




Afua Kuma's Prayers and Praises as Evidence of a Vibrant Primal Substructure in African Christianity

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ABSTRACT

Following from the assertion that there exists a symbiosis between Christianity and the Primal Substructure in Africa, this paper sets out to examine Afua Kuma's Jesus of the Deep Forest using Harold Turner's six feature analysis of primal religions. It focuses on how Afua Kuma's poetry builds upon the six features of the primal worldview with her new insights from the Christian faith. The author argues that this is evidence of the vibrant primal substructure in African Christianity. This article thus contributes to the growing body of scholarship on African Christianity and its primal underpinnings and Christianity as a non-Western religion

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INTRODUCTION

Kwame Bediako notes in his analysis of Christianity in Africa that:

The Christian tradition as historically received through the missionary enterprise has, on the whole, been unable to sympathise with or relate to the spiritual realities of the [primal] world-view. It is not so much a case of an unwillingness to relate to these realities, as of not having learnt to do so.¹

Afua Kuma's *Jesus of the Deep Forest* stands out as a successful conversion of the primal worldview, turning it towards Christ. Described as "theology from where the faith must live"², Afua Kuma's poetry demonstrates the vibrancy of African Christianity as it engages with the traditional forms of the primal religions of Ghana at the grassroots. It, therefore, provides a platform for the analysis of the symbiosis existing between the primal substructure and the Christian faith. On this basis, this article proceeds to examine Afua Kuma's *Jesus of the Deep Forest* using Harold Turner's six feature analysis of primal religions.

Primal Religions and the Christian Faith

Bringing together the religions of circumpolar peoples, of different African peoples, the peoples of India, South East Asia, Inner Asia, North and South America, Australia and the Pacific has proved a challenge for scholars of religion over the years.³ The similarities and 'family likenesses' among these religions had been observed through a number of studies, but an appropriate designation proved quite elusive. Earlier designa-

¹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 69.

² Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa, the Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong: Regnum Africa, 2000), 8.

³ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History, Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 120.

tions like ‘primitive’ and ‘animist’ carried with them derogatory and evolutionistic undertones which made them unsuitable for academic discourse.⁴

In 1963, John V. Taylor, in his book *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* proposed the designation ‘primal’ and gradually this became, in concerned circles, a “more widely acceptable”⁵ term in the treatment of this worldwide phenomenon. In 1976, John B. Taylor’s introduction to the World Council of Churches Consultation on Primal World-View elaborated on the term ‘primal’ as the one used to describe the fundamental nature of forms of spirituality or cosmology that historically existed prior to and have contributed to other known religious systems like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.⁶ Turner, one of the earliest promoters of the designation, defines primal religions as

The most basic or fundamental religious forms in the overall history of mankind [which] have preceded and contributed to the other great religious systems. In other words, there are important senses in which they are both primary and prior; they represent a common religious heritage of humanity.⁷

Turner’s six feature analysis has served as a basis for several studies of primal religions subsequently. Taylor notes his preference for ‘primal worldviews’ rather than ‘primal religions’, pointing out that many non-adherents of primal religions are still greatly influenced by their primal backgrounds. He defines the ‘primal worldview’ as that which encompasses the underlying beliefs, values, understandings of reality and cosmologies that are prevalent among both adherents and non-adherents of primal religion.⁸

In gaining a clear understanding of the designation ‘primal’ one can synthesize the reality that primal worldviews or religions are ‘the substructure of Christianity.’⁹ This implies that the primal worldview is never obliterated but merely built upon by Christianity. Andrew Walls notes that since 1945 there has been a mass movement of primal peoples towards Christianity and Islam.¹⁰ This is corroborated by recent studies. In Ghana, for example, the Christian population grew from 4.7% in 1910 to 61.5% in 2010, implying a correspondent decline in adherents of primal religions.¹¹ Indeed the general trend in West Africa has also shown a decline of adherents to the primal religions from 72.9% to 15.1% within the same 100 years.¹² Furthermore, data from the recent 2021 census shows that Christians in Ghana are 71.3%, while Traditionalists are 3.2% of the national population.¹³

Walls calls this phenomenon a recession but is quick to note that:

One product of the process of recession has been the absorption of much of the configuration of primal religions into Christian and Islamic communities.¹⁴

⁴ The term ‘Primitive’ takes its source from the Great Chain of being concept which grades all creatures from the lowest to the highest and views ‘less civilized’ cultures as bestial and the missing link between animals and the polished cultures. Gillian Bediako discusses the development of this concept and the Four Stages Theory. Bediako, Gillian M., *Primal Religion and the Bible, William Robertson Smith and His Heritage* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 46-63 ‘Animist’ – a term coined by armchair anthropologist, E.B. Tylor, was used by the Edinburgh 1910’s Commission IV report to describe “the religious beliefs of more or less backward or degrade peoples all over the world; a system the chief feature of which is belief in the occult power of the souls of individuals, and their capability of continued existence after death.” W.H.T. Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference*, (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 139.

⁵ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 120.

⁶ John B. Taylor (ed.), *Primal World-Views, Christian Dialogue with Traditional Thought Forms*, (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1976), 3f.

⁷ Harold Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ *Australian Essays in World Religions* (Bedford Park; Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1977): 27-37(28).

⁸ Taylor (ed.), *Primal World-Views, Christian Dialogue with Traditional Thought Forms*, 3f.

⁹ Andrew F. Walls, Thoughts on the Background to the [Primal Religion as the Substructure of Christianity] Project in Gillian Bediako, ‘Editorial’, *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (December 2008), 1-4 (2).

¹⁰ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 131.

¹¹ Todd M. Johnson, & Kenneth R. Ross (eds.), *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 132f.

¹² Johnson and Ross. (eds.), *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010*, 132f.

¹³ Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census*, General Report Volume 3C, November 2021, 58.

¹⁴ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 132.

Lamin Sanneh makes a similar point noting that Christianity and Islam have been indigenized by the primal religions of Africa.¹⁵ Walls further asserts that primal religions may be viewed as having a continuous life within the universal faiths and that Christianity has thrived most on the primal substructure throughout history.¹⁶ Elsewhere, Walls stresses the need for this vital engagement with or conversion of the primal substructure, tracing this from Christianity's first shift from its Judaic roots into the Graeco-Roman setting. He posits that "conversion of the primal religion implies converting the past, converting what makes us who we are, including the mental maps of the universe which we all operate."¹⁷ Using "mental maps of the universe" in place of worldview, Walls speaks of a turning or a transformation of all that exists in man's primal worldview towards God.¹⁸

Afua Kuma's Biography

Christiana Afua Gyan is the 'formal' name of the African poet popularly known as Afua Kuma. A native of Obo, a town located in the Kwahu Mountains of Ghana's Eastern Region, Afua Kuma was the daughter of committed Presbyterian parents, with her father serving as an elder of the local assembly.¹⁹ Her name suggests that there may have been two Afua's (female born on Friday) in the household, and she being the younger received the designation, Kuma (younger). Afua Kuma's marriage to Kwadwo Frempong led to her settling in Asempaneye (Atuobikrom), where she worked as a farmer and a well-known traditional midwife.²⁰

Although Afua Kuma was raised as a Presbyterian, the conversion of her two 'troublesome' children by the Church of Pentecost led to her joining that church. She became an even more passionate and active member of the Church of Pentecost when she lost her brother, an occurrence that is perceived as having been quite traumatic for her.²¹ Although Afua Kuma had not received any formal education, it is obvious that through her Christian upbringing and regular fellowship with the Church of Pentecost she had gained a firm grasp of the message of the Bible. Indeed it was during one such church meeting that when the opportunity was given for congregants to burst out into spontaneous praise, after the custom of the Church of Pentecost, Afua Kuma burst out for the first time with a unique praise poem that surprised the entire congregation. None had ever praised in this way before, for she had burst out in a skillful and poetical oratory that exalted Jesus Christ. And from that day Afua Kuma continued to compose much more of such sweet and meaningful poetry till she passed into glory. What was so unique and significant about Afua Kuma's prayer of praise?

An African Primal Form

Afua Kuma's poetry is significant when placed against the backdrop of the history of the church in Africa. The church in Africa for many years had very little that could be called African, apart from perhaps the indigenes who were members of the church. John V. Taylor, a European priest who lived in Uganda, decried this state of affairs passionately stating,

It is bad enough that religious pictures, films and filmstrips should have almost universally shown a white Christ, child of a white mother, master of white disciples; that he should be worshipped almost exclusively with European music set to translations of European hymns, sung by clergy and people wearing European dress in buildings of an archaic European style, that the form of worship should bear almost no relation to traditional African ritual nor the content of the prayers to contemporary African life ...²²

¹⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity, the Religious Impact*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 211.

¹⁶ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 133.

¹⁷ Walls, *Thoughts on the Background to the Project*, .2.

¹⁸ Walls, *Thoughts on the Background to the Project*, .1f.

¹⁹ Philip T. Laryea, 'St. Ignatius of Antioch and Afua Kuma of Kwahu, A Study in some Images of Jesus in Second Century Christianity and Modern African Christianity' (Unpublished MTh. Thesis, The School of Theology, University of Natal, Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2000), . 51f.

²⁰ Afua Kuma, , *Jesus of the Deep Forest, the Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981) 3.

²¹ Laryea, 'St. Ignatius of Antioch and Afua Kuma of Kwahu', 52.

²² John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision, Christian Presence amid African Religion*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963 reprinted 1994), 13.

This sad state of affairs can be described as the legacy of the missionary movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which though well-intended were fraught with many problematic notions of Africa and its people. The fundamental belief that Africans were animists and had no religion placed missionaries on a war-path with anything African. Branding all African practices as heathen and ‘fetish’, they set about establishing their own form of Christian righteousness – European or Western culture as ‘Christian culture’. Taylor makes an interesting point by referring to his aforementioned list of grievances as mere ‘outward forms’ that can easily be replaced or corrected. The central factor in dealing with the negative legacy of the Western missionaries is not the outward form, but in Taylor’s view, the acceptability of true, unrestrained African Christian spirituality. The author finds Taylor’s question as most pertinent: ‘...If Africa offered [Christ] the praises and petitions of her total, uninhibited humanity, would they be acceptable?’²³

Although the outward form is not central as has already been stated, the outward form somewhat reflects the content and appears to be the first point of call. This is the factor, the author believes, caused the stir among the congregants of Asempaneye Church of Pentecost and other subsequent audiences of Kuma. The oratory skill and creativity displayed by Kuma in praising God that day was only to be found in the royal courts of Akan chiefs. The form of Kuma’s prayers and praises were so close to the *Apae*, the poetry recited for Akan chiefs on special occasions, that although the role of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged as her inspiration, some scholars suggest that it is likely Kuma had some earlier exposure to *Apae*.²⁴ Shedding light on *Apae*, linguistics expert, Kwesi Yankah notes,

The aim of *apae* is primarily that of bringing into sharp focus, and celebrating, the royal personality. In furtherance of this, all notable events in the history of the royalty are highlighted and poeticized, but the poeticization consists essentially of performing and dramatizing a series of royal appellations in which are telescoped the notable deeds and personality traits of the stool.²⁵

Yankah explains that *apae* etymologically derives from *pae* which means “to cry out the titles of.” Thus the phrase *opae ohene (mmrane)* means “he cries out the titles of the chief.”²⁶ Noting that praise is the basic underlying theme in *apae*, Yankah avers that “within each stanza, the series of images captured are often conceptually related and are piled up to underline or emphasize a particular royal trait or demeanor.”²⁷ An excerpt from Kuma’s poetry demonstrates this:

Yebetonton Yesu Kristo din ho.

Ampa ara! Ese no, efata no.

Yebebo no mmeran.

Obirempɔn Yesu a wadi aninsem

Ono na yefre no Okatakɔyi

Ewiasɛ amansan mu Okokuroko.

Opanten a yemmɔ no mmaa

*Asemputapon a yenno no sukɔ*²⁸

We are going to praise the name of Jesus Christ

We shall announce his many titles:

They are true and they suit him well, so it is fitting that we do this.

All-powerful Jesus

who engages in marvelous deeds,

he is the one called Hero – Okatakɔyi!

Of all earthly dominions he is the master;

the Python not overcome with mere sticks, the Big Boat which cannot be sunk²⁹

This is what caused the stir in that Pentecost church meeting. Kuma was using this splendid cultural praise form to exalt Jesus Christ and this has been viewed as indigenous Christology by scholars reviewing

²³ Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 16.

²⁴ Laryea, ‘St. Ignatius of Antioch and Afua Kuma of Kwahu’, 52f.

²⁵ Kwesi Yankah, ‘To Praise or Not to Praise the King: The Akan “Apae” in the Context of Referential Poetry’ *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Special Issue on Epic and Panegyric Poetry in Africa (Autumn, 1983), 381-400 (390), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819158> Accessed: 19/10/2011 18:19.

²⁶ Yankah, ‘To Praise or Not to Praise the King: The Akan “Apae”’, 391.

²⁷ Yankah, ‘To Praise or Not to Praise the King: The Akan “Apae”’, 391.

²⁸ Afua Kuma, *Afua Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, Kwaebrirentuw ase Yesu, (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981), p.5

²⁹ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.

her poems.³⁰

Kuma's divinely inspired praise, although rooted in Akan social ritual, is creatively relevant to even contemporary African life using modern imagery like bulldozers, police, etc. to convey its message. The use of this primal or pre-Christian form may be likened to the similar adaptation of pre-Christian forms by the Celtic Christians of the 4th century of which the *Lorica* or *St. Patrick's Breastplate* stands out.³¹

Harold Turner's Six Feature Framework of Primal Religions

In order to appreciate Kuma's prayers and praises as reflecting an engagement with the Ghanaian primal context, Turner offers a framework of six cardinal features of primal religions or worldviews which must be thoroughly understood. Turner's six features present themselves as a useful tool for assessing and understanding primal contexts because they were based on extensive research of about 1300 religious movements published in a bibliography³² about a decade prior to the publication of his article espousing the six features. Reviewing Turner's bibliography co-authored with Robert Mitchell, Fernandez notes that,

Robert Mitchell and Harold Turner have given us a particularly valuable compilation: 1300 references have been annotated, and often within an aptness that derives from the authors' experience in fieldwork on these movements in West Africa.³³

Further to this bibliography, Turner makes available on microfiche a collection of material on new religious movements from around the world also based on extensive fieldwork. Turner's work is important because as John B. Taylor stresses "Any dialogue with primal world-views must be based on studies of a wide variety of primal societies."³⁴ In applying Turner's model however, he himself cautions that "not all primal traditions will exhibit every feature and their emphases across the various features will vary."³⁵ With this in mind, this article briefly explores Turner's Six Feature Analysis of Primal Religions.

The first feature Turner notes is that the primal worldview is characterized by "Kinship with Nature".³⁶ In this feature which he calls the ecological aspect of primal religion, he posits that

There is a profound sense in many primal societies that man is akin to nature, a child of Mother Earth and brother to the plants and animals which have their own spiritual existence and place in the universe.³⁷

Turner notes that this kinship with nature results in the treatment of nature with immense respect and reverence and reduces wanton destruction of nature.

Next, Turner discusses the concept of "Human Weakness" as a core feature of primal religion. By this, he refers to "the deep sense that man is finite, weak and impure or sinful and stands in need of a power not his own."³⁸ Turner alludes to Rudolf Otto's description of man's fundamental response to 'the Holy' or numinous in acknowledgment that men are mere creatures. Turner describes this concept of human frailty as "an authentic religious sensibility coupled with a realistic assessment of man's condition."³⁹

Turner introduces his third feature as complimenting the second feature: "the conviction that man is not alone in the universe" but exists with "more powerful" and "ultimate powers or beings" in the "spiritual

³⁰ Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 15.

³¹ Gillian M. Bediako, "'Be Thou My Vision': the Lorica and Early Irish Christian Worship in African Perspective", *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (June 2006), 46-52 (47f).

³² Robert Cameron Mitchell, & Harold W. Turner, (compilers), *A Bibliography of Modern African Religious Movements*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

³³ James W. Fernandez, "Review of 'A Bibliography of Modern African Religious Movements by Robert Cameron Mitchell & Harold W. Turner; Bibliography on Spirit Possession and Spirit Mediumship by Irving I. Zaretsky" in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Jun., 1968), 611, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/670904>. Accessed: 02/11/2011 09:58.

³⁴ Taylor, *Primal World-Views*, .3.

³⁵ Turner, 'The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,' .32.

³⁶ Turner, 'The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,' 30.

³⁷ Turner, 'The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,' 30.

³⁸ Turner, 'The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,' 31.

³⁹ Turner, 'The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,' 31.

world”.⁴⁰ The concept of transcendence is vital to primal worldviews and the transcendent realm has different categorizations, hierarchies and traits. The transcendent spirits are either hostile and malevolent or ambivalent and benevolent, ensuring protection, provision and guidance for human beings.⁴¹

Linking the fourth feature to the third, Harold Turner elucidates that primal societies believe that “men can enter into a relationship with the benevolent spirit world”.⁴² By entering into such a relationship with transcendent powers they gain access to their powers and blessings and receive protection from evil forces against whom they are helpless if left on their own. Their relationship through customs, rituals, sacrifices and sometimes religious specialists, connects them to “the transcendent source of true life and practical salvation”.⁴³

The fifth feature of primal societies is the view of “Man’s Afterlife”⁴⁴ which Turner believes is a further development of the understanding of the transcendent realm and the building of relations with that realm. Man’s relation with the transcendent goes beyond life into death. Primal societies believe in the realm of the dead and often there is an ancestral cult which helps them to relate with this realm. Turner observes that the ancestors are seen as playing a mediatory role between the transcendent and humans.⁴⁵

Finally, Turner proposes a sixth feature, “the Physical as Sacramental of the Spiritual”,⁴⁶ asserting that primal societies are convinced that there is no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. They view the ‘physical’ as merely acting as a vehicle for ‘spiritual power. He explains:

The one set of powers, principles and patterns runs through all things on earth and in the heavens and welds them into a unified cosmic system.⁴⁷

This implies that all things that happen are interconnected and are traced to a spiritual cause, no matter how simple or secular it may appear to be. Having gained an overview of Harold Turner’s Six Feature Analysis they can now be applied to Afua Kuma’s work.

BEYOND THE FORM: JESUS OF THE DEEP FOREST AND TURNER’S SIX FEATURES

Going beyond the primal outward form the author seeks to examine the content of Kuma’s prayers and praises using Turner’s six features as a basis. The extent to which the content of Kuma’s poetry reflects the six primal features will reveal how much her Christology and Christian theology builds upon the African primal sub-structure thereby setting it apart as an example of African Christian spirituality and vitality.

Kinship with Nature

The first feature of the primal worldview that Turner describes is a kinship with nature. The Akan primal worldview is very much alive to this, holding in reverence *Asase Yaa*, the ‘Earth Goddess’ as Sarpong calls her. Among other things, she forbids farming on certain days and ‘wanton spilling of human blood on her.’⁴⁸ Busia disagrees with calling *Asase Yaa* a goddess, tracing the error to Rattray’s work on Ashanti. He cites the Ashanti saying, “*Asase nyɛ bosom; ɔnkyere mmusuo*” meaning “the Earth is not a goddess, she does not divine” as evidence.⁴⁹ There is however a consensus that the Earth is viewed as possessing power in Akan traditional thought:

The Ashanti believed that the Earth had a power or spirit of its own which could be helpful if propitiated or harmful if neglected. This power in the Earth was conceived as a female principle, *Asase Yaa*

⁴⁰ Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 31.

⁴¹ Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 31.

⁴² Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 32.

⁴³ Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 31.

⁴⁴ Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 32.

⁴⁵ Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 32.

⁴⁶ Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 32.

⁴⁷ Turner, ‘The Primal Religions of the World and their Study,’ 32.

⁴⁸ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect, Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 18.

⁴⁹ Kofi A Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti, A Study of the Influence of Contemporary Social Changes on Ashanti Political Institutions* (London: Oxford University Press: 1951), 40.

(Earth) whose natal day is Thursday.⁵⁰

Apart from *Asase Yaa* who is revered, trees, lakes, rivers, mountains and many other features of nature are revered by the Akan. In Kuma's poetry, the Akan kinship with nature is manifest in that the deep African forest appears to be the setting in which she proclaims the praises of Jesus. Kuma proclaims Jesus to be

<i>Obo a yerehintaw ase</i>	The great Rock we hide behind:
<i>Ɔdɔtɔ kɛsɛ a w'ase wo nwini</i>	the great forest canopy that gives cool shade:
<i>Odupɔn kɛsɛ a woama nhama ahu osoro.</i>	the Big Tree which lifts its vines to peep at the heavens,
<i>Odupɔn a woregu akorokera</i>	the magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves
<i>ama mfuwdee aye yiye</i>	encourage the luxuriant growth below. ⁵¹

She later refers to Jesus as *Sekyere Buruku*, the tall mountain⁵² that is reputed to be so majestic that it is venerated by her Kwahu people.⁵³ Jesus is the Breeze which makes human beings prosper,⁵⁴ the Source of flowing waters,⁵⁵ the Fountain of life, the glistening Water-lily of the great swamps,⁵⁶ and quite uniquely the fertile forest-land.⁵⁷ Calling Jesus "the fertile forest-land on which farmers labour..." amounts to a conversion of the role of the cherished *Asase Yaa*, "the fertile woman *par excellence*" upon whom the Akan farm and depend on for survival.⁵⁸ The traditional sacrifices to *Asase Yaa* before cultivating a piece of land, to ensure fruitful yields,⁵⁹ now belong to Jesus.

Human Weakness

The second of Turner's six-feature framework is human weakness. The primal worldview of Africans has a "deep sense that man is finite, weak, and impure or sinful and stands in need of a power not his own." Sarpong's retrospection on Ghanaians reveals as much:

Before a Being of such magnitude as God, only a fool will exalt himself. Consequently, the Ghanaian thinks of himself as mere nothing before God. He humbles himself in the hope that God may have pity on him.⁶⁰

Kuma refers to humankind as poor or as children contrasting humankind with Jesus. She notes humankind's need for the transcendent in the following stanza:

<i>Yesu a wagye ahiafo</i>	Jesus, Saviour of the poor,
<i>Ama yen anim aba nyam</i>	who brighten[s] up our faces!
<i>Damfo-Adu,</i>	Damfo-Adu: the clever one,
<i>wo na yeredan wo</i>	we rely on you
<i>sɛ tekɛma redan abogyɛ⁶¹</i>	as the tongue relies on the mouth ⁶²

Humankind is imaged as children needing knowledge from the pencil of teachers.⁶³ Even the lawyers who are the great spokesmen in the courts of law need a spokesman- Jesus.⁶⁴ Showing further the frailty of humans, Kuma declares "we have been walking and walking, so now we are sitting and resting, for we are

⁵⁰ Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, 40.

⁵¹ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.

⁵² Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 6.

⁵³ Laryea 'St. Ignatius of Antioch and Afua Kuma of Kwahu', 78.

⁵⁴ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 12.

⁵⁵ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 12.

⁵⁶ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 13.

⁵⁷ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 39.

⁵⁸ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 18.

⁵⁹ Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, 41.

⁶⁰ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 11.

⁶¹ Kuma, *Afua Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 5.

⁶² Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.

⁶³ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 27.

⁶⁴ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 27.

very tired...⁶⁵ In a classic adaptation of the popular Akan saying “*Ɔkwaterekwa se orekoma wo ntama a tie ne din*” (meaning the name of the naked person suggests that he or she has no cloth to offer you) Kuma points out the weak state of humans. “That man is naked – what can he give you?”⁶⁶ Throughout her poetry humankind is portrayed as finite, weak, fearful, hungry, helpless and needing the help of the Transcendent.

Humankind is Not Alone

Kuma’s prayers and praises are also replete with verses that demonstrate the conviction that humans are not alone in this universe. This feature of the primal worldview compliments the previous feature discussed and resonates with the Akan belief in the Supreme Being, the ancestors, the divinities, charms and amulets. For the Akan, the spirit realm is alive with ‘beings more powerful and ultimate than himself’.⁶⁷ Kuma engages with some of the traditional names of the Supreme Being even though her poetry is primarily in praise of Jesus. She equates Jesus to God the Father by addressing him as *Onyankopɔn Totrobonsu*, the Giver of Rain, which is a pre-Christian conception about the Akan Supreme Being.⁶⁸ Not only is Jesus the giver of rain but He is the rain, which is an exceptional representation of the incarnation. In another stanza, Kuma ascribes the ownership of the shining and glorious city to Jesus⁶⁹ and later to *Otumfo Nyankopɔn*,⁷⁰ the Almighty God suggesting equality of status. The use of the pre-Christian titles of the Supreme Being affirms the affinities between the primal worldview and the Christian faith. One sees the Christian doctrine of equality of the Father and Son being built upon the Akan primal conception of God.

Evil spirits, demons, *mmoatia*, and *sasabonsam* that are hostile to humans are very much a part of the Akan primal worldview which must be engaged by any religion that seeks to build on this substructure. Failure to do so will result in what the early missionaries experienced from their early converts. As Charles Gyang-Duah notes from mission reports in the early 20th century, “some church members continued to consult [deities] in time of difficulty for help.”⁷¹ Kuma’s Jesus confronts *sasabonsam* and *mmoatia*:

*Yesu, ɔde ne tumi ne ne nyansa
Akosiw asaman kwan
Ɔye nkrante kese mu otiwan
Ɔno na watwitwa mmoatia mu asinasin
na waso sasabonsam ti akyim ne kɔn
ama kwae kese mu ada ho ama abɔmmɔfo.*⁷²

Jesus blockades the road of death
with wisdom and power
He is the sharpest of all great swords,
has made the forest safe for the hunters.
The *mmoatia* he has cut to pieces;
He has caught *sasabonsam*
and twisted off his head!⁷³

In the Akan primal worldview, plants and animals are believed to have ‘*sasa*’, some form of strong spiritual power. Animals with very powerful ‘*sasa*’ are called ‘*sasamoa*’ and when they are killed can cause the death of the hunter or bring other misfortunes. The elephant is one such animal and is greatly feared.⁷⁴ Kuma’s portrayal of Jesus as the one who returns the hunters’ lost guns to them and orders them to go and kill the elephant is significant. She further extols Jesus as the one who does not use rifle bullets ‘but ...kills the

⁶⁵ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 37.

⁶⁶ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest* 30.

⁶⁷ Turner, *Australian Essays in World Religions*, 27-37.

⁶⁸ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 10. Pre-Christian here refers to the period before Africa encountered Christian in what is referred to by scholars as the 2nd Wave.

⁶⁹ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 12.

⁷⁰ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 13.

⁷¹ Charles Gyang-Duah, , *The Scottish Mission Factor in the Development of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1917/1957*(Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 1996), 201f.

⁷² Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 19.

⁷³ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 19.

⁷⁴ Ernestina Afriyie, *The Theology of the Okuapehene’s Odwira: An Illustration of the Engagement of the Gospel and Culture among the Akan of Akropong Akuapem*, (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, Akropong, 2010), 92f.

elephant with kapok'.⁷⁵ Jesus, incarnated in the Akan context through Kuma's praise, deals adequately with all the fears of the spirit realm.

An interesting introduction into the African spiritual universe is the biblical concept of Satan or the Devil, and devils which did not originally exist. Kuma uses the names *Obonsam* and *Abonsamfo* for Satan and devils.⁷⁶ The English translation however renders *Abonsamfo* as the devil, possibly to fit the context as the stanza appears to be discussing Satan. However, this has a reductionist effect as the concept of demons or devils is alive in African Christianity, especially in the Church of Pentecost which was a major factor in Kuma's theological formation. Deliverance ministries and prayer camps are evidence of African Christianity's engagement with this primal conception. Christaller defines *Obonsam* as a wizard, sorcerer, witch (*abayifo*), or the devil or a demon. He explains that the devil is "conceived to be an evil spirit reigning over the spirits of deceased wicked men."⁷⁷ He further states that a demon is a spirit that teaches men evil deeds and is the father of *abayifo* (witches), *abosom* (deities) and *asuman* (charms).⁷⁸ The latter parts of Christaller's definition appear to have been tainted by the Christian conception considering that the Akan concept of the afterlife does not make room for a "spirit reigning over the spirits of deceased wicked men", while some *abosom* are viewed as children of *Onyankopon*.⁷⁹ However, the point is that the traditional concept of *Obonsam*, who is an enemy of humankind, is built upon by the Christian faith when that name is given to the biblical archenemy, Satan. Kuma combines the imagery of the devil as a roaring lion in 1 Peter 5:8 and as a ravenous wolf in Matthew 7:15 and 10:16 as no match for the outstretched arm of the Lamb of God.

Man Can Relate with the Spirit World

Turner postulates a fourth feature: the belief that men can enter into a relationship with the benevolent spirit world. Only a transcendent helper can defend human beings against evil forces and Kuma demonstrates that Jesus is the Helper extraordinaire:

Yesu Mintimminim!

Ono na okyereben ahyia no awu.

Dade a yemm no kahiri.

Oprammire adan ne bo agu n'anim.

Yesu a wo na woye esono bommfo

Okatakyi, won a woakum onwomwa atwa ne ti

ama obirempon asi ntumpan so anopa

*W'ayawfo nyinaa resi abofo di w'anim*⁸⁰

Oma-dodow,

Oma-fonoe,

Okye-soe,

Yennye wo abenkum, a Awura,

Okatakyi, nea wodom yen no,

*Yen nsa nifa aye ma.*⁸²

Jesus you are a solid rock!

The green mamba dies at the sight of Jesus.

The iron rod that cannot be coiled into a head pad:

Jesus you are the Elephant hunter, Fearless One!

You have killed the evil spirit and cut off its head!

The drums of the king have announced it in the

morning

All of your attendants lead the way dancing with joy.⁸¹

He gives plenty,

even in excess,

and to everyone!

We don't receive your gifts in our left hand,

O Great One, Okatakyi;

But because of your bountiful blessings

our right hand is full!⁸¹

⁷⁵ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 19.

⁷⁶ Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 18.

⁷⁷ J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)* (Basel: Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, 1933), 38.

⁷⁸ Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante*, 38.

⁷⁹ In the Akan primal worldview wicked men who die do not qualify to become ancestors and are not allowed into *asamando*, the world of the ancestors, but hover around until they are reborn and given the chance to redeem themselves by living good and moral lives. Sarpong, *Ghana In Retrospect*, 36ff.

⁸⁰ Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 7.

⁸¹ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.

⁸² Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 10.

Jesus is not only portrayed as a transcendent helper but one we can relate with; he calls us and⁸³ is a friend to all.⁸⁴ Kuma's poetry conveys the imagery of a transcendent helper upon whom all can call for help in all kinds of situations:

<i>Mifiri wo ade a</i>	If I buy your goods on credit,
<i>mma wo koma nhyehyew wo</i>	have no fear:
<i>Mintuaa wo ka a,</i>	If I [haven't paid] you
<i>nni ho nkɔmmɔ</i>	you shouldn't complain:
<i>merəkɔkyerɛ ɔsape</i>	for I'm going to ask a very generous
	Man,
<i>na magye sika mabetua wo ka</i> ⁸⁵	and get the money to pay you ^{86,87}

The role of 'specialists', in this case, priests or *asɔfo*, is heavily emphasized in Kuma's work.

The priests direct mankind to Jesus⁸⁵ and speak for him:

<i>Momma yentie ɔsɔfo yi asem</i>	Let us listen to the words of the priest
<i>na ɔreka nkwaye ho asem</i>	for his is speaking about deliverance.
<i>Asafo Yehowa afo n'ano ho ngo</i>	The Lord of hosts has anointed his mouth with oil,
<i>na ɔreka nokwasem</i> ⁸⁸	and he speaks the truth. ⁸⁹
<i>Me wuranom asofo,</i>	My masters, the asofo,
<i>Me ne me namfomon rehwehwe mo;</i>	I and my friends are searching for you.
<i>Yese mo na moka Nyame nokwasem,</i>	It is said, "You are the ones to speak the truths of God."
<i>Mommeka nkyerɛ yen na yebetie</i> ⁹⁰	If you speak and teach us, we will listen. ⁹¹

Belief in the Afterlife

Belief in the afterlife is core to the primal worldview and in the Akan context accounts for the ancestral cult as well as the elaborate funerals rites that accompany deaths. Despite the belief in the afterlife, death is not a welcome topic.⁹² Responding to this worldview, Kuma's Jesus has "tied death to a tree so that we may be happy,"⁹³ and "swallowed death and every kind of disease".⁹⁴ "Jesus is the One who shouted at Death, and Death ran from his face"⁹⁵ after his resurrection. He orders his *Ɔsɔfo* "to watch over us and not let us fall into the pit of death."⁹⁶

⁸³ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 10.

⁸⁴ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 23 & 39.

⁸⁵ Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 41.

⁸⁶ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 41.

⁸⁷ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 30 & 37.

⁸⁸ Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, p.41

⁸⁹ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 41.

⁹⁰ Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 29.

⁹¹ Kuma, *Afia Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 29.

⁹² Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 22f.

⁹³ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.

⁹⁴ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 11.

⁹⁵ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 29.

⁹⁶ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 30.

Jesus of the deep forest is further exalted as,

The first-born Child who knows Death's antidote. Jesus is the wall which bars Death from entry, and makes many hearts leap for joy.⁹⁷

Jesus not only deals with Death and the fear of death but gives eternal life: "[The truths of God] will bring man close to Jesus, the one who has everlasting life and peace, for Death knows not the way to [Jesus'] town."⁹⁸ About *asamando* (the land of the dead) Christaller records:

It is said: the realm of the dead is below (in the earth); some say: it is above (in heaven); about this there is no surety. Where one is taken to, when he dies, there his spirit is; when you die and they take you to the spirits' grove, then your spirit is in the grove. The town (or country) of the departed spirits is not in the grove, but in the earth; it is a large town (city), a long way off, and in going there a mountain has to be ascended.⁹⁹

In Kuma's praise poetry, the Akan primal concept of the *asamando* is replaced with the Christian concept of "the city [or town] of the great chief, where large beads and precious stones roll about in the streets"¹⁰⁰ or "Jesus' town".¹⁰¹ This is the glorious holy city with gold nuggets strewn about and streams of precious beads flowing through.¹⁰⁰

Kuma develops her theology of the afterlife further:

*Asendua no, eye Kristofo twene a,
Yenam so koto mogya subura mu;
Mogya yi taa ho,
Na se enye asendua yi a
Yennya akwan nkogware mogya no bi.
Enti eye Kristofo agyapade a
Yenam so konya daa nkwa.*

The cross is the bridge we cross over
to search for the well of his blood.
The blood-pool is there.
If it were not for the cross
we would never have the chance to wash in that
blood;
the cross is the Christians' precious inheritance; it
brings us to eternal life.

Kuma points out how to get to Jesus' town: by washing in the fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's vein. Only then can man cross that bridge into eternal life. Kuma provides some certainties about the afterlife building upon the primal substructure.

No Dichotomy between the Spiritual and Physical

Turner's final feature holds that there is an absence of a sharp distinction or separation of the physical from the spiritual. The spirit realm rules the physical and acts done in the physical are vehicles of the spirit world. The Akan primal spirituality has this strong sense of unity or closeness with the spirit realm and thus all activities commence with prayer and invitation to the ever-present ancestors to partake in that activity. Problems encountered in the physical are attributed to spiritual causes and are first dealt with in the spirit realm. Jesus of the deep forest adequately addresses this worldview as 'He is the Thumb, without which we cannot tie a knot'.¹⁰² This implies that without Jesus human beings can do nothing.

As discussed earlier, Kuma's poetry does not do away with the many malevolent spirits in the African primal worldview but rather posits Jesus, the equivalent of *Onyankopon*, as protector and antidote. In maintaining these malevolent spirits who are the spiritual causes of many seemingly physical problems, mishaps or

⁹⁷ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 31.

⁹⁸ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 29.

⁹⁹ Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante*, 423.

¹⁰⁰ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 25.

¹⁰¹ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 29 100, 12f.

¹⁰² Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.

ailments, Kuma reinforces that there is no dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. Jesus solves the problem of barrenness and difficult childbirth which are believed to be the result of the activities of witches and other malevolent forces. Issues regarding childlessness usually affect the stability of the marital home. Kuma's antidote is the Word:

<i>Se wutie Onyame asem a,</i> <i>Worenkɔgye nkonyaa na w'aware aye yiye.</i> <i>Dɔkota ɔnyɛɛ aprehyan</i> <i>na nkontonkoroma gu fam.</i> ¹⁰³	When you heed the [Word] of God, you need not wear an amulet to make your marriage fruitful. [Without the doctor operating] The child, placenta and all, comes forth. ¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵
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Working as a midwife made Kuma conversant with issues pertaining to childbirth and the various forms of protection people resort to in order to survive.

Areas that would be classified as secular- government, education, national security, judiciary, legal practice, agriculture, economics, textile industry and mechanical engineering - are for Kuma the domain of this Wonderworker Jesus.¹⁰⁴

<i>Wunya aban asem</i> <i>Na wokɔbɔ Yesu amanneɛ;</i> <i>Wudu kɔɔto a yese kɔ wo baabi;</i> <i>obi mmisa m'ano, obi mmisa m'ase,</i> <i>merɛkɔbɔ Yesu amanneɛ;</i> <i>enne me kunu yɛ lɔyani;</i> <i>n'ano awo ne ho.</i> ¹⁰⁶	If you are in trouble with the government, you go and tell Jesus. When you reach the court They will say, "Go back home!" No one will question you; you won't have to say a word. I am going to tell Jesus about it: today my Husband is a lawyer – how eloquent he is! ¹⁰⁷
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CONCLUSION

Turner's six-feature framework for understanding primal religions and the primal worldview provides the framework for assessing the engagement of Christianity with the African primal worldview.

The various portraits painted of Jesus by Kuma of Obo Kwahu, demonstrate Him as the Provider and Protector who engages with all the six features of the African primal worldview as postulated by Turner. Building on the primal substructure, Kuma in her praise poetry brings her new Christian understanding of the person and abilities of Christ to her spiritual universe or worldview, thereby incarnating Christ into the African spiritual universe.

The theology of Kuma, the 'grassroots theologian' and poet *par excellence*, can be said to have adequately demonstrated that "Africa can offer Christ acceptable praises and petitions from the depths of her total, uninhibited humanity". Indeed it is evidence of a vibrant primal substructure in African Christianity.

¹⁰³ Kuma, *Afua Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 27, 28, 30, 37, 40, 43.

¹⁰⁶ *Afua Kuma ayeyi ne mpaebɔ*, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 43.

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