing toiletries would be using at *asamando*.¹⁸¹ Should the family forget to put them in the coffin these items with the corpse, they would have to send them to the cemetery and buried in the grave.¹⁸² After this, the body is laid in state.

Laying-in-state and Public Viewing

Laying-in-state normally takes place on the day of the final funeral rites. Previously, it was the deceased family who took up the responsibility of preparing the body for laying-in-state and burial. Strangers had no role in the preparation of the corpse. This helped the grieving family to come to terms with the departure of their loved one. In the attempt to make the funeral grand by the current usage of services of funeral homes, has totally cut out the role of the family in the preparing of the dead. Laying-in-state is now done by professionals. What follows is the account of the traditional way of laying the dead in state.

In most parts of Akan, the deceased is laid in state in his/her father's house, except for royals who are permitted to be laid-in-state at the house of the head of the royal family. This practice agrees with the belief that a person's *ntoro* comes from the father. The body is dressed to reflect his/her status or profession. For example, chiefs are dressed in their regalia. Various forms of "ghost" or "soul" currency (*saman sika* or *kra sika*), in the form of ornaments of a certain shape

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Bathing may be done three times.

¹⁸¹ Adu-Gyamfi, *Observable Artistic Changes in the Funerals of Adanse Traditional Area*, 19.

¹⁸² Ibid.

and design, are bound round the wrists of the corpse.¹⁸³ Hair may be placed in the corpse's mouth because hair is seen either as a form of money or has some value in the world of the ghosts.

In the case of a chief, queen or royal, the body is laid in state well-dressed with gold ornaments, aggrey beads¹⁸⁴ and special pendants and rings. The dead body may be covered with gold dust to show the wealth of the family. Chiefs and queen mothers normally lay in state for a couple of days or weeks.

In the olden days, the dead was laid on its left side, generally with the hands folded against the cheek, and sometimes with a handkerchief in the hand to wipe of the sweat that is expected to appear from climbing the hill to the land of the dead. This position brought about the figurative expression *wada ne benkum so* (he/she has slept on his left) meaning he/she has died.¹⁸⁵ But these days the dead may be laid on the back with face up and the hands placed at the sides or on the chest or he/she may be made to sit or stand. It must be noted that during all these rites, the children in the house where the dead has been laid in state are sent to a nearby house. They do not have to come back to the house until the dead is buried.

Unveiling of the Corpse by Church

The Church has no place in the preparation of the corpse for public viewing. The body belongs to the family and therefore it is the family's responsibility to see to the laying-in-state of the dead. However, the church plays a very crucial role before public viewing begins. After laying the body in state the church performs an unveiling ceremony ("*ɣerekɔbue funu so*"). The main purpose of this act is to seek the guidance of God and the comfort of the Holy Spirit for the deceased family as they go through activities of the day. Public viewing and wailing only comes after this event has been done. Currently, there is no official order of service for this event in any of the historic mainline churches in Ghana. This study however proposes the following

1. Hymn
2. Prayer
3. Reading of a short scriptural passage
4. Brief message of condolence to the family members present
5. Benediction

This ceremony should be very brief, usually not exceeding 15 minutes.

¹⁸³ Ofori, *Christianity and African Culture*, 34.

¹⁸⁴ Aggrey beads, also called aggy beads, are a type of decorated glass bead from Ghana, used by West Africans as ornaments in necklaces, bracelets and other jewellery.

¹⁸⁵ Adu-Gyamfi, *Observable Artistic Changes in the Funerals of Adanse Traditional Area*, 19.

Public Viewing and the Presentation of *Adesiedee*

The practise of laying corpses in state not only honours the dead but also gives sympathizers the opportunity to have their last look at the deceased. While the body is lying in state, the deceased family and other people are invited to file past it as a way of paying their last respects. When satisfied with the arrangement, they invite other mourners to come and file past the corpse to bid their farewell and last respect to the deceased. Family members sit bedside the corpse to fan him/her in order to drive away flies and to honour the deceased.

Money and items such as mat, pillow, bed sheet, bucket, matches, handkerchiefs, and so on called *adesiedee*, burial items, are given in support of the journey to join the ancestors. After receiving the money, the person tells the corpse not to worry himself with going to thank the persons who contributed the money because he will do that on his or her behalf. The blood relatives add an amount to the corpse to use on his journey. Other items such as clothes, rings, etc. are added to the corpse by the in-laws.

Covering of Coffin and Procession to the Cemetery

Ghanaians bury their dead in coffins. However, the time when *adakatea* (an unpolished coffin made of *Wawa*, *Odum* or Mahogany) was used to bury the dead is no more. Coffins have progressed from simple to complex forms. Today, coffins are made not only from wood but also from materials such as plastics, metal, fibreboard and fiberglass.

Contemporary coffins are decorated with broken mirrors, white linen, polyester, white beddings, flowers, shiny silver, bronze or gold plates and bars and so on. It is the responsibility of the children of the deceased to buy a coffin for their parents. Through the innovation of a carpenter named Seth Kane Kwei, customised coffins (those made to resemble an important element of a person's life, usually his/her profession), have also emerged.¹⁸⁶ Coffins for farmers are usually in the form of cocoa pod, drivers in a form of a car, musicians in the form of a microphone, fishermen in the form of a fish, pastors in the form of a Bible and so on.¹⁸⁷

After the family is satisfied that the body has been viewed by all people present, preparations to take the body to the cemetery for burial begin. Before the coffin is closed and finally taken to the cemetery for burial, the first born of the deceased is invited to say farewell to the deceased. Also, the *dea ote ayi kete so* ("the one who sits upon the funeral mat") or the one who is directly responsible for the organization of the funeral is invited to inform the deceased

¹⁸⁶ Roberta Bonetti, "Alternate Histories of the Abebuu Adekai," *African Arts* 43.3 (2010):14-33, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Barima, Interview

of all the contributions that have been collected.¹⁸⁸ This act is a sign of respect and accountability. The living wants to avoid any accusation by the dead of stealing any of the contributions. Afterwards, the family ensures that all the accompaniments are put in the coffin which is then closed and never opened again.

As stated earlier, cemeteries are often located outside a town's boundary. For this reason the deceased must be carried from the place where laying-in-state to the burial site. Often, the dead are carried on a bier, usually made of a wooden slab. Much like modern day pallbearers, it was family members and friends who carried the bier. When the coffin is brought out of the house, it is made to touch the earth three times and after the third time it is finally allowed to rest on the ground.¹⁸⁹ Samuel Ofori, quoting Rattray states that "the reason for the curious custom is undoubtedly to give *Asaase Yaa* (the Earth Goddess) due notice and warning."¹⁹⁰ Afterwards, the people proceed to the cemetery.

The *abusuapanin* (or his representative) leads the coffin to the cemetery with branches of *summe* (*cortus* sp.) plant in both hands, regularly touching the coffin with it saying "[*Asomasi*], *me pae wo kra ne yen ntam*" ("[Name of deceased], I separate your soul from us)."¹⁹¹ One branch is buried with the corpse and another is placed under the pillow of the one who performs this rite places to ward off the ghost or *sasa* of the dead.¹⁹² Before they reach the cemetery, a gun is fired three times again. The gun shots are believed to inform *nsamanfoɔ* ("ancestors") that their brother or sister is coming to them so they should meet him or her.

The spouse of the deceased is not allowed to go to the cemetery. He/she may be sent there after fortieth day rites or after the day the family meets to examine the properties of the deceased. The funeral procession to the cemetery is usually led by women who move just behind the coffin bearers. Mourning amidst music characterises the procession to the grave side. Ghanaians believe that the crowd at one's funeral translates to the crowd that will meet him/her at the entrance to the world of the spirit.¹⁹³ For this reason the procession is always a very large one. However, only family members of the deceased are allowed to proceed beyond a certain distance to the graveside.¹⁹⁴ At the tomb, an oration is delivered, and the body is laid to rest.

¹⁸⁸ Ofori, *Christianity and African Culture*, 41.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹³ Noah Gyamfi Kumi, Interview by co-author (Isaac Boaheng) on 22nd December, 2016 at Asikasu No. 1, Dormaa-Ahenkro.

¹⁹⁴ Ofori, *Christianity and African Culture*, 42.

Burial

We have stated earlier that chiefs and royals are buried at “*Amanfo*” or “*Banso kɔkoransan*” while other people are buried at the clan’s cemetery called ‘*nsaman pɔw mu* or *nsama pɔ mu* (thicket of ghosts). In the case of a chief only his sons are permitted to bury him and this is done at midnight among the Akan. A sheep is sent to the site with gun shots to perform certain rites and also inform the “*nananom*” or ancestors of a new arrival. Other ceremonies are performed before the burial. In the case of other people of the community, the *abusuapanin* pours libation at the graveside before the coffin is put in the grave. This act compares the Edo practice of offering prayers at the burial site for an old dead person. One such prayer is the following:

Your children whom you have left here, you should order money for them. You should send them children. You should send them everything. That is used in the world . . . As they have lived to do this for you. Let their children live to do it for them . . . As you looked after your children. When you were in the world, so you should look after them Unceasingly.¹⁹⁵

It is believed that the dead needs items he/she used one earth in his/her journey to the otherworld and his/her stay there. For this reason, Akan bury their dead with items such as money, food, a mat, blanket, pillow, handkerchief, jewellery, the bucket, cloth, soap etc.¹⁹⁶ The food prepared for the dead is known as *kra aduane* (food for the soul) and generally consists of a fowl, eggs and mashed plantains or yams and water. It is placed beside the body with the following words repeated three times; *Wo kra akokɔ ni o!* (“Here is a fowl for your soul”). Here comes the reason for laying the body on its left side. This is done purposely to leave the right arm and hand free for eating.

In the underworld, it is believed, people retain the positions of their earthly hierarchy.¹⁹⁷ For this reason, a dead chief was buried with slaves to attend to his needs. Similarly, at the death of Luapula kings, as Mbiti reports, “their wives and slaves are sacrificed. This is done to provide them with full households similar to those they had in this life.”¹⁹⁸ In Akan a chief may be buried with a slave believed to serve him at *Asamado*.

The belief in ancestors and their relation to the living also informs the position the corpse is placed during burial. The corpse is buried with the legs

¹⁹⁵ Aloysius M. Lugira, *World Religions: African Traditional Religion* Third Edition (New York NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 50.

¹⁹⁶ Mary Ampomah, Interview by co- author (Isaac Boaheng) on 28th March, 2016 in Odumasi, Sunyani.

¹⁹⁷ Holloway, *Africanisms*, 166.

¹⁹⁸ Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa*, 256. Mbiti notes that the practice is presumably prohibited now.

pointing home. In an interview with Mary Ampomah who is well versed in the Akan culture, she revealed that this practice is believed to “enable them [the Ancestors] to walk home and not into the bush when they wake up.”¹⁹⁹ Believing that the world of the dead is located in the north, the Herero bury their dead facing north.²⁰⁰ The Edo people of Nigeria bury their dead with their feet pointing west, toward the Ughoton, the old port of Benin on the West African coast. From Ughoton the dead are believed to embark in canoes and cross the sea to the spirit world that lies in the dome of the sky.

During burial, the family members and friends bid the deceased farewell by throwing a bit of soil or flower petals into the grave before the burial is completed. The relatives place the bands on their wrists in the grave to show that they do not have anything to do with the deceased person again. More soil is put on the coffin in the grave to cover the grave. Flowering plants are planted at the extreme ends of the grave. A doll, *akuaba*, is also placed on graves. These days, wreaths may be placed on the grave. A gun is shot, and in the view of the people, it is to say goodbye to the dead person and the ancestors.

Post-burial Purification Rites

People who go to the cemetery are considered contaminated with evil spirits. Therefore, certain rites have to be performed before they are allowed to re-enter society and return to the process of living. Failure to cleanse or purify as required by tradition is believed to bring bad luck or misfortune to the family or people close to the deceased. Against this background, while the body is sent to the cemetery for interment, those left behind fetch water into a calabash and place it at the entrance of the house. Sometimes a hyssop called *adwira* is placed at the entrance for cleansing. All those who went to the cemetery are expected to wash his/her hands to ward off bad omen before entering the house. This must be done before giving any report of what transpired at the burial site to those who were left behind. Also, “*bre suo*”, water for refreshment, is also given to those who went to the burial site.

Final Funeral Rites

In the olden days fork-sticks and palm branches were used to prepare sheds for the funeral durbar. Today, funeral grounds have canopies of different styles arranged to provide shade. Family members sit in state and people greet them and sympathise with them. Sympathisers and loved ones bring donations in cash to the family to help them defray some of the debts incurred during the funeral. Sympathisers are

¹⁹⁹ Mary Ampomah, Interview by co-author (Isaac Boaheng) on 10th April, 2016 in Odumasi, Sunyani.

²⁰⁰ Mbiti, *African Concept of God*, 256.

refreshed with food and drink. In Asikasu No. 1 it is the practice that the whole community supports a deceased family with items such as firewood, charcoal, maize, plantain cassava, vegetables and other things to help feed sympathisers. These items are presented on denominational basis; Moslems also make this contribution.

The widow normally puts *prekese* (*tetra pleura tetraptera*) in her hand and this prevents everyone from shaking hands with her. At about 4:00pm the widow is sent home. Even before that time the chief, if present, leaves the funereal ground. At about 6:00pm the whole ceremony comes to a close.

Musicians, drummers, brass bands and poets feature prominently at the funeral grounds. In the past, music at funerals was basically traditional. It included *Nnwomkorɔ*, a cultural song exclusively performed by a group of adult women, *Adenkum*, a traditional calabash music of festivals, and *Adowa*, a cultural group which was originally a female dance performed orally with body movements performed at funerals. Today, various dance bands and traditional drumming groups are engaged for most funerals.

Post-Funeral Family Gathering and Thanksgiving

The family gathers the following day to render account for the funeral and pay off all debts, if any. After taking stock of the event, it is the norm to share funeral debt equally across board for the family members. In the evening of the same day, relatives of the dead person go round the town, house to house to thank those who helped them to make the funeral celebration a success.

Fortieth day celebration

It is customary among the Akans to observe the fortieth day of the dead as a day of mourning whether or not the burial and the final funeral celebrations had been carried out. It is on this day that the spirit of the dead is believed to depart from the earth. Until then the spirit of the dead is believed to be dwelling among the people. The living may even leave some food near the *bukyia* or *bokyia* (cooking tripod) for the spirit to come and eat during the first forty day of the death. On this day the family gather in the family house and examine the deceased's property. If there is any will it is read on this day. At this time the designated "*ɔdiadefo*" (successor or heir) of the deceased is officially declared, installed, and invested with the ritual instruments that entitle him or her to the inheritance. The deceased is remembered on this day and libation is poured.

Symbolism in Akan Funeral Rites

In Africa, there are a lot of symbols associated with funeral rites. These symbols according to Asante, express at least three main concerns, namely, the need to protect the living from the wrath and possible harm by the dead; the need to ensure a safe passage for the dead into the world of the dead and the need to accord the dead the necessary respect.²⁰¹ It is believed that a person who is not given befitting death rites may become a wandering ghost (*Saman Twentwen*), who then becomes a threat to the living since it can cause harm at any time. Therefore, people are very attentive to giving the departed a proper funeral so that the spirit of the departed will be content in the world beyond and not come back as a discontented ghost to plague those left behind.

Funerals usually involve the core beliefs and customs, spiritual practices, and certain expected behaviours that will be symbolic of mourning the death of a loved one. For example, when a death has occurred, there are prescribed behaviours and rituals performed such as what is worn, how the bereaved are addressed, how feelings should be dealt with and what will be done to symbolize the separation of the deceased from the people who are left behind. Also, there are clear prescriptions and strict rituals in every society governing the appropriate behavior in the face of death. Asante gives a list of the various items connected to Asante funeral and explains the reasons for which each item is used. These symbols include egg and snail shells, a net, dried okro, raffia, plantain, pepper, leaves, *prekese* and a gold necklace, *awisiado*. In what follows the study gives highlights of Asante's thought on symbolism in Akan funeral rites.²⁰²

The *awisiado* is an expression of love or consolation of the bereaved. It may be presented by a wife to a bereaved husband as a symbol of love for the husband and his siblings who have become orphans due to the death of their parent. At the funeral of father, the children, bare-footed, wear a white net cap at the end of which is tied an eggshell with a red tail feather of a grey parrot. In addition, a strip of silk cloth (*kyem tam*) or kente is tied on the forehead beneath the cap. All this is intended to express the pain that the children are going through due to their father's death.

The net cap tied with an egg shell signifies the children's feeling that their father's death has made them as vulnerable and unsecured (both spiritually and physically) as a fish caught in a net. The emptiness of the shell stresses the feeling that by the death of their father has taken away the cream of their family. It also points to the hopelessness of the children and the irreplaceable loss they have

²⁰¹ Asante, *Theology and Society in Context*, 34.

²⁰² We have gleaned what follows from Asante, *Theology and Society in Context*, 34-38.

experienced. Just as an empty shell has no life, so the children have no life. This feeling, expressed through symbolic language, is a challenge to the Akan saying that there will always be a father to replace a dead father (*Agya bi wu a, agya bi te ase*). Clearly, the children are keenly aware that the saying that there will always be a father to replace a dead father is only meant to console them, hence the expression *agya bi wu a, agya bi tease dee, woka de dada awusia*.

The red feather of the grey parrot's tail is used by the widow to signify her state of loneliness resulting from the demise of her husband. This comes from the belief that parrots move in pairs and when one dies the other remains single until it dies. The widow is therefore saying “*m'anomaa nua a me ne no da duam na w'awuo yie. Menenam saa na me de akɔ wuo mu.*” This finds expression in the following words by a widow we interviewed said:

Living as a single, widowed woman is not easy. I met my husband when I had lost both my parents to death. He then filled the gap and became my intimate friend as well. But now he is dead. The vacuum his death created can never be filled. I have no one to talk to or share my worries and joys with and that make me feel very sad and lonely.²⁰³

Adult female blood relatives of the deceased wear black cloth under with red cloth on top. They smear lines of red clay (*ntwoma*) on the forehead and shoulders (known as *kotobirigya*) as an indication that they are blood relatives. It also signifies that the relatives would bleed all over, if grief could cut as sharp as blade. A priest related to the deceased however may smear him/herself with white clay. The women make a necklace from a creeping plant called *nyanya* and wear to symbolize the disgraceful mood as mourners. This message is found in the expression *owuo agu yen anim ase*.

They wear black clothes to symbolize the dark cloud, death, which is associated with loss and pain. Mourning bands (*abɔtire*) are fastened round the head into which red peppers are sometimes placed. The red peppers convey the message that the bearer is in deep pains due to the death of the relative. The widow also hangs three dried okros around her neck to signify her “hope in the midst of hopelessness” as well as “the enduring value of death”. Her hope is that though the okro is dead and dried, the seeds can germinate into new okro. The okro also symbolizes the enduring value of death in the sense that just as the dried okro has a store of its seeds so the widow has a store of pain and sorrow.

The widow also puts a raffia bungle on her elbow as a way of saying that by the death of her husband her life has become as unstable as the raffia which is blown to and fro by every wind. Swinging her arms forward and backwards while

²⁰³ Comfort Fosua, Interview by co- author (Isaac Boaheng) on 18th March, 2017 in Berekum.

wearing the raffia bungle (symbolising wings), the widow expresses her inner desire to be with her departed loved husband. Her message is that she wished she had wings to fly where death has taken her husband. At the back of the widow hangs a finger of plantain as a symbol of her pain. By this symbol the widow indicates that “but for the fact that one could not live without food, I would not set my eye on food, let alone eat it, given the painful loss of my dear one.”

As the widow moves on the street to the funeral grounds, she dances, trying to jump into the air “to pluck leaves.” This dance, described by the expression *ote ahaban*, symbolizes the deceased’s hard work that earned the family their daily bread. Therefore, with the demise of the husband the widow is saying that she and her children will feed on mere leaves which she will struggle to come by in a similar manner she struggles through the “jump-move” in her dance.

When she arrives at the funeral grounds she sits down and places one palm in another. This way, the widow is saying that she will henceforth depend on alms. She also indicates that her load is heavy, and hence needs assistance by placing her palms on her head. It is for this reason that she also turns her back on the people she trusts can give support to her. These people, usually closed relatives and friends, sit behind her.

Widowhood Rites in Africa

Widowhood is a condition in which one loses his or her spouse through death. A widow is thus a woman who has lost her husband and has not remarried. During the period of widowhood, there are prescribed customs and rituals performed for and by the widow. These are called widowhood rites. Widowhood rites are common phenomena globally although there might be variations in the manner in which it is practiced.

In Ghana almost every ethnic groups perform widowhood rites, though the practices differ. Akan and Ewe traditions require the widow to undergo certain rituals such as seclusion, prescribed dress codes, walking barefooted, fasting for extended periods of time, symbolic gestures directed at the corpse such as being required to hold the deceased husband’s ankles or sleeping in the same room where the corpse is laid and so on. The reason assigned for widowhood rites among Africans are as follows.

First, widowhood aims at officially separating the dead husband and the wife since they now belong to two different worlds. In African thought the spirit of the dead does not go straight to the ancestors until the funeral rites are performed. From the day of death to the final funeral rites, the spirit of the deceased hovers around and may pose a threat to the living. Since the dead had intimate relation

with the widow or widower the living spouse may probably be the first target of the deceased who may want to take her along for the companionship which they shared on earth. This is possible because it is believed that the marriage union is not broken by death but by the funeral celebration of the deceased. For this reason, the widow or widower still remains the ‘property’ of the deceased spouse. It is, therefore, the widowhood rite, that is performed during the funeral celebration that officially breaks that link that exists between the deceased and the living spouse so that he/she can come back to normal life.

Second, the widowhood rites are intended to re-integrate the widow/widower into the community so that she/he can become once again a ‘normal’ member of the community and be able to exercise his/her normal social responsibilities. During widowhood rites, there are series of rituals that lead to cleansing from the uncleanness associated with the dead. It is only after this purification has been performed that the widow comes back to normal life and associates herself with other people.

Again, it protects the widow against sexual intimacy with the deceased. Without this rite it is believed that the husband might come to request for sex. This is possible because the soul of a woman is not as strong as that of man. The Akan expresses this in the saying “*ɔbarima no ba be nunu obaa no.*” After the rites are over the man cannot come near the woman again because the intimacy that existed between them is broken and the wife is freed to re-marry if she so wishes. In an interview the following reasons were given by three widows for their participation in widowhood rites: respect for tradition, to be exonerated from being accused of having a hand in the husband’s death, pressure from family members.

Widowhood Rites Among Akan

The word *kunadie* comes from two Akan words—*kuna* meaning uncommon husband or a husband is not easy to come by and *die* meaning experience. *Kunadie* therefore means an experience of not having it easy to come by a husband. Better still, a husband is not easy to come by or not common for me. *Kunadie* is a cultural rite which Akan women go through after losing their husband as a way of celebrating the “special quality and munificence of a departed husband.”²⁰⁴ *Kunadie* last for a period of forty days after the death of a husband. However, the traditional period of bereavement for widows extends until one year after the husband’s death.

Setting the Widow Apart

Widowhood rites begin immediately after the death of the husband and lasts for about year. As soon as the husband dies, the living wife is taken to a special place

²⁰⁴ Asante, *Theology and Society in Context*, 39.

and shaved off her hair to the skull (the shaved hair is kept, to be used in a future rite). This act signifies that the hair belongs to the deceased husband and so now that he is no more there is no need to keep the hair belonging to him on the widow's head. In Akan, on the day of marriage, the husband pays for the wife's hair through the payment called the *etire adee* or *etire nsa*. That is why it is traditionally wrong for a married woman to have her hair touched by a strange man. The shaving of the hair also signifies the removal of all the things that the husband touched or saw on his wife and make her new when new hair begins to grow.

Still on the first day of the demise of the husband, the widow is made to bath three times. The water used for bathing is mixed with salt. The salt reminds the widow of her puberty rites, when she was given salt to taste as a sign of the sweetest stage of life she was about to enter, marriage.²⁰⁵ The death of her husband has brought to an end the sweetest stage in life. For this reason, the salt is no longer given to her to taste but put in the bucket full of water to dissolve into tastelessness.²⁰⁶

A black thread is used to run through a padlock and this is worn around her waist with the padlock which hangs directly over her "womanhood." This act according to Asante is indicative of the fact that "with the demise of her precious husband, who was a rarity, one of his kind, the one who had unlimited access to her womanhood, she has temporarily closed her 'womanhood.'"²⁰⁷ There is also the belief that this act will ward off any sexual interference from the dead husband. It also means that the widow is forbidden from having an intimate affair before a stipulated period. The padlock is usually removed by a special person (usually a man) designated to break the widowhood of widowed women before the widow can have an affair with anybody.

To ensure that the husband does not come near her, two widows called "*mmerewa tia*" are asked to accompany her wherever and whatever she does. Also, she sleeps in between these two widows. *Kuna dɔsɔ* is used to tie her waist for one year before she can remove it and re-marry again. During the one year period especially when the *kuna dɔsɔ* is on her waist, she is not supposed to have sex with any man. If a man forces her and removes the *kuna dɔsɔ* on the bed of the man, it becomes a curse upon that man.

The widow is not allowed to eat heavy foods but light ones. She is also barred from arriving home or sitting outside after sun set. The *mmerewa tia* are expected to help her adjust to the situation in which she finds herself so that she can forget about the deceased husband and move on in life. Widowhood rites are

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

therefore expected to have positive impact on the widow. Fosua Comfort, had this to say in an interview:

I learnt many things from the women who took care of me through the widowhood rites. They taught me many things I never knew about the Akan culture which served as an eye-open. The experiences in the period of widowhood prepared me to stand on my own feet without the man. I may be so sad, lonely and broken, yet when I remember what they taught me I become much encouraged to move on.²⁰⁸

Yet, widowhood rites may be considered as an infringement on the woman's rights, reducing women to something else less than human, controlling their freedom and coercing them to go through the rites else they face consequences.

Severing the Relationship Between the Widow and Her Late Husband

The separation of the widow from the deceased husband is also enacted symbolically. On the day of burial the woman leads the procession, carrying an earthenware bowl (*apɔɔwewa*) closely followed by the coffin bearers. In the earthenware bowl is the hair which was shaved immediately the husband died. According to Asante the wife's hair shaven and thrown away proves that the husband really purchased it and will therefore be seen and accepted in *Asamando* as a responsible person.²⁰⁹

The widow walks to a crossroad on the way to the cemetery and then throws the *apɔɔwewa* down for it to break and return home without reaching the cemetery.²¹⁰ She comes home without looking back else she may bring back home the tragedy she has thrown away. The message of the act of throwing away the earthenware bowl is that "the widow and her dead husband are no more in union (*"yetoo nkwanta a, yapaε"*) and that the cooking pot in which the widow prepared food for the husband is now broken."²¹¹

The Widow on the Day of Final Funeral Rites

The funeral cloth for the widow is a red colour cloth, dyed in barks of special tree to make it a little dark. It is known as *memmu wo ta* ("I do not have the least respect for you"). The significance of this cloth according to Asante is with the demise of the husband the widow has now lost her respect.²¹²

On the funeral grounds the widow sits on the *asesedwa*, stool and holds *prekεε* to express her feeling that the demise of her husband has made her lose

²⁰⁸ Fosua Comfort, Interview.

²⁰⁹ Asante, *Theology and Society in Context*, 40.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

her privacy. Her husband who covered her privacy is no more and she is therefore going to be a public spectacle. Like the *prekese* fruit which is a public object due to its sharp scent, news about the widow would now spread quickly.²¹³ Holding the *prekese* in her palm, the widow is prevented from shaking hands with other so that she does not transfer any misfortune associated with widowhood to anyone.²¹⁴

Purification Rites

After the one year anniversary, a ritual is performed to end the widowhood. She is sent to a river for bathing and cleansing. After the bath, the widowhood rite is over. The clothes on her and other items used for the bathing are not to be used again by her. She puts on a new cloth after the bathing usually white cloth to symbolize her purity and newness. The old items are collected by the *mmerewa tia* and given out. She removes the *kuna dɔsɔ* and wears it no longer.

Re-integrating the Widow

Food is prepared for people to eat with her to indicate that she can now socialize with them. She then goes round the community to greet the people and to receive gifts to welcome her back into the society. From this time the widow is free to live her normal life without any restriction. She can also re-marry if she so desires.

Widowhood Rites Among the Fafra

The Fafra widowhood rite involves five rituals, namely, setting the widow/widower apart holding the calabash/hat, sitting on leaves/holding of leaves, shaving and bathing the widow/widower (purification rite) and re-integrating the widow/widower. In what follows the highlights of these rituals shall be discussed.²¹⁵

Setting the Widow/Widower Apart

Like the Akan, widowhood rites among the Fafra begins immediately after the death of a spouse. The first stage of the rites involves setting the widow apart. This involves taking the widow a room other than the one in which her husband is laid in state. She is kept in this room together with other women who console and support her during her stay in that room.

Immediately, a calabash is prepared for her to handle. One of these women is specially assigned the duty is to guide her and provide her needs and in case she needs to attend to nature's call one or two women accompany her. The role of these women is similar to that of the *mmerewa tia* in the Akan widowhood rites. She is

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ We have gleaned what follows from Atinga "Death and Dying", 91-95.

made to stay in this room till burial takes place. This separation is effective until the final funeral rites are performed and the widow is re-integrated into the society. The calabash prepared for the widow is taken from her after burial has taken place. It is then put in a big pot until the day the final funeral rites would be performed when it is brought out and used for the rest of the ritual. At this time the widow is not made to carry the calabash around as an external symbol of a ritual separation. However, the presence of the calabash in the ritual room always reminds her of her state as a widow. This practice protects the woman against sexual advances by members of her community and thus keeps her ritually pure for the final rites. For a widower, he is not separated at this moment but sits outside and also surrounded by some elders who make sure they give him the support that he needs.

Holding the Calabash/Hat

The Fafra keep wake. On the day of the wake keeping during the final funeral rites, the calabash that was kept after the burial of one's spouse is brought out from the pot. It is then cleaned and smeared with some black stuff made from burnt shea nut leaves.

These are those the widows have sat on in the past. At this point the widow is made to sit on leaves from the shea nut tree and hold the calabash. In the case of a widower he is exempted from this act of holding the calabash as he sits. He only holds the prepared calabash for a short while at the beginning of the funeral and it is taken from him and kept aside. He does not sit on the leaves but rather on the skin of a cow or the local mat. He however, eats from the calabash throughout the funeral. The man does not sit on the leaves but on a cow skin or locally made mat, though he also needs the leaves from the shea nut tree for some rituals.

Unlike the widow who sits in the room and holds the calabash, the widower sits in the kraal and holds the traditional hat call the *zuvuca* (literally means head cover), with a piece of millet stalk or a knife beside him. The calabash signifies an external symbol of separation and for the Frafra people something far more than the external.

The calabash is like the earthenware in Akan in from which the couples ate and drank water and the local brew. As the woman holds a calabash during the funeral she expresses her care for the late husband during his lifetime when she prepared food for him. More so, the calabash brings to mind the mystical dirt which they shared as they ate together from the calabash. To be purified from this mystical dirt the widow is expected to drink a certain concoction from the calabash.

The hat held by the widower is also symbolic of the fact that his duty as a man is not to cook food and serve in the calabash for the household (as in the

case of a woman) but to provide food for the family's upkeep. Traditionally, Frafra men put their tobacco and cola nuts in their hat for future use. Therefore, the *zuvuc* (which he holds) symbolizes the fact that he is a man. The stalk/knife serves as a weapon for the widow/widower to ward off the spouse in case he/she makes any attempt to take his/her partner away along with him/her.

Sitting on Leaves/Holding of Leaves

Among the Frafra as well as their neighbours like the Kusasi and the Builsa the widow sits on leaves from the shea nut tree while the widower sits on the skin of a cow or a traditional mat throughout the dry funeral²¹⁶ celebration of the deceased spouse. Yet, the shea nut leaves also form part of the rituals for widower as well. The significance of the shea nut tree in the life of the Frafra community makes it suitable for the ritual.

The Frafra depends on the shea nut fruit for food. The shea nut also provides them with wood for roofing their houses. It also gives shea butter for cooking. The fact that shea butter gives oil to sooth people's heart makes it suitable for the widowhood ritual. The widow, sits on shea butter leaves while the widower (who does not sit on the leaves) is given the leaves at the beginning of the ritual to signify the soothing power in the oil produced by the shea butter tree.

Shaving and Bathing the Widow/Widower (Purification Rite)

It has been stated earlier that the widow/widower is considered unclean/dirty. To make him/her clean requires the rites of purification. In the early part of the evening of the last day of the funeral, the widow/widower brought out, seated at the family's refuse dump/compost heap.²¹⁷ He/she, surrounded by women, is shaved and bathed amidst wailing by the women. During this time, some herbs and some leaves from the sheanut tree are roasted in a pot nearby. After the hair has been shaved, he/she moves to that pot with the roasted herbs and purifies him/herself with the smoke coming from the herbs. This is followed by a ritual bath with warm water boiled in the herbs. The bath takes place in the full glare of all people. The practice of taking this bath completely naked has been modified to taking it with at least the pants on. Once the bath (the climax of the widowhood rite) is over the widow/widower goes home and eats some T.Z prepared specifically for the purpose of purification. This is the last time that he/she eats from the calabash.

²¹⁶ According to Atinga Frafra funerals are in two parts the 'wet' and the 'dry' funerals. The wet funerals could simply be understood as a burial rite performed shortly after death, leading to the burial of the deceased. The wet funeral only paves the way for the second and more elaborate part known as the 'dry funeral' also referred to as the final funeral rites. Atinga "Death and Dying"

²¹⁷ Every Frafra family has a compost heap where the household refuse is thrown. This compost heap is usually located directly in front of the house. It serves as a source of organic manure for the farms.

Re-integrating the Widow/Widower

The shaving and bathing rites, aside purifying the widow/widower, brings to an end the period of isolation. He/she by this rite is renewed and ready to re-aggregate into the life of the community. In the re-integration process, she is treated as a complete new comer who does not know anything and has to be taught anew. It involves an elderly woman leading her to various strategic parts of the house, such as the grinding room where she is symbolically taught how to grind, the kitchen where she is made to peep inside where she would be cooking from and ritual room where she is shown various items used for rituals.

Widowhood Rites Among the Tallensi

The Tallensi widowhood rites include the following: confinement, shaving the widow (defacement), dethronement and purification rites. We outline these processes below.

Confinement

Tallensi widowhood rites involve confinement of the widow during which time she is not allowed to do things she would ordinarily have loved to do. It is believed that if she goes out she might meet the death husband's spirit which might harm her. In case she needs to go out she has to hold a knife and a stalk and walks sideways while brandishing the knife to scare away the spirit of the deceased.

Shaving the Widow (Defacement)

The second stage is the period of defacement during which her hair is shaved apparently to make her look unattractive during the period of the funeral. Like the Frafra practise, the shaving is done at the refuse dump site. The shaving usually takes long hours because it is done slowly.

Dethronement

During this period, the widow is made to sit on the floor or on a mat while putting on leaves from a Shea tree. The widows endure a lot sitting on the ground. The dethronement signifies her shame as a widow. The belief is held that if the widow, upon being bitten by an ant or other creeping creatures, reacts to the pain she was unfaithful to her deceased husband. Should this happen, the widow has to go through some very humiliating cleansing rites which no widow wants to pass through.

Purification Rites

Like the Fafra, Tallensi widowhood rites are climaxed by a ritual bathing which

takes place at the refuse dump or in a nearby river in the company of other widows. Testimony about this bathing has to be given to the society and for this reason everyone must see the widow bath. After this, the widow is reintegrated into the community and the family with a different status as a widow.

Christian Widowhood Rites

Widowhood rite has been recognized by the church as a practise that needs the church's involvement. The Catholic Church of Ghana has also incorporated some of the customary widowhood rites into the Christian rites for widows. E.R Mawusi outlines processes of widowhood rites for Christian widows in the Keta-Ho Diocese of the Volta region. The processes are initiation into widowhood, clothing of the widow and finally the outdoorings of the widow. What follows is a summary of Mawusi's work.²¹⁸

Initiation into Widowhood

The widowhood rites begin with a three-day retreat to initiate the widow into the period of widowhood. This corresponds to the traditional rite of solitary confinement. The three-day retreat begins either on the day after the public mourning or the day after the burial.

Before the retreat begins, the priest visit the widow's and sanctifies the house, rooms and widows through sprinkling with holy water. A bit of her hair is cut to be disposed of later by the priest and this corresponds to the shaving of the widow's head and her private parts in the traditional rite. The widow then begins the three-day retreat.

Clothing of the Widow and Widower

On the third day of the retreat, the priest visits the widow again and blesses her clothes to be used in widowhood. He also prays for her against assault or temptation of wicked spirits. After three months, the mourning cloth is taken off at a day is fixed for that purpose. During the period of three months of widowhood, the widow is expected to lead a modest and chaste life and to avoid consultation of diviners as done in the traditional performance.

The Outdoorings of the Widow and Widower

The next stage of the widowhood is the outdoorings of the widow/widower which

²¹⁸ E.R Mawusi, "Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel firmly in Ghanaian Culture. A Necessary Requirement for Effective Evangelization for the Catholic Church in Ghana" (Doctor of Theology Dissertation: University of Vienna, 2009), 157-158.

usually takes place on Saturday. On this day, the widow/widower presents a new (white) cloth to the priest to be blessed in Church and to be worn the following Sunday. At church service the next day, just before the final blessing, the priest may give the widow a special blessing.

This process eliminates the rigorous rites that widows undergo under customary practices. However, there are some people who are in doubt whether widows/widowers who go through such a Church rite will consider themselves to have fulfilled the demands of their traditional society regarding widowhood. There is no easy solution to the problem. The Authors agree with Mawusi that “Probably the best solution is for Christian widows to go through all those traditional rites which do not conflict with Christianity. If there are elements in the traditional rites that are incompatible with Christian doctrines or Christian ethical standards, these can be replaced with Christian elements.”²¹⁹

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana has in their Worship Book the following to say about conducting the service for widowhood.

Service will be in the house and within the first week of the death of spouse; this period shall end after burial.

A three-day or week long fast may be instituted for the widow in recognition of the fact that fasting in the Bible often gave expression to grief. Loss of appetite is also often the experience of the bereaved and the regularized fast may prove therapeutic.

In the evening before the breaking of the fast, a passage of scripture would be read. Suggested Bible passage--Ps. 146; 61; 62; 71; 115:1-3; 142.²²⁰

The order of service is as follows:

1. Call to Worship
2. Hymn
3. Salutation
4. Hymn
5. Purpose of Gathering
6. Hymn
7. Prayer
8. Scripture Reading
9. Exhortation
10. Hymn
11. Prayer
12. Holy Communion
13. Commendation

²¹⁹ Mawusi, “Inculturation”, 158.

²²⁰ Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Worship Book, 120.

14. Closing Hymn

15. Benediction²²¹

Thanksgiving Service for Widows/Widowers

Even though the Methodist Church Ghana has no formal liturgy for widowhood rites, it has one for the thanksgiving service for widows. Thanksgiving service for widows/widowers seeks to provide a spiritual strength against the panic into which married couples are thrown when they lose one of the partners through death. The aim of the order is to find a Christian way of ending or terminating the traditional widowhood rites which certain cultures insist on getting widows and widowers to observe. The widow at this service must be dressed in white.

The order of service of the Methodist Church Ghana for this service is as follows.²²² The service begins with a hymn followed by the declaration of the purpose of gathering by the officiating Minister. The Minister declares that the sister or brother has come to give thanks to God for a successful marriage and to declare publicly as he or her ends his/her traditional period of widowhood. A hymn is sung again and passages read from the Bible. A prayer is said, hymn sung. Following this is the widow's/widower's declaration to break the marriage covenant with the departed partner. The minister then sprinkles water three times on the widow/widower, in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Finally, the minister says the benediction.

Journey to the Land of the Departed

In African thought, when a person dies his/her soul passes to the world of the ancestral spirits where it continues to live. For this reason, Africans refers to the souls of dead persons as the living dead. This belief is rooted in the concept of immortality of the soul. Even though Africans believe in afterlife in the “invisible world”, in the “village of ancestors”, there is no belief in a future resurrection of the bodies.

According to some people, the world of the dead is located somewhere in the deep of the earth (underworld, underground or netherworld). Others believe that the world of the departed is located in woods (eg. the Akamba), bush (eg. the Ngoni), rock (eg. the Teita, Gisu) wilderness or forest (eg. the Bambuti, Bacongo, Lele).²²³ The Chagga, according to Mbiti, conceive of the journey to the next world

as long, dangerous and terrifying which requires the soul to move through a hot

²²¹ Ibid., 120-24.

²²² The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Methodist Liturgy and Book of Worship*, 268-270.

²²³ Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa*, 257.

desert for eight days.²²⁴ On the ninth day, the soul arrives and is admitted after paying a bull of admission.²²⁵ The Gas belief that the dead cross a river to the other world where the noses are broken so that the dead speak in nasal tones.²²⁶

In Akan, it is believed that when good people die, and die a good death, they go to a place of bliss Akan call *Asamando*. It is believed that the one who takes care of the other world and gives entrance to this world is a male person called *Amokye*.²²⁷ This person, it is believed, punishes those who were wicked in the life on earth as soon as they get to the entrance.

In many societies in Africa, it is believed that from the place of bliss, the ancestor can come back to be reborn in order to finish a job he or she started, but could not complete. It is also believed that some of the dead can decide to come back for another lease of life. Another belief is that those who could not get entry into the bliss (place of rest), roam about as ghosts frightening people until they are born again.

Conclusion

The chapter has shown key similarities and differences between death and funeral rites in selected cultures. One thing that comes clear is that missionaries need to understand each symbol or act in these and other cultural related practises. This is the only way by which valid judgement can be made. In the next chapter, the study takes a look at chieftaincy institution.

²²⁴ Ibid., 255.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., 256.

²²⁷ Ampomah, Interview.

Review Exercise

1. Compare Akan burial with ancient Jewish burial.
2. To what extent can Jacob's funeral be regarded as the funeral of an old African man?
3. Explain the African understanding of life after death.
4. How does the African belief in life after death inform their funeral practices?
5. What is the place of symbolism in Akan funeral rites?
6. What is the function of children in funeral rites of their deceased father as depicted in the funeral of Jacob?
7. In what sense can we say that African's funeral rites are Biblical?
8. What cultural differences do you observe in the widowhood rites of the Akan and the Fafra?
9. Is there anything such as a Christian funeral? Has the church gotten any alternative to those funeral or burial rites for its members? Explain your answer.
10. In respect of funeral rites, what should be done for church members who die? Should the church present burial items otherwise referred to by the Akan as *adesiedie*? How should the church handle its members who engage in such traditional rites?

CHAPTER 7

Chieftaincy Institution

Chieftaincy, Ghana's most enduring socio-cultural institution, has borne and will continue to bear the thankless task of providing cohesion and underpinning the nation-state. It is one of Africa's enduring traditional institutions that has displayed remarkable resilience since pre-colonial era. In those days, chiefs had the responsibility to lead their people to war and to make sure his people are protected. The outcome of wars determined the extension or reduction of a state's territory. Chieftaincy in Ghana is the traditional form of government in Ghanaian societies. In the Old Testament the history of Israel's monarchy begins with Saul, the first king of Israel. In this chapter, chieftaincy in Ghana and in ancient Israel would be analysed and the similarities with that of kingship in Ghana, particularly as practised among the Gas and the Akan shall be assessed.

Understanding the Concept of Chieftaincy

The term Chief, according to the Chieftaincy Act 795, refers to “a person who, hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a Chief or Queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage.”²²⁸ As a traditional institution, chieftaincy is as old as the history of the country. Though it is one of the oldest Cultural Institutions and traditions of Ghana, it continues to play very significant and relevant roles in national development. In Ghana a great deal of veneration is reserved for the chief who is an embodiment of the culture and customs of the people.

Chiefs are considered as intermediary between the dead and the living. The chief had a great deal of powers invested in him during the pre-colonial era. He exercised judicial, legislative, executive and administrative powers. However, with the introduction of colonialism and Christianity in Africa, and with the introduction of the indirect system of rule, the duties of the chiefs have been reduced to cultural matters because of the introduction of new political structures such as the civil service, local government ordinances and taxation.

²²⁸ Ghana Chieftaincy Act 795 (Np:Np, 2008), 2.

Origin of Chieftancy

How did the Chieftancy institution begin in Ghana and in ancient Israel? Among the various oral traditions relating to the origin of the institution, the most recurring account traces the origin of chieftancy to a point in time “when a group of people settled at a particular place, began to structure their society and then thought it prudent to nominate or elect someone who will be their leader.”²²⁹ The one who was outspoken, pro-active and had leadership qualities (such as ability to led people to war) was usually chosen to serve in this capacity. With time, it gradually metamorphosed into a well-structured system which today has become the institution of Chieftancy with the creation of stools and skins as symbols of kingship and authority.²³⁰

In ancient Israel on the other hand, kingship began at the request of God’s people for a human king to lead them in a manner that is practice in the Ancient Near East. From the time God instituted the nation Israel through the Mosaic Covenant on Mt. Sinai to the time of Samuel, Israel remained a purely theocratic nation. Later the pressure from the Philistine called for a new tactic from Israel. Samuel was well advanced in age and his sons were irresponsible children who could not provide the leadership the times demanded. Israel thought it necessary to have a king to withstand the opposition of the highly organised Philistine. The elders of Israel requested for a king that will go before them to fight their battle (1 Sam. 8:19-20). The request for a king was greeted with mixed feelings. Some passages seem to oppose the idea (8:1-22; 10:17-19; 12:1-25), others were in favour of it (9:1-10:16; 10:20-11:15).

Their concept of a king is one that can lead them in battle just as it is in the Ghanaian context. The whole system of chieftancy, both in Ghana and ancient Israel, is based on wartime defence tactics. In many ways, the Old Testament presents kings according to this ancient Near Eastern model. Saul was mighty warrior, Solomon a great builder. The king’s role as judge, and as the advocate of the helpless, is described enthusiastically in Psalm 72. The king was expected to obey the commandments of God and to listen to the prophets. In ancient Israelites, the power of the king came from God.

Structure of Chieftancy/Categorizations of Chiefs

The Akans believe that just as one person cannot constitute a society so one man

²²⁹ Naaborko Sackeyfio-Lenoch, *The Politics of Chieftancy: Authority and Property in Colonial Ghana, 1920-1950* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 74.

²³⁰ Ibid.

does not rule a community. The Akan also believe that one head does not go into council or two heads are better than one and so they say *ti korɔ nkɔ agyina*. The formation of the state and the governance of it is a shared responsibility. It therefore follows that the chief, as leader of the society needs the counsel and support of other sub-chiefs. These chiefs have different powers and perform different roles. Thus, in the Akan setting, kingship is hierarchical. The Akans therefore have the saying *ahenfo kyiniye ebi deda ebi akyi* literally meaning “the umbrellas of chiefs are not of the same value.” The Akan chieftancy structure includes the paramount chief, divisional chiefs, sub-divisional chiefs, *adikrofoɔ*.

The chieftancy structure of leadership is evident at every level of the Akan society. At the family level the *abusuapanin* (the family head) is the highest authority. The *odikro* is the head of a small village and the *ɔhene* is the head of a town. The *omanhene* (state or paramount chief) is the head of a cluster of towns and villages (called the *oman*). The Paramount Chief, *ɔmanhene* (*oman*, traditional state, and *hene*, chief, king), is the leader and highest authority in every traditional area. Traditionally, the paramount chief is considered as the owner of the traditional area. He is the one to whom all divisional chiefs swear oath of allegiance.

The queen mother, *ɔhema*, according to Akan political hierarchical order, is the next most important person after the paramount chief is the queen mother. Referred to as the *ɔbaapanin* (from *ɔbaa*, female, woman, and *panin*, elder), the queen mother is expected to have great experience and wisdom of the secrets of the society. She is therefore the one to be consulted with regards to problematic and delicate issues. In such cases she is referred to as *Abrewa* (Old Lady). The traditional expression for this consultation is, *Yerekɔbisa abrewa* (“we are going to consult the old lady”).

Like the chief, the queen mother serves as a spiritual and pours libation on certain occasions. The structure of ancient Israel monarchy includes the queen mother. In a situation when the state is unable to enstool a chief, the queen mother may act as both the chief and queen. In the Old Testament Queen Athaliah is reported as having reigned as a monarch within Israel/Judah. Jezebel was the queen of Judah and the wife of Ahab.

Under the Paramount Chief, are the Divisional Chiefs also called the wing chiefs (*Mpakanfo*). Each traditional area is divided into wings such as the Vanguard, the Right Wing, the Left Wing and the Rear Guard and they are tasked to administer the various sections of the chief’s territory under them. Traditionally, these chiefs are referred to by titles such as *Gyasehene*, *Adontenhene*, *Krontihene* (*Mankrado*), *Nifahene*, *Benkumhene*, *ɔsomannyawa* and *Kyidomhene*. There are other divisional chiefs including the following: the *Abakomahene* is the head of

the royal family, the *Gyaasehene* has the responsibility of household matters of the *Omanhene*, *Sanaahene* takes care of the treasury of the state, *Sumankwahene* takes care of spiritual matters while *Banmuhene* takes the responsibility of issues related to burial of the *Omanhene*.

In some communities, there are also two or more *Asafo* Companies. In the olden days these were officers in charge of various battalions of the state. In modern times, these companies are ceremonial. They help mainly in communal and other pieces of work in their communities. There is also a Council of elders basically comprising head elders (*abusua panin*) of various kingship groups of the society. The head of the council of elders presides over the meeting of such group. This hierarchical aspect of chieftancy in Ghana seems to be absent in Jewish practise where there is usually one king with no sub-chiefs under him. Saul, David, Solomon and other ruled without formal sub-chiefs. However, in the Jewish practice the king always had his officials (though not kings) with whom he governed. For example, Solomon has officials and governors (1 King 4:1ff) which include secretaries, commander-in-chief, district officers, personal secretaries etc. These officials are likely to perform the roles of the sub-chiefs in the African setting.

In the olden days, chiefs had the responsibility to lead their people to war and to make sure his people are protected. The role of the chief as a military leader accounts for the military titles of traditional rulers as listed below: *Asabarima* (warrior), *Asagyefo* (Deliverer in time of war), *Otumfo* (One who exercises power), *Asahene* (War captain), *Asediayo* (One who delivers on his (war) promises).

Choice/Selection/Election of Kings

Kings in ancient Israel were selected by God. The first King Saul was selected from the tribe of Benjamin when the people of Israel demanded for a king (1 Sam. 8:5; 1 Sam. 8:19-20). When he disobeyed God, he was rejected and David from the tribe of Judah was anointed to take over later as king (1 Sam. 15-16). God was pleased with David and promised that the kingship will not depart from his house (2 Sam. 7:16; 2 Chron. 23:3). Consequent to this covenant, David's family line became the royal house of Israel from which kings are selected.

Similar to that of ancient Israel, in Ghana kings are always selected from royal houses (the family of the stools).²³¹ In the Ga traditional area of Accra, chiefs are selected from three royal houses among which it rotates. The three royal houses are Teiko Tsuru We, Amugi We and Taki Kome We. Similarly, South Ewes also have royal lineages from which the occupants of stools are chosen. The lineage

²³¹ Ernest E. Obeng, *Ancient Ashanti Chieftancy* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Company, 19

usually recognised and designated as the royal family is the one that is believed to be the first to have set foot on the state land.²³² Among the Asantes of Ghana, there is only one royal clan (the *Dyoko* clan) from which the king is chosen.²³³ The Royal *Dyoko* Clan boasts of ten maximal segments known as *Dyoko* Duo out of which only one, that is the *Dyoko* *Dbohyen*, yields male candidates to occupy the Golden Stool. The many sub-lineages of this one great segment seek to ensure that their rights to the monarchy do not lapse, and therefore always compete to get the nomination when the monarchy falls vacant. For Asante the struggle within the Royal *Dyoko* lineage expresses the vitality of the monarchy.²³⁴

Unlike ancient Israel where there is no specific role of any Queen mother in the choice of a king, in Akan communities, the Queen mother's influence is forcefully felt in the choice of who ascends to the throne.²³⁵ "She is the recognized authority on genealogy of the Stool Family and can therefore decide whether a candidate is eligible or not."²³⁶ When the Stool becomes vacant the *mankrado* will inform the *Gyaasehene* (administrator) of the vacancy; the *Gyaasehene* will then officially communicate the vacancy of the Stool to the Queen mother who has the mandate to select a king for the town to initiate the process of finding a suitable person to occupy the Stool. Indeed, in the historic choice of a modern king she could not stand alone. In the Asante kingdom, the Asantehemaa needs the support of the Oyoko Queen mothers of the major stools of Kumasi and the other states. She needs help, particularly because she may be presented with an enigma where she may have to consider her own son side by side the sons of other royal women.²³⁷

The Gas on the other hand reserves the role of choosing a king to the elders of the house that is to produce the chief. They nominate the person to be king and then inform the head of the council of royals who in turn summons the counsellors to elect the candidate. After their confirmation, the chief in whose division the king resides, the royal regent and chiefs of the other towns are informed. It must be noted that the candidate for chieftancy must not only be a royal but must also have a sturdy physique and no physical deformity.

86), 39.

²³² Chris Abotchie, *Social Control in Traditional Southern Eweland of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1997), 49.

²³³ Robert B. Fisher, *West African religious traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* Fisher (Maryknell, NY: Orbis, 1998), 75.

²³⁴ Irene K. Odotei and George P. Hagan, *The King Returns: Enstoolment of Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II and the Ayikese (Great Funeral) of Otumfuo Opoku Ware II*, (Institute of African Studies: Accra, 2003), 33.

²³⁵ Obeng, *Ancient Ashanti Chieftancy*, 39.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Odotei and Hagan, *The King Returns*, 35.

Ritual of Confinement

In Akan the installation and enstoolment of a chief is preceded by a 40-day confinement in the “*Banmu* or inside the Hut”²³⁸ during which he is taken through the basics of being a king. It is a period for his spiritual purification and fortification, and also for teaching him the social and behavioural graces of his office.²³⁹ This is done by the *Gyaasehene*. The Gas confine their kings for a period of three weeks in which the royals take the king elect through the same rite (as stated above). This period of confinement does not have any similarity with what pertains in the ancient Israel. In the Old Testament, we do not find any account of confinement of kings before their installation.

Traditionally the position of the Akan chief is the conglomerate of traditional law, philosophical values, religious beliefs and cultural practices of the Akan, among others. The sacred position of the chief demands that it must be free of contamination- nothing despicable come into contact with it. Among the Asante, for example, Thomas Lewin summaries the standard qualification to ascend the golden stool as:

An *Dyoko* *ɔhedye* or royal, from Kumasi must be known for his *ahɔɔfɛ*, or handsomeness, his *animuonyam*, or personality, and his *ɔbrapa*, or good character. *Esesɛ obi a ɔbedi Asantehene yɛ obi a ɔwɔ ahɔɔfɛ ne ɔbrapa*. An Asantehene must be handsome, must have personality and must have a good character. No Asantehene may ever be touched by the knife.²⁴⁰

In the olden days, disqualification based on physical disability was not subject to negotiation because (as stated earlier) the sacred office of the chief must not be contaminated with any physical impairment.

Enstoolment

In both Ghana and ancient Israel, chiefs were enstooled according to some well-organized norms and practices. The enthronement procedure for kings in Israel was very elaborate. The installation of Solomon as king as recorded in 1 Kings 1:32-48, will be used to illustrate this point. In this passage, Solomon was placed on the King’s mule and taken to Gihon to be anointed by the priest and the prophet. The anointing of Solomon as a king was a social event. In the presence of the entourage, trumpets were sounded and all the people shouted “long live king Solomon.” There

²³⁸ Obeng, *Ancient Ashanti Chieftancy*, 39.

²³⁹ Odotei and Hagan, *The King Returns*, 36.

²⁴⁰ Thomas J. Lewin, *Asante before the British: The Prempean Years, 1975-1900* (Lawrence: The Regent Press of Kansas, 1978), 115.

was great rejoicing in the town as Solomon was taken back to the palace and sat on the royal throne. The royal officials came to congratulate him and pledge their allegiance to him through David.

Saul's kingship came to fruition in three stages. First he was anointed privately by Samuel (in response to God's command [9:16]) after the two had met while Saul was searching for his father's lost asses. Second, at Mizpah he was chosen by lot²⁴¹ from the clan of Matrites of the tribe of Benjamin (10:21). Finally, Saul's charismatic gifts to the test of an Ammonite invasion confirmed his choice as the king (11:1-15).

In the case of Akan, the nominee is led to the stool house where the blackened stools representing his royal ancestors are kept. Upon the blackened stool of the most renowned of his ancestors, the chief is lowered and raised three times. He is then enstooled. By this installation rite (at which he swears an oath), the chief is brought into a peculiarly close relationship with the royal ancestors. Henceforth, he becomes the legitimate intermediary between the people and their royal ancestors without whose protection and aid, misfortune will befall the community. In the Ga traditional setting, this is where the king acquires his regal name. It is strictly a private ceremony which occurs at midnight in the royal stool room with only a few royal councillors and priest around. About three days to the enstoolment, the council of elders sends clothing, drinks and money to the candidate as gifts. This gift is similar to the bride price presented to the bride during marriage ceremony. At this ceremony the candidate is called "the bride of the state." The enstoolment itself occurs at midnight at the royal palace. Prior to the enstoolment, the priest purifies the building with water and bloody sacrifice to inform the gods and ancestors of what is about to take place.

After the purification, the chiefs of different divisions of Accra assemble according to rank in the reception room adjoining the stool room. The lights are turn off shortly before midnight.

The candidate is then led by the head of the council of royal, the stool priest and several councillors into the stool room. In the stool room he is placed three times on the royal stool by the stool priest. He receives several insignia of office including bracelets and necklace.

The drums announcing the king's enstoolment is beaten in the house and their charges are taken up by talking drums outside the palace informing the people that they have a new king. When the king finally comes out of the stool room he exchanges an oath of allegiance first with the head of the royal council and then with each of the divisional chiefs. After the exchanges, the senior priest of

²⁴¹ The casting of lots ensured that the selection was a matter of God's choice. No one, not even Samuel, could have rigged the outcome.

Accra pours libation to ratify the chiefly contracts. A sheep is then slaughtered, the king and all the chief steps barefooted in its blood, thereby solemnly sealing their oath. Final libation is poured by one of the priests and then drinks are served and everyone departs to their homes.

The Incorporation/Outdooring

The next step in the installation ceremony takes the form of social gathering. In the case of the *Asantes*, the *Asantehemaa* sits in state with the *Mamponhene*²⁴² and Commander of the Right-wing Division of Asanteman on her right, and the *Asumegyahene*, the Commander of the Left-wing Division on her left. Upon entering the durbar grounds (usually the stadium) in a palanquin, dressed in the great battle dress (*Batakari Kесе*), the *Piesie* goes round saluting the throngs of people and finally dismounts in front of the *Asantehemaa*. He takes a gun, fires it once before the Queenmother and the Centre Division, receiving from his men under arms a spontaneous volley of musket fire before he goes to the *Mamponhene* and the Right-wing chiefs and the *Esumegyahene* and the Left-wing chiefs, to repeat the performance. The ceremony shows that at the heart of the army and constitution is the Queen mother the power behind the throne.

For the Ga Kingship, this ceremony is referred to as the inauguration of the king. The inauguration is a public ceremony which takes place outdoors in a mid-afternoon. On the day before the inauguration, the head of the council of royals crown the king with an antelope skin hat which is prepared by a member of one of the *Asere* division families. The antelope is the symbol of the Ga Kingship. The inauguration takes place in a large public space filled by retinues of the chiefs and priest of the Ga state. The king sits on the right hand of the head of the council of royals behind the heads of the three royal houses on a raised dais. The regent, the chief of *Gbese* division, with his retinue sits below the dais on the right hand. On the left is the second ranking Accra Chief.

The inauguration starts with the head of the council of royals presenting the king to the regent and asking the regent to introduce the king to his people. The regent then presents the king to the populace. One of the major priests then pours libation. The oath of allegiance is exchanged mutually with the head of the council of royals on the dais. The king then descends to exchange pledges of loyalty with each chief in the Ga state. When the king finally returns to his seat, the priest of *Nai, Nai Wulomo*, pours libation informing the gods and ancestral shades of what has transpired. Gifts

²⁴² The Mamponhene is the one who acts as the Asantehene when there is none due to death or distoolment. In Akwapim, the Kontihene of Akwapim takes charge in the absence of the Okuapehene (source: <http://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/akropong-stands-still-as-okuapehene-s-death-is-announced.html>) Accessed on 15/3/17.

of cloths are exchanged between the king, priest and chiefs before the king departs.

Personal Ornaments of the Chief

The royal insignia of the Israelite kings were the crown or diadem, the scepter, and the throne.²⁴³ Saul held a spear (1 Sam. 18:10) and wore an armlet (2 Sam. 1:10). From the reign of David onward, the Israelite kings had palaces and personal troops. Most of the kings of Judah were buried at Jerusalem in the royal tombs. The Bible says the kings of Judah were buried in the City of David, that certainly could include somewhere under the palace. It turns out that it was fairly standard practice for Judah's leaders to build their tombs under their homes.²⁴⁴ Several scriptural references associate tombs of prophets and kings with their actual place of residence.

In Ghana, the most outstanding of the chief's regalia is his ceremonial dress. The Kente is the most outstanding ceremonial dress of the chief of the people of southern Ghana. The other ornaments of the Ghanaian chief include jewellery. The head-dress is another ornament for the chief. This may take the form of a cap, hat, helmet, crown, headband, or turban. It is a taboo for a chief to walk barefooted. Walking barefooted is tantamount to distoolment. Sandals therefore form part of his personal ornaments. Other regalia of the Ghanaian chief include umbrellas, palanquins, linguist-sticks or staffs of office. The stool and the skin of certain animals are also very important regalia of the chief. Stools are used by chiefs of Akan, the Ewe, the Ga-Adangme, and other ethnic groups in the southern Ghana while skins are used by chiefs in the Northern part of Ghana. Like ancient Israel, kings in Ghana are also buried at a particular location. Their royal tombs are located at a certain place— that is the royal city (like the Jewish Jerusalem).

The stool or the skin is also one of the most important regalia in African chieftancy. In Akan for example, sacrifice and respect to stools are special peculiarities as formal expression to the ancestral cult. The continuous pouring of blood on these stools makes them black and so they are referred to as *nkonwa* (*nkongua*) *tumtum*, black stools. K. Amponsah has stated that;

These stools are blackened and kept in a temple known as *nkonguafieso* in the chief's palace so that he can guard and offer something to them regularly. The stools are arranged by order of succession and some are regarded as dignified and honourable than others depending upon the achievements of the occupants. The attendants of the *Nkonguafieso* are

²⁴³ Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 22.

²⁴⁴ Baffour Awuah, *As I Journey Along*, 35.

stool bearers and the sons of the chief.²⁴⁵

Throne Names

A feature of the Hebrew royalty was the use of regal names, by which most of the kings are regularly known. The most explicit instance is Zedekiah, whose personal name was Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17). David's personal name may have been Elhanan (cf. 2 Sam 21:19), Uzziah's Azariah (cf. 2 Kings 15:1-7 with 2 Chron 26) Solomon's Jedidiah (cf. 2 Sam 12:24). D. F Payne suggests that the practice was by no means confined to Israel and Judah: the Assyrian king Tiglathpileser III held the throne of Babylon under the name Pul (or *Pulu*) and appears with both names in 1 Chron 5:26.²⁴⁶

The story is not different in Ghanaian chieftancy practises. In Ghana, chiefs are given royal names by which they are called as long as they sit on the throne. These royal names are chosen during the period of confinement when they are placed on the stool in the stool rooms. Examples of regal names taken upon enstoolment include Nii Adama Latse (Ga Mantse), Nii Tete Tsuru I (La Mantse), Osagyefo Oseadiyeo Agyeman Badu II and Otumfuo Osei Tutu I.

Conclusion

The study of kingship from these two contexts reveals that kingship is a divine designation to a chosen clan among a people. Just as in Biblical times especially in the monarchical era, chiefs were chosen and installed and they serve as leaders of the community, so it is in the Ghanaian traditional set-up specifically with Akan and Gas which were the foci of our study. Like ancient Israel, where the monarchs ruled in the stead of God, Ghanaian chieftancy presents chiefs as representatives of God's rulership. The kings served as the custodians of culture and traditions of the people, administered justice and led the people to war.

They were the carriers of the destiny of the entire community. The occurrence of good fortune or bad omen is attributed to their reign. The concept of God who rules through human agents is present not exclusive to the Biblical stories but ubiquitous in most societies.

²⁴⁵ K. Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion Studies (Vol.1)* (Accra: Adwinsa Publications, 1977), 102.

²⁴⁶ Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4*, 22.

Review Exercises

1. In what sense are African kings representatives of God?
2. Explain how Saul rose to become a king in Israel. How does it compare to the practice in your traditional area?
3. What are the roles of the Queen Mother in traditional African society?
4. Are Chiefs spiritual leaders? Explain your answer.
5. In the area of chieftancy, how can the church handle its members who happen to be royals and are candidates for vacant stools?
6. Explain the concept of the black stool in Akan chieftancy tradition. Does the black stool defile a Christian chief who sits on it? Explain.
7. Describe the process involved in the selection of a chief in your area. How does it compare the practice in ancient Israel?
8. Can chiefs and queen-mothers maintain their royal status in society and still be regarded as full members of the church?

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ABOUT BOOK

The seven-chapter book, *Essays in the Old Testament and African Life and Thought*, has been published as a modest attempt to show some areas of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and African life and thought. Throughout the book the authors demonstrate that Africans can better understand the Old Testament if they use their own culture as framework for interpretation, while guarding against any tendencies of syncretism. The authors' desire is that this publication will serve the need of Christians who want to understand God's word, and at the same time prompt similar works in Old Testament studies.

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