

# African Traditional Oath-Swearing: An Evaluation from a Ghanaian Pentecostal Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Although it has been acknowledged that the early European Christian missionaries to Africa have contributed significantly to the emergence and growth of Christianity on the continent, it is also obvious that the ethnocentric tendencies that accompanied their missionary zeal caused them to demonize many aspects of the African cultures. This demonization led to a long-standing debate among African Christians themselves on whether one can be truly African and truly Christian. Despite the fact that the situation seems to have improved greatly in contemporary times, one of the key areas of contention within African Christianity, which has persisted to date, is the chieftaincy institution. To the best of my knowledge however, not much has been researched in this field from Pentecostal perspectives. Using personal observations and participation in Christian Royal conferences as well as personal conversations with some Pentecostal church leaders and some royals in Ghana, this paper examines the functions of the traditional oath swearing for Christians who are chiefs. The paper argues that although, the oath swearing by itself is not inimical to Christian beliefs, Christians who swear oaths should be mindful of the deity invoked in the swearing process. The paper also recommends that to be able to transform unethical and unscriptural aspects of traditional practices and make disciples of all nations, Pentecostal Christians should not be ignorant of traditional practices within their communities. These include the traditional oath swearing, which is the focus of this paper. The paper is therefore an attempt to initiate an important dialogue among African Pentecostals, both scholars and practitioners, on the subject of Christianity and chieftaincy within contemporary times.

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## INTRODUCTION

The question of whether one can be truly African and truly Christian has been a subject of concern for both missiologists and African Christians for some decades now. This concern emerged from the recognition that some of the early Christian missionaries demonized the African culture and considered many of the rich heritage of the African people as pagan.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, this understanding has penetrated into the Africans themselves to the extent that some have become very apprehensive of quite a number of practices within their own culture.<sup>3</sup> Although the situation has improved significantly in contemporary times, one of the key areas of contention within African Christianity, which has persisted to date, is the chieftaincy institution. Many Christians have considered this institution as evil, demonic and incompatible with Christianity. Some Christians will not even be comfortable discussing the subject as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the elements or practices that make the chieftaincy institution to be considered as demonic or inimical to the Christian faith include the pouring of libation, animal sacrifice, fortification of the body, forced polygamy, feeding

<sup>2</sup> Christian Tsekpoe, "Local Species' in African Soil: The Development of James McKeown's Mission Models and Their Implications for the Church of Pentecost Ghana" (PhD Thesis, London: Middlesex University, 2020), 71,162; Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Mission* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2012), 3-4; Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Dorchester: Deo Publishing, 2012); Birgit Meyer, "Make a Complete Break with the Past: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 316-49.

<sup>3</sup> Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Mission*; Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*; Bolaji E Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> In a personal discussion with a group of lay leaders of The Church of Pentecost during a Lay Leaders' School in Teshie-Nungua on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2014, the issue of whether a Christian can be a chief and remain an authentic Christian became a heated argument where the majority of a class of 51 students were of the view that one cannot be a chief and remain an authentic Christian.

of ancestors, the use of alcoholic beverages, chewing of spices and spitting on one's face to make the person strong, divination, rituals of the black stool and traditional oath swearing.<sup>5</sup> This paper will however focus on discussing the traditional oath swearing. The first part will discuss the meaning, significance and implications of traditional oaths whilst the second part will propose a Christian response to the subject from a Pentecostal perspective.

### Some Implications of the Demonization of African Cultures

Onyinah observes that the demonization of the African cultures contributed to the creation of different people groups among Christians in Africa.<sup>6</sup> He identified one of such groups as mission-oriented people. He explains that "these have absorbed mission Christianity wholeheartedly and make war on traditional beliefs and practices with little or no apparent concern for indigenisation."<sup>7</sup> He cited the firing of Ephraim Amu, who was a teacher and a preacher in the Presbyterian Training College at Akropong- Akwapem as an example. Amu introduced Ghanaian music and drumming in the school and also put on the African traditional cloth to preach at Church. His fellow Africans considered his actions as pagan. They were therefore of the opinion that it will not be appropriate to allow him to continue bringing the pagan practices to their only Presbyterian Training College. He was consequently forbidden from preaching in the church.<sup>8</sup> What was happening in Ghana was not different from the situation in other African countries. For example, Bolaji Idowu lamented about Nigerian Christians as follows:

It was a thing entirely out of the question for a Nigerian clergyman to be seen dressed in his own national clothes even in his own house; when there were churches none would dare to enter for worship unless they were 'correctly dressed,' which could only mean that they should be dressed up in European clothes; when it was considered a sacrilege for an 'educated' Christian Nigerian to be seen walking along the street dressed in a Nigerian costume.<sup>9</sup>

Again, Onyinah identified another group of African Christians, who also accept Christianity wholeheartedly but are of the view that Christianity should be practiced within the African culture. They argue that there are pointers to God within the African culture just as God has revealed himself to all people in all cultures. They advocate that the African should be allowed to find Christ in his own culture. Kwame Bediako argues that, "there is within every tradition of culture, history, identity and continuity, elements which lead to Jesus and affirm Him as Lord; but equally, there are within every tradition, elements that lead away from Jesus and deny Him."<sup>10</sup> In presenting the Gospel to people of any culture it is important to identify those elements within the culture that point to Jesus and help the people to identify Him as Lord and Saviour within their own culture.<sup>11</sup> Idowu maintains that seeing Jesus through the eyes of another culture is far reaching, disastrous implications for the church. For him, "its detrimental implication is a denial of, or failure to recognize, the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ who belongs in every race and nation."<sup>12</sup>

### Meaning of Oaths/ Vows

According to Tom Loonen and Mark Rutgers, an oath is a solemn promise that provides the assurance that it will be adhered to by the one taking the it.<sup>13</sup> They further assert that "this assurance is offered by trust in the god invoked in the oath or as a sacred guarantee. Similarly, John Boatright indicates that "most oaths involve a deity, who is appealed to for assistance ("so help me God") or support ("may God be my witness") or enforcement ("may God strike me dead"). The invocation of the divine into the oath is to call upon one greater than the person making the oath and thus makes it binding on the parties involved in the oath.

The binding nature of an oath is corroborated in the scriptures. Hebrew 6:16-17 states that, "now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question, that oath is binding. God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind" (NLT). Because of its importance, oaths need to be made from deep thought and clear understanding. When oaths are taken, they must be obeyed. The Scripture above and many other biblical passages make it clearer that oaths give assurance to those receiving it that the one making the oath cannot change his mind.<sup>14</sup>

It should be noted that apart from the chieftaincy institution, where oaths are taken during the installation ceremony of chiefs, a great number of other institutions also take oaths, including Christian leaders when they are being

<sup>5</sup> Group Workshop Reports during the Royals' Conference Organised by The Church of Pentecost in May 2014 at Gomoah-Fetteh, Central Region, Ghana.

<sup>6</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*, 106.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 106; Philip Laryea, *Ephraim Amu: Nationalist, Poet and Theologian (1899-1995)* (Akropong-Akwapem: Regnum Africa, 2012; Tsekpoe, "'Local Species' in African Soil: The Development of James McKeown's Mission Models and Their Implications for the Church of Pentecost, Ghana.", 60.

<sup>9</sup> Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Kwame Bediako, "Gospel and Culture: Some Insight from the Experience of the Early Church," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 2, no. 2 (1999): 8-17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Kofi Agyekum, "Ntam 'reminiscent Oath' Taboo in Akan," *Language in Society* 33, no. 3 (2004): 317-42.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

called into office. For example, during the ordination ceremony of lay leaders and the clergy in many churches, the ordinands are required to take the oath of their particular office as part of the ordination ceremony. A typical example is The Church of Pentecost, a Pentecostal denomination with its headquarters in Ghana.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, it is known globally that there are professional oaths sworn by some professions, which are intended to establish the commitment and loyalty of members of such professional bodies. These include: the Hippocratic oath also known as the physician's oath (which is one of the oldest professional oaths)<sup>16</sup>, the banker's oath, the armed forces oath and the judicial oath. Again, there are political oaths taken by political office holders. In Ghana for example, some of the political oaths include: the oath of allegiance, the presidential oath, the cabinet oath and the oath of ministers of state.<sup>17</sup> Apart from these oaths, there are host of other oaths that are taken by individuals and institutions such as the wedding vow for people marrying, matriculation vow for fresh students within certain universities and patriotic vows taken by citizens.<sup>18</sup> One key element that can be identified in all these oaths identified, is their binding nature and the obligation the oath places on the one making it. It is therefore palpable to argue that apart from the fact that oath taking is not limited to the chieftaincy institution, it is also obvious that the concept of oath taking is neither demonic nor inimical to the Christian faith.

## METHODOLOGY

In this article, an attempt has been made to generate Christian responses from a Pentecostal perspective. This was done through observations, participation in royal conferences and taking active part in workshops on the extent to which Christians can involve themselves in traditional chieftaincy in Ghana. Additionally, personal conversations were held with some royals who are Christians and some Pentecostal church leaders in Ghana to solicit their views on the relationship between Christianity and the chieftaincy institution in Africa. The purpose for this is to analyse such observations and conversations in a way that can engender dialogue on the subject, since very little research can be found on the subject from Pentecostal perspectives.

### Ghanaian Traditional oaths

Traditionally, oaths referred to in the Akan language of Ghana as *nsuae* are a very important aspect of the installation of chiefs. In Ghana, there are different types of traditional oaths. These include chiefs swearing of allegiance to their superior chiefs, council of elders in the swearing to their chiefs, chiefs swearing to their communities, elders in the royal family or in the palace swearing to a dead chief before he /she takes the final journey. All these various types of oath swearing depend on the customs and practices of the traditional area in question.<sup>19</sup>

The period of oath swearing takes place after the candidate has been confined for a number of days, depending on the community as well as the status or rank of the office, the chief is being prepared for. The oath swearing serves as the peak of the installation process in most indigenous Ghanaian traditional leadership. Opuni-Frimpong observes that "until a new leader swears the traditional oath, he is not considered as fully installed. The new leader first swears to the other leaders as they, in turn, respond to the oath by assuring their loyalty to the new leader."<sup>20</sup> Just like the chiefs, political leaders in Ghana are not permitted by law to assume their leadership positions until they take their oath. Article (80) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana states that "A Minister of State or Deputy Minister shall not enter upon the duties of his unless he has taken and subscribed the oath of allegiance, the oath of Minister of State and the Cabinet oath, as the case may be"<sup>21</sup>

The oath swearing outlines the parameters or the social agreement between traditional leaders and their subjects. The oath is binding on both the leader who swears it and the subjects, to whom it is sworn. The subjects are expected to be loyal to their chief whilst the chief is also under obligation to fulfil his part of the agreement as indicated in the oath. Explaining oath swearing among the Ashanti people of Ghana, George Hagan pointed out that,

The heads of families make their pledges (*nsuae*) to village chiefs. Village chiefs make their pledges to heads of vicinages (*Odikro*). The *Adikrofo* severally swear to their divisional chiefs who, in turn, pledge allegiance to the king of Ashanti ... Through this system of pledges the *Asantehene* obtains formal jural ties and support from all the states in the union: the people serve and support their family heads and chiefs, and through them, their *Odikro*, *Omanhene*, and then the king.<sup>22</sup>

The oath swearing therefore becomes a system that commits everybody, from the paramount chief to the ordinary

<sup>15</sup> The Church of Pentecost *The Church of Pentecost Ministerial Handbook* (Accra: The Church of Pentecost Headquarters, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Boatright, "Swearing to Be Virtuous: The Prospects of a Banker's Oath"; Loonen and Rutgers, "Swearing to Be a Good Banker: Perceptions of the Obligatory Banker's Oath in the Netherlands."

<sup>17</sup> 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana for the various content of the various political oaths taken by Ghanaian politicians.

<sup>18</sup> In Ghana for example, the Ghana National pledge is an oath taken by all Ghanaians, especially during their school days.

<sup>19</sup> Group Workshop Reports of the Royals' Conference Organised by The Church of Pentecost in May 2014 at Gomoah-Fetteh, Central Region, Ghana.

<sup>20</sup> Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Missions: Perspectives of Akan Leadership Formation on Christian Leadership Development* (Accra: SonLife Press: 2012) p. 138

<sup>21</sup> The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana.

<sup>22</sup> George Hagan, "The Golden Stool and the Oaths to the King of Ashanti," *Research Review, Institute of African Studies, Accra: Ghana* 4, no. 3 (1968): 23.

individual in the community to behave responsibly. Great importance is attached to the oath that is sworn and as a result, each party tries as much as possible to fulfil his part of the oath.

### The functions of traditional Ghanaian traditional oaths

To better appreciate the traditional oaths and their functions, this article shall examine a portion of an oath sworn by Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II. This oath is traditionally referred to as the *Ntamkese* (the great oath) of the Ashantis.<sup>23</sup>

**Table 1:** Twi and English Versions of *Ntamkese*

<i>The oath in Twi</i> <sup>24</sup>	<i>English Translation of the Oath</i> <sup>25</sup>
<i>Osei ne Poku Nana ne me;</i>	I am the grandson of Osei and Poku;
<i>Bonsu Nana ne me;</i>	I am the grandson of Nana Bonsu;
<i>Agyeman Nana ne me;</i>	I am the grandson of Nana Agyeman;
<i>Me wɔfa ne Kwame Kyeretwie;</i>	Nana Kwame Kyeretwie was my uncle;
<i>Opku Ware II yɛ me nuapanin;</i>	Opoku Ware II was my elder brother;
<i>Sɛ ɛnɛ, me nuapanin Opoku ware kɔ nʌkuraa,</i>	Today, my elder brother Opoku Ware is gone to the village,
<i>Na Kumasefoɔ adaworoma, mode ne tuo ama me,</i> <i>Sɛ menfa nhwe mo so hwɛpa,</i>	And by the grace of the people of Kumasi, I have been given his gun to rule;
<i>Amma mo manmmuo pa, sɛdɛɛ me nananom yɛɛ a,</i>	If I do not rule well as my ancestors did,
<i>Meto Ntam Kɛsɛɛ.</i>	I violate the great oath.

A close observation of the content of the oath above reveals that the traditional oath has different functions. First is Leadership function. The chief pointed out that the people of Kumasi have given him a “gun to rule” and if he fails to rule well as his ancestors did, he “violates the great oath.” The gun to rule in this case represents the leadership mandate given him. To continue being the chief, he must prove to be a good leader, just as his predecessors did. Opuni-Frimpong discloses that “the Akan traditional oath and the swearing period indicate that the oath-swearing component in the installation process provides more than a social contract and political direction in traditional governance. It provides further major grounds for traditional leadership formation.”<sup>26</sup> He added that “the chief through the oath affirms his willingness to lead the community in humility, providing good governance and protection to the people.”<sup>27</sup> The chief assures the people of his readiness to be faithful and courageous in leading them to fight their enemies and continue the good works of his ancestors. Failure to do this means that, he has failed his leadership obligations and this is enough reason for his removal from the throne. Right from start, the oath helps to make the chief understand the various conditions that can cause him to lose his position of leadership, authority and power that is entrusted to him.<sup>28</sup>

Second, the traditional oath swearing provides social functions. It should be pointed out that even though the chief is the leader of the community and yields power and authority over his subjects, the oath places him under control and makes him responsible to his subjects as well. This is because, by taking the oath, he agrees that his subjects have the power to dethrone him if he misbehaves as a king. The oath thus provides checks and balances for social life and governance of the traditional community.<sup>29</sup> When the chief holds the sword, he is to mention all the names of his ancestors. In the oath quoted above, it is evident that Otumfuo Osei Tutu II traced his genealogy, starting from his grandfathers, then his uncle and finally his brother, who was his immediate predecessor. By this, he demonstrates knowledge of the history of the community he is coming to lead. Knowing the history of the land is an indication that the new chief is ready to build on the foundation of his predecessors. He is to emulate their good example and continue the good work they have done before him. Nana Addo Dankwa III argues that,

Our ancestors, therefore instituted the oath-swearing systems, which, in effect, is a sort of social contract, binding both the family offering leadership and the families forming the community to observe strictly the agreement they had accepted. The leader had jurisdiction over all the members of the community and gave political direction, led tribal armies to wars, settled disputes, administered land and did many acts for the good governance of the community.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Twi is a language spoken by some portion of the Akans of Ghana. The Akans constitute about 46% of the Ghanaian population.

<sup>25</sup> For the translation of this oath into English, see Opuni-Frimpong, 142.

<sup>26</sup> Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Mission*.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Nana Addo Dankwa III, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana: The Future*, 72. In Opuni-Frimpong, 139.

Here again, the chief must consider himself as being accountable to the community he leads. He can therefore not act independently. The chief must accept and openly affirm the boundaries of his authority and power. During the swearing of an oath, the chief is “made aware that the stool or skin is always greater than him (the occupier), a fact that is an eloquent check on despotism. A chief has limited power, for he could be deposed, if he incurs the displeasure of his subjects. He cannot act independently of the traditional council or head of the community.”<sup>31</sup> George Hagan indicates that,

Oaths have their source in some tragic social event, and the desire to prevent such a tragedy recurring makes the oath one of the most important supports of the social system as it makes enforceable the rules of social intercourse. Generally, the invocation of a tragedy (*ntam*), even when it does not operate as a binding force behind a pledge, acts as a device which enables one person to regulate or control the behavior of another. Thus oaths do not only permit the king and his chiefs to command the services of their subjects, but also enable slaves and commoners to impose obligations and restraints on the king and his chiefs, as on any other individual in the nation.<sup>32</sup>

Third, the traditional oath swearing provides protective functions. This is because, throughout the oath swearing, the chief assures his subjects of protecting them in times of war and trouble. According to Kofi Dapaah Okae Gyening, the military functions of the chief as a leader puts a responsibility on him to provide protection and security to his people as enshrined in the oath he swears. He is therefore expected to serve and defend his subjects at all times.<sup>33</sup>

Fourth, the traditional oath swearing provides moral functions. During confinement, the chief is taught the implication of the oath he will take. He is expected to avoid being corrupt and immoral. He is taught to be disciplined, self-controlled and a man of integrity. Again, the removal from office is linked with the neglect or violation of the moral obligations of the oath one took when he was being made chief. The oath therefore becomes a check and a reminder to the chief to live a morally upright life and be of good reputation.<sup>34</sup>

Fifth, the traditional oath swearing provides legal/ judicial functions. “During the oath swearing, the people and the new leader set up together the legal framework and the parameters of power and authority, the breach of which incurs removal from office.”<sup>35</sup> The oath itself becomes a legal instrument guiding the effective governance of the community.<sup>36</sup> Besides this, when there is a dispute between two parties, one of them can invoke an oath. When this happens, it becomes the obligation of the chief whose oath has been invoked to investigate the matter and give judgement and inflict a fine on the guilty person to pay. Whoever is not satisfied with the judgement can invoke a higher oath and compel the judgement to be set aside and the case taken to a higher court.<sup>37</sup>

### Lessons from Traditional Oath Swearing

Besides the functions, it is also important to point out that, the oath swearing moment is a very deep learning moment since the whole process provides the new leaders with a lot of helpful information about leadership as well as about the people he is going to lead. The oath-swearing provides the opportunity to offer rich information, not only to the new leader, but also to the larger community.<sup>38</sup> Lessons that can be gleaned from the traditional oath swearing include the following:

1. **The fear of God:** Since God is the Supreme Being, the chief sees his authority as one under that of God. Agreeing with Okyeame Ampratwum, Opuni-Frimpong indicates that the fear of God and willingness to serve his subjects are the major values taught to the chief during the swearing of an oath.<sup>39</sup>
2. **Confidentiality:** The oath of secrecy helps the chief to learn the importance of keeping confidential issues. Before the chief swears an oath, he learns that “You do not say all you see and hear in public.”<sup>40</sup>
3. **Hard work and Service:** It is believed that since chiefs are expected to work with *Nananom* (the ancestors) and the elders of the community, they are bound by oath to work hard just as their ancestors did.<sup>41</sup>
4. **Loyalty and Team Work:** The chief needs to be conscious of the fact that he cannot plot against the elders. He can also not work in isolation. As he demands loyalty from his subjects, the oath reminds him also to be loyal to them.<sup>42</sup>
5. **Communication Skills:** By swearing the oath, one of the lessons the chief is thought is that “You are coming

<sup>31</sup> Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Mission*. 140.

<sup>32</sup> Hagan, “The Golden Stool and the Oaths to the King of Ashanti,” 23.

<sup>33</sup> Kofi Dapaah Okae Gyening “Chieftaincy and Ghana Culture” [http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index\\_1.php?linkid=65&adate=26/05/2015](http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index_1.php?linkid=65&adate=26/05/2015) *National Commission on Culture*. Assessed 08/092015.

<sup>34</sup> Personal conversation with Nana Kwesi Bondam IV, *Sahen* of Gomoa Assin Traditional Area and Chief of Gomoa-Kyiren in the Central Region on January 8, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Mission*.139

<sup>36</sup> Personal conversation with Nana Kwesi Bondam IV, 01/08/2017.

<sup>37</sup> Hagan, “The Golden Stool and the Oaths to the King of Ashanti,” 27.

<sup>38</sup> Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Mission*, 139.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 139-140.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

to lead the people so learn how to speak to them.”<sup>43</sup> As a result of this, he needs to choose his words carefully, communicating in the clearest and most coherent ways to the understanding of his subjects.

6. **Respect for Others:** The chief also learns to respect the opinion of other people since no one person is a repository of knowledge. The chief must also be mindful of the fact that respect is reciprocal. It is not commanded but earned by respecting others. In this case, the chief is expected to respect his elders and his own family members. They are to be given their rightful places as royals.<sup>44</sup>
7. **Moral Chastity:** The chief needs to be careful with other people’s wives. As the leader of the community, he is under obligation to set a moral standard for his subjects to follow. If he begins to live a morally questionable life, it is a violation of the oath he has taken and his leadership can be revoked.<sup>45</sup>

## DISCUSSIONS

### A Pentecostal Christian’s Response to Traditional Oath Swearing in Ghana

The Christian God himself is King and rules in His Kingdom. The world and everything in it belong to this great King who is the creator.<sup>46</sup> These include all kings and their kingdoms. Psalm 22:28 points out that “for the kingdom is the LORD’s, and He rules over the nations.” Again, in interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Daniel pointed out to the King that he will be driven from men into the bush until he comes to the recognition that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”<sup>47</sup>

These Scriptures are pointers to the fact that the kingdoms of this world belong to God. He is looking for people who will be willing to serve Him as kings so that he will give the various kingdoms to them for His own glory. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, including Ghana, the people who will take these kingdoms have demonized the chieftaincy institutions and rejected it to the disappointment of God. The rejection of the traditional chieftaincy system is not in doubt among Christians, especially those of the Pentecostal traditions. Birgit Meryer postulates that “while other groups in society, among them leaders of the Catholic and Protestant mission churches, try to come to terms with local traditions and to reconcile new and old ideas in order to develop a genuinely African synthesis, pentecostals oppose this revaluation of tradition and culture.”<sup>48</sup> There is the need for Pentecostal Christians to recognise the fact that God is interested in the affairs of men, including who becomes a chief within a particular community in all generations. Just as God was interested in chiefs in the Old Testament times, so also is He interested in chiefs within these contemporary times.

In discussing traditional oaths, however, one question that is critical and needs to engage the attention of Pentecostal Christians is, whether the oath is sworn to the Christian God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ or to another god. Christian chiefs will want to know if by swearing the traditional oath, they have not sinned against the Almighty God. This is a question that demands an honest answer. It must not be overlooked in the Christian response to the traditional chieftaincy institution in Ghana. In cultures where the oath is sworn to deities other God the Father of Jesus Christ, there is the need for such Christian chiefs to collaborate with their kingmakers and elders of their communities to provide a roadmap that can transform such processes in a way that will surrender the oath swearing to the God of the Bible.

Secondly, Christians should not be ignorant of the content and process of traditional oath swearing in the local communities. This study has already established the fact that traditional oaths are more than a mere traditional ritual. Rather, they are part of traditional leadership structure that ensures security and continuity for the community. It regulates behaviour at all levels. It is therefore important for Christians of every community to fully understand the process and content of the traditional oath swearing within their local community. This gives them the opportunity to carefully analyse the implications of these oaths. By studying the content of the oath, one will be able to tell whether that oath glorifies God or not. As far back as 1940, Ephraim Amu contended that:

There are deep truths underlying our indigenous religions, truth which may not be equal in weight to Christian truths, but which are deemed representations of the great Christian truths. Let this truths be made use of in teaching the greater truths to the Africans. The very religious Athenians believed that there was a God they did not know, and they built an altar to Him, and they were right. St Paul found no better language in which to refer to the God he was preaching than in the Athenians’ own words on the altar: ‘To the unknown God.’ If Christianity were given to us by such methods as would make it intelligible to us, I believe the results would be amazing.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>45</sup> Personal conversation with Nana Kwesi Bondam IV, 01/08/2017

<sup>46</sup> The concept of God as creator is not in doubt among both Christians and African traditional believers. In Akan, one of God’s names is *ɔbodɛɛ* meaning, the creator.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel 4:25 b (NKJV)

<sup>48</sup> Meyer, “Make a Complete Break with the Past” 317”.

<sup>49</sup> Ephraim Amu, “The Position of Christianity in Modern Africa,” in *The National Review of Missions*, ed. D. D. William Paton and M. A. Margaret Sinclair, vol. 29 (London: Presbyterian Church House, 1940), 480.

Christian royals should therefore be encouraged to get involved in decision making within the royal families. Understanding the traditional systems will give them the opportunity to contribute their Christian values that can be introduced into traditional issues including the content and the process of the traditional oath swearing.

The mission of the church needs to be understood in context. Christians have been commanded by Jesus to make disciples *of* the nations<sup>50</sup>. It is unfortunate that the Church has turned out to be making disciples *from* the nations. Even though *salems* are no longer in existence, the African Christian is still alienated from his own cultural roots, to a large extent, a situation Birgit Meyer calls “a complete break with the past”.<sup>51</sup> Because of this misunderstanding of the mission of the Church, Christian disciples are not able to impact and transform their societies. There is a complete disconnect between the disciple and the society in which he lives. God is expecting believers to make disciples who can truly be Christians and truly African chiefs.

As suggested earlier, it is the responsibility of Christians to study the content of their traditional oath and identify the strengths of these oaths. If there are elements that do not glorify God in any of the oaths, such as swearing an oath to satanic objects or deities other than God, Christians should be able to make inputs and suggest modification and change. This however can only happen if Christians see the chieftaincy institution as belonging to their own Father in heaven and actively involve themselves in it. Christians should not get involved in chieftaincy, with the pre-conceived mind that they are going to change a bad custom, but they should enter into it with the mind-set of learners who want to understand the system. This however should be done with openness of heart to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In this case, the role of the Christian as salt and light of the world will come to bear. Christian royals should see themselves as missionaries who have been sent by God to disciple the chieftaincy institution for God's glory.

It is on record that some of the traditional oaths can be changed, modified or forbidden, if they are found to be obsolete or if the content does not glorify God. It is identified that some oaths of the past have already been amended. Hagan identifies three important oaths of which two are practically obsolete. He indicated that these oaths are *Nhyira*, *Taame* and *Kwasida*. *Nhyira* which stand for cursing the *Omanhene*. The content is as follows:

**Table 2:** Twi and English translation of *Nhyira*

<i>Twi</i> <sup>52</sup>	<i>English Translation</i> <sup>53</sup>
“Obosom ... kum Ohene,	“Spirit of [name of shrine] kill the king.
Efiri se adee a wode aye me.	For what you have done to me.
Me dee meko, wo nso so fa ka.”	I am going away (to die) and I leave the debt to you.”

Hagan explains that “once a certain man in the time of Ntim Gyakari pronounced this oath/curse on the then leader of the Kumawu and the latter died. So, this oath or curse was forbidden.”<sup>54</sup> This made it clear that there are conditions under which some type of oaths can be considered obsolete or inappropriate and stopped or changed. The role of the Christian chief therefore is to clearly understand the oath-swearing and contribute his/her quota as an ambassador of Christ within the traditional set up. Again, it is time for Christians to accept the chieftaincy institution allow God's glory alone to shine in all palaces.

Third, church leaders and the chiefs should work hand in hand for the wellbeing of their communities. In the Old Testament for example, the kings of Israel worked closely with the priests and the prophets of God. Chiefs should not be seen as enemies of the church. Also, church leaders should not be regarded as antagonists of chieftaincy. To be able to do this successfully, the Author proposes that each palace should institute daily or weekly devotional prayers to take care of the spiritual and prophetic needs of the chiefs, the royals and the entire community. This is to say that there should be a conscious effort by the church to extend chaplaincy services to palaces. This will not only provide spiritual direction for the chief, but also serve as spiritual protection to the chief and his subjects.

### Oaths Have Implications

Everybody who swears oaths must be conscious of the fact that every oath sworn has implications. Whether it is the chieftaincy oath, the political oath, the professional oath, or Christian leadership oath, they must be obeyed in order not to incur curses upon oneself. The Bible records different incidents where people took oaths. Some were good oaths that brought blessings to the people who took such oaths and fulfilled them.<sup>55</sup> Others did not obey their oaths and these resulted in tragedy.<sup>56</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:5 warns that it is better not to make a vow than to make the vow and not pay. It has

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>51</sup> Meyer, “Make a Complete Break with the Past” kindly insert the page number .”

<sup>52</sup> Hagan, “The Golden Stool and the Oaths to the King of Ashanti.”, 27.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>55</sup> See 1 Samuel 1:11, 24-28; 2:21

<sup>56</sup> Joshua 9:18; 2 Samuel 21:1ff.

been shown clearly in this presentation that just like biblical oaths, Ghanaian traditional oaths are important vows that should not be treated lightly. Refusal to adhere to the content of the oath has serious consequences for both the chief and the subjects. As a result of that these oaths should be taken seriously.

## CONCLUSION

The argument presented in this paper is not whether Christians can swear traditional oaths or not but the point here is that first, the content of the oath should be pleasing to God. Secondly, Christians should not invoke any other deity apart from the Almighty God as a witness to the oath because the Lord God is a jealous God. Finally, when oaths are sworn, they need to be obeyed. Traditional oaths, which have been the subject of discussion in this paper, should be treated in the same way as all other important oaths. The study recommends that -Christians should get involved in traditional chieftaincy and oath swearing, it is not just the swearing that is important, but the discipline to be faithful to God and all subjects based on the content of the oaths that are sworn. This is what makes the royal a true example of Christ in the palace.

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