

Christian Engagement with Ewe Culture in Ghana: A Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

The issue of gospel and culture has been in contention since the inception of Christianity and its expansion into other environs outside the Jewish nation Israel. As Christianity left its comfort zone in Jerusalem, it needed to engage with different cultures and give relevance of the good news to people that were alien to the Jewish culture which was a national religious culture. Using the comparative and dialogical approaches, this study thus, discussed some religious and cultural practices of the people of Agave in Ghana and how these help in demonstrating the true revelation of God in the person of Jesus. The study found that all the religious and cultural practices have prepared the hearts of *Agaveawo* for the gospel of Jesus. All the practices were towards the aspirations of forgiveness of sin, well-being, productivity, peace, victory over death and dark powers and agricultural productivity. The individual responses strengthen the argument that what the traditionalists sought in *Dzawuwu*, *amawuwu* and *Trɔkosi* systems, one can find in Christ. The study contributes to the agenda of developing and articulating Christology in African theology and Christianity.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the gospel and culture has been in contention since the inception of Christianity and its expansion into other environs outside the Jewish nation Israel. Christianity, an eastern religion in the Middle East, began as the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth spread His message of salvation to all men in Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth as He had instructed them to (Matt 28:18-19). As it left its comfort zone in Jerusalem, it needed to engage with different cultures and give relevance of the good news to people that were alien to the Jewish culture which was a national religious culture. Unlike the Islamic religion, the ‘Christian faith must go on being translated, most continuously into the vernacular culture and interact with it or it withers and fades.’¹ Missionary activities in recent times have recognized that cross-cultural mission is faced with gospel and culture problems, as Christianity is

¹ Andrew Finlay Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process: Studies in Transmission and Reception of Faith* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), 29.

clothed in Western culture.² Newbigin confirms this when he writes concerning the missionary efforts to deal with gospel and culture problems thus:

it has sought to explore the problems of contextualization in all the cultures of humankind from China to Peru, it has largely ignored the culture that is the most widespread, powerful, and persuasive among all contemporary cultures— namely . . . modern Western culture.³

The first-century church according to Kwame Bediako, faced the problem of gospel and culture as the Christian Jews thought Christianity was for the Jews only and God was not the God of Gentiles too. Thus, one needed to be Jewish to be accepted into the Christian community. However, the true understanding of the gospel and culture was resolved by Paul of Tarsus and Stephen in their addresses in defense of the gospel. The Council of Jerusalem also dealt with this issue in Acts 15.⁴ It took time for the Jews to realize that God was for all men and Jesus' message crosses borders and cultures and supersedes the Jewish culture. As Christianity crosses borders and cultures, it takes different forms and shapes but the message remains the same, Jesus of Nazareth. However, Christianity still faces the same problem of gospel and culture. Therefore, one can conclude that the problem has existed in the 1st century church and has come to meet 21st century Christians, especially in Africa where most people live between two cultures, African and European. That notwithstanding, this study using the comparative and dialogical approaches, seeks to discuss some pertinent issues of gospel and culture in relation to how Christ fulfills the aspirations in some Agave religious and cultural practices. The practices include *Adzemu Kosi*, *Dzawuwu* and lastly *amawuwu*. It begins with a history of Christianity in Eweland.

The People, Boundaries and Kinship

The people of Agave form a part of the larger Ewe-speaking group of Ghana. By their history, culture and dialect, they are a distinct group of Ewes living in the territory which flanks both sides of the lower Volta River, from the lower Volta Bridge to the mouth where the river enters the Atlantic Ocean.⁵ The Agave State shares borders with Anlo and Avenor in the South and East respectively, Mafi to the North and Fievier in the North-West.⁶ Other borders include the Agave-Sokpoe/Tefle border in the West and the Agave-Ada border in the West and South. The main border towns are 'Anlo, Avenor, Mafi, Fievier, Sokpoe, Tefle and Ada'; however, as is usually the case with inter-tribal boundaries, most of the borders are not clearly marked out but represented in most places by water courses such as streams, creeks, lagoons and valleys. Apart from such physical features, the border villages themselves are also used, especially where no other distinct features exist.⁷

Kinship among Agaveawo⁸ is purely patrilineal. Thus, children (both male and female) automatically belong to the lineage or *fome* of their father and hence also to his *hlɔ*. Originally, there

² Ministry Magazine, "Gospel, Culture, and Cultures: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Contribution," 2000, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1989/10/gospel-culture-and-mission>.

³ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, vol. 6 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 2-3.

⁴ Kwame Bediako, "Gospel and Culture: Some Insights for Our Time from the Experience of the Early Church," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 2, no. 2 (1999): 8–12.

⁵ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave* (Dabala: The Agave Traditional Council, 1974), vii.

⁶ Godwin Kwaku Nukunya, *Kinship and Marriage among the Anlo Ewe* (University of London, Athlone Press, 1969); Charles Kɔmi Kudzɔdzi, *Eve Dukɔ fe Anyigbawo* ŌHo: Resource Center for Ewe Socio-Cultural Studies, n.d.). G.K. Nukunya confirms this border in his *Kinship & Marriage among the Anlo Ewe*. A map he produced in his work named Agave among the shared borders of Anlo. See map on page 4 of his book. In addition Charles Kɔmi Kudzɔdzi, in *Eve Dukɔ fe Anyigbawo*, also confirms this, see page 9.

⁷ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 43. For physical border features and villages, see ATC, *The History of Agave*, 43-45.

⁸ This means the people of Agave.

were seven *hlɔwo* but due to separations and enlarged family sizes, there arose other additional *kponuwo* (households) which developed into *hlɔwo* shoring up the number of *hlɔwo* to fifteen.⁹

Christianity in Eweland

The European presence in Ghana dates back to 1471 when the Lisbon Merchant, Fernao Gomes with two Captains, Joao de Santarem and Pedro de Escobar arrived in Shama. The first mass to be held in Ghana was on January 19, 1471, by Diogo da Azambuja who landed in Elmina (Edina) with hundred artisans and 500 soldiers.¹⁰ The later wave of Christianity is generally accepted to have been pioneered by Prince Henry the Navigator in the Fifteenth Century and later followed by Christian missionaries.¹¹ However, the first missionary contact with the Ewe people was on November 14, 1847.¹² These were the North German Missionary Society popularly known as Bremen Mission.

The first missionaries sent by the Society were Lorez Wolf, Karl Flato, James Graff and Luer Bultmann. The latter three however died before they could start work. Thus, Wolf was the only survivor who went to work and was joined later by some other missionaries from the same society. They worked among the people of Peki, Keta, Anyako, Ho, and other parts of today's Volta Region of Ghana.¹³ The missionaries studied the lives and culture of the people and came up with many works of literature on the missionized. Accordingly, "the Special linguists, such as Schlegel, were sent in 1854 and, with their help, the Ewe language was transcribed; so before the First World War we had our Ewe Hymn Book, Liturgy, Catechism, and Church Order. Most important of all, the whole Bible was translated into Ewe and published in 1913."¹⁴

The missionaries did not embark upon the task of translation alone. There were many indigenous men and women who contributed to this great work of translating the Ewe Bible. Local men such as 'Andreas Aku, Adzaklo, Samuel Quist, Yosef Tosu and Kudese,'¹⁵ helped Dauble and Spieth in translating the Ewe Bible. The people of Eweland thus began reading the scriptures and other religious materials in their mother tongue.

Christian encounter with the people of Eweland changed their perspective on the celebration of festivals and other cultural and religious practices. The missionaries prevented their converts from participating in the celebration of festivals. According to Dan Dzide, 'Christian missionaries in Ghana regarded festivals as animistic and primitive...Christians were prevented from joining these traditional activities because the activities were considered to be against the teachings of Christianity.'¹⁶ One of the means of preventing converts from participating in traditional feasts was through formal education. Christian indoctrination also played a part by mainly proselytizing the indigenes. Formal education reached out to the young generations while catechism reached out to both the young and old. One of the greatest tools was the use of the vernacular, Ewe in worship.¹⁷

⁹ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 43. The clans include, not in any particular order, Agormidro, Anyigbe, Agorvie, Aludza, Fievier, Goloe, Netideke, Gbava, Gblevie, Kudzragbe, Towo, Tsevie, Tsiala, Tsvie and Weta. The Outdooring ceremony program adds Lafeawo as the additional clan adding up to sixteen clans.

¹⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 12.

¹¹ John S Pobe, *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an African Context* (Mambo Press, 1992); J Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa* (Achimota: African Christian Press, 1996).

¹² Rebecca Yawa Ganasah, *Christ Meets the Ewe-Dome of Ghana, a Theological and Ethical Reflection on the Rites of Birth and Initiation into Womanhood* (Accra: Legon Theological Studies Series, 2008), 117.

¹³ Ghana Evangelical Presbyterian Church, "The Vision of the Global Evangelical Church, a Summary," World Council of Churches, 2013, <https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/evangelical-presbyterian-church-ghana>.

¹⁴ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, "The Vision of the Global Evangelical Church, a Summary."

¹⁵ Ganasah, *Christ Meets the Ewe-Dome of Ghana, a Theological and Ethical Reflection on the Rites of Birth and Initiation into Womanhood*, 39.

¹⁶ Dan Dzide, *A Handbook of Eweland, the Northern Ewes in Ghana*, ed. Kodjo Gavua, vol. 2 (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2000), 99.

¹⁷ Chris Abotchie, *Social Control in Traditional Southern Eweland of Ghana: Relevance for Modern Crime Prevention* (Ghana Universities Press Accra, 1997), 95.

Conversion at this stage was more individual than communal and it came not without its own disadvantages. The test of time determined the fate of Christianity in Eweland. The missionaries then, failed to meet the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization's idea of conversion when they wrote that:

Conversion should not be conceived as being invariably and only an individual experience, although that has been the pattern of Western expectation for many years. On the contrary, the covenant theme of the Old Testament and the household baptisms of the New should lead us to desire, work for, and expect both family and group conversions.¹⁸

The individual conversions created many problems. The gospel test as proposed by Andrew F. Walls came to play as many of the people lived double-standard religious lives.¹⁹ Abotchie accordingly commented on this:

...the individual who is educated and a practicing Christian adheres to the Christian doctrine enjoining him to condemn and abhor traditional religious beliefs and obligations. But in times of crises- death, disaster and disease...the educated and practicing Christian (of little faith) soon relegates his Christian Commandments to the background to seek answers and succor from the traditional deities by performing investigative and redemptive rituals purported to end or avert his affliction.

...These Christians of little faith openly paid lip service to the Supreme Omnipotent Jehovah but secretly sought to assuage their fears by resorting to forbidden traditional practices.²⁰

This practice is still common among the Ewe people in Southern Volta. Due to the ambivalence, many of the traditional rites and rituals such as outdoorings, funerals, festivals and puberty rites still exist despite modern civilization and education.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative research as its principal methodology, using comparative and dialogical approaches. The characteristics qualitative research presents make it more conducive to explore the subjects of this study. The participants for this study were two Ewe Bible Translators and Consultants, one Ewe Linguist, one Ewe Historian, four members of the clergy and 10 members of the laity. The data for this study was collected through personal interviews and focus group discussions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Adzemu - Kosi: A Type of Saviour (Christ)

One religious cultural practice among the Agaveawo that serves as reparation or redemption for the wrong done is the *trɔkosi* system. It describes a system in which 'a deity...accepts a virgin girl in the atonement of a crime committed by her close relations.'²¹ The Agaveawo refer to the "sacrificial" virgin as *trɔkosi*.²²

In practice, according to Kodzovi Akpabli-Honu:

...young unmarried girls (usually virgins) are given out to the shrine to avert a curse invoked upon a family by the deity for a crime committed by a family member. Usually, the victim of the crime seeks redress at the shrine of a deity believed to have powers to expose the offender (criminal). Consequently, the offender's family begins to lose its members until a spirit

¹⁸ Lausanne Movement, "LOP 2: The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture," Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978, <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-2>.

¹⁹ Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process: Studies in Transmission and Reception of Faith*, 18-25.

²⁰ Chris Abotchie, *Social control in Traditional Southern Eweland of Ghana*, (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1997), pp.98-99.

²¹ Kodzovi Akpabli-Honu, *Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana, a Study of Trɔxovi System among the Ewes of Ghana* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2014), 1.

²² Akpabli-Honu, *Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana, a Study of Trɔxovi System among the Ewes of Ghana*, 1.

medium, upon consultation, reveals the cause of the deaths at the particular deity's shrine where the curse was pronounced...²³

In an interview with Eric Kofi Ativor, he confirmed this practice. He stated, "even though God forgives, our daily sins must be cleansed and that has kept the system in existence." When one loses an item, for instance, a laptop, all the person does is cry to the Adzemu cult²⁴ and present it with a drink (probably alcohol). Within days, people in the family of the criminal begin to fall sick, and some even die. Until the family of the culprit through divination finds out the cause of sickness and death in the family, these predicaments will prevail. On the other hand, when one finds out the cause of death in the family, one brings a sacrifice to the cult to avert sickness and death. The nature of sacrifice is mostly using young virgin girls.²⁵

Togbe Adzemu, as this cult is popularly referred to, 'serves as a social sanction and arbiter of justice.' It performs this duty 'by bringing to book all wrongdoers in the society.'²⁶ As mentioned earlier, 'to appease Togbe Adzemu, the wrongdoers would have to offer a female member of their household whether young or old as a wife or "kosi" to the deity as an atonement for the crime committed.'²⁷ The woman then becomes the wife of the chief priest (Adzemunua) of the shrine and becomes known as *Adzemu-kosi*. She lives in the shrine and serves the deity for seven years. After this service, she is released to her parents but is customarily required to participate in the cleansing festival *Dzawuwu* and also perform wifely duties to her husband the chief priest.²⁸

Even though this act has been condemned globally, the underlying religious concern in this system is the atonement work done by virgin girls. In essence, they provide purification for the sins of their family. Like the Son of God in the epistle to the Hebrews, they take the punishment of sin from their family. There are many weaknesses in this argument related to for instance gender, and the aftermath of the atonement. Yet the mediatorial act of cleansing by becoming a slave to a shrine compares to the redemptive work of Christ taking the place of the sinful man even unto death on the cross just to avert eternal condemnation.

The *trɔkosi* system is the shadow of the actual work of Christ on the cross for the sin of mankind among the Agaveawo. Nonetheless, the lives of these young maidens are lived in bondage to a god or shrine. Hence, as Christianity takes over the land of Agave, according to Ativor, the Local Council of Churches and the traditional heads must collaborate to 'change' this system. The significance of the religious practice, however, according to Emmanuel Nyador, is the total commitment to God. When asked how this religious cultural practice helps one to see the full revelation of God in Christ and appreciate Christ's ministry, he asserted that 'total loyalty is shown here. Giving one's whole being to God and obeying his rules, teachings and instructions starts from here.'²⁹

This implies that the *trɔkosi* system has laid the foundation for Agave Christians to have total trust in the salvation of Christ. They must show a high level of commitment to God in their daily worship of Him as these slave girls do to the shrines. Christ died to provide purification for the sins of mankind and thus, Adzemu has no power over humanity. Yet man's commitment like that of these virgin girls is necessary to bring out the impact of the full revelation of God in Christ and is the only way to demonstrate the true ministry of God among mankind.

Dzawuwuza: A Cleansing Feast

Another religious cultural practice worth mentioning is the main festival of Agaveawo, *Dzawuwuza*. Formed from two words, *dza* means 'to be clean; to cleanse as ground maize' and can also mean 'an

²³ Akpabli-Honu, *Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana, a Study of Trɔxovi System among the Ewes of Ghana*, 1.

²⁴ There are other cults in the Agave area but the most popular one is Adzemu which has many followers.

²⁵ Eric Kofi Ativor, Interview, 7 December 2014.

²⁶ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 40.

²⁷ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 40.

²⁸ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 40.

²⁹ Emmanuel Nyador, Interview, 20 December 2014. Akatsi.

offering, a sacrifice consisting of food or drink'.³⁰ *Wuwu* signifies the act of sprinkling. Thus, it is a festival of food sacrifice to cleanse the land and its entire people. Though the word denotes sprinkling, the food is rather shared among the various clans but not sprinkled as in the case of the *Homowo* festival of the Ga.³¹ The contents of the food mixture include millet flour and honey. The mixture is then distributed among all the clans and eaten that same day.³²

Dzawuwu is an annual festival celebrated through the months of January and February every year. 'It is an occasion when the great Ivory Stool of the Agave and its associated Gborble cults are cleansed and ritually fed as demanded by divine law. The Adzemu cult and all other deities brought by our ancestors from Hogbe are similarly purified.'³³ The great Ivory Stool was given to Adela Kloe, one of the sons of Tɔgbe Agaa during one of his hunting expeditions in Atando. In addition to this Stool, he was also given a flat piece of rock, a flute and a spear. These items were vomited by an elephant Adela Kloe killed during this hunting session. A voice then gave the following instructions to Adela Kloe:

Behold these objects that just came out of the belly of the elephant. This piece of rock...; take it home so that you and your descendants worship it at all times as a cult.

Take a second look at the Ivory Stool. It has come forth as the visible sign of political power that has come to stay. Take it also home and enstool somebody on it to rule over all your people.

... the spear and flute...must always accompany the Ivory Stool wherever it is taken. [They should be] let out at some fee to any household that would require them as special customary objects for the outdooing of twins.

Before you hear me no more, remember that the Ivory Stool and the Gborble cult emanated from the same source – the elephant. For that reason, the Ivory Stool and the Gborble cult must be purified together once every year.³⁴

The above forms the genesis of the *Dzawuwu* festival. The voice gave birth to the religious (Gborble cult worship) and political (Ivory Stool) foundation of the Agaveawo including the yearly cleansing of the cult objects.

One significant observance of the festival is the 'general ritual clean-up' termed '*kpokpokplo* (sweeping of land) or *dɔdɔde*.' (removal of disease).³⁵ This is carried out in all Agave townships. As the name suggests:

Its significance lies in ridding the state of all sin, evil and dangerous spirits so that there would be good health and fortune, abundant rain and bumper harvests in crops, fish and animals in the ensuing years.³⁶

This day marks the general cleaning of the environment. The towns and villages are cleared of weeds and gutters are drained.³⁷ This is an act of purification that paves the way for easy access to *Mawu* (God), *trɔwo* (smaller gods) and ancestors. Ativor observes that even though this act physically helps in good hygiene (physically), it is believed that it truly cleanses the souls of the individuals and

³⁰ D. Westermann, *Gbefiala or Ewe-English Dictionary* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer (E.Voshen), 1930), 19. There are other meanings to *dza*. It is a name of a leaf, a kind of yam and a fruit.

³¹ Ativor, Interview, 7 December 2014, Alesikpe. Some people use a kind of yam known as *dzawute* in preparing the mixture for the celebration.

³² Ativor, Interview, 7 December 2014, Alesikpe.

³³ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 41.

³⁴ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History Of Agave*, 12-13.

³⁵ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 41. This is a clean-up exercise that involves draining of gutters, weeding of overgrown bushes, and burning of all filth in the town.

³⁶ The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 41.

³⁷ Kwaku Amoaku-Attah Fosu, *Festivals in Ghana* (Kumasi: Amok Publications, 2001), 32.

community and promotes communal living. He continues that “Christ may have come to wash our sins away but we too need to daily cleanse ourselves. Thus, this is the time to do our part.”³⁸

The other significant activity is *nugbidodo* which means reconciliation. The period marks peace-making with all people. It is believed that *Mawu* and the ancestors will not listen and bless the people if they do not settle any disputes at this time. Thus, *nugbidodo* is done among families, clans, chiefs and even friends. This is mostly marked with what is termed *hanuqudu* (group eating) where all people eat from the same bowl in a household (there is the belief that if one dislikes another, they cannot eat from the same bowl).³⁹

The climax of the festival is the grand durbar day which takes place on Saturday. This is mostly done to pay homage to the chiefs. It is the day when citizens from far and near offer prayers of thanks and seek protection from *togbewo* ‘who delivered them from despotic rulers at *Hogbe* and gave them a new home.’⁴⁰ amidst drumming and dancing. Songs are sung in praise of the chiefs and the leaders of the great fight for freedom.

The festival prepares both body and spirit of the Agaveawo for the cleansing act. The significance of this festival, Nyador proclaims, is that:

There is complete unity, love and understanding in the festival. Respect for authority is highly exhibited. Followers of some of the cults come from far and near to pay homage. These help the growth of Christian ministry for the love had been established before.⁴¹

What Nyador seems to imply is that the *Dzawuwu* festival is not only about the cleansing of the land and the community but bears more on the unity and love as well as respect for authority demonstrated during this festival. This in the end prepares the minds of the Agave Christian to accept the ministry of Christ in love and respect His authority as the Son of God. This festival also promotes community life, which forms the core of the ecclesia of God.

In the author’s interview with Ativor, he mentioned that *Dzawuwu* is a time for fellowship. Thus, the drumming and dancing from one shrine to the other enhance this fellowship. Just like Christian fellowship during festivals such as Christmas and Easter, so it is with the Traditionalists. During this festival, they come together as one people in fellowship towards the promotion of faith and solidarity with one another.⁴² Significantly, the *Dzawuwu* paves the way for Christian ministry on the Agave land where the people are already knitted in fellowship as is expected of God’s Church.

The Place of Jesus in *Dzawuwuza*

Andrian Hastings, writing on the preconceived thought and attitude about African religious life and spirituality in the nineteenth century by European missionaries, asserts that,

In fact neither in the nineteenth nor the twentieth centuries did missionaries give much thought in advance to what they would find in Africa. What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent: its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, and its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade.⁴³

With this perception, the pre-Christian religious life of the people was deemed valueless and had no salvation value. The people were described as *tabula rasa* waiting to be written on.⁴⁴

³⁸ Ativor, Interview, 7 December 2014. Alesikpe.

³⁹ J.G Kodzo-Vorduagu, *Anlo Hogbetsoso Festival* (Accra: Domak Press Limited, n.d.), 17. Bernard Kofi Akpeleasi, Interview, 8 December 2014, Lolito. Mr. Akpeleasi is a retired Ewe teacher by profession and has been a contract translator to the Bible Society of Ghana. He was part of the translators of the New Ewe Bible.

⁴⁰The Agave Traditional Council, *The History of Agave*, 42.

⁴¹ Nyador, Interview. 20 December 2014. Akatsi.

⁴² Ativor, Interview, 7 December 2014. Alesikpe.

⁴³ Adrian Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 60.

⁴⁴ Kwame Bediako, “Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions,” in *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, ed. Samuel Vinay and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 115–75.

Festivals were not exempted from this contempt. The missionaries presented Jesus not only in a foreign language but also with a disfigured face that opposed anything pre-Christian in Africa.⁴⁵ In relation to this is the fact that the missionaries saw nothing as a preparation for the gospel in primal African settings. This however is not true as the people have implicit elements that point toward God and Christ. It is against this backdrop that Christianity needs to convert traditional religious elements for its use. An example is the festival *Dzawuwu*. There are elements in the history and even the celebration of the festival that could easily be attributed to the Christian thought of Jesus' functions.

Jesus as Liberator

The redemptive plan of God for humanity was weaved in a historical journey right from the Garden of Eden into Egypt. It can be said that the journey of the Ewe from *Ŋotsie* is a typology of Israel's freedom from Egypt. The central concern is freedom from tyranny. There are many differences but freedom is the ultimate.

The Passover celebrated by the Jews is because of their historic redemption from the tyranny of Pharaoh. The Passover is "the name given to the chief of the three great historical annual festivals of the Jews. It was kept in remembrance of the Lord's passing over the houses of the Israelites (Ex. 12:13) when the firstborn of all the Egyptians was destroyed. The word afterward came to denote the lamb that was slain at the feast" (Mark 14:12-14; 1 Cor. 5:7).⁴⁶

This feast celebrates God, now manifest in the person of Jesus. Jesus has become the centre of the Passover festival as he is seen as the Redeemer of the people then and now (those Jews who profess faith in him). He is the Saviour of all humankind. Jesus as Saviour of the world saved the Ewe from slavery in *Ŋotsie*. He is not only a spiritual saviour but also a physical Saviour. 'Our Saviour' in African understanding according to Bediako, refers to the persons in the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ The implication is that Jesus "is able to do all things, to save in all situations, to protect against all enemies, and is available whenever those who believe may call upon him."⁴⁸

Owing to the fact that Jesus is the Saviour of all people including the Ewe, it is prudent to say, that He liberated them from the wicked hands of King Agɔkɔli in the *Ŋotsie* exodus. It is not farfetched to say that the wisdom involved in planning and outwitting the King came from above (James 1:17). Interestingly, many of the song texts sung during the festival attribute the escape success to *Mawu* (God). A typical example is one composed by Philip Gbeho (first two lines):

<i>Mina ne miadzi ha akafu mia Mawu</i>	<i>Let us sing and praise Mawu (God).</i>
<i>Amesi kplo mi tso mia dzofe ke</i> ⁴⁹	<i>He who led us far from our source/home</i>

The primal understanding of God by the Ewe is the Creator God and Rescuer. Hence, the Ewe allude that God created the heavens, the earth, and all things in it. He is also the Deliverer and Protector. They believe in the spirit world; they know that *Mawu* is relational and that he can protect. That Jesus is the Son of *Mawu* (Heb.1:2) and he has been given all authority makes it possible to place him within the liberation process and the celebration of *Dzawuwu* festival. Ewes must accept him as the liberator of their forefathers and celebrate him for using them to free mankind from wickedness. What this means is that even though Ewews still celebrate *Dzawuwuza* in remembrance of the ancestors and cleansing of the Ivory Stool, they do so with the mindset that Christ was the head and leader of the team that liberated, led the people to freedom, and give him that due respect.

⁴⁵ Orlando E. Costas, "Keynote Address, Proclaiming Christ in the Two Thirds World," in *Sharing Jesus in the Two-Third Worlds* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983), 1-11.

⁴⁶ M. G. Easton, *Eastons Bible Dictionary*, Oak Harbor, WA (Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1996).

⁴⁷ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture a Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), 8-9.

⁴⁸ Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture*, 9.

⁴⁹ Kodzo-Vordugu, *Anlo Hogbetsotso*, 29.

Jesus as Purifier

Another aspect of the *Dzawuwuza* is the cleansing and purification process. Purification is in two senses: ceremonially and morally. The Hebrew understanding of purification is of refining metal.⁵⁰ However, the term has come to mean physical cleansing of the body of dirt. This is done using water (Lev. 15:16), fire (Num. 31:23), or blood (Lev. 14:25) and the offering of a sacrifice.⁵¹ In Eweland, purification is done by cleaning the environment amidst the pouring of libation and sacrifice of animals. The impurity of a man, many have agreed, comes from within and is not only physical. Thus, even in the Old Testament, atonements were made for purification purposes on Atonement Day.

Accordingly, the Epistle to the Hebrews makes one understand that 'impurity is a spiritual or moral quality that comes from within. The blood of Jesus is understood as the agent that has purified all people once and for all.'⁵² Jesus is concurrently the High Priest and the last sacrifice that purifies all mankind, even in different cultures and traditions one time forever.⁵³ Ceremonially and morally, he purifies man and makes him/her like himself so they can have access to *Mawu* and all the blessings he has for them. This is achieved by a renewal of mind and allowing the spirit to transform unto Christlikeness (Rom.12:1-2). Thus, there is no need for yearly purification as done during *Dzawuwuza*. Significantly, man ought to keep his/her environment clean. Nonetheless, just as the cleaning has to be done every time, tells of mankind's limitedness in keeping themselves clean of filth. Christ purifies with his death on the cross forever.

This extends to the human race who are willing to submit themselves and their culture to him. In essence, Jesus purifies the culture or festival and takes away man's limitedness in cleansing once and for all. In addition, no one takes the glory of purification but all glory goes to Jesus who deserves it.

Christ as Peacemaker

In addition to purification in the *Dzawuwuza* celebration, is the process of peace-making among families, clans, chiefs and friends. They climax the peace talks by eating in groups to signify forgiveness and unity. It is possible to do this every year but there is still evidence of strife and conflict among the clans and chiefs. Human effort in promoting peace is useless unless God intervenes. He is the true source of peace. Christ died so that man may have peace with his fellow man (Eph. 2) and also be reconciled to God. Peace is 'not merely as the elimination of discord, but as the harmony and true functioning of the body of Christ (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 14:33).'⁵⁴

Christ offered his body as living bread for humanity in all cultures and traditions. Thus, for continual peace in Agaveland, it need not be just physical group eating but a spiritual holy communion of Christ's body with the clans, chiefs and family members who know that Christ died so that history may be one with that of God's people in the Bible, for the Bible is man's story too.⁵⁵ Mankind ought to then eat the body of Christ, which is everlasting and promotes peace.

Christ as King

Finally, the grand durbar of chiefs is the pinnacle of the *Dzawuwuza* celebration. Honour and glory go to the chiefs and heroes of the land in the form of drumming and dancing amidst appellations. It is easy to turn these appellations to Christ. Jesus is the King of kings and the only one who deserves praise and worship. He is worthy to sit on the Ivory Stool which gives political power to the chiefs. He gave wisdom to the people to plan their escape from their enemy and his wicked ways. He led them to freedom in their present location in Ghana and they have come out of this historic movement. It is

⁵⁰ D. R. W Wood, *New Bible Dictionary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1004.

⁵¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1985), 843.

⁵² Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 843.

⁵³ Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture*, 43.

⁵⁴ Wood, *New Bible Dictionary*, 891.

⁵⁵ Kwame Bediako, "Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4, no. 1 (2001): 2–11.

important to note that Eweland has no kings but chiefs. The word *Fia* can be translated as king or chief. Thus, even the songs and appellations can be turned into praise of Mawu's Son, Jesus. He is the true *Fia* of *Dzawuwuza* that needs appellations and honour during the festival celebration.

In assessing the issue of gospel and culture, it must be noted that the gospel is Christ. Gospel cannot be simplified to certain facts or principles. In essence, the gospel is a person - Jesus, his birth, ministry, death and resurrection. Everything in relation to Jesus and how it affects humans, form the gospel. The gospel is therefore not a scientific formula.

Culture shapes the worldview and the way people accept Christ. The language, dressing and other aspects really demonstrate the acceptance of the gospel. Thus, people cannot receive the gospel outside their culture, which makes them who they are. Gospel cannot be separated from culture as Jesus lived in the Jewish culture. Jesus the Christ is unique.

According to Allison Howell "sometimes when people observe rituals performed in a culture or see artefacts used in certain ways, they assume immediately they understand them, and make judgments about what is happening."⁵⁶ Christians especially condemn both the practices and those performing these rituals only on a shallow basis. This attitude does not help in a solid presentation of the Gospel. Christians can however convert some cultural practices into Christ and *Dzawuwuza* is no exception. Jesus is the true liberator, both physical and spiritual, he is the true and last purifier of the body and soul, and he is the peace of the world and the only true King of kings. In essence, the significant aspects of the *Dzawuwu* festival can be turned towards Christ as he speaks all languages too. Jesus is not after all alien to the culture and traditions of the Ewe culture; he also lived in a culture.

Amawuwu: A Communion Ritual

Closely related to *Dzawuwu* is *amawuwu*. *Amawuwu*, formed from two words *ama* (green leaf) and *wuwu* denoting an act of sprinkling, is performed to cleanse a wrongdoer to prevent sicknesses and death from the individual or a community. The worst sin one can commit in Ewe land is *gu*. To *dogu* is 'to trespass against acknowledged laws of decency, respect or reverence.'⁵⁷

Gudodo (committing wrong) is '...nuvõ gātõ si naa dölèle ame fe gbõgbõ kple ñutila, eye wohea ku vaa ame ñutõ, ame viwo kple amenuwewo dzi...' ⁵⁸ (a big sin that gives sickness to the spirit (breath) and body of a person and brings death to the individual sinner, his or her children and people around him..). Some of these acts of *gudodo* include *amewuwutetepõ* (attempt to murder), *fififi* (stealing), *avatsokaka* (lying), *vlo dodo nuqudu* (wasting of food), and *fifodeame* (cursing).⁵⁹ In addition, hitting someone with a broom, stamping someone with one's foot, and sleeping with sisters from the same mother, among others are also considered as *gudodo*.⁶⁰ How can this sin be lifted?

According to Ativor, the procedure for *amawuwu* depends on the gravity of the *gu*. The procedure involves the use of *ama*.⁶¹ Relatedly, Motte gives a detailed description of the ritual:

Ele na ame si da vo la be, wòatsõ gbõ alo koklovi deka ayi na dufia, ame si ko kpõ mõ aḍe nuvõ sia fomevi ḍa la. Ne woyõ ametsitsi bubuwo va kpe la, ekema wowõa gbe aḍe, eḍanye tãsrõe alo aḍa alo ama...dea tre me, eye wokua tsi kõna ḍe edzi. Ekema dufia nua tsitre, doa tre la ḍe dzifo zi etõ, eye wòdoa gbe ḍa... Ne ewõ esia võ la, ekema atu tsi ḍe ame (sic) la dzi zi etõ, eye ametsitsi siwo va kpe

⁵⁶ A. Howell, "Researching Gospel and Culture Issues: Tools of Research," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 2, no. 2 (1999): 22–28.

⁵⁷ D. Westermann, *Gbefiala or Ewe-English Dictionary* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1930), 78.

⁵⁸ S. A Motte, *Mia Denyigba* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1968), 87.

⁵⁹ Motte, *Mia Denyigba*, 87-88.

⁶⁰ Ativor, Interview, 7 December 2014.

⁶¹ Ativor, Interview, 7 December 2014.

*la hã foa fu ðe tre la ñu, tua tsi ðe edzi zi etõ, klã ñkume ðe eme,... eye wotsõnã na vodala la hã wòklã ñku me...eye wotsõa gbõlã la ðaa dzenkple ðuna.*⁶²

It is required of the wrongdoer, to take either one goat or fowl to the town leader, who alone has the authority to remove this kind of sin. When he has called other elderly people together, they make a kind of herb, it may be *tãsrõe* or *afla* or *ama*...into a calabash, then they pour water on it. Then the town leader stands up and points the calabash heavenwards three times, and then he prays...when he is done with the prayer, he then spits water unto the person three times, and the elders who have come together also come around the calabash, spit water into it three times, wash their faces into the calabash, and then they give it to the culprit to also wash his or her face... and they use the goat meat for *dzenkple* and eat.⁶³

The content of the prayers is mostly to ask for forgiveness and peace from *Mawu* who is believed to be the giver of peace.⁶⁴ The act depicted by Motte above sees people coming together to make peace with God over sin committed by an individual in the community. This ritual not only appeases the individuals involved but also creates room for *hanuðuðu* (group eating). This involves the sacrificing of the goat presented to the elders and its meat used for *dzenkple*. Nyador, explaining the significance of *amawuwu* to the Christian ministry says, “this [*amawuwu*] is just like the communion we take in the church together. It is towards forgiveness of all sins committed by individuals as well as the community.”⁶⁵ The washing of the face from the same calabash and eating the sacrificial meat cooked from the same pot depict the act of communion. This ritual is performed purposely to demand forgiveness of the individual offender and the community even for the elders involved in the purification act.

Jesus in the last supper with his disciples gave the bread and wine as his body and blood respectively, which were given and poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Thus, the *amawuwu* ritual prepares the minds and hearts of Agave Christians for Christian communion not only as a remembrance of Christ but also as forgiveness of personal and communal sins. Thus, they appreciate the work of Christ on the cross.

Christ’s Fulfilment of Agave Religious Cultural Aspirations: Individual Responses⁶⁶

A critical analysis of responses from participants in this study shows that Jesus means more than just a purifier. Some see Him as *ametakpõla* (protector), *xõnametõ* (helper or assistant), *agakpe sesen* (strong iron-rock) *adanuðõla* (advisor) and *fofo* (brother/ father).⁶⁷ In the aspirations of *Dzawuwu*, *amawuwu* and *trõkosi* is the need for forgiveness, protection, healing, peace, well-being and fertility. In addition, the people seek to have high agricultural productivity and long life.

Many have agreed that the ministry of Jesus as heir and cleanser of their sins has made these provisions that they sought formerly in the traditional rituals and festivals. Some mention that Christ has victory over *aka* (ordeal), *dzo* (magic) and *adze* (witchcraft). One of the respondents mentioned that “the behaviour and doings of the people testify that all the above is true” in reference to the lack of fear for the potent powers. “The *aka* is and was controversial in some days past. People used it to get the truth which at times was not true. Innocent people were punished for no wrong done. However, with the introduction of Christianity, the use of *aka* in Agave land has drastically reduced.”

⁶² Motte, *Mia Denyigba*, 88-89.

⁶³ Author’s translation.

⁶⁴ Motte, *Mia Denyigba*, 89.

⁶⁵ Nyador, Interview, 20 December 2014.

⁶⁶ These responses are as a result of a Focused Group Discussion held in Restoration Christian Church, Agbakofe and individual interviews.

⁶⁷ Nyador, Interview, 20 December 2014.

With reference to healing, Nyador asserts, ‘people used *dzo* to get what they needed. They used this means to *juju* their victims and tend to heal them for money. Now Christianity has empowered a lot of people to seek healing at the church, hospitals and clinics.’⁶⁸ When it comes to protection, ‘many things including *dzo* and *adze* were used in the past to protect the people of Agave. Christ is now the protector of most of Agaves. Also, the ancestors do not protect us anymore.’

According to Nyador, “women’s childbirth mostly depended on the gods, especially that of *dzo* and *adze*. We ‘bought’ the womb of the women from the fetish priest for fertility. Today it is from Christ. Agricultural productivity had behind it the gods ‘that have the power of the rain and for that matter agriculture. Today Christ has come to stop all these and gives us rain to increase our farm produce.’”⁶⁹

The fear of death is one terror among the Agave people. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Because of this, the rituals for purification are held sacred and are performed regularly to avert any unexpected death. Nyador explains that “for the fear of death, people submitted themselves to a lot of things. They spent their valuable belongings to serve the leaders of the cults, for example, *trɔnɔwo*, *bokɔwo* and *hunɔwo*.”⁷⁰ Now the power of Christ has given man victory over death.

According to Bernard Akpelesi, he will prefer all people to come to accept the peace and well-being Christ brings to all people than that which the Agave people seek in *Dzawuwu* and its associated rituals.⁷¹ How do these responses direct the Christian mission to the rest of Agaveawo who do not yet know Christ and His salvation work on the cross?

CONCLUSION

This study has discussed some Agave religious and cultural practices and how these help in demonstrating the true revelation of God in the person of Jesus. The study found that all the religious and cultural practices have prepared the hearts of Agaveawo for the gospel of Jesus. All the practices were towards the aspirations of forgiveness of sin, well-being, productivity, peace, victory over death and dark powers and agricultural productivity. The individual responses strengthen the argument that what the traditionalists sought in *Dzawuwu*, *amawuwu* and *Trɔkosi* systems, one can find in Christ. Hence, there is a need for all Agave to come to Christ. The author has also demonstrated how Christ can partake in the annual *Dzawuwuza*. It will be of great importance and the advancement of the Gospel when Christians observe the activities of the traditionalists such as the festival and its rituals and bring them from the known to the unknown just as Paul did in Athens.

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⁶⁸ Nyador, Interview, 20 December 2014.

⁶⁹ Nyador, Interview, 20 December 2014.

⁷⁰ Nyador, Interview, 20 December 2014.

⁷¹ Akpelesi, Interview, 8 December, 2014. Lolito.

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