

Ewe Cosmology and Spirituality: Implications for Christianity, Theology, and Biblical Scholarship in Africa



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ABSTRACT

The study examined the context, content and nature of Ewe Cosmology and Spirituality to decipher their significance or implications to Christianity, Theology, and Biblical scholarship in Africa. The study used the qualitative and phenomenology theory. Together they provided the right framework to engage with the critical issues that emerged thereof. The study analysed the historical trajectories and the nature and forms of their socioreligiocultural engagement with other cultures or people groups. It was observed that the Ewe people's historical development and encounters with different cultures produced a unique but complex cosmology pervaded by diverse spiritualities. Furthermore, it has created distinctive socioreligiocultural cosmology and spirituality that present very peculiar challenge that Christianity and Theology need to find a way around in order to engage meaningfully and effectively with the Ewe socioreligioculture. Recognition of the uniqueness of the Ewe cosmology and spirituality will inform the development of the right epistemology or nomenclature to fill the impasse created by the sharp dichotomy between the Ewe and Western (missionary) religiocultural cosmologies. The study concludes that the Ewe cosmology and spirituality present very unique and distinctive but legitimate and competitive socioreligiocultural frameworks that present great significance for appropriate epistemological frameworks or nomenclatures for Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

The Ewe cosmology and spirituality present a unique and distinct socioreligioculture pervaded with complex dimensions and nuances which provide special epistemology and an ontology that inform its cosmological worldviews and spirituality. Concepts that define the content, context and nature of the physical and spiritual ecology indicate a fascination with the nature, essence and dynamics of socioculture and the divine. Pervaded by a cosmology of active deities, spirits and ancestors, the Ewe cosmology presents deep religiocultural cosmology which is indicative of a deep interaction between the physical and spiritual universe that presents a conception of close corroboration and interaction. This presents its own peculiar challenge to Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship.

That notwithstanding, the quest to engage with the Ewe cosmology and spirituality therefore is not impossible. However, it requires a comprehensive methodology deciphered to provide an appropriate

understanding and nomenclatures to address issues of peculiarity and distinctiveness presented by it. Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship, therefore, need legitimate concepts that possess the capacity to present relevant and appropriate alternatives to the significance presented by the normative Ewe cosmology and spirituality. This will necessarily need to possess characteristics such as openness, patience, respect and objectivity. The Ewe cosmology and spirituality itself possesses a tapestry of epistemology and nomenclature that Christianity, Theology and Biblical scholarship could adapt to engage with it.

Despite, the variety of contexts, epistemology and nomenclature presented by the Ewe cosmology and spirituality, there is a strong temptation to misconceive its socioreligioculture and instead create tension, antagonism and confrontation. With the right methodology, an appropriate framework or nomenclature can be developed to provide the right context to effectively and efficiently engage with issues present within the Ewe cosmology and spirituality. This study discusses how possible, the peculiar challenges within the Ewe cosmology and spirituality can be examined and a pathway developed to provide the right answers and paradigm for appropriate and relevant engagement.

Origin of the Ewe People

There are several accounts of the origin(s) of the Ewe people. Amenumey and Meyer trace it to “Adzatome” (“*aza to me*”, Ewe expression that describes the place where mankind showed great smartness or intelligence) thus Babel around present-day Iraq founded by Ham, the second son of Noah after God confused the language of men for building a tower that reaches heaven’s gate (cf. Gen 11:1-9).¹ According to Ameka, this is credited as the source of the Ewe language “*Ewegbe*.”² According to Dotse’s oral tradition claim, the Ewes were led by an ancestor called “*Gu*” under whose leadership they settled at the delta of the river Nile, in present-day Egypt around the 11th century.³ Ladzekpo submitted that the tyranny of the natives did not allow the Ewes to stay for long.⁴ *Mi*, a warrior led them out south-westerly into Sudan close to present-day Khartoum.

According to Gunn due to drought, famine, and rampant slave raids by Arab slavers, they left south-eastwards into Abyssinia, present-day Ethiopia.⁵ At Abyssinia, the slavers traced them. Because they could not repel them due to their superior weaponry, they moved out, this time southwestwards into the regions of the bend of river Niger and the middle reaches of river Senegal. Tradition has it that they made great contributions to the old Ghana Empire, whose capital then was Walata, near Timbuktu which collapsed and was replaced by the Mali Empire, led by Mari Djata. It is during their stay here that they developed a spirituality made of deep rituals and sacrifices. After the death of Mari Djata, the empire disintegrated.

It was survived by the Songhai Empire. After the collapse of the Mali Empire and following the Niger River southeastwards, they came into present-day Nigeria, at the height of the Oyo Empire around the 13th century and settled briefly at Ile Ife in Yoruba land. Here they developed the Ifa divination. When the Oyo Empire collapsed, they moved westward to Dahomey, present-day Republic of Benin and settled in *Ketu*, also called *Amedzorpe* a Yoruba town in modern-day Benin. Toulassi indicated that at Benin or Dahomey, the need for security and protection made them split into three units of military groups *Lashibi*, *Adotri* and *Woe*.⁶ The first group settled around the Mono River and named that place Tado (Tando or A’Tando).

The second group settled between the Mono and the Haho Rivers which became Notsie in the present-day Republic of Togo. The third group settled at Adele and established the nucleus of what later became the Kingdom of Dahomey, but then called Dogbo-Nyigbo. At Notsie, they became semi-

¹ Divine Edem Kobla. Amenumey, *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times: A Political History with Special Emphasis on the Anlo, Ge, and Krepi* (Accra: Sedco Publication Limited, 1986); Birgit Meyer, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation: German Pietist Missionaries, Ewe Converts and the Politics of Culture,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2002): 167–99.

² Felix K Ameka, “Ewe,” in *Facts about the World’s Languages: An Encyclopaedia of the World’s Major Languages Past and Present* (New York: HW Wilson Press, 2001), 207–13.

³ A Kobla Dotse, “The Origins and Brief History of the Ewe People,” *Silver Springs, Maryland: XXXXX Publications*, 2011.

⁴ C K Ladzekpo and Structure Of Dance, “Introduction to Anlo-Ewe Culture and History,” 1995.

⁵ Jean-Philippe Gunn, “The Ewe in West Africa: One Cultural People in Two Different Countries (Togo/Ghana) 1884-1960,” 2017.

⁶ Toulassi Boniface, “Traditionally Inherited Leadership among the Ewes in Togo, West Africa: Reasons and Beliefs: Building an Integrative Approach” (Regent University, 2018).

autonomous. Some accounts claim that at its height, Notsie had over thirty-six semi-autonomous groups with their own leaders *Awoamefia* but together ruled by the leader of the Notie or Juatja. They soon developed centralised kingship and constructed a 17” by 30” wall around the city to protect it from external attacks and slave raiders. The king of Notsie Adela Atogble married Mama Asongoe a former wife of Adza Ashimadi, the king of Tado.

Mama Asongoe gave birth to Kponoe Ashimadi who became Sri I, and later Awoamefia I of the Dogbo-Nyigbo. She gave birth to several girls including Mama Kokui Wala, the mother of Tsatsu Adeladza, who became Awoamefia II of the Dogbo-Nyigbo at Anloga. After the demise of Ago, Ago Korli became the successor. He ruled with an iron fist, flaunted all traditions, and punished those who did not obey him. His reign became synonymous with tyranny and cruelty. According to Greene, this began a crucial phase in the history of the Ewes.⁷ Ago Korli instituted and promulgated laws and practices that put the people into serious hardship and maltreatment. Here they adopted the worship of deities that were conceived as very powerful but wicked.

According to Montgomery some of them were killed with ease or no mercy.⁸ The height of the cruelty of Ago Korli was when he asked that, first, the Dogbo-Nyigbo should produce mud concrete mortar with their bare feet and hands for the expansion of the wall around the Notsie, second, that they should make a rope with clay and third that all elderly people should be killed. According to Anyidoho the Dogbo-Nyigbo however kept one mama *Tegli* a very wise elderly woman who was considered a mouthpiece of the gods.⁹ It was this woman who advised the Dogbo-Nyigbo woman on how to break through the 17” by 30” wall of Notsie by throwing bath and wastewater against it to soften it. This made it possible for them to break it down and escape to *Tsevie*, in present-day Togo.

According to Montgomery and Vannier from *Tsevie* they dispersed under different leaders according to lineage.¹⁰ It is here, Notsie, that the twin powerful priests Togbui Astu Tsala Ashimadi and Etse Tsali Ashimadi who later became Okomfo Anokye (that is Okomfo from Notsie) of the Asanti perfected their arts. Unfortunately, before their forced migration from Notsie, Togbui Etse Tsali Ashimadi left and came to Awukugua where he became a powerful priest, healing and providing other spiritual services and guidance to the royal family and other people. It was here that the Asante King Osei Tutu saw him and invited him to Asanti to come and assist him in recovering his throne and unite the Asanti kingdom.

According to Gavua and Greene oral traditions have it that the first group led by leaders like Akoto, Kodzo De, Amega Lee, Asor and Bisiaku went south-westwards towards the Volta.¹¹ They settled in places like Hohoe, Matse, Peki, Asorgli, Awudome, Ve, Gbi, Kpando, Logba, Alavanyo, Kpalime, Agu, Kpedze, Wodze, and other towns. Amega Lee left the group southwards. He made a settlement at “Ge” or Accra, Legon, still bearing his name. He later left to join the main Dogbo group which had settled at Anloga. The second group went northwards toward the mountain ranges. They settled at places like Ho, Akovia, Takla, Kpenoe, Hodzo, Klevi, Sokode, Abutia, and Adaklu. The third group moved southeast toward the sea. They settled in places like Be, Togo, Wheta, Anlo, Klikor, Ave, Fenyi, Afife, Dzodze, Mafi, Agave, Tavie, Tokoe, and Tanyigbe to frustrate the pursuit of *Agokoli*.

According to Botwe-Asamoah unification of Eweland was the result of 1956 plebiscite.¹² Garratt indicated that after the defeat of the Germans in the 1st World War, the German colony of Togoland was partitioned.¹³ One portion was placed under the protectorate of Britain and became known as British Togo. The other, under French protectorate, became the French Togo, now the Republic of Togo. Both Togo

⁷ Sandra E Greene, “The Past and Present of an Anlo-Ewe Oral Tradition,” *History in Africa* 12 (1985): 73–87.

⁸ Eric J Montgomery, “They Died in Blood: Morality and Communitas in Ewe Ritual,” *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 2018, 25–40.

⁹ Kofi Anyidoho, “The Back without Which There Is No Front,” *Africa Today*, 2003, 3–18.

¹⁰ Eric, J. Montgomery and Christian N. Vannier, “Dawn of the Gods: History and Power in Eweland,” in *An Ethnography of a Vodun Shrine in Southern Togo* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 39–79.

¹¹ Dan Dzide, *A Handbook of Eweland, the Northern Ewes in Ghana*, ed. Kodjo Gavua, vol. 2 (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2000); Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996).

¹² Botwe-Asamoah, Kwame. “Ewe Nationalism; A Historical Perspective.” PhD diss., Southern Connecticut State University, 1977.

¹³ John Gregory Garratt, “Kulturkampf in Lomé: German and Ewe Identification and Alienation In Togoland, West Africa, 1884-1913,” *Traversea* 2 (2012).

under the British protectorate and Togo under the French protectorate were under the umbrella and supervision of the Trusteeship Council of the League of Nations, now the United Nations.

To Adotey, while Togoland under French Trusteeship was administered by its own Governor appointed by the French, the British protectorate of Togoland, later to be known as Trans-Volta Togo (TVT), and then as the Volta Region (VR), was administered by the Governor of the Gold Coast who reported directly to the Trusteeship Council of the League of Nations.¹⁴ The plebiscite decided whether the Western (British) Togoland would unite with the Eastern (French) Togoland or remain with the British on the Gold Coast. Before independence, the British Government recommended that the Trans Volta Togoland be integrated into the Gold Coast.

For Lawrance and Amenumey, this suggestion did not go down well with a portion of the people, especially the Ewes, who opted in the plebiscite to join French Togo, which then had attained an “autonomous republic for obvious reasons.”¹⁵ After independence, however, the Parliament of Ghana adopted a resolution to merge the Trans Volta Togo in the Mandated Territory under the Security Council of the United Nations, to form the Volta Region of Ghana, with a regional capital at Ho.

Ewe Cosmology and Spirituality

Amongst all the people groups in Ghana, the Ewe's religiocultural cosmology and spirituality are considered the most active, or vibrant. It is so pervaded by a densely populated ecology of powerful *deities* and *spirits*. Together across Eweland, there are over 3487 *deities* venerated in several hundreds of families, homes and communities. A particular family or community can have more than 40 deities at a single shrine. Apart from family or community deities, individuals also have their own deities connected to their day of birth, place of birth, or destiny. According to Adzogble Ewe autochthonous religion is formed by a deep fascination with the mystics of the physical and spiritual cosmology and the supernatural.¹⁶ It is spirited, graphical, and explicit. According to Lartey, it is a dual cosmology conceived as different dimensions or aspects of the other.¹⁷

Like every autochthonous religion, the Ewe traditional religion organised the religious beliefs and practices of the Ewe into systematic forms. Although multifaceted and multidimensional it creates a system of formal recognition of its existence, essence, and philosophy. Ewe traditional religion is very sacred, mystical, and densely populated. It concerns how they conceive the universe, the ecology of physical and spiritual cosmology, person, and personhood. Ewe religioculture begins with the concept of God “*Mawu*” which in the Ewe language is translated, as “*maa wu wo*” meaning “he will not kill you” or its inference “let you be killed or destroyed” and deities (*trɔwo*) or spirits.

The concept of being considered “supreme” or “first and foremost” developed in *Adzatome* and was further elaborated along the cause of migrations and encounters with other cultures and nation-states. It is believed that “*Mawu*” is a borrowed deity from the *Adzatome* or *Babel* culture by interactions and a blend of Ewe religioculture and other cultures. *Mawu*, therefore, became the highest *deity* and ruler of the cosmology of “*gods*” and “*spirits*” that animated the Ewe spiritual cosmology just like it was found among other people groups nearby. According to Raunet as they Ewe people travelled from place to place and encountered other cultures, the concept of “*Mawu*” was further developed to recognise “*femaleness*”.¹⁸

The “*femaleness*” of “*Mawu*” became “*Lisa*.” therefore “*Mawu-Lisa*” (the Male-Female deity or Father-Mother deity) Even though scholars have argued to the effect that “*Mawu-Lisa*” are two separate deities; male and female and therefore a couple, the nuance does not really imply that. Just like in the Ga religioculture, God is addressed as Father-Mother God which does not necessarily mean a God with two persons, father, and mother, so does the Ewe concept of the *Mawu-Lisa*, it does not necessarily mean two

¹⁴ Edem Adotey, “The Paradox of Colonialism—The German Colonial Project, Pan-Ewe-Identity and Consciousness in Togo, 1884–1914,” *Germany and Its West African Colonies: “Excavations” of German Colonialism in Post-colonial Times*, 2013.

¹⁵ Benjamin Nicholas Lawrance, “Shaping States, Subverting Frontiers: Social Conflict and Political Consolidation among the Ewe Dukowo in the Togoland Mandates, 1919-1945.” (Stanford University, 2002); Amenumey, *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times: A Political History with Special Emphasis on the Anlo, Ge, and Krepi*.

¹⁶ Roseline Elorm Adzogble, “Metaphysical Doctrines of the Anlo of Ghana and Process Philosophy,” *Process Studies* 51, no. 1 (2022): 25–45.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Lartey, “Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana” (JSTOR, 2000).

¹⁸ Nathalie Raunet, “Les Ewe (Togo, Ghana, Bénin), Histoire et Civilisation Ed. by Nicoué Lodjou Gayibor,” *African Studies Review* 65, no. 2 (2022): E33–35.

deities but the emphasis rather is on his Male-Femaleness as an attribute and not personality. The inclusion of “Sogbo” between “Mawu” and “Lisa” however, is an exaggeration of the potency or power of *Mawu-Lisa* especially his mastery and control of elements in the skies i.e., thunder, lightning, etc or the sky itself which is conceived as the corridor of celestial power.

“Sogbo” is “so” meaning “sky” or “thunder” and “gbo” which also means “great.” *Sogbo* therefore means power or greatness over the skies and therefore a deity that possessed power or control over the skies more than any other. “Mawu-Sogbo-Lisa” is therefore a devotional recognition of further attributes of “Mawu-Lisa.” According to Greene, especially in the 15th century, *Notsie* saw new rituals and appellations to “Mawu”, i.e., *Sogbolisa*; the originator and source of all that is seen, visible and invisible.¹⁹ *Kitikata*; is the one who sustains and upholds all things in himself. *Gbēdēgblēme*; the incontestable and incomparable being. *Blēmavo*; is the one who has always existed and will continue to exist (he does not expire or grow old). *Magblēmagblē*; the one who cannot be bribed or coerced into condoning or conniving etc.

According to Parrinder at Ile Ife in Yoruba-land in the 13th century another conception of “Mawu” emerged that emphasised his strength or might.²⁰ “Se” or “Ese” (‘Se’ or ‘Ese’ in ewe means strength) Mawu “Se” was a “warrior” deity who became actively involved in everyday activities and problems of the people. Mawu Sogbo-Lisa²¹ (the creator), Mawu Kitikata (the sustainer of creation), and Mawu Ese (strong and mighty) the creator or God of destiny became the Ewe trinity. While the first two, Mawu Sogbo Lisa and Mawu Kitikata, remained too supreme and directly did not involve themselves in the everyday affairs of humans, Mawu (E)Se or Dzorgbe Se directly and actively participated in human affairs.

Mawu “Se” therefore became the performative deity who kept law, order, and justice, the epitome of executive strength. As a result, lots of shrines soon sprung in his name. This informed a deep sacred spirituality guided by the perception that there is a “deity” who is very active in cosmology and who keeps everything in balance by probity, accountability, and justice. Individual, family, and community life were therefore organised such that they ensured that there were no contraventions or abuse of either their law or those formulated by years of observation and experience of his dealings within the physical or spiritual cosmology.

The concept of “causation” or “causality” therefore became a strong part of the Ewe religiocultural cosmology. Whatever a person did had consequences. This belief brought about the development of intermediary deities individually or collectively venerated. Some of these deities included *Yewe* (the god of thunder and lightning), *Afa* (the god of divination) who originated in Ile-Ife Nigeria among the Yoruba, *Eda* (guardian of the natural world, associated with the protection of the environment and balance of ecosystems), etc. others also popularise Legba, Heviosso, Mamiwata etc.

Engaging with the Ewe Cosmology and Spirituality

The attempt to understand the extent to which Ewe cosmology and spirituality affect Christianity and theology is an attempt to find out what rationale provides the basis for the tenets and practices contained within the cosmology and spirituality or the point where Christianity and theology meet with the ewe cosmology and spirituality. This requires a phenomenological approach which provides a competitive methodology to assess the nature, and essence of cosmology and spirituality. Engaging with the Ewe cosmology and spirituality therefore means, understanding the extent of impact or implications that it presents within which or against which a Christian theology can be derived.

According to Quarcoopome the Ewe cosmology and spirituality present a fascination with how its socioreligioclature is organised.²² One of the most important aspects of it is the presence of a complex cosmology of spirits and deities. The active presence of powerful deities or spirits presents a perception

¹⁹ Sandra E Greene, “Notsie Narratives: History, Memory and Meaning in West Africa,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 1015–41.

²⁰ Edward Geoffrey Parrinder, “Theistic Beliefs of the Yoruba and Ewe Peoples of West Africa,” *African Ideas of God*, 1950, 224–40.

²¹ *Latter Mawu became often depicted a dual deity with a male counterpart, Lisa. As a divine couple, Mawu and Lisa represented the complementary aspects of the universe i.e., the heaven and earth, the moon and sun, respectively and embody harmony, balance, and unity.*

²² Nii Otokunor Quarcoopome, *Rituals and Regalia of Power: Art and Politics among the Dangme and Ewe, 1800 to Present* (University of California, Los Angeles, 1993).

of cosmology or spirituality that is very much retributive. The retributive nature of the Ewe cosmology is but an indication of a cosmology defined and pervaded by justice. The concept of justice in the Ewe cosmology is intertwined with communal values, spirituality, and the ethical principles that guide social interactions. Justice is seen as the restoration of equilibrium, harmony and balance within the community or the natural world which involves reconciliation, restitution, or punishment.

The Ewe cosmology is known for its pervasion of wicked deities and therefore retributive. The entire society is organised with an understanding that a person does not have to intentionally cause harm to others. The concept of (retributive) justice is very pervasive. It is problematic that the forgiving (mercy) attribute of the Christian God is emphasised more than his justice in the Ewe cosmology. A presentation of the Christian gospel in the Ewe cosmology must therefore be presented wholistically to emphasise the justice of the Christian God. In Exodus 34:7 it states, ‘... He will by no means let the guilty go unpunished, but visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children unto the third and to the fourth generation....’

The parallelism presented by the Ewe and Christian concept of justice must be presented in a correlated form and appropriate epistemology develop for it. Anything less of this defeats the true understanding of the justice of the Christian God which describes his being and holiness. Another important component of the Ewe cosmology is the concept of life and death which is seen as different sides of the same coin or stages of the same process. For Rosenthal life in the Ewe cosmology is perceived as a process characterized by stages or transitions.²³ It is not just a physical existence but a spiritual journey. Death is therefore not the end of life (existence) but a transition to another stage (ancestral world) where the deceased continues to play a very significant role in the lives of the living.

For Fiawoo²⁴ although the ancestors have left their physical bodies, they are believed to serve as intermediaries between the living and the divine realm and possess special access to spiritual forces and divine powers that make them powerful allies and protectors of their descendants. Their presence is therefore felt in everyday life, in moments of joy, and sorrow, and in times of decision-making or crisis. Because they have lived in society before, they are considered to have wisdom, knowledge, and experience and therefore act as sources of guidance, offering advice to the living. More importantly, they are seen as custodians of cultural heritage and traditions. They embody the values, customs, and rituals passed down through generations.

This is why every individual in society is considered to possess a specific functionality or purpose within the society or community. Destiny, known as "*feleko*" in the Ewe language, refers to the predetermined path or fate that an individual is believed to follow throughout their life. While destiny is considered predetermined, to some extent, individuals are also believed to have a degree of personal agency. They can make choices and decisions that may influence the course of their lives although these choices are ultimately constrained by their predetermined destiny. This is why, the elders will always approach the "oracle" to inquire of a person's "*feleko*" before they are even born. This informs the kind of name that must be given to the child and upbringing.

This understanding also informs the concept of reincarnation in the Ewe cosmology. The concept of reincarnation is conceived in two forms; the first is a rebirth that comes with total consciousness of the previous life. This may include in a critical sense physical features and mannerisms recognisable as characteristics of the previous individual. Such a person may live with these features or mannerisms for the entirety of their second life. The second is also rebirth with partial consciousness of a previous life. That consciousness may not last the entirety of their lives but a majority of their early stages and soon wane off. This may last up to about seven or nine years when it will start to wane.

Rebirth, therefore is a major aspect of the general concept of life in the Ewe cosmology and spirituality. Therefore, death and birth are considered two very important things; while one is an exit into the ancestral world, the other is entry into the physical world. As such both birth and death are given the highest reverence. There are therefore complex birth and death rituals that celebrate each of the two in the most sacred way possible. It is believed that when a child is born and the required ritual is not performed,

²³ Judy Rosenthal, *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo* (University of Virginia Press, 1998).

²⁴Fiawoo, D. K. "Characteristic Features of Ewe Ancestor Worship." *Newell, WH (éd.), Ancestors, The Hague, Morton* (1976): 263-281.

the child could return. Similarly, if the death ritual for an individual to be received in the ancestral world is not performed well, the ancestor might reject the deceased.

Christianity in the Ewe (land) Cosmology

Christianity in Ghana is a dynamic of trajectories and epochs. Scholars such as Isichei, Hastings, Sundkler and Steed associated it with European merchant activities.²⁵ While Pobee and Hildebrandt place it around 17th January 1471, Agbeti places it on 20th January 1482 which coincides with the arrival of a Portuguese expedition with Augustinian Catholic priests, Captains Joao de Santarem, Pedro de Escobar and over 600 crew under the command of Don Diogo d'Azambuja at Elmina (*Edina*) near Cape Coast.²⁶ According to Groves²⁷ a day after, an Altar was erected and the first mass was celebrated.²⁸ Buah claim a school was soon started around 1529.²⁹ As indicated by Debrunner³⁰ a monastery was also built.³¹

This led to the evangelism of the Efutu and Komenda areas and around 1503, the conversion and baptism of the Chief of Efutu and over 1, 300 of his subjects. According to Buah around 1534, Ghana was made part of the diocese, with headquarters in Sao Tomé. However, trade, commerce and other enterprises soon overtook the attention of the Mission. In 1642, when the Dutch captured all Portuguese properties along the West Coast, the activities of Mission were proscribed. Nonetheless, in 1880, they returned with Frs. Eugene Murat and Auguste Moreau (SVD) at Elmina. The second wave was associated with Prince Henry the Navigator around the 15th century and later Church Mission bodies.

According to Ganusah and Meyer missionary activity in Eweland started around November 14th, 1847 by the Bremen Mission or North German Missionary Society who originally sent four missionaries Lorenz Wolf (26), James Graft (32), Luer Bultman (28), and Karl Flato (25) to Gabon but unfortunately landed at Christiansborg, Osu.³² After observing the development that the Church Missions had brought to neighbouring places coupled with a partnership that came to exist between the Missions, local people and colonial government which brought them assistance and military support, the King of Peki, Kwadzo Dei Tutu Yao II through his son Nyangamagu invited the North German Missionary Society to come and start activities among his people.

On his arrival on November, 14th 1847 in Peki a date officially recognised as the beginning of EPCG, Lorenz Wolf arrived in Peki and delivered his first sermon based on Psalm 22:22 "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the congregation will I praise thee". According to Dzide and Nugent, Lorenz lived among the people as one of them. A year later 1848, the first school was opened with 14 boys.³³ Unfortunately, in April 1851, having worked for 4 years, Lorenz Wolf died on his way home. According to the EPCG, in January 1852, Quinius took over and between 1853 and 1855, a fresh missionary work started from Keta by Daeuble and Plessing.³⁴

On 26th January 1856, Brutschin and Steinmann arrived at Adaklu-Waya and opened a new Mission Station. In 1857, Anyako station was established. In 1859, the Mission station at Ho was established. In 1864, a Mission Seminary was opened at Ho. When the Asante War erupted in 1869 all the missionaries left, leaving the Mission with no leaders. On 29th October 1882, Rudolf Mallet was ordained as the first African Minister. In 1884, a new school was re-opened at Peki-Blengo by Stephen

²⁵ Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995); Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950-1975* (Cambridge University Press, 1979); Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, vol. 74 (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁶ John S. Pobee, *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an African Context* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1992); Jonathan Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa: A Survey* (Africa Christian Press, 1987); John K. Agbeti, *West African Church History; Christian Missions and Church Foundations, 1482-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

²⁷ Groves, Charles Pelham. *The Planting of Christianity in Africa: Volume One, to 1840*. Lutterworth Press, (1948). p. 123

²⁸ Charles Pelham Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa: Volume One, to 1840* (Lutterworth Press, 1948).

²⁹ F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana, Revised and Updated* (Malaysia: Macmillan, 1998).

³⁰ Debrunner, Hans Werner. "A history of Christianity in Ghana." (1967). 19

³¹ Hans Werner Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967), 19.

³² Rebecca Yawa Ganusah, *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 Project in collaboration with Asempa Publishers, 2008); Birgit Meyer, "Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* 33 (2004): 447-74.

³³ Dzide, *A Handbook of Eweland, the Northern Ewes in Ghana*; Paul Nugent, "A Handbook of Eweland, Vol. I: The Ewes of Southeastern Ghana Edited by FRANCIS AGBODEKA Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 1997.

³⁴ Ghana Evangelical Presbyterian Church, "The Vision of the Global Evangelical Church, a Summary," *World Council of Churches*, 2013.

Kwami. In 1888, Rev. Peter Hall, a Basel missionary also brought Christianity to Nkonya Ntsumuru. In 1854 Schlegel, was sent to study the Ewe language. He immediately went to work, and soon he was able to transcribe it and the Ewe hymn book, catechism was put together.

According to Ganusah, by 1913 with the help of local people like Andreas Aku, Adzaklo, Samuel Quist, Yosef Tosu and Kudese the whole Bible had been translated into Ewe and published.³⁵ Presently, there are various churches and religious organisations that are strongly established and thriving in Eweland including Catholics, Anglicans, the Pentecostal and Charismatics, the Presbyterian, Methodist churches, the Adventists and recently Latter-Day Saints. According to the GNSS survey, presently a total population of 1,635,421, 67.2 per cent are Christians; 21.8 African Traditional Religion and 5.1 per cent are Muslims. It must however be emphasised that breaking the hegemony of traditional religion never was without confrontations

Missionaries came face to face with diviners, priests, and deities of the communities who were vehemently opposed to their activities. Their presentation of a religion different from the indigenous religions, though, sounded a good idea to some of the Kings and Queens because it meant more deities and therefore more powers, and some other people too because of the development that came with it i.e., education, agriculture, medical facilities etc it did not sound the same to those who strongly associate and got their livelihood from shrines. For example, Brivio recounts the struggle between Vodun priests and Roman Catholic missionaries.³⁶ Some of the missions had their camps burned and others were even attacked physically by followers of the Vodun shrines.

Meanwhile, the Indigenous religioculture influenced so much the sociocultural setup of the life of the people and community. Just as has been noted earlier, the Ewe cosmology is mainly spiritual, the spirituality of the cosmology transcended and informed every activity of the social life. According to Dietrich, because the Ewe cosmology is mainly spiritual, very charged and active, everybody tried to institute systems of protection and guidance from possible attacks or confrontations.³⁷ This popularised *Yewe* deity “*legba*” is considered a defender of shrines, households and even neighbourhoods. “*Legba*” was able to protect the spiritual essence of people and prevent their destinies from being affected by others or restore those that had been changed or affected.

“*Alegba*” was therefore very important and every household almost had it. The “*Alegba*” shrine and ritual practices coincided with the “*Afa*” divination. According to Nukunya, the Ewe people are very particular about the distinctive purpose of everyone who joins the family as a child or babe.³⁸ As a result, divination was popularised. It provided the means to see what future a person had and how to nurture such a person as well as the dangers that lay ahead of them. Divination provides the means to know whether an adventure or a business objective will be successful or not. These two the “*Alegba*” which provided protection and prevented other deities or spirits from attacking people and the “*Afa*” divination together provided very helpful religiocultural services to the people.

Within the Ewe religiocultural cosmology, many more deities exist, some are family deities but have large patronage because of their potency and others have local patronage. As a result, almost every family had their own deity that was venerated to protect members of the family, keep them from being attacked and connect them to their ancestors. Other shrines exist, named especially after renounced ancestors of the Ewe people, i.e., *Gu*, *togbui Tsala*, *togbui Tsali* etc shrines are shrines with the names of renounced ancestors of Ewe people who possessed unmatched power and contributed to the founding and freedom of the Ewe people during their various migrations and encountered with other people groups and nation-states.

It seemed that the Ewe people focused very much on the spirituality of the physical world than its physicality. As a result there arose over-emphasis on the belief in “causation”, that there is necessarily a cause for everything or that to live well and succeed in this physical world, one must be spiritually

³⁵ Ganusah, *Christ Meets the Ewe-Dome of Ghana: A Theological and Ethical Reflection on the Rites of Birth and Initiation into Womanhood*.

³⁶ Alessandra Brivio, “Religious Encounters in Togo: Vodun and the Roman Catholic Church,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 10, no. 1 (2022): 1–19.

³⁷ Christi M Dietrich, *Spirit Messengers, Divine Encounters: Practitioner Inhabitants of the Anlo-Ewe Spirit World* (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2012).

³⁸ G. Nukunya, *Afa Divination in Anlo: A Preliminary Report* (Legon, Accra: Research Review, 1969).

resourced or protected. They believed that nothing had been given unto man that was not had out of the benevolence of the gods. Every life, every achievement, every ailment, or success was the doing of the gods. Everybody therefore came to maintain close affinitive and embrace of the deities that could provide them the necessary protection or resources that guaranteed success and safety. This belief popularised the *trɔwo* shrines and to that effect the infamous “*trɔwosi*” practice.

The *trɔwo* are intermediary spirits (*deities*), they lived among the people, regulated interpersonal relationships and kept balance in the society. They maintained law and order and especially punished wrongdoing. Therefore, the *trɔwosi* system was a provision made within the ewe religioculture that enabled families to pay the spirits for wrongs done against them. As to why, the system changed from what it was into the use of young girls (virgins) is another subjective for study. According to Ame, these young girls (virgins) became the servants of the shrines their families had consulted for the rest of their lives unless the priest decided otherwise.³⁹ According to Bilyeu because, they had become the payment for the wrongs committed against the gods, consequently, they became the property of the priests who were representatives of the gods, they took as many as they could for wives and others for various services as needed by the priest or shrine.⁴⁰

Such girls did not return to their families or home again. They remained to provide various services such as cleaning, cooking, and assisting with religious ceremonies etc. Their families did not have the right to request their release, even in some instances, the family provided feeding support to the young girl and shrine priest. The priest did not owe any cultural duty to ask permission from the family or parents of such children before they could engage in sexual activities with such girls. It was the deity that determined if it desired to engage in such activity with anyone it chose to. Those who engaged in the *trɔwosi* believed that, if they did not pay for their wrongs, the shrine would continue to attack them and cause lots of misfortune. It was therefore reasonable to sacrifice one person to avert such calamities than for the whole family to perish.

Implication of the Ewe Cosmology and Spirituality to Christianity and Theology

The failure of Christianity in its Western (missionary) form to recognise the tapestry of the relevant framework presented by African cosmology and spirituality is a challenge that has been discussed for many years. The hegemonic nomenclatures of Western (Missionary) Christianity and its prejudicial evaluation of Africa’s sociocultural cosmology and spirituality present a trajectory of tension and rivalry. Like the Western framework itself, African cosmology presents an African framework that is complex, it is competitive and legitimate and presents a very relevant paradigmatic context out of which the Christian gospel could be effectively and efficiently communicated.

The challenge of an alternative framework that sufficiently provides relevant answers to the existential problems presented by the encounter of Christianity with the African Traditional Religion and Sociocultural cosmology presents a critical impasse. Western (missionary) Christianity therefore necessarily needs to re-examine the normative frameworks that have defined the context and content of its nomenclatures to recognise the availability of rich variety and multiple other frameworks that possess equal capacity and potential to provide a very relevant and appropriate framework for its nomenclatures. There is therefore the need to enculturate the Christian gospel and nomenclatures to eliminate the foreignness of the gospel outside its Western (European) culture.

The uniqueness of the Ewe cosmology and spirituality presents a very complex dimension of reality. The complexities of which lie not only in its dimensions of reality but spirituality as well. Inculturation, therefore, will provide the sensitivity and flexibility to engage with the diversity presented by Ewe cosmology and spirituality. Through inculturation, the dichotomy created by the prejudices and polemisation of Western (Missionary) Christianity and the African socioreligiocultural cosmology can begin to see each other as a parallel framework providing different but complementary contexts enriching both the spiritual and cultural lives of individuals and communities.

³⁹ Robert Kwame Ame, “Traditional Religion, Social Structure, and Children’s Rights in Ghana: The Making of a Trokosi Child,” in *Vulnerable Children: Global Challenges in Education, Health, Well-Being, and Child Rights* (Springer, 2013), 239–55.

⁴⁰ Amy Small Bilyeu, “Trokosi-the Practice of Sexual Slavery in Ghana: Religious and Cultural Freedom vs. Human Rights,” *Ind. Int’l & Comp. L. Rev.* 9 (1998): 457.

In an attempt to find the right framework to address issues presented by the Ewe sociocultural cosmology and spirituality the framework of Christianity must recognise the impact of factors such as language, norms, traditions, and values since they provide the context within which the Ewe's form a worldview or lenses through which they see the world (physical and spiritual). To a large extent, this may require the task of adapting Christian beliefs, rituals, and even symbols to align with the sensibilities of the Ewe culture including the incorporation of languages, music, art, and traditional practices, ceremonies, liturgies and theological concepts in ways that resonate with local beliefs and worldviews.

By integrating relevant elements of the Ewe cosmology and spirituality into Christianity and the framework of its nomenclatures, Christianity and the gospel resonate with the lived experiences, values, and aspirations of the community which produces a sense of ownership and agency and facilitates evangelisation. This is because when religious traditions are contextualised within the cultural framework of the people they seek to reach, they are more likely to resonate and become attracted. This is particularly true since the Ewe cosmology and spirituality are already pervaded with a complex hierarchy of deities and spirits, what people need is an alternative, an alternative that presents a better answer to the problems available within the indigenous cosmology.

CONCLUSION

The study has examined the Ewe cosmology and spirituality to decipher the implications presented to Christianity and Theology. This was done by a study of the historical trajectory of the Ewe's, analysis of the nature and dimensions of their cosmology and spirituality, and assessment of the process and methods of engagement and implications derived from the normative framework or nomenclatures of Christianity and Theology. It was realised that the historical development and encounter of the Ewe with other cultures produced a cosmological worldview and spirituality pervaded by diverse spiritualities, deities and spirits. Howbeit, this produced a very unique and distinctive socioreligiocultural cosmology or lenses through which the Ewe perceive, understand and interpret their universe and elements within it.

The uniqueness or distinctiveness of the Ewe cosmology and spirituality presented a serious challenge. A challenge that Christianity and Theology needed to find a way to go about if they wished to engage with the Ewe socioreligioculture. The failure to produce such right approach or methodology only indicated an inability to decipher a way to engage with it. Inculturation or indigenisation which provided the only relevant or appropriate framework was the only efficient and effective methodology. Recognition of the uniqueness of the Ewe cosmology and spirituality provided a framework to decipher appropriate nomenclature that provided a solution to the impasse created by the sharp dichotomy that existed between the Ewe and Western (missionary) religiocultural cosmologies.

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