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**Pentecostalism and Indigenous
Religions**

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Editorial Address: pujournals@pentvars.edu.gh

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CONTRIBUTORS

Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah is the Past Presiding Bishop of The Methodist Church Ghana (2003-2006). He is currently the Director of Research and Publications, at The School of Theology, Mission and Leadership, Pentecost University.

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, PhD, is Baeta-Grau Professor of Contemporary African Christianity and Pentecostal Charismatic Theology at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra, Ghana, where he currently serves as the President of the Seminary.

Genevieve Nrenzah is a Research Fellow in the Religion and Philosophy Section of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Her research and teaching interest include Africa's diverse indigenous religious beliefs and ceremonies and their extensions in the African Diasporas; Religion and Economics; Sound/Music in Indigenous Religions and Christianity; Sacred Spaces; Sexuality, Religion, Human Rights and Neo Feminism in Ghana. She is currently an Alexander von Humboldt scholar at the University of Rostock, Germany working on the project – 'Rights, Ritual, Discourse and Abuse in Ghanaian Pentecostalism'.

Samuel Ofori is an ordained minister of The Church of Pentecost, and currently worships at the Mt. Olivet Assembly in the Darkuman District, Kaneshie Area. He lectures at the School of Theology, Mission and Leadership of the Pentecost University, Sowutuom-Accra, where he serves as the Head of the Centre for Ministerial Formation and Training. He holds a PhD in Theology from the Akrofi-Christaller Institute (ACI), Akuapem-Akropong, Ghana. His research interest is in Christianity and African Culture.

Harvey Kwiyani is a Malawian missiologist who has conducted extensive research in African Christianity and African Theology for his PhD. He taught African Theology at Liverpool Hope

University. Harvey is CEO of Global Connections, programme leader for the Africa Christian Diaspora route of the CMS Pioneer MA, and founder and executive director of Missio Africanus, a learning community focused on releasing the missional potential of African and other minority ethnic Christians living in the UK.

Charles Owiredu holds a PhD from the University of Durham in England. He is a Senior Lecturer at the Daniel Institute, Central University, Ghana and a former Vice President (Academics) of Regent University College of Science and Technology. His area of specialization is Biblical Studies and African Thought with research special interest in Biblical Languages, Etymology and Eco-theology.

Justice Anquandah Arthur is a senior lecturer and the head of the Department of Theology, School of Theology, Mission and Leadership (STML), Pentecost University in Accra, Ghana. His research interests are media and material culture of African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity; the use of the Bible in African Christianities; the encounters of other religious traditions with Pentecostal-Charismatic churches; issues of religion, development, and conflict in Pentecostal contexts.

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Theme for Next Issue:
Pentecostalism and the Public Space

EDITORIAL

Pentecostalism and the African Religious Imagination

Pentecostalism can be defined by the pneumatic emphasis of its spirituality. That means, at the heart of Pentecostal Christianity is the experience of the Holy Spirit. Although Pentecostalism and its younger progenies, the various charismatic movements have become worldwide movements the expressions of its spiritualities differ according the religio-cultural contexts in which they are located. Thus, within the African context, Pentecostals, whether consciously or unconsciously, function within two major worldviews, and these are, the biblical and the traditional. The pneumatic emphasis of Pentecostalism is seen both through the regular manifestations of the Holy Spirit in tongues, visions, and prophecies, and in a strong interventionist theology that gives attention to healing, exorcism, and deliverance.

At the center of Pentecostal/charismatic movements are mediators of supernatural power – pastors, prophets, and evangelists – people deemed to have been endowed “with eyes to see” into the invisible spiritual realm, and who bring communication from there to the human realm. All these Pentecostal/charismatic spiritual phenomena are present within African traditional religious practices too. Among the Akan of Ghana, for example, the traditional priest has an assistant, whose function includes the interpretation of the “tongues” spoken through the priest by the deity. The critical functions of the traditional priests always include the powers of divination, prophecy, healing, and exorcism. In other words, the credibility of the priest hinges on the extent to which he or she hears from the deity that is served and to be able to deliver authentic prophetic directions, including bringing critical medical or healing interventions to aid the afflicted.

In a sense, especially when considered from the viewpoint of the prophetic ministry, African Pentecostal leaders are

Christian charismatic figures who function as the Christian equivalents of traditional medicine and diviners and whose ministries, although intended to be biblical, also very forcefully reflect the ways in which religious mediations occur in primal societies. In the primal societies of Africa, as Ghanaian pastoral theologian Emmanuel Lartey points out, medicine has always been practiced by traditional priest healers and so to the traditional African the most important activity of the priest is the medical one—the ability to diagnose correctly and to prescribe accurate remedies for various diseases.¹ The process of diagnosis usually requires consultation with spirits and discerning from the spiritual realm, a process that has also come to be associated with the work of Pentecostal/charismatic Christian prophets.

Here in this volume, we have essays that are dedicated to the intersection between Pentecostalism and primal religions and how certain practices of the traditional context, literally influences the Pentecostal/charismatic agenda. A critical example of this development is what I refer to as the act of communicating with the supernatural in terms of “religious mediation” and how important it is to primal or indigenous religiosity. This intersection has led to a certain type of religious functionary within the African Christian church whose activities include healing, prophecy, and the reversal of negative destinies. In *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins makes the following observation that summarizes my thoughts on how primal spirituality has been reinvented in African Pentecostalism:

Considering the central role of healing and exorcism in Southern churches, it is tempting to look for older pagan roots, and to ask just how the emerging congregations justify their ideas. Of course, Southern churches thrive because of their appeal to distinctly African or Latin American ideas—their ability to work within traditional

1 Emmanuel Y. Lartey, ‘Healing, Tradition and Pentecostalism in Africa Today’, *International Review of Mission*, vol. 75, 297 (January 1986), 75.

culture—but these examples of accommodation do not amount to a betrayal of the faith, still less to syncretism.²

In other words, the primary intention of the Pentecostal/charismatic movements under study in the essays in this volume is to be biblical, but in the process, they have achieved contextual relevance by working within indigenous worldviews of spiritual causality and the use of supernatural force to interpret and counter the effects of extraordinary evil.

If integrations into or reinventions of primal religious and cultural ideas in indigenous expressions of the Christian faith do not amount to syncretism, as Jenkins notes above, then we are confronted with questions relating to modes of understanding these innovations that are said to be at work in the indigenous churches of the global south, especially, Pentecostalism. One suggestion is that we should look at how the Bible is translated, interpreted, and consequently understood and used in these contexts:

The rising churches can plausibly claim to be following abundantly documented precedents from the founding ages of Christianity. The Bible itself so readily supports a worldview based on spirits, healing, and exorcism. When Jesus was asked if he was the Messiah, he did not give an abstract theological lecture but pointed to the tangible signs and wonders that were being done in his name. ...When Paul took the Christian faith to Macedonia, the first known mission into Europe, he was responding to a vision received in a dream.³

Healing, visions, and dreams are important religious categories in the sort of innovative Christianity represented by Pentecostalism and these phenomena have long been recognized as central themes in primal piety as well. Philip Jenkins concludes from these observations, as some like Christian G. Baëta, Andrew Walls and Kwame Bediako did

2 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Revised and Expanded Edition (Oxford University Press, 2007), 148.

3 Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 148

much earlier, that 'in understanding what can look like the oddities of Third World churches, it is helpful to recall one basic and astonishing fact, which is that, they take the Bible seriously indeed.'⁴

The early 20th century prophet, William Wadé Harris, took on the designation 'Black Elijah of West Africa' because like his Old Testament model he confronted people's ancient cult-figures or idols which he combated by calling upon the fire of God to burn as demonstrations of viable power. In the explanation of Jenkins, legend tells how pagan shrines actually burst into flames as Prophet Harris approached and their priests, like those of Baal "fled before the coming of such supernatural power."⁵ Jenkins proceeds to illustrate that parallels of contemporary Southern Christianity with ancient Christianity are just as clear when we consider prophetic leadership: "The vitality of prophecy in the contemporary South means that the rising churches can read biblical accounts with far more understanding and sensitivity than Northern Christians can."⁶

The calling, role, and modus operandi of the *ɔkɔmfɔ*, *babalawo* or *nganga* (traditional priests/diviners), as these religious functionaries may be designated within various African traditions, presents a particular poignant example of how the resonances between primal piety and indigenous revivalist Christianity works out in practice. When the *ɔkɔmfɔ* (priest) comes under the possessing influence of the deity, he or she does not speak in ordinary human language. The *Akɔmfɔ* speak the language of the gods because the gods do not communicate in human languages. Rather they do so in "unknown primal tongues" as a sign of their existence and presence. It lies in the power of religious functionaries with access to the language of the supernatural realm to relate to suppliants what the gods may be saying. Harvey Cox

4 Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 148; Christian G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of some Spiritual Churches* (London: SCM, 1962).

5 Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 58.

6 Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 149.

points to the meaning of Pentecostal tongues in the light of a phenomenon that has always been known within primal or indigenous traditions. He explained why the phenomenon of glossolalia constitutes a profound transcendental experience or a form of vital participation in the life of transcendence:

I believe that the inner significance of speaking in tongues or praying in the Spirit can be found in something virtually every spiritual tradition in human history teaches in one way or another: that the reality religious symbols strive to express ultimately defies even the most exalted human language. Virtually all the mystics of every faith have indicated that the vision they have glimpsed, though they try very desperately to describe it, finally eludes them.

It is within this context of the human inability to adequately capture and express the deep things of the spirit that St. Paul describes Pentecostal tongues as 'groans' or 'sighs' that are 'too deep for words' (Romans 8:26). This does not refer to silent prayer, as popular interpretations have generally cast it. Rather as Pentecostal New Testament scholar, Gordon D. Fee suggests, it "sighs too deep for words" refers to communicating languages that are humanly incomprehensible because "we do not know how to pray." Human languages are limited in their ability to articulate what lies deep within the human psyche. Interpretations of Pentecostal tongues are therefore given to those to whom the Spirit grants the required ability. In the traditional shrine, it is left to the *ṣṣṓfó*, who is the mouthpiece of the deity, to interpret what the *ṣkṣmfo* who assumes the position of the deity under possession may be saying to suppliants.

It is instructive that the Yoruba designation of the diviner, *babalawo*, literally means "father/custodian of secrets." The functions of both the *ṣkṣmfo* and *babalawo* include diagnosis, the prescription of appropriate remedies and when needed, a prophetic function that reveals the minds of gods and deities to peoples and communities. Understood this way, the reemergence of the prophetic role within African independent

and Pentecostal Christianity takes on a particularly important significance. Jenkins appropriately refers to the independent churches as critical in demonstrating the real spiritual hunger that Christianity encountered and sought to fill within its African converts.⁷ These particular types of Christianity constituted paradigmatic shifts from the rational and cerebral expressions of the faith associated with the historic Western-mission related denominations because they offered more reasonable and experiential forms of faith that were especially able to cater to the tensions that exist within people and communities as they sought to make sense of their physically and spiritually precarious African worlds.

Rijk van Dijk explains how this occurred when Pentecostalism in Ghana came under indigenous leadership:

When the mission Pentecostal churches were placed entirely in the hands of African leadership in the 1930s and the 1950s, the leadership accommodated to notions of the spirit world, the ways in which individual subjects were affected by such influences and forces, and it developed distinct ideas on how such afflicting forces could be counteracted in prayer-healing, speaking in tongues and similar rituals.⁸

Globalization, modernity, immigration to Western contexts and economic development have created new fears, anxieties and challenges that have made the resort to supernatural solutions to problems even more paramount for many Africans. The spiritual allies of the African Christian reside in the supernatural realm and their powers are mediated by the ministers of the church, that is, prophets, dreamers, and visionaries. The essays in the current edition of the journal do not exhaust the issues, but one thing is clear, African Christians generally, and Pentecostals in particular, need to reflect soberly on the importance of traditional beliefs in living out the Christian faith within a world in which people do not take off

7 Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 54.

8 Rijk A. van Dijk, 'From Camp to Encompassment: Discourses of Transsubjectivity in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 27, 2 (1997), 140.

their traditional religious “clothing” even after they have come to Christ. The sorts of existential issues that are taken to our prayer camps are clear indicators of the issues we talk about in this volume of the Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission.

Professor J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu
A Member of the Editorial Advisory Board

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION USING PENTECOSTAL NARRATIVES TO EXPLORE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PENTECOSTALISM AND INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS OF MALAWI

Harvey C. Kwiyani

Key Words

Pentecostal Narratives, Spirit world, Enthusiastic Christianity, Ancestors, the world African Religion, and African Pentecostalism.

Introduction

This essay uses a theological reflection of Pentecostal narratives from Malawi in southeast Africa where I was born and raised to explore the connection between Pentecostalism and indigenous religions. It has been sparked and undergirded by several key events that I have experienced in my faith life. I am a descendant of a Pentecostal preacher (my father), a Presbyterian minister (my grandfather) who had two brothers, one an indigenous religion priest and spiritual healer and the other a founding apostle of an African Independent Church. Yet, I have taken on an academic journey in theological education with Pentecostal leanings. Chief among the events that sparked my Pentecostal curiosity behind the argument of this essay is the conversion of my grandfather's brother from an indigenous religion to Christianity and the myriad struggles he faced as he discerned what to do with his longstanding spiritual gifts as a medium for the community.

He had refused to convert to Christianity for a long time in spite of—or maybe because of—his Presbyterian brother's witness. He always said that Christianity (especially that of his Presbyterian brother) did not understand the spirit world with which he had dealt every day all his adult life. He refused to recognize it as a religion because for him, a religion must attend to the spirit-world. If it did not, like the Christianity of my grandfather, it was only fit to be a moral philosophy.⁹

⁹ Harvey Kwiyani, "Can the West Really Be Converted?," *Missio Africanus Journal of African Missiology* 4 (2019): 83.

The day he converted, he declared, (and I was there to hear him say this), that he had finally realized that the Spirit in Christianity was the real deal – every other spiritual authority and power out there that was not of God - was both inferior and vile. In his words, “compared to everything I have ever worked with, the Spirit of God feels like pure fresh air.” I would later understand that pure fresh air is actually a translation of Holy Spirit.¹⁰ The theological questions that flooded my mind on that day, in the 1990s, have stayed with me for decades. This essay is part of my lifelong quest to understand the relationship between enthusiastic Christianity and African indigenous religions.

The Spirit World of African Religions

I believe that the most cited statement describing the African people’s religious outlook is John Mbiti’s simple but complex opening sentence in *African Religions and Philosophy*, “Africans are notoriously religious.”¹¹ Of course, Mbiti was right. Africans, who had been misrepresented by Europeans for centuries as having no religion, were actually helplessly religious. In that one statement, Mbiti challenged decades of Western religious violation and mislabelling of Africa that had gone on for centuries. The African religion that had for so long been dismissed was to be recognised for what it really was – a religious heritage that had served Africans for centuries. Europeans had labelled it first as non-religion – this made it easier to justify slave trade. Without religion,

10 Heiligen Geist in German, *hagio pneuma* in Greek, *Spiritus Sanctus* in Latin and *ruach kadosh* in Hebrew. All these can be translated clean air or wind. I am certain that my grandfather did not know this. Of course, in Chichewa, the word “spirit” is translated *mzimu* (pl. *mizimu*) but spirits are generally spoken of as *mweya* or *mpweya* (trans. “air”) and *mphepo* (also trans. “wind”). People will often talk about *mweya/mpweya wabwino* or *mphepo yabwino* meaning “good spiritual atmosphere” when things are going well for them and *mweya/mpweya/mphepo zoyipa* to talk about a bad spiritual atmosphere when they face frustration.

11 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 1.

Africans were not human and could, therefore, be justifiably enslaved. When slavery became unsustainable, and Europeans came to evangelise Africans, the tone changed. Africans were recognised to have a religion that was totally different from Christianity, different enough to be the opposite of Christianity and, therefore, a devilish religion. This they pejoratively labelled animism and believed it to be idol worship, ancestral worship, evil, and anti-Christian. African indigenous religions were perceived as enemies that the missionaries needed to take down, forcefully, if necessary, if they were to plant Christianity in Africa. It was, in the eyes of the Europeans, worse than having no religion at all. It was good for nothing but anthropological and ethnographical research.¹² Mbiti sought to disrupt that belief by declaring that Africans had religion and that it was this African religion that prepared for the arrival of Christianity. He called African religion *preparation evangelica* suggesting that they prepared the way for the coming of the good news of Jesus to Africa.¹³ Of course, the African worldview that shapes most expressions of African indigenous religions is not too different from the one Africans read about in the Bible.

The world of African indigenous religions is built on the belief that the universe is full of invisible beings – spirits – that are immensely more powerful than humans. This spirit-world includes God and spirits (including those of ancestors). Of course, God is, above everything else, the all-powerful (or almighty) Spirit, the source of all (spiritual) power.¹⁴ Spirits are believed to have the ability to affect and shape the material world in which we live. God created and gave power to many spirits, some of them work for God's cause for all creation while

12 Kwiyani, "Can the West Really Be Converted?," 83.

13 John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2012), xiii.

14 "For thine is the power, the kingdom and the glory for ever and ever." Also, as Jesus said, "All power is given unto me." Indeed, my grandfather would often say that *all power is spiritual power*, that one cannot have power that is not of the spirit first, and that spiritual power is always delegated and designated and must be used in harmony with the rest of what is happening in the spiritual world.

many others seek to frustrate God's desires in the world. The primary purpose of human beings is to serve the spiritual world and, thereby, maintain a harmonious order in the universe.

In addition, humans are essentially spirit-beings with bodies.¹⁵ When humans die, their spirits continue to exist, joining the spirit-world as ancestors (the most prominent of these will continue to be invoked, often by name until they are forgotten, at which time they join the world of unnamed ancestors that are believed to be still engaged in the human world). Often, good and generous ancestors are invoked to help protect the communities of their descendants from opposing spiritual forces (as they are believed to be even more powerful after death). As a result, many Africans believe that human life, as we live it in this physical realm on earth, mirrors developments in the spirit-world. Life will go well when the spiritual powers on our side are stronger than those seeking to frustrate us.

The Spirit in African Independent Churches

In the early years of the Western missionary engagement in the 19th century, mainline missionaries attempted to convert Africans to a religion that looked nothing like their own indigenous religious heritage. The missionaries lacked the spirit-language that was, to Africans, the hallmark of religion. They did not understand the spirit-world of the Africans and, thus, right from the start, there was a theological miscommunication between the Europeans and the Africans. Explaining the African perspective of the conflict, Jacob Loewen states:

Verbally, missionaries tend to confess a belief in spirits, especially the Spirit of God. But it seems to be more lip service than anything else, because most of them have never seen or experienced an evil spirit. Their knowledge

15 I heard it numerous times among my grandfather's circles that the spirit-world is more real than the physical one and that everything that happens in the material world is a result of something that had already taken place in the spirit realm. Curiously, this language, almost verbatim, shaped Malawian Pentecostal theology and served as an impetus for evangelism and spiritual warfare.

is entirely conceptual, rather than experiential. In fact, their whole educational system in the Western scientific world has taught them that there is a deep cleavage between the material and the spiritual, and whether they want it or not, they tend to accept the material as much more real.¹⁶

The encounter between Western Christianity and local spiritualist religious systems (whether in Africa or in other parts of the world) has always been tense. For the Africans, for instance, it was difficult to imagine a religion in which the spirit-world remains merely an abstraction. It was understandably perplexing for Africans to imagine a religion – Christianity – whose Spirit was allegedly stronger than the spirits of the ancestors but was not active. Consequently, they concluded the Spirit in Christianity was either too weak or non-existent.¹⁷ It was believed to be a spirit only in name. It could not bring down rains. It could not heal the sick. It could not foretell of future events. It could not perform miracles. In fact, some of the missionaries did not believe in miracles. All these were activities that were associated with spirits and spiritual power in traditional religion. Paul Pomerville observes that,

The excessive impact of western culture on the theology brought by the missionary to non-western cultures resulted in an extremely naturalistic, rationalistic, and abstract-oriented theological product being introduced into supernaturalistic, intuitive, and concrete oriented societies.¹⁸

Many people who converted to Christianity continued to believe in the efficacy of the spirit-world of God, other spirit-beings, and spirits of their ancestors. This was in addition to the faith they found in the God of Christianity. It would be too much of a challenge for them to live without the connection

16 Jacob A. Loewen, "Mission Churches, Independent Churches, and Felt Needs in Africa," *Missiology* 4, no. 4 (1976).

17 For more on this, see David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford, 1968).

18 Paul Anthony Pomerville, *The Third Force in Missions: A Pentecostal Contribution to Contemporary Mission Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 74.

with the spirits.¹⁹ Citing Gottfried Ooster's reflection on this problem, Pomerville adds that:

For it is precisely the absence or lack of the power of God as a reality people can live by that has been a precipitating factor to these movements. In African traditional religions, power is as the center of their thinking. And the spirit – of God, the gods, or the ancestors – was a tangible reality. How remote, how intellectual, how powerless seems to be the God and the Spirit the missionaries preach about, or the Westerners show in their lives. As one leader once expressed it in a conversation with the missionary, “you have held back the Spirit!”²⁰

From African Indigenous Religions to African Pentecostalism

In addition to bringing in a religion in which the Spirit was detached from the experiential aspects of life, the missionaries denied and strongly criticized the supernatural dimensions in traditional societies. All the indigenous spirit-talk was evil and had to cease for fear of syncretism. When African Christians began to access vernacular translations of the Bible, they read for themselves what it says about spirits – God is a Spirit, the Spirit anoints Jesus for ministry (that actually looks like that of the spirit mediums of their society) and that the Spirit of Jesus lives in his followers, empowering them to do greater works than the miracles he performed – again, miracles that looked like the ones they saw in their indigenous religions. In the Scriptures, African Christians found the Spirit which seemed similar to the spirits in the indigenous religions.

In response to the pneumatological hiatus in Western theology, Africans started their own independent churches. As a result, enthusiastic indigenous movements, later labelled Zionist or Ethiopian, came into existence largely due to this theological misunderstanding.²¹ The Africans were drawing

19 Even today, some studies suggest that many African Christians still depend on African spiritual consultants for their spiritual needs. See Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

20 Pomerville, *The Third Force*, 76.

21 See Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

from their spirit-centered worldview to inform their learning about the Spirit in the Bible. The general outlook of the African independent churches that emerged out of this encounter show a form of Christianity that bypasses the European middleman to engage the Bible using African cultural sensibilities. AICs are the foundation upon which African Pentecostal movements build.

In a nutshell then, African Pentecostalism has its roots in African indigenous religions. It has Christianised the African worldview by replacing the myriads of spirit-beings of African indigenous religions with God and the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, as my grandfather suggested, is the clean spirit that has infinite powers compared to anything else. My grandfather would allude to the fact that the power of the Spirit of God is in its cleanness – without holiness, we cannot see God (Matt. 5). Any spiritual power that is not holy, (and, therefore, not of the Holy Spirit) is suspect. In addition, the blood that was at the centre of African religion (which was also at the centre of the Judaism that we see in the Old Testament) has been replaced by that of Jesus, doing the same primary work as the blood of the sacrificial animals in the Old Testament – touching the spirit-world on behalf of humans to appease and entice God or the spirits to forgive, bless, and protect them.

Thus, the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent Spirit of Jesus in African Pentecostalism continues the work of the spirits in African religions, doing everything as it should be done, in holiness and truth. The Spirit continues to breakthrough into the world of humans as expected, to intervene and set the world in order according to the kingdom of heaven in which God is king. The medium and priest of indigenous religions is replaced by the Pentecostal prophet or apostle and their world marches on. A Christianity that is shaped by African cultural sensibilities must, out of necessity, wrestle with the spiritual and spirit-centred concerns of Africans. It ought to offer answers to their spiritual problems and not treat them as superstition that must be ignored. Such a Christianity will have

to be enthusiastic. Indeed, a non-enthusiastic (non-Charismatic, non-Pentecostal) Christianity will be strange and, to a great extent, useless.

Conclusion

I have argued within the limited space of this essay that African indigenous religions provide the foundational building block upon which African Pentecostalism stands. Indeed, African Pentecostalism is, in the words of David Ngong, a thinly disguised African indigenous religion.²² As a matter of fact, it appears to me that Pentecostalism is what happens when Christianity encounters spirit-centred religions of the world. Jesus enters the world of indigenous religions and offers himself as the more excellent way.²³ He comes with all power in heaven and earth and, through his Spirit, gives gifts to his followers to walk in the same spiritual power. As this happened in Africa, indigenous religion gave way to spirit-centred Christianity. I propose that in the African continent, the Africanisation of Christianity has also been its pentecostalisation, bringing it closer to African cultures and religions.

22 David Ngong, on Twitter, @ProfDNgong, <https://twitter.com/ProfDNgong/status/1456637499619565574> posted on 5 November 2021.

23 Through his Spirit, he is the sacrificial lamb without blemish, the high priest who brings the sacrifice before the Mercy Seat, and of course, the God who receives the sacrifice (see Heb. 8).

A REFLECTION ON PENTECOSTALISM AND MONTANISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INDIGENOUS RELIGION OF CYBELE OR THE GREAT MOTHER OF THE GODS

Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah

Key words

Montanism, Montanus, Cybele, the Great Mother, Attis, Pentecostalism, Indigenous religions, the Day of Blood and the Day of Joy.

Introduction

This study comes under two main sections; the first part gives a brief summary of the indigenous religion of Montanus before his conversion to the Christian faith. The second section draws out five beliefs of the modern-day Pentecostalism that are found in the Montanist movement led by Montanus. We shall then conclude that indigenous religions have some beliefs and practices that are shadows of the reality that are now fully realized in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Indigenous Religion of Montanus

To understand and appreciate Montanism in the context of Pentecostalism we need to know the practice of the indigenous religion of Cybele, the goddess that Montanus served as a chief priest before his conversion to the Christian faith. After his conversion the Christian group he led came to be known as Montanism or the New Prophecy that began either in Pepuza, Tymion or Ardabau in the region of Phrygia of Asia Minor, (now in west-central Turkey).²⁴

The myth surrounding Cybele was that when she was a small child, she was left in the wilderness to die, but she was protected by wild animals like lions and panthers; and “she

²⁴ See, an article, “Magna Mater and the Galli”, <https://pressbooks.becampus.ca/unromantest/chapter/magna-mater-and-the-galli/>

grew up into an intelligent beautiful and headstrong woman.”²⁵ She fell in love with a young handsome prince called Attis (a shepherd). The intense love of the divine Cybele was too much for the mortal prince²⁶, so without informing Cybele, Attis decided to marry Sagaris, a nymph.²⁷ When Cybele heard about this, out of jealousy and anger she went to the wedding feast. The guests scattered when they saw her, and Attis too was terrified. Cybele made Attis temporarily mad, and he fled to the mountains. He fell under a pine tree and slashed himself, and finally castrated himself and bled to death. Cybele deeply regretted and mourned for Attis, and Jupiter consoled her assuring her that the pine tree would remain sacred forever. But then Cybele restored Attis to life, it also brought the world of nature back to life.²⁸

There were two major annual festivals that were celebrated to commemorate Attis and Cybele. The first one, named the ‘Day of the Blood’ and the ‘Day of Joy’ (Hilaria) was celebrated from March 15 to 27. At the festival a pine tree was cut and brought to Cybele’s shrine, where it was honoured as a god and adorned with violets considered to have sprung from the blood of Attis. On March 24, the ‘Day of Blood’, her chief priest, the archigallus, drew blood from his arms and offered it to her accompanied by the music of cymbals, drums, and flutes.²⁹ The lower priests also slashed themselves and poured their blood on the sacred pine. After two days of sorrow and mourning for Attis, the festival ended on the third day of March 27 with great joy, celebrating the resurrection of Attis and renewal of the fertility of nature made possible by the power of Cybele.³⁰

25 “The Cult of Magna Mater”, by Anders Sandberg, <http://legallhistorysources.com/ChurchHistory220/LectureOne/MagnaMater.htm>

26 Ibid.

27 Nymph is a mythological spirit of nature imagined as a beautiful maiden inhabiting rivers, woods, or other locations.

28 <http://www.talentshare.org/~mm9n/articles/montanus/1.htm>

29 “Great Mother of the Gods”, by the editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Great-Mother-of-the-Gods>

30 “The Cult of Magna Mater”, by Anders Sandberg. <http://legallhistorysources.com/ChurchHistory220/LectureOne/MagnaMater.htm>

The second annual festival that developed later in Rome when the worship of Cybele was adopted by the Romans, was called Megalesia, celebrated each year from April 4 to 10. A key cultic practice during the festival was the taurobolium, – a baptism by blood of bulls. Instead of following the self-castration of Phrygian priests, in Rome bulls were “castrated and sacrificed on perforated roof, and new initiates were baptized in its blood as they stood under the flowing rain of blood from the sacrificial bull.”³¹

According to an ancient myth Cybele was the inventor of pipes and drums, as well as magical medicines for healing sick children.³² Women who needed all kinds of help went to sleep in her temples. She was considered the mother of all creatures, - the giver of life to gods, goddesses, human beings, beasts and plants alike.³³ Cybele was also a protector of life in times of war. In 204 BCE, Hannibal, the general and statesman of Carthage in North Africa, regarded as one of the greatest military commanders in history, planned to invade Italy.

The Roman military commander at that time, Scipio Africanus was advised that if the Romans could get the goddess Cybele to Rome, they would defeat Hannibal and his powerful army. The advice was followed, and Cybele was brought to Rome, “together with her sacred symbol, a small stone reputed to have fallen from the heavens.”³⁴ The Romans won the war and established the worship of the goddess Cybele in Rome, adoring her as the Great Mater of the Gods (Latin: Mater Deum Magna Idaea). Some of Cybele’s self-castrated Phrygian priests (the Galli) accompanied her to Rome and practiced some form of transgenderism. They made every effort to appear and behave as women. Their linen and silk clothes were a combination of fashionable feminine and priestly dress. ...

31 See, “Magna Mater and the Galli” <https://pressbooks.becampus.ca/unromantest/chapter/magna-mater-and-the-galli/>

32 See, Anders Sandberg, “The Cult of Magna Mater”.

33 “Great Mother of the Gods”, Encyclopaedia Britannica.

34 Ibid.

The Galli adopted female mannerisms and speech patterns and applied an extensive range of cosmetics to enhance their feminine appearance.³⁵ Since Roman law was against self-castration, Roman citizens were forbidden to become Galli priests.³⁶

This is a brief description of the indigenous religion Cybele or the Great Mater of the Gods that Montanus was the chief priest before he accepted Christ Jesus as his Lord and Savior and as a result of that Montanism was born.

Pentecostalism and Montanism

This section focuses on five foundational beliefs of Pentecostalism that are also found in Montanism or the New Prophecy. The first qualification for being a Pentecostal is a conversion to the Christian faith and Montanus and his followers had that experience. From the account of Epiphanius of Salamis, the Montanist movement started in 156 or 157 BCE.³⁷ For Eusebius of Caesarea, the “Father of Church History”, Montanism began in 171 or 172 BCE. Although there is some disagreement on the origin of the movement, as we have just noted, both Epiphanius and Eusebius agree that Montanus rejected the worship of Cybele when he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. In the words of Eusebius, Montanus became “a recent convert to the [Christian] faith... gave the adversary access to himself... and began to speak and prophecy strange things”.³⁸

The second belief of Pentecostalism is that a convert to the Christian faith must receive the Holy Spirit as God’s gift (Acts 2:38; 11:15-18). This baptism in the Spirit must be accompanied by speaking in tongues and prophesying. We get a hint of this happening to Montanus when Eusebius testified that after his conversion, Montanus “began to speak and prophecy strange things”. Cephas N. Omenyo, infers from this testimony

35 Ibid.

36 See, “Magna Mater and the Galli” cited above.

37 *Medicine Box* 48.1-2,

38 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.16.7

that Montanus and the two women associates, Pricilla and Maximilla had the Holy Spirit baptism, spoke in tongues and later declared themselves the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Therefore, the Montanists passed the first two tests of being Pentecostals, namely, being born again and being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, in Pentecostalism when a person is converted to the Christian faith, baptized and empowered by the Holy Spirit, s/he must pursue holiness or righteousness. Interestingly, in this respect, the indigenous religion of Cybele that the Montanists rejected had some similarity with Christianity. The indigenous gods and goddess, like Cybele in Phrygia region, were usually referred to as 'Holy and Just'; and their worshippers were expected to pursue justice, righteousness and vengeance.⁴⁰ What the Montanist converts discovered was that their new faith in Christ Jesus actually challenged them to morally pursue much more rigorous living in holiness and justice than that of Cybele. To achieve their objective, according to Tertullian, himself a Montanist, the Montanists seriously committed themselves to the discipline of fasting and prayer. For instance, in addition to the orthodox church's fasting days, the Montanists kept their "own special fasts" and "frequently extended fasting into the evening...and did not drink anything that has the flavor of wine."⁴¹

What makes their rigorous pursuit of holiness so relevant is that Montanism was born when the mainline or orthodox church was going through serious moral decline, and the Church leaders were sadly compromising with the world. Tertullian embraced

39 Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*, Uitgeverij Boekencentrum Zoetermeer, The Netherlands, 2002; 79. See also, Robert Aboagye-Mensah, *John Wesley, The Charismatic. Did he speak in Tongues?* Accra: Adwinsah Publications, 2019: 37.

40 See, Mark Cartwright's article on Phrygia Religion, <https://worldhistory.org/phrygia/>

41 Tertullian, *Fasting 1* cited in Angus Stewart, "Was the Church Right to condemn Montanism?"

Montanism for this reason, and therefore persuasively defended the rigorous moral disciplines of the Montanists.⁴²

An eighteenth-century theologian, who was greatly influenced by and endorsed the Montanists' pursuit of holiness in line with Tertullian was John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Wesley had observed that whenever the church is going through moral decay and retrogression, God raises up a remnant who worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth to revive the church to pursue holiness that would positively impact society. Thus, for Wesley God sent Montanism "for reviving what was decayed, and reforming what might be amiss".⁴³ Wesley believed that Montanus, a believer in the Lord Jesus, filled and led by the Holy Spirit, "was one of the holiest men in the second century".⁴⁴ Again, writing on "The Real Character of Montanus", Wesley stated:

It seems, therefore, by the best information we can procure at this distance time, that Montanus was not only a truly good man, but one of the best men then upon the earth; and that his real crime was, the severely reproving those who professed themselves Christians, while they neither had the mind that was in Christ, nor walked as Christ walked; but were comfortable both in their temper and practice in the present world.⁴⁵

Here Wesley is referring to his own personal Aldersgate conversion experience. After Wesley's conversion on May 24, 1738, he pursued 'Scriptural holiness' that later impacted Wesleyans like Charles Parham and William J. Seymour.

42 Robert L. Wilken, "Tertullian, Christian Theologian"

43 *The Works of John Wesley*, Third Edition Complete and Unabridged Volume VI, First Series of Sermons (40-53), Second Series Begun (54-86), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, Reprinted 1984, 328.

The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition Complete and Unabridged Volume XI Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, Reprinted 1984: 485

44 *The Works of John Wesley*, Third Edition, Unabridged Volume VI, First Series of Sermons (40-53), Second Series Begun (54-86), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, Reprinted 1984: 328.

45 *The Works of John Wesley*, Third Edition Complete and Unabridged Volume XI ... Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, Reprinted 1984: 485-486.

The outcome of their commitment to Wesley's teaching on holiness led to the Azusa Street revival in 1906 that gave birth to the modern-day Pentecostalism. For this reason, Walter J. Hollenweger described John Wesley as the grandfather of modern-day Pentecostals.⁴⁶ So, the Montanists too did not only have personal faith in Christ Jesus but having been baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, they also vigorously pursued holiness and justice.

The fourth belief of Pentecostalism is that in Christ Jesus all persons, male and female from all ethnic groups are equal, and this belief was also found in Montanism. As we know on the Day of Pentecost all women and men who were present in the upper room "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Holy Spirit enabled them" (Acts 1:12- 2:4). Again, on that day all the people who had gathered there from all the nations heard the Jewish disciples "declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:11; cf. Galatians 4:26-29).

Before Montanus was converted to the Christian faith, he was a chief priest (archigallus) of Cybele, and together with Priscila and Maximilla they venerated Cybele as the mother of all creatures. Since Cybele was Great Mother/Mater "the cult was a highly ascetic order which placed women spiritually above the men and respected them as such".⁴⁷ When Montanus, Priscilla, Maximilla and the other Montanists became converts to the Christian faith, there were two things that they had to accept. First, that it is not Cybele, but Jesus Christ who is the One by whom and for whom all things were created - "things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:15-16). Second, that in Christ Jesus all persons, male and female have equal access to the Holy Spirit, and therefore men and women are spiritually equal before God.

46 See, Robert Aboagye-Mensah, *John Wesley, The Charismatic: Did he speak in Tongues?* Published by Adwinsa Publications. 2019: 5

47 <http://www.talentshare.org/-mm9n/articles/montanus/I.htm>

The fact that Montanus had no difficulty as a bishop in appointing Priscilla and Maximilla as prophetesses of the church means they had understood the implications of their new faith in Christ Jesus where all persons are equal. In fact, later the Montanists appointed men and women as bishops. Cephas O. Omenyo, probably had this in mind when he stated that, "Montanism believed the Holy Spirit continued to speak through prophets who could be male or female. In fact, when the Montanists became independent of the established church, they had women bishops".⁴⁸ Thus, Montanus and his followers put into practice the logical part of their new faith in Christ where both men and women have equal access to the Holy Spirit. Consequently, both men and women, are qualified to occupy the same leadership positions in the Church. Unfortunately, this biblical conviction of the Montanists did not go well with the leadership of the mainline church at the time. And even today, not all Christian denominations, including some Pentecostals, accept women into high office as Bishops or Apostles/Prophetesses.

The fifth belief and practice of Pentecostalism is ecstasy. Here I am using the term ecstasy or ecstatic utterances in its wider usage in the early church to include all forms of visions, being in a trance, prophesying, and praying in a comprehensible language or in tongues that need interpretation (Acts 11:4-10; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 14:6-12). In this context, I am actually following Tertullian's definition of ecstasy as spiritual quality that was given to man when God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). Tertullian referred to what happened to Adam in this text as Adam's "ecstasy of sleep".⁴⁹ According to him, a second example of ecstasy was when God assured Abraham that "a son coming from his own body will be your heir", in response to Abraham's fear that a foreigner, Eliezer of Damascus will

48 Cephas O. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 79-80.

49 See Angus Stewart, "Was the Church Right to Condemn Montanism?" Cited from Epiphanius, *Medicine Box*, 48.4.6; 48.5.8.

inherit him because he and Sarah were childless. Abraham had an ecstatic moment when God put him “into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.... On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land”. (Genesis 15:2 and 12, 18). Tertullian described this ecstatic vision as “ecstasy of fear”.⁵⁰

A third example of a broad understanding of ecstasy is the process that led to Cornelius’ conversion (Acts 10). Peter fell into a trance, saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth, containing all kinds of unclean animals and he was asked three times to kill and eat but he refused. The outcome of his ecstatic experience was when in obedience to the Lord, Peter went to Cornelius’ house and presented the gospel to all the people present.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God” (Acts 10:44-46).

A fourth example of ecstasy is Paul’s description of his vision of being caught up to the third heaven and he did not know, “whether it was in the body or out of the body, God knows” (2 Corinthians 12:2-3). In this ecstatic vision, as Angus Stewart has pointed out, Paul’s bodily senses were dimmed but his mind remained conscious. The mind remained active as he participated in another world and was able to recall and relate to others afterwards what he saw and heard⁵¹. This is uniquely true about biblical ecstasy where prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel could vividly recall all that happened to them after their ecstatic or visionary experiences.

Surely, ecstatic utterances including prophecies are found and practiced in other religions, including the indigenous religion

⁵⁰ Epiphanius, *Medicine Box*, 48.7.8.

⁵¹ Angus Stewart, Op. Cit. See also, A. Daunton - Fear, “The Ecstasies of Montanus”, in Elizabeth A. Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica*, vol. 17, part 2 (London: A. Wheaton & Co. Ltd., 1892): 649.

of Cybele/Great Magna Mater. But one major difference in the ecstasies of Cybele priests and that of biblical prophets and Christians is that when the priests of Cybele were possessed or were in ecstatic mood, their minds, speech and actions were completely taken over by the demonic spirits such that afterwards they could not remember what they had gone through. Nonetheless, when the Montanist Christians were filled and led by the Holy Spirit and became prophets and prophetesses they had full recollection of all that had happened to them after their ecstasies or ecstatic utterances.⁵² Their faith in Christ Jesus, filled and led by the Holy Spirit gave them authority and power over demonic spirits, unlike that of Cybele worshippers (Romans 7:6; cf. Romans 8:14-17).

Concluding Remarks

There are other beliefs and practices of Pentecostalism that have some similarities in the indigenous religion of Cybele that time and space will not permit us to discuss fully in this paper. For instance, the worshippers of Cybele celebrated 'the Day of the blood of bulls and the Day of Joy' but remained enslaved to demonic powers. But when the Montanists, like the Pentecostals believed in Christ Jesus, "who is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:10) they were given victory over the principalities and powers and the demonic forces. Indeed, their faith in the power of the blood of Christ Jesus empowered them to "extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16).

The Montanists came to understand that the festival of 'the Day of blood and the Day of Joy' of Cybele was "a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:17). So, after they had encountered the reality in Christ Jesus, the Montanists were able to use their musical instruments, songs and dancing in the worship of the triune God in ways that enriched their lives and their diverse ministries. Interestingly,

52 Ibid.

the modern-day Pentecostals too have come to realize that the Triune God has not left himself without a witness in the beliefs and practices of their indigenous religions. They firmly believe that through the preaching of the “good news about Jesus and the resurrection . . . now he commands all people everywhere to repent” and “be baptized with water and with the Holy Spirit” (17:18, 30; Acts 11:16), and become living witnesses of God’s love, grace and power in the church and in the whole world.

“BLESS AND DO NOT CURSE”: CONTEMPORARY PENTECOSTALISM, AFRICAN CULTURES, AND THE PRACTICE OF CURSING

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

Key Words

Contemporary Pentecostalism, weaponization curses, fighting personal battles, Charismatic Christianity and Pentecostal Spirituality.

We discuss in this article the phenomenon of cursing in African Christianity, specifically contemporary Pentecostalism, and how this relates to African cultures and the teachings of Scripture. In both African cultures and contemporary Pentecostalism, the phenomenon of cursing is quite widespread. In Romans 12:14, Paul states: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”⁵³ Pentecostalism is a religion that believes in biblical authority and so we must ask the question why do their leaders encourage cursing which goes against the grain of Scriptural teaching? The sub questions guiding these reflections include the following: What is a curse? How does it feature in the African traditional worldviews? Why have charismatic leaders of contemporary Pentecostal churches and ministries adopted cursing as an arsenal against their enemies? What does the weaponization of curses teach about contemporary Pentecostal notions of spiritual authority and to what extent does Christian cursing resonate with traditional cultural practices?

The thesis of the article is that although it exists within African traditional cultures, the practice of cursing cannot be justified on biblical grounds. Laurenti Magesa has noted how, despite the growth of Christianity, traditional African cultural perspectives

⁵³ Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in this article are from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.

persist, continuing to exert influences on the way Christianity is expressed.⁵⁴ In Christianity, the practice of cursing others also goes against the grain of Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality, which emphasizes transformed living as evidence of the Born-again experience. The Spirit empowered person is deemed to have been made a new creation in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). In Pentecostal spirituality, Christians are not just reborn, renewed, and empowered with graces, but they also exercise spiritual authority. Such authority, which is often exercised “in the name of Jesus” constitutes a means of dealing with principalities, powers, demons, and situations. Nevertheless, once Born-again, the belief is that in life, speech, and conduct, the Christian will live to reflect the values of Jesus Christ which is to love, forgive, and bless others and not curse them.

What is a Curse?

A curse is the use of words to invoke harm on others with mystical consequences on the cursed. The consequences of curses include loss of wealth, vigor, power, banishment from society (common in rural Africa), and death.⁵⁵ Curses are usually invoked in the name of some supernatural being, which meta empirical reality, in the context of African traditional religious practices, could be any deity or the ancestors. In Ghana’s recent political history, we have seen politicians curse their opponents in fits of rage and anger resulting from false accusations and the like.

I argue in this article that, although it is a popular traditional mode of dealing with offences, the weaponization of the curse as a means of fighting personal battles, defies biblical admonishments to love enemies and even pray for them. The reference to “enemies” in this context does not include demonic spirits such as those Jesus drove out of persons who

54 Laruenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 6.

55 Herbert Chana Brichto, *The Problem of “Curse” in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1963), 3.

were troubled and whose lives were rendered miserable and dysfunctional by such entities. Jesus cursed an unfruitful fig tree, but whatever the lesson from that event is, he never used it as an example of how to curse others if we do not have positive experiences with them. This study may be considered significant precisely because we are dealing with the uses of extremely violent verbal assaults against real human beings in the name of Jesus and on the authority that the Bible does not offer. To appreciate the extent of the cursing regime, we consider two recent examples from Ghana.

Examples of Cursing in Charismatic Christianity

The authoritative and adjuring use of the spoken word is an important factor in this matter because, as Ruth Marshall argues, prayer is a weapon of spiritual warfare, and thus the central theme of redemptive praxis.⁵⁶ It is not the exercise of verbal authority that we problematize here, but the fact that these enchanted forms of speech are understood to encompass the right to curse those who offend the believer and in particular, those who step on the wrong side of the charismatic figure or anointed man/woman of God. I have in various areas of fieldwork in contemporary Pentecostal settings, heard people cursed for issues ranging from unfaithfulness in the payment of tithes to seceding from one church to establish another. Among charismatic Christians who believe in the exercise of authority this way, the use of violent language and obsession with enemies—real and imaginary—underlies the understanding of the use power and militant prayer that have come to characterize the new Pentecostalism.

56 Ruth Marshall, “Destroying Arguments and Captivating Thoughts: Spiritual Warfare Prayer as Global Praxis,” *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, vol. 2, 1 (2016), 93.

Curses of Bishop Dag Heward-Mills

In 2021 news reports emerged of a major fallout between Bishop Dag Heward-Mills and several of his former associate pastors. They had sued their former boss alleging among others that their pensions had not been paid with others claiming emotional abuse from confrontation with him over reprimands because of dissenting views over various issues. When a video featuring Bishop Heward-Mills cursing people, the public was quick to make connections between the fractured relationship between the bishop and his former associates. The following words of cursing are contained in the said video which is widely available on the Internet:

[Enemies] in my life, I say, you are finished in the name of Jesus Christ.

Any form of wickedness in this church represented by criticisms, murmurings, speaking against authority...as Miriam became white with leprosy, so also may you be whitened with an incurable disease and never rise from your hospital bed, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let those that have made themselves opposers, and accusers, let them wither like the fig tree withered when Jesus spoke against it, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let all forms of wickedness, conspiracies, secret meetings, whisperings, telephone messages and conspiracies and phone calls [resorts to speaking tongues in the video recording at this stage], let it turn into an explosion, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Curses of Rev. Anthony Kwadwo Boakye

One of the U-Tube Videos on curses spewed on detractors by the Rev. Anthony K. Boakye of the Resurrection Power New Generation Church contains the following curses against various groups of people ranging from journalists to former members who have left his church:

- Whoever recorded my voice on a cassette, and doctored my speeches to disgrace me, God should kill them. Those who attended schools of journalism because of me, God should kill them. Radio Presenters who sit on radio and TV Stations to disgrace me, God kill them.
- Frimpong [an acquaintance of Pastor Boakye suspected to have revealed some negative things about him to the media] who brought up all this, God should kill him, his wife, and children. The one who also doctored the cassette and the one who works at the TV Station with so much hatred for me in this world, God should turn him into a corpse.
- Rev. Anthony Boakye then leads the congregation to say "Lord Jesus, whoever brought up a cassette to disgrace Boakye and Jesus in Ghana and the world, in the name of Jesus, Lord, we kill them this afternoon [said repeatedly]."
- Radio presenters, journalists who sit on TV and behind radios, people who have conspired to disturb Boakye... Lord of Resurrection Power, we are sons of Judah, sons and daughters of the Lion of Judah, this afternoon, Lion, go forth, angels present, go forth, attack and deal with them, attack Frimpong, his wife and children [said repeatedly]... we destroy you, we kill you; all the rich people backing them, in the name of Jesus, we dismantle and clear you from the face of the earth.

He then actually prays what he thinks must happen to his detractors:

Father, arise, they've bitten more than they can chew... they and their descendants and wives and children, we clear them, we won't stop till things happen, we won't sleep in Ghana [repeatedly]. Beware, I unleash blindness, stroke, epilepsy upon you, be blinded [repeatedly], catch stroke and be bed ridden, get stuck in your rooms. Judah has risen, the children of the Lion of Judah have risen... in Jesus' name. Lord, Father of Boakye, arise, teach them sense; those who joke with your name and your servants, you have said, those who touch your servants have touched your eyes, Ghanaians have touched your eyes, avenge them, speak... whoever prospers through our church and decides to quit, the money that they have made will be taken back from them.

Most of the African charismatic leaders who weaponize curses, such as the two we refer to here, tend to be very high profile public religious figures leading very large congregations and who also have very far-reaching media ministries. The circulation of these ideas, beliefs, and practices, that have been reinvented in contemporary Pentecostal Christianity is evident in the ministries of leaders like Derek Prince who teaches that, Christian leaders have the authority to speak good or evil and expect what they decree or declare to become reality. Prince goes as far as to teach that bless or curse their followers such as when a pastor clashes with associates who break away from them. These blessings and curses have lives of their own and can affect their targets for generations, especially when uttered by servant of God.⁵⁷

Curses in African Traditional Religious Cultures

In African cultures, libation pouring offers the context in which evil persons in society are cursed.⁵⁸ They are cursed as enemies of abundant living, and it is a phenomenon that is also used by individuals to settle personal and family scores. In Ghana, for example, it is not uncommon for communities to find slaughtered fowls alongside a bowl of mashed yam mixed with oil and cracked eggs at various locations in a village or town. As soon as those things are seen, it is a sign that someone has been offended and therefore has placed those ritual items there to curse the offender. The items embodying the curse would usually be placed there with the words of the curse spoken over them and on occasion, the words may be accompanied by libation pouring.

The power of the spoken word, which we find in traditional culture, is also a vital component of Pentecostal spirituality.⁵⁹ I

⁵⁷ Prince, *Blessings and Curses*, 40-43.

⁵⁸ See for example, Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 72-73.

⁵⁹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Ghana* (Oxford: Regnum, 2015), 77.

find a direct linkage between the spewing out of curses and the uncritical proclamation of prosperity. In the traditional African context where supernatural evil is considered hyperactive and in which witchcraft, for example, may be wantonly cited as the cause of retrogressions in life, curses are frequently deployed as a weapon of resistance against evil persons. In such a context, curses are rife because they are resorted to as a means for dealing with those who are believed to be working against the prosperity of others. This is a context in which any problem, from ill health to one's inability to secure travel visas, or even proper documentation when living abroad, may all be explained in terms of the doings of one's enemies.

It is not uncommon to hear at Ghanaian charismatic prayer vigils, congregants being led to declare, "anybody in my father's house; anybody in my mother's house; anybody in my workplace, working against my interests, may they die in Jesus' name." The inveighing of curses is not arbitrary, for as we say in Ghana, "every insinuation has an intended target," and that I believe includes cursing in both the African traditional and charismatic Christian tradition.

Pentecostal Spirituality and the Cursing Regime

What those who use such verbal violence against others "in the name of Jesus" do is weaponize the word of God as an instrument of war against other human beings. Cursing has become a means of instilling fear into close associates, church members, and others who may dare to raise any forms of criticism against how a leader uses power and resources. Curses are deployed as a deterrent against any associates who may be entertaining thoughts of leaving their current employment to establish their own ministries. In sections of contemporary Pentecostalism, curses are spewed out in defiance of biblical injunctions regarding retributive justice, and they indirectly challenge the sovereignty of God in determining how to handle those who sin against him by sinning against others.

There are many reasons for the popularity of cursing among certain contemporary Pentecostals and one of them is in the understanding of the nature of charisma itself. Firstly, it is usually justified with references to instances in the Bible in which curses occur. Secondly, charisma tends to resist accountability and in the lives of the churches we look at, the curse is weaponized to instill fear into those who challenge the leader's authority or show dissent in the running of affairs and in decision-making. For all that Pentecostalism has achieved in world Christianity with respect to the growth and public influence, there have been serious scandals among its leaders ranging from the authoritarian use of charismatic power to lack of accountability in the use of financial resources and moral choices in life and ministry. Thirdly, and for Africa, curses within Pentecostalism resonate with the traditional culture as we have noted.

Defying Biblical Authority

The use of imprecatory prayer in cursing others, I point out, is inconsistent with what Jesus stood for and how he wanted his followers to behave towards others. Jesus concludes the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35 with the following warning:

So, my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

In the context of the parable, I take the phrase "will also do to every one of you to mean", being treated like the unforgiving servant who would later be incarcerated, and all his earthly belongings sold to defray his debts. This was his punishment for not reciprocating in showing mercy towards a fellow servant who owed him, when he himself, had been the gracious beneficiary of the king's kindness. It is with a similar principle in mind that Jesus inserted into the Lord's Prayer the line that says, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

The point is that anyone who has an unforgiving spirit, bears grudges, curses others, defies the authority of Scripture in how Christians respond to offences against them. Above all, one of the marks of the experience of the Spirit is graceful speech because, the renewal that comes from encountering the Spirit of God in both regeneration and empowerment, includes transformation in the use of the tongue. In contradistinction to the focus of curses, the terms and expressions that define the mission of God in Christ include love, compassion, and empathy.

Thus, if we take it that Jesus is the ultimate example in the human response to offences against us, this is how he responded:

When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly (I Peter 2:23).

It is instructive that this text on how Jesus gracefully bore his humiliation in the crucifixion is immediately followed by references to how “he bore our sins on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness,” for, “by his wounds you have been healed” (I Peter 2:24). If the mission of God is to be expressed in the spirit of Christ, then he becomes the exemplar in the Christian response in terms of dealing with those who offend us.

Challenging Divine Sovereignty

If human beings take on the power of cursing, it challenges the sovereignty of God. Ultimately, the power to bless and curse belongs to God. Those who live in obedience to God are blessed, but those who walk in the way of sinners and sit in the seat of scoffers, experience illbeing. Although he chastises his children through negative occurrences, the bottom line in God’s dealings with human creatures is love, forgiveness, and kindness. In the mission of God sin is detested and brings curses, but once a spirit of genuine repentance is expressed, the

divine gifts of forgiveness, love, and compassion, are available. These are the gifts of God that he makes available in Christ and therefore Christian mission cannot be defined apart from God's restoration in forgiving grace which are embodied in the Christ event.

In the prophecies of Joel, for example, we see how the invasion of locusts in the land, for example, led to a call for genuine repentance and restoration to avoid deaths (Joel 1:6-14). The opposite of cursing is blessing, so when there is repentance in the land, God sends grain, wine, and oil. His people are satisfied and are no longer a mockery among the nations (Joel 2:19). We see that much of these curses arrogantly asks the God who on the cross cried, "father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," to set aside his own divine principle of forgiveness. Those who curse do so in defiance of the authority of the Bible and implore God, literally demand of him, to destroy lives that people feel need to be taught some bitter lesson. The mark of God's sovereignty in the Old Testament includes statements of curses that could come upon people who defy his authority.

However, the general tenor of biblical teaching is that God is love, and he does not wish any, not even sinners to perish (Ezekiel 18:23; II Peter 2:3). When Jesus met those possessed by demons, he cast out the evil spirits, but the human victims of demonic affliction were never cursed. When it comes to sin, even when a woman had been caught in an adulterous affair, Jesus sent her away forgiven and with the pastoral advice not to sin anymore (John 8:3-11). It is the same authority that Jesus bequeathed to the disciples when he "gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases," and subsequently, sent them out "to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal" (Luke 9:1-2). Healing and exorcism, as we see from this commission, are forms of pastoral care because those afflicted were seen as victims of the evil spirits that possessed them, the sins that alienated them, and sicknesses with which

they are afflicted. The most important thing is the power of utterance in the use of words by Jesus in which, rather than treat victims of sin and spirit possession harshly, he spoke words of forgiveness and drove out the evil spirits also by the word.

If forgiveness is what defines our relationship with God and with each other, why has contemporary Pentecostalism adopted a culture of cursing in defiance of biblical authority? In the African Christian context, the use of curses and the popularity of it could be understood as part of the fallout from the shortfalls of Word of Faith practices. The working presupposition of positive confession, D.R. McConnel notes, is that one's mental attitude determines what one believes and confesses, and what one believes and confesses determines what one gets from God.⁶⁰ If one preaches that speaking the word, positive confession, or naming-and-claiming, can unlock prosperity, then when it does not work, the sources of hindrance need to be cursed. Those blamed as the sources of evil in human life often include vulnerable people believed to possess the spirit of witchcraft and political, business and even pastoral rivals, and other such persons whose activities and behaviors may be considered inimical to the progress of others.

The use of the powers of blessing is understandable as it fits into the overall Pentecostal theological worldview that in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, God intervenes in human life. He does so, not simply for the purpose of eternal salvation, but also the realization of material and spiritual wellbeing or more generally, human flourishing. In the story of the demoniac of the Gerasene in Mark 5, for example, people witnessed the transforming power of God in a man who started life living in the tombs and cutting himself with stone in loud and distressing agonizing cries, but who was later to be found restored, and well-dressed, and in his right mind (Mark 5:15).

⁶⁰ D.R. McConnel, *A Different Gospel*, updated edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 135.

In the Christian context, I consider the use of the powers of cursing to be in defiance of biblical authority based on the biblical teaching on forgiveness. The first is Jesus' teaching that his hearers should turn the other cheek when slapped on one and even to release their inner garment if another should insist on unjustly taking their outer cloak (Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:29). The second is the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in which Jesus warns that those who do not forgive would be treated even more harshly by God for not extending the divine mercies they have enjoyed towards others (Matthew 18:21-35). The third is Paul's admonition in Romans 12, which reads:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...
Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (Romans 12:14, 17-18).

In all these passages, including what has come to be designated the Lord's Prayer, forgiveness is considered part of the privileges that God extends to humanity and Christians are thought to reflect this divine nature when they cultivate a forgiving spirit. In conservative evangelical Christian theology, forgiveness is what leads to salvation, and it is in the exercise of God's prerogative of forgives that we are not consumed or destroyed.

The charismatic personalities behind the formation of contemporary Pentecostal churches stand in the same tradition. They are both revered and feared because of the powers of blessing and cursing associated with the anointing on their lives. They have the powers to declare who would prosper and who will fail in life. Most importantly, those who offend them could have their blessings withdrawn whether it be money, material possessions, businesses, the gift of children, or even one's very life. Literally, some of these charismatic figures claim that the powers of life and death are on their tongues. These powers of blessing and cursing are not just attributed to them, they consciously claim them and weaponize them against those who challenge or undermine their authority.

Conclusion: Weaponizing Curses in Defiance of Biblical Injunctions

J. Lee Grady quotes Pastor Larry Stockstill as noting that a person's spiritual gifts, talents and abilities can make room for him in attracting the notice and attention of others, but those gifts, though legitimate and God given, can be operated in pride and arrogance rather than in submission to God.⁶¹ In my estimation, the word of God or prayer is weaponized to avoid accountability. I have used the expression "weaponize" on purpose to indicate that contemporary charismatic Christianity in Africa is one in which patrons looking for personal breakthroughs are literally led to curse their enemies and spiritually incapacitate and physically disable or even kill them to release one's blessing. Beyond the belief that prosperity is impossible without the extermination of one's enemies, an important reason why charismatic pastors curse their "enemies" is disloyalty. It is considered disloyal, as is evident in the curses of Boakye and Heward-Mills for associate pastors to part ways with their spiritual mentors.

This sort of Christianity thrives on the personal charisma and psychology of the leader, as I have noted. In prosperity thinking numbers are important. The bigger the congregation the more legitimate a person's ministry is and so losing important personnel and numbers could be interpreted in terms of failure. Those developments are not taken lightly. It does often happen that when associates feel unable to work with a particular General Overseer, they would breakaway or secede from the original organization. The numbers are important for the legitimization of charisma. That means breakaways undermine charismatic authority. Depending on the strength of their charisma, those breaking away can take away many of the leader's followers and that is why secessions are not taken lightly. Thus, the power of the curse has also been weaponized against such breakaways to ensure absolute loyalty from

61 J. Lee Grady, *The Holy Spirit is not for Sale: Rekindling the Power of God in an Age of Compromise* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2010), 102.

pastoral associates. Whichever way one looks at it, the use of the curse in contemporary Pentecostalism cannot be justified on the basis of the Christian Scriptures and the ways of the Jesus Christ.

INVALIDATING INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS VIA CHRISTIANITY: POPULAR GHANAIAN GOSPEL SONGS/MUSIC

Genevieve Nrenzah

Key Words

Psychological and emotional effects of Music, Anthropologists and Ethnomusicologists, Human conditions, and Graphic communicative illustration.

Introduction

Music is the organization of the raw material of sound into formal and structural patterns that are meaningful and generally acceptable to that society in which the organization has taken place. A pattern that relates directly and in a most intimate manner to the worldview and the life experience of that society viewed as a homogeneous whole, and are accepted as such by that society.⁶²

Music is present in the everyday lives of people of all ages and from all cultures around the world. Listening to music, singing, playing (informally, formally), creating (exploring, composing, improvising), whether individually and collectively, are common activities for many people.⁶³ It is one of the universal ways of expression and communication for humankind.⁶⁴ Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have suggested that music has been a characteristic of the human condition for millennia.⁶⁵

Apart from enjoyable activities, music exhumes entertainment, pleasure, gratification, exercise, relaxation of the mind, and

62 Ademola, Adegbite. "The concept of sound in traditional African religious music." *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 1 (1991): 48.

63 Biasutti et al., *The Impact of Music on Human Development and Well-Being*. Lausanne: Frontiers Media SA. 2020, 1.

64 Biasutti, M., Welch, G. F., MacRitchie, J., McPherson, G. E., Himonides, E., eds. (2020). *The Impact of Music on Human Development and Well-Being*. Lausanne: Frontiers Media SA. *Frontiers in Psychology* 17 June 2020, 1. doi: 10.3389/978-2-88963-683-9

65 Cross, I. (2016). "The nature of music and its evolution," in *Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology*, eds S. Hallam, I. Cross, and M. Thaut (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 3–18. DOI: 10.1093/oxford/9780198722946.013.5

energizing the body. It allows the manifestation of individual internal conditions and feelings, bringing about many positive effects in those who engage in them.

Music is performed in most religious settings or communal gatherings and individually by people. In African indigenous religious cultures, music and sound have always been intricately connected to an embodiment of self, spirit, and divinity, and it mediates morality, belief, and experience. Ghanaian traditional music and songs comprise diverse genres such as the *Asafo* songs, sung or performed during wars, communal work/cleaning, or even joyful events; *jama*, performed in joyous moments such as festivals or competitive sports; *kete* or *adowa* and *bɔbɔɔbɔ*, performed alongside dance performances for almost all occasions - marriages, funerals, and festivals.

Music and songs form a significant part of the liturgy and other church activities in Christian circles. Helmut Georg *Koenigsberger* assessing the music and religion in early modern European history commented that theology and music were heavenly sisters, and neither would touch the other's honor; there could be no antagonism nor rivalry.⁶⁶ Music gives the spirit its relationship to harmony and unity. Music differs from all the other arts in that it is not the image of ideas but the image of the will itself, which explains the extraordinary effect of music, an effect much more significant than that of any other art.⁶⁷

Music's psychological and emotional effects on human beings can be powerful, extensive, and influential. A person might not be aware of music's structural, mathematical, and architectural characteristics, but "the brain has to do much computing to make sense of it."⁶⁸

66 Koenigsberger, H. G. (2017). Music and Religion in Early Modern European History. In *Music and the Renaissance* (pp. 275-306). Routledge.

67 Helmut Georg Koenigsberger, [Music and Religion in Early Modern European History](#) in Vendrix, P. (Ed.). (2011), 201-237. In *Music and the Renaissance: Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation* (1st ed.). Routledge. 207. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315090900>

68 [Keep Your Brain Young with Music | Johns Hopkins Medicine](#) Schäfer, Thomas et al. "The psychological functions of music listening." *Frontiers in psychology* vol. 4 511. 13 August 2013, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00511

If a person has ever been moved to tears by a tender live performance at Church or a religious gathering, then that person can easily understand the power of music to affect moods, even inspire action, and change from behavior.⁶⁹ It follows then that the words and tone in songs and music can be compelling, sustain the interest of persons in specific locations such as sacred space, and keep working on their inner minds even when they leave the space.

Following the submission of Schäfer, I argue that gospel music and songs are a device and power source Christianity inventively contrivances in delegitimizing indigenous religions in Ghana. It has helped Christianity significantly fuel itself to expand at the detriment of the mainstay of indigenous religious traditions (IRTs). Christianity has been increasing since its inception though this has not been the case at the outset of her introduction in Ghana. Omenyo highlights the two phases of Christianity in Ghana. The Portuguese trader's era of the 1400s and the 19th century missionary era. He argued that Christianity created a "theological deficit" in both phases by demeaning the Akan religious worldview and reducing Akan beliefs to illusions and imagination.⁷⁰ While the first phase to Christianize Ghana was largely unsuccessful, the second phase thrived with help from the colonial government, the advent of African Christianity in the form of African Initiated Churches (AICs)⁷¹ and the translation of the Bible into local language. Sill contends, "translating Christian religion' understood in the narrow sense of translating a text, namely, the Bible, as well as in the broader sense of the transferring of an entire religion."⁷²

69 Manza, interview by Genevieve Nrenzah, 10 January 2021.

70 Cephas N. Omenyo. *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2006) 4.

71 Nrenzah, G. *Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood*, 118

72 Ulrike Sill, Thick Translation of Religion between Cultures: The Basel Mission in Ghana, in DeJonge, M., & Tietz, C. (Eds.). (2015). *Translating Religion: What is Lost and Gained?* (1st ed.). Routledge. 84-103. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315724102>

It was a significant breakthrough as the people could understand the Bible in their native language and draw examples in the Bible synonymous with their experiences of practical ritual performances.⁷³

The translation of the Bible into indigenous languages led to the emphasis of the IRTs as supposedly repository of the devil. Meyer argues of a paradox that characterizes Christianity in Ewe land, "On the one hand, existing Ewe concepts were integrated into the Christian Ewe discourse through translation, while on the other, a strict boundary between Christianity and Ewe religion was drawn through diabolisation. Missionaries based the claim that the gods and ghosts served by the Ewe were natural agents of the devil on their interpretation of the New Testament."⁷⁴ The foundation made by missionaries by casting Ewe IRTs and others in Ghana as evil and inhabited by the devil remained on the people's minds even long after the missionary had left. Meyer recounts how competitive, diverse Christian denominations are often united in praying against their common enemy, the devil, formulating ritual procedures to deal with the devil present in IRTs.⁷⁵

It seems that breaking away from the past and being born again does not end the battle with the devil; the Christian must constantly work harder spiritually to put the devil and his cohorts at bay. As well as being considered weapons to counter the enemy, songs and music also become the graphic communicative illustration in exhibiting that one has nothing to do with IRTs. Words are carriers of intents; their effect on the mind and a person is powerful. Language then is an effective tool of communication that holds a key in changing the mind

73 Genevieve Nrenzah. *Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood and Revitalizing Old Shrines: Current Developments on Ghana's Religious Landscape*. (Bayreuth: University of Bayreuth Publishing, 2015), 118.

74 Meyer, Birgit. "Diabolisation." In *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, 83-111. Edinburgh University Press, 1999. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrhvm.11>.

75 Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, reprint, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, xviii

and being of a person. Therefore, songs composed and sung in the local language can convey a message of Christianity in delegitimizing the IRTs. They have the potential of making the IRTs meaningless by using positive messages and words in the Bible to project the Christian faith while demonizing IRTs.

Scholars of religious studies probably have less explored the conception that songs and music can influence a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The increasing body of empirical and experimental studies concerning the broader benefits of musical activity and research in the sciences associated with music suggests that there are many dimensions of human life – including physical, social, educational, psychological (cognitive and emotional) – which can be affected positively by successful engagement in music.⁷⁶ Thomas Schäfer et al.'s observations on approaches in music functions from an empirical perspective help us to practicalize theory. They noted two utilities in this direction. The first aim is to observe or identify how music is used in daily life, and the second approach infers the structure or pattern underlying the use of music.⁷⁷

North and Hargreaves have noted, “musical behavior is a characteristic of all human beings. The environment and the experiences of individuals, often within groups, shape its realization.”⁷⁸ The environment Ghanaians find themselves in has been defined by Christianity as an embodiment of evil embedded in the belief systems of dualism and “spiritualization” of the world and humans. Lyrics from songs, therefore, depict these subjects. The ability of songs to heal is explored by Fancourt, who alerts us on music's contribution to health and well-being, provides evidence of physical and

76 Biasutti et al. *The Impact of Music on Human Development and Well-Being*, 1

77 Schäfer, Thomas et al. “The psychological functions of music listening.” *Frontiers in psychology* vol. 4 511. 13 August 2013, 3. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00511

78 G.E. McPherson. “Commentary: Music education and the role of music in people's lives,” in *Music and Music Education in People's Lives: An Oxford Handbook of Music Education* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3–18. DOI: 10.1093/oxford_ he/9780199730810.0 13.0002.

psychological impacts.⁷⁹ Social inclusion and communalism in the case of Ghana is a characteristic of IRTs, which is gradually being replaced by the social system of the nuclear family, courtesy of Christianity and colonialism. Welch et al. argues on musical activity's ability in enhancing an individual's sense of social inclusion⁸⁰ in the current discontented situation. The recent collection of Biasutti et al. draws on eighty-eight researchers from seventeen different countries, with each paper illustrating the relation of music to other essential aspects of human functioning stamps the acceptance of music's impact on humans.⁸¹

Methodological Considerations

In IRTs of Africa, religious language, imagery, the products and influences shape symbols, and texts often, which in this inquiry is in local gospel songs and music. This paper explores songs/music as one of the positive tools that Christianity has been deploying in delegitimizing IRTs successfully in the past and continuously sustaining it in contemporary times. Using content analysis and interviews, I analyzed the presence, tones, pictures, meanings, and relationships of certain words in the lyrics, themes, or concepts in locally composing gospel songs and argued a paradox exists in Ghanaian local gospel lyrics. Christianity employs coordinated lyrics in local gospels to delegitimize IRTs while legitimizing the Christian faith. Through performed singing in communal religious spaces, individual spaces, and dissemination of songs in video production, words work on the mind, leading to a stronger belief in Christianity and conviction of the evil inhabited IRTs. Becoming a Christian means a rebirth, an ignition of the

79 D. Fancourt, and S. Finn, What Is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being? A Scoping Review. (Copenhagen: World Health Organisation, 2019).

80 G.F. Welch, E. Himonides, E., J. Saunders, J., I. Papageorgi, and M. Sarazin, M. Singing and social inclusion. *Front. Psychol.* 2014, 5:803. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00803

81 Biasutti et al. *The Impact of Music on Human Development and Well-Being*, 5.

power in God and Jesus his son vividly illustrated in the songs of the defeat of the devil and triumph of Jesus. Continuous praise and worship through the magnification of God through appellations make the Christian triumph over evil through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The more a message repeatedly feeds the mind, the mind keeps processing it as such, and with time, it becomes the truth.

From fifty local gospel songs of audio and sometimes videos, I illustrate my argument with themes from the data. A few generally well-known songs that speak to the argument have been included and analyzed. Most of the songs composed by gospel musicians come with corresponding videos, and I noted that the videos are often produced to communicate the message of the lyrics. The analysis of the songs is based on both audio and visual. The selected songs are from professional gospel musicians and anonymous composers or folk songs. While many of the songs have anonymous composers, I found out that many belong to churches such as the Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God, and Christ Apostolic Churches. These are churches known to be led by the spirit of God to compose songs during their annual church gatherings. Since they have churches in every corner of Ghana, when they depart from these church programs, they depart with the songs and consciously disseminate them in their local assemblies, and it keeps going until it becomes a household song. In this paper, we do not link the songs directly to them because they do generally not claim ownership of the songs. The diverse themes sifted from the lyrics of the songs have been grouped into three – the theme that depicts IRTs as repository of evil and a must for a person to experience rebirth, triumphs through empowerment from Jesus and Holy Spirit as well as appellations magnifying God and Jesus over IRTs.

Indigenous Religious Traditions as Repository of Evil

As alluded to earlier, missionary Christianity perceived the practice, belief, and people as heathen, evil, and demonic. With this mindset, they set out to rescue the perishing. Right from the beginning of the onslaught of Christianity, the lines were drawn between good and evil. Christianity was and is good, and IRTs were and are still wrong, so all activities were geared towards bringing light to the darkness. Debrunner illustrates this in his account of the 20 January 1482 expedition headed by Diego d'Azambuja when they landed in Elmina. He is said to have reported back home that:

Our men held the mass with many tears of devotion, and thanks to God for allowing them to praise and glorify Him among those idolaters and asking Him that as He was pleased that they were the first to erect an altar at so great a sacrifice. He would give them wisdom and grace to draw those idolatrous people to the faith. So that the Church which they would found there might endure until the end of the world.⁸²

The mission activities of the nineteenth century also continued with the total disregard for the people and their religion. Smith narrates an incident in Akropong where J. A Mader (1851-77), a very zealous missionary, openly flogged a fetish priest for opposing the preaching of the gospel.⁸³ Asaafa and Kwaaman sacred groves in the central region were destroyed and replaced with a church. A king in Akwapim was warned with a letter and threatened to be punished by the queen of England by Inspector Josenhans if he married a female catechumen and violated her conscience as a Christian with polygamy. Missionaries felled sacred trees in Aburi in 1850 to build mission houses.⁸⁴ These countless examples suggest the historical rift between IRTs and Christianity that was inherited

82 Debrunner, H. *A History of Christianity in Ghana*. Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967, 17.

83 John David Kwamena Ekem. *Priesthood in Context: A Study of Priesthood in Some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation*. (Sonlife Press: Accra, 2009), 95.

84 Nrenzah, *Modernizing Indigenous Priesthood*, 97-98; Ekem, *Priesthood in Context*, 82.

and practiced in contemporary Ghana. Songs are a significant part of the Christian mission including hymns. The lyrics of the song below shows the mission theology of the early:

*Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.*

*Refrain:
Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful,
Jesus will save.*

Later Christians would contextualize the already created notions of IRTs through songs to fuel the continuous rift, delegitimizing IRTs while validating Christianity. The environment or the circumstance musicians find themselves serves as a source of inspiration. African American gospel, for instance, was rooted in the experiences of servitude because of slavery. This song was intended to give people hope in a dire situation. The African American songs believe that “God has brought us through so much already, we can only be sure He will continue to do so.”⁸⁵ They were encouraging themselves even in servitude of sustenance readily provided by Christianity. The songs’ foundation substantiates their situation and a way out—to be saved by accepting Jesus. The slavery situation is temporal because it only affects the body, but the everlasting soul will live life hereafter in a perfect place with God and Jesus in Heaven.

In the Ghanaian context, the belief was that the people and environment were filled with deities, sickness, witchcraft, evil, and darkness. The belief system, according to Christians, puts them in bondage. To extricate oneself from the bondage,

85 Marvin Curtis V. “African-American Spirituals and the Gospel Music: Historical Similarities and Differences.” *The Choral Journal* 41, no. 8 (2001): 9. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23553686>.

that person must be born again and must be delivered from those evil powers. Ritualistic activities were earmarked to that effect, but the significant thing is music-- a powerful tool for communication with the ability to generate and challenge the existing social order.⁸⁶ In Christian musical lyrics, words to change that which is the mainstay IRTs, while introducing the new Christianity that will change the lives of the people physically and spiritually is painted in the compositions. The genre in the Ghanaian gospel context is overcoming bondage, evil, sickness, witchcraft, gods, dwarves, juju (evil potent charm that harms the other by favoring the user) power residing in IRTs. Next, I discuss some of the songs with these themes.

<i>Yen nana nom, 2x</i>	<i>Our ancestors 2x</i>
<i>Yen nana nom som abosom.</i>	<i>Our ancestors worshipped deities</i>
<i>Na yendi 2x</i>	<i>As for us</i>
<i>Na yendi ysbosom Yehowa</i>	<i>As for us, we will serve God</i>

This is a very popular song in Ghana, which is sung communally in churches, school worship, and individually. People express the joy of liberation from the religion of nananom (ancestors) to a blissful religion of light. For one to be liberated and break free from the chains of their ancestors, one must be born again. Accepting Christ as a personal savior means a rebirth or being born again. According to Meyer, being born again is to break entirely from the past; any attempt to reintroduce cultural practices into Christianity as the mainline churches pursue under the Sankofa agenda is “described as ‘sliding back’ or ‘relapsing’ into ‘heathendom.’⁸⁷ When one is born again, he/she is empowered with power from God to overcome IRTs. Christians often demonstrate this power by stepping on the devil through songs like the one below:

86 Adomako Ampofo, A. and Awo Aseidu. “Changing Representations of Women in Ghanaian Popular music: Marrying research and advocacy.” *Current Sociology*. Vol. 60 (2), 2012, 258-279.

87 Birgit Meyer. “‘Make a Complete Break with the Past.’ Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse.” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 317-318. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1581573>.

<i>Metia abonsam so, metia abonsam so</i> <i>M'ahuru makɔ soro metia abonsam so</i> <i>Metia abonsom so, metia abonsam so</i> <i>M'ahuru makɔ soro, ɔsoro, osoro</i> <i>Metia abonsam so</i>	I am stepping on the devil I jump up to the sky and step on the devil I am stepping on the devil, I am stepping on the devil I jump up to the sky, the sky, sky I am stepping on the devil
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Deities dwell in the belly of the earth and other natural bodies. By Christians jumping up and stepping on Satan on ground/land, implicitly, the singer is stepping on the deities and, in effect rendering them powerless; as the believer jumps up and receives strength from God, s/he can step on evil in triumph.

Interestingly, being born again does not mean a one-time activity. The Christian must work towards daily survival and struggles with the devil. The Christian is also counselled to be vigilant in his/her dressing, food, thinking, behavior, job, extended family, festivals, rites of passage, and practically everything in the social system of the Ghanaian as the devil can use any activity to impede their progress. Songs like the one below, *Ya wo me fofro*, and *I am born again*, talks about being free from the IRTs deities and their activities of feeding gods, pouring libation, reiterating the happiness that the blood of Jesus exhumes. In the local gospels, IRTs base is metaphorically described as a place where evil abounds. When one sings that *ya wo me fofro* (I have experienced rebirth) or *M'ahu kanea* (I have seen the light it) implies that the religious traditions before this experience were dark. Becoming a Christian transforms a person from the old state of being in darkness to a new state of being born again into a new blissful life of "light" - Christianity.

<p><i>Ya wo me fofro</i> <i>Mennhye Kwakufuri san bio</i> <i>Menn ma bosom aduane bio</i> <i>Menngu nsa bio</i> <i>Mogya no agye me o</i> <i>Yesu mu ye anigya nkoa</i> <i>Me ne nananom kan ntem a yapaei 2x</i> <i>Aninyam aninyam nka Nyame oo</i></p>	<p>I have been born again I am no longer under Kwaku Furi (deity) I will no longer feed the gods I will no longer pour libation The blood has saved me There is joy in Christ I have completely cut off the ancestors Glory! Glory to God!</p>
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My body eiii my God I go give am oo
My body eii edey for my God 2x
Some people dem dey, them
Some people dem sey, dem dey worship agbaragba oo
Some people dem dey dem dey worship Budha, na my body

Diana Akumuyi's song above sends the final signal to the devil that the Christian is totally for Jesus. The devil cannot possess him or her body to push him here and there. Praises of the liberator also become a tool in the devil's fight. Christians must constantly detach themselves from Satan, roaring, and roaming to devour Christians. Sometimes, songs cast a slur on IRTs named here Satan, insinuating his urge to destroy or kill Christians, but Jesus is with them to save and protect them from Satan's destructive activities. Again, the experience of being born again gives the believer some level of hooting at or demeaning IRTs in glorifying God. *Aninyam nka Nyankopɛn* is a perfect example of glory, glory to God.

<i>Aninyam nka Nyankopong 2x</i> <i>Me wo akoko me fa ma bosom</i> <i>Aniyam aniyam nka Nyame oo</i> <i>Me sika me fa ma Komfo</i> <i>Aniyam aniyam nka Nyame oo</i> <i>Me wo ntuma me fa me kramo</i> <i>Aniyam aniyam nka Nyame oo</i> <i>Mara kasa megya Nyame eeeee</i> <i>Onyame o ye ohene oooooo</i> <i>Aniyam aniyam nka Nyame oo</i>	Glory, glory to God Glory to God 2x I have fowl; I will not give to god Glory, glory to God I have money I will not give to the indigenous priest Glory, glory to God I have cloth I will not give to Muslim Glory glory to God My God, my father God eeeee God is a King Ooooooo Glory to God ooo
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Kyekyere no ei, kyekyere no ma me (tie him, tie him, tie Satan on a metal for me) is also sung to hoot at the devil and at the same time to show off Gods power to tame Satan and all there is to make the Christian worry-free.

Kyekyere no ei, kyekyere no ma me
kyekyere no ei, kyekyere no ma me
Kyekyere no kyekyere no Satan bo dadie mu ma me 2x

Again, demonstrating that one is now a Christian and abhors IRTs-- singing Satan pull off I am no longer yours, sends the signal to the devil and cohorts that a person is now officially not their member.

<i>Twe wo ho, Twe wo hon, abosam twe</i> <i>wo ho</i> <i>Me ye wodzi bio 2x</i> <i>Twe wo hon menn ye wodzi bio seisei</i> <i>2x</i> <i>Abosam twe wo hon, me ye wodzi bio</i>	Satan pulls of the pull of; Satan pull off am no longer yours 2x Pull off, pull off Satan, pull off I am no longer yours Pull of am no longer yours right Now Satan pulls off. I am no longer yours.
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This song reminds Christians that they no longer belong to the past--commanding Satan to pull off because he is no longer welcomed significantly boosts the singer's ego and gives him a sense of new security in the new community to which he now belongs. The songs analyzed display the lyrics Ghanaian Christians employ in denigrate IRTs while authenticating

Christianity. There is also the theme of power, empowerment, and triumph over the devil, which we examine next.

Power, Empowerment, Triumph over IRTS through Jesus and Holy Spirit

Power is an explosive phenomenon that energizes and fuels IRTs. The diverse divisions within the IRTs sometimes contest during their *agorɔ and akɔm* festivals to substantiate who wields more power. To downplay this supposed power so feared by people, musicians, through their lyrics belittle this so-called power present in IRTs by displaying a power above all other powers in Jesus Christ. Lyrics often accompanied with graphic videos of the songs communicate the message of Jesus winning and deities losing all the time.

Songs composed by Tagoe sisters typically have these power narratives. One of the songs worthy of analyzing is *Edin bɛn nie*⁸⁸ (what a name!) composed by Rev. Kusi Berko Brempong of blessed memory. The lyrics and the accompanying video overwhelmingly describe the Christian God's powers present in Jesus Christ over IRTs base - gods, dwarves and witchcrafts.

The song tells a story, and then consistently he repeats the chorus *Edin bɛn nie montwere me, montwere me*, what a name, what a name, shows that hammers on the name of Jesus as the name above every other name and a name that frightens dwarves, gods, witches and *Mami Wata*. The song is worded and convincing, and the video was performed to powerfully communicate power in Jesus whiles showing the powerlessness of IRTs deities, which vanishes at the mention of Jesus. This song is important because it became and is still a household song.

88 Rev. Kusi Brempong: Track Edin Ben Nie (Official Video) Universal God Records - YouTube

Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me 2x
Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me 2x

Asem ato me
Nsuo afa me sunnie
Maye aye, aye, aye me nya fawode oo
Nfi nhya du num nie, me nya yaresa
Na sonn mate se obi wo ho,
obi wo ho oma fawode oo
Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me.
Edin ben nie motwere me, mo twere me 2x
Edin ben nie motwere me, mo twere me 2x

Wiase abrobo ye hun nkoa.
Bronya be sie a na meyemu hyehye me
Masem me ka ne se, masem ye mobo bebre
Mefie abayie for, abayie for reye me
Enso mate se obi wo ho bayie suro no
Obi wo ho abayie dwani no oo
Enti Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me, aa.

Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me 2x
Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me 2x

Komfo be wo ho, o wo ghana asaase se ha
Sa Komfo na wa bin bebere
Bebere ko ne kyen ko ko bisa wun hyebre
Bebere no ko ne kyen ko bo hunhun ban
Eno nti Komfo no ka wo nitrim se, opese onyan tumi
bia esin tumi nyinaa
Na Se nia okasa mami wata koto no,
na sa okasa tumi nyina kon ni fom oo.
Na se okasa bayie nyina adwunno no
Nti oko kwayee Bretuo be mo,
oko kwaye Bretuo be mo, oko hyia ne mmoatia
Oko nhya ni mmoatia oni omo ye adwuma no nyinaa
Odi to omo enim se, Mawura nom mmotoa, medi
asem nam oo, na ma ma mo kye me
Mehya tumi bia esin tumi nyinaa, na sa me kasa
Na Se mekasas mami wata koto no,
na sa mekasa tumi nyina kon ni fom oo.
Na se mekasa mmoatia nyina adwuno me
Mmoatia se Okomfor no see, eei Okomfo
asem kese ben na wo de ba no?
Sa die no diee, sa die no deie enye yie da,
Efise obi wo ho a, Nyankopon adin nkan edi ama no.
Nti die wa nyan no, Okomfo die wo nyan no fa nu sa
Sa nimpa kro no die hen die yen tumi ebo no den
Ye bo ne din a yenyina beyra
Okomfo gyina ho koon na obisa mmoatia no,
Wo die edin ben nie motwere me, motwere me ma ba
aa,

Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me 2x
Edin ben nie montwere me, montwere me 2x

enti Okomfo bisa mmoatia no se me ko india ana, eho
na me ho nipa kro aa
mmoaa ye si no se Komfo dabi enko india

*What a name, what a name, show me, show me
What a name, what a name, show me, I have come.*

*I am in trouble
My pillow has wallowed in the water.
I have tried and tried everything without getting freedom
It's been more than 25 years without healing.
I have heard that someone gives healing
Someone offers freedom
What a name, what a name, show, show me*

*What a name, what a name, show me, show me
What a name, what a name, show me, I have come.
Life is full of fear.
I get anxiety the Christmas season.
All I say is that I am miserable
Witches in my family, witches have bewitched me
Yet I have heard of someone whom witches fear
Someone who witches run away from
So what a name, show me, show me aa.*

*What a name, what a name, show me, show me
What a name, what a name, show me, show me, I have come
There is an indigenous priest.
An indigenous priest who lived on this land Ghana
He was a powerful priest
Many people solicited his direction in their lives,
Many people went to him for protection
So the indigenous priest thought that he wanted
all power in this world
So that when he speaks, Mami Wata will bow before him
So that when he speaks, all other powers will kowtow before him
So that when he speaks, witchcraft powers will run away
He, therefore, went to the deep forest
He went to the deep forest for a meeting with dwarves
It with the dwarves he has been working with
He informed them that, my lord dwarfs, I came with a message
I want powers that is above all other powers
So that when I speak, Mami Wata will bow before him
So that when I speak, all other powers will kowtow before him
So that when I speak, witchcraft powers will run away
The dwarves' told the indigenous priest, eei priest, what big
case are you trying to bring.
As for this request, this request can never be granted ever
Because God has already given those powers to someone.
So take what you have gotten already like that; indigenous
priests take what you have like that.
As for that person, we cannot mention his name
If we mention his name, we will all vanish
The indigenous priest stood there quietly and asked the dwarves
What name is that, what name is that show me, show me aa
What a name, what a name, show me, show me
What a name, what a name, show me, show me, I have come*

*Then the indigenous priest asked the dwarves
whether he should go to India to find that
person with powers.*

*The dwarves told him that, no, not in India.
The priest asked whether he should go and
inquire from the powerful chief priests.*

The dwarves said no, he is not the one.

*The priest then asked the dwarves, so where
should I go?*

*The priest then mentioned names of powerful
rulers who have come and gone
Mentioned the names of lords that have come
and gone, but the dwarves said, no, the person
is none of the people you mentioned*

*The indigenous priest stood quietly for a while
with all his intentions bottled in his mind
Then he asked the dwarves, is it Jesus? All of a
sudden, the dwarves vanished.*

obisa mmo se me ko komfo hene hene ho ana
mmoa se no se dabi oo enye ono
obisa omo bio see enhinfa na me ko
obobo mpanyinfo bebre aba asese woyi so kro.
obibo owuranom mu bebre aba asese woyi so ko, mmoa
si no se enye omu mmo bia
Komfo dzina ho kon na ni sem nyina aka ne tim ooo
Afi obisa mmotia no se, eye yesu ana, oti nani no na
mmotia no adwani ko

Nti edi ben ne awawadin, awurade din awawadin,
owura Yesu den awawadin. Awawa din aaa
Edin ben nie motwere me, motwere me ma ba 2x
Edin ben nie motwere me Yesu din aa
Edin ben nie motwere me, Yesu din aa
Edin ben nie motwere me, Yesu dzin mmotia suro no
Yesu din

Edin ben nie mɔntwere me, mɔntwere me 2x
Edin ben nie mɔntwere me, mɔntwere me 2x
Yesu din.
Edin ben nie mɔntwere me, Yesu din aaaa

*So, what a name, a wonderful name, Our
Lord's name is wonderful
Lord Jesus name is a wonderful name, wonder-
ful name aa
What a name, what a name, show me, show me
What a name, what a name, Jesus name aa
What a name, what a name, Jesus name aa
What a name, show me, dwarves are afraid of
Jesus' name.*

*What a name, what a name, show me, show me
What a name, what a name, show me, Jesus
name aa.*

*Nkunim, nkunim, nkunim
Nkunim wo mogya ni mo
Me di otanfo no so
Wo mogya aa a ni mu*

Victory, victory, victory in the blood of Jesus tells of victory over IRTs. Retelling that there is power in the blood of Jesus. In the blood of Jesus, one can reign over the enemy.

*Hwana buba eiii, yensuro
Mortia bɛ ba
Kakufuri bɛba
Kabrikye for bɛba yensuro*

Power and military triumph depict the world as a warzone where followers of God (Christians) and the devil are at war. It cast the die between evil and good. The devil always engages or brings situations to sway the children of God, and the Christians triumph over Satan by the blood of Jesus. Songs such as these are military and fast in action and are sung to triumph over evil - IRTs. Rev. *Yawson's, ɔbonsam, bɔ wo a bɔ no bi* (when the devil hits you, hit him back) denotes that the believer faces the devil squarely because Christ is with him/her and the devil is afraid of Jesus's name.

ɣbonsam, bɔ wo a bɔ no bi
ʒpim wo pim no bi
ʒpush wa push no bi
ka na nim, kan na nim
Yesu Kristo ka wo ho
Na ɔbedwane, Obosam suro Yesu dzin.
ɣbosam akom akom akom a Wotumi ayv hwe 2x
Yesu baa ya ɔde tumi ye adwuma
Yeei ei ɔde tumi ye adwuma
Holy ghost baa ya ɔde anointing ye adwuma
Yeei ei ɔde tumi ye adwuma

Triumphing over the devil instigates Christians to praise God with appellations in celebration.

Appellations Magnifying God and Jesus over IRTs

In IRTs, appellations are hidden names often used in praising God, deities, priests, and chiefs. In the indigenous setting, the appellation is heavier depending on whom it is meant for. For example, *Otumfuɔ* means someone that holds power. The Asantehene has the title *Otumfuɔ* Osei Tutu II. Chiefs or religious functionaries also have titles and appellations such as *Kuntukonunku* (fearful), *Dasebre* (generous), *Osagyefo* (liberator), *Odenho* (unlimited resources), *Okatakyie* (brave person), *Odomankoma* (giver of all things), *Odombarima*, *Osabarima* (brave), *Anɔpahema* (dawn), and *Nyakuntɔn* (rainbow). These titles have been transferred to the Church and used to address only the Christian God. In the Christian song, *Mmrane* appellations by Rev. Berko below, he tells the story in a form typical of an indigenous religious priest - pouring libation. He calls God his father. Papa, when I call you, come oo. He calls him ancient of days. He sings of God-deserving praise. On and on, he uses the traditional appellations for God:

<p><i>Daadaa Nyame a Efiri akyirikyiri woye Onyame W'anim ne w'akyi Onyame biara nni ho Odomankoma wofata ayeyie oo Papa ee mefrefre wo a bra oo Okatakylie ee begye wo ayeyie ee Odomankoma begye wonkamfo nnwom Agyei... agyei... agyei... Tumi nyinaa wura Onyankopon e Wone nea wone na wote ase ampa Odomankoma Onyame bi nka wo ho oo Ye ye ye yeya ye yaye Enti enne mebo wo mmrane Mebo wo mmrane agye e Na mefrefre wo a, ampa ara efata wo ampa Odomankoma begye w'ayeyi nnwom M'awurade ee aseda se woo o Agya mebo wo mmrane eee, emmrane se wo Agya mebe wo dinn, aseda se wo Agya mebo wo mmrane eee, emmrane se wo Agya mebe wo dinn, aseda se wo</i></p>	<p>Ancient of Days You are God from eternity Before you there is no other Everlasting God you deserve all praise Father! Respond when we call you The Ultimate One, come for your praise Everlasting God come and inhabit this praise song Daddy eii...Daddy eii...Daddy eii Omnipotent God You are who you are and indeed, you are alive Everlasting God, there is no god besides you <i>Ye ye ye yeya ye yaye</i> So today I will call out your appellations I will sing your appellations, daddy I call on your name because you are worthy Father, I will sing your appellations, 'cos you are worthy I will proclaim your name, 'cos you deserve thanksgiving Father, I will sing your appellations, 'cos you are worthy I will proclaim your name, 'cos you deserve thanksgiving</p>
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The song is directed in praising the almighty God, and it is purposefully arranged such that one does not confuse the appellation of God to any other. The praise names used for chiefs are also used for God but not as much as for indigenous religious functionaries. In indigenous religions, God is worshipped through the deities and ancestors, but the song makes nonsense of that concept and goes directly to God with the appellations. It brings the Christians' mind that only God and his Son Jesus deserve those praise names and not any hidden deity somewhere or an earthly chief who can die.

The composer talks of chiefs who call themselves *Otumfuɔ*, *Kuntukununku*, and *Osagyefo* but could not overcome death unlike God who is alive forever. Meaning Christians should

shun away from these earthly powers and IRTs because they will wane away, but God never dies; therefore, he alone deserves these appellations.

Conclusion

The paper sought to reflect on the communicative impact of local gospel songs/music on a person. It raised the argument that local gospel music lyrics are meant to communicate a message to the listener, and the message is geared almost all the time towards delegitimizing the mainstay IRTs and their contents. I analyzed songs composed by gospel musicians and others by anonymous composers, which otherwise are popular nationwide.

The genre of songs typically has sub-themes such as fear, spiritual battle between the devil and God, power, empowerment, healing, freedom, and appellations. Three main themes were sifted out of the many and discussed. Findings indicate that local gospel songs purposefully delegitimize IRTs belittling its components as insignificant and powerless.

Another recurring theme is power and empowerment from Jesus and God to deal with Satan and cohorts present in IRTs. The final point is the transfer of appellations and praise names used in IRTs for God, deities, ancestors, and chiefs to the Christian God. The usage backed by lyrics substantiates that the chiefs, deities, and ancestors to which those influential praise names are bestowed are mere mortals. Also, those earthly leaders come and go and their powers wanes, they are mere mortals who die or whose reign are no longer recognized once they depart the earth. Conversely, the immortal and almighty God and Jesus are ascribed the praise names because they are eternal, *so mmrane se amo*, (they deserve praise) as Rev. Berko puts it.

The findings in the analysis are revealing in that I looked at the explicit lyrics and intent behind the composition and noted that local gospel musicians intentionally compose to disseminate

the message that positivizes Christianity at the detriment of IRTs. This paper fills the gap on music as a communicative tool in changing and sustaining the interest of believers in a religious tradition, but specifically, it contributes to the growing literature on African indigenous religious studies.

Abstract

This paper is about a subtle means deployed by followers of Christianity in delegitimizing Indigenous Religious Traditions (IRTs) in Ghana. It traces the activities of the historical debut of both the fourteenth-century Portuguese entry and the 19th-century missionary activities. It argues that local gospel music lyrics are meant to communicate a message to the listener, and the message is geared almost all the time towards delegitimizing the mainstay IRTs and their contents. The current generation of Christians, even though headed by Africans, are following suit of what happened earlier in those two periods—employing various means in expanding Christianity in an attempt to shrink or uproot IRTs. Lyrics and graphic video pictures in Songs/Music have been an ardent device directed to this agenda. Using historical and the content analysis method in analysing fifty local Ghanaian gospel music, we noted the genre in the songs as fear, spiritual battle between the enemy, the devil (witches, dwarves, juju,) disease, and God, power, empowerment, healing, freedom, and appellations. The recurring markers from songs composed by both known musicians and anonymous composers were grouped into three broad themes and analyzed. Findings indicate that the local gospel songs depict a plan to undermine IRTs by distinguishing between good and evil. Supplier, giver of good things (God and his son Jesus), and the destroyer and detractor of good things is the (devil) present in IRTs.

JESUS IN AFRICAN TRADITION: THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN THE ASANTE PRE- CHRISTIAN RELIGIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Samuel Ofori

Key words

Tradition, Gospel, pre-Christian, ancestors, intermediaries, Christianity.

Introduction

The history of Christian expansion has revealed that whenever the Christian gospel enters a new cultural milieu, new questions are asked that have to do with the nexus between the gospel and human cultures. A major question that arises whenever the Christian gospel enters a new cultural context is: How should new converts relate to their cultural past? Or, how far can the gospel be adapted to fit into a culture without losing its essential message? This has been a major issue African Christians have had to grapple with upon their conversion. Ernestina Afriyie's comment on this issue is noteworthy. She states,

For a long time, African Christians have been struggling with the relationship between the Gospel of Christ which they have accepted and their traditional practices. These struggles should have been long past by now. Yet they continue because theologians have still not been able to show the way forward in true conversion by bringing Christ into the places within African communities where He has never been before.⁸⁹

Hans Debrunner makes this observation in the introduction to his book, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, thus:

After thirty years of experience in many parts of Africa, Dr. H. Ph. Junod said, 'Wherever I went, I found that my Master had been there before me'. This is true also for the

⁸⁹ Ernestina Afriyie, 'The Theology of the Okuapehene's Odwira: An illustration of the engagement of the Gospel and Culture among the Akan of Akropong-Akuapem', 25.

history of Christianity in Ghana. Christ was there before the arrival of the missionaries. He was there in the boisterous and lively atmosphere of that country, the peculiar atmosphere so different from that of some other African countries, animated as it is by an immense zest for life.⁹⁰

Similarly Rattray, after observing the cultural and traditional practices of the Asante, concluded thus:

I sometimes like to think, had these people been left to work out their own salvation, perhaps someday an African Messiah would have arisen and swept their Pantheons clean of the fetish (*suman*).⁹¹

From these statements, it can be deduced that they saw the customs, traditions and practices as pointing to the 'Messiah'. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they walked with the Lord without recognizing Him in their midst. Mugambi made this observation thus:

But the story of Emmaus can be brought to life in Africa. Christ walked with the disciples; He talked to them, 'but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him'. It was not until the end of the journey, by a simple unobtrusive gesture, that their eyes were opened, and the unknown figure was the Lord.⁹²

Paul wrote to the Ephesian church about the gospel as 'God's secret plan hidden through all the past ages (which) has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit' (Eph. 3:5).⁹³ The phrase, 'all the past ages' is not restricted to only the Jewish past. In fact, Paul's letter was written to a Greek audience and the phrase was thus relevant to them. The implication is that Christ is no stranger to any culture. Jesus has never been a stranger to the African heritage. In this presentation, therefore, an attempt is made to locate the Spirit of Christ in the pre-Christian Asante religio-cultural context by examining some of their religious traditions.

90 Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 1.

91 R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, v.

92 Judith M. Bahemuka, 'The hidden Christ in African Traditional Religion' in J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (eds.), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1989): 4.

93 Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996): 66.

The Challenge in locating Jesus in the African religio-cultural context

Locating Jesus in the African spiritual world was a major challenge to most of the early Western missionaries⁹⁴ and even for majority of modern African Christians. Stinton quotes Gatu, who speaks in favor of locating Jesus in the Kenyan pre-Christian past, in an interview thus:

One time, when I was trying to talk about images of God in the African setting, and what God has done and how God has revealed himself through all nations, I found it very difficult to put it to the Revival brethren, particularly when I was trying to use traditional tunes to convey Christian messages. They were challenging me and in fact accusing me of taking the church back to heathenism.

And I said, 'Brethren, now look! If the God that I believe in, who is the Father of Jesus Christ, did not reveal himself in any way to my people of Kikuyuland, I will have nothing to do with that kind of God! Because I believe if he is that kind of God, he must have revealed himself in a certain way to my Kikuyu people, in preparation for the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. And I said, 'This is why, for me, he's such an important person in my life. And this is why this God is so important, because he never left my people without any witness, even before the coming of missionary Christianity, as it were.'⁹⁵

Even though Gatu spoke with reference to his people, the Kikuyu of Kenya, the sentiments he expressed apply to the whole of the African cultural context, including the Asante context.

According to Andrew Walls, a major theological question in Africa, in our contemporary era has to do with how to cope theologically with the African past. And by coping theologically with the African past, he implies that Africans have the urgent

94 Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004): 11.

95 Gatu in an interview with Diane B. Stinton, cited in Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, 33.

need to understand how God was at work among their own traditions. To him, three stages in dealing with the African traditional heritage can be identified, the missionary stage, the convert stage and the reconfiguration stage. He further contends that Africans are in the reconfiguration stage where African traditions and experience are being reconfigured in Christian terms.⁹⁶ He asserts emphatically that:

Twentieth-century African Christians have to face the question, where was God in Africa's past? It is the first question on the African theological agenda. And it is not answerable in terms of Western theological experience.⁹⁷

Serious efforts, therefore, have to be made to understand the traditions of the Asante religio-cultural context in relation to the Christian gospel. How is Jesus related to Asante religious traditions? How can we make Christianity our own? This is the crucial question that has to be answered. To put it another way, how can the gospel interpret and inhabit the cultural realities of the African context? Bediako is of the view that this is not a matter of superficially classifying some elements as bad and therefore must be discarded and others as good and must be allowed in Christianity to stay.⁹⁸ He approaches the issue through using 'Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition'.⁹⁹ According to him culture must be made to pass through the prism of scripture for its light and shade to be discerned.

In the Asante religio-cultural context, some of the traditions would be made to pass through the prism of scripture to discover the 'spirit of God already present in the deep symbols of their culture'¹⁰⁰ and draw them into God's activity in Christ. This will be discussed under the heading, Jesus and the Asante Intermediaries.

96 Andrew Walls, 'The Expansion of Christianity: An Interview with Andrew Walls', <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2052>, accessed on 16th September 2010 at 13.30 GMT.

97 Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 97.

98 Bediako, *Biblical Christologies*, 116.

99 Kwame Bediako, 'Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition', 3-6.

100 Christensen, *An African Tree of Life*, 2.

Jesus and the Asante Intermediaries

In relating to, or dealing with, the Supreme Being or the Transcendent, the Asante have three major intermediaries. These are: Asase Yaa; Nananom Abosom, and Nananom Nsamanfo. When a chief, in prayer, pours libation in the nkonwadanmu (stool room) or during ceremonial occasions, he addresses these intermediaries. How does the gospel and for that matter Jesus Christ relate to these intermediaries? Bediako makes an assertion which attempts to answer the above questions:

He comes in as Lord and Saviour. But in our own tradition before he comes, we have a concept of salvation, we have ideas of expiation, mediation, placating our ancestors. We have an idea that if we harm them, they do something to us. My view is that Christ comes in and assumes the roles of all these points of our piety which we addressed to our understanding to various sources of power; it could be God, it could be deities, it could be ancestors.¹⁰¹

What Bediako is putting across by this assertion is that Christ fulfills the roles that the traditional intermediaries performed and these give us pointers to locating him in the African context. In this presentation, an attempt would be made to examine the Asante intermediaries in relation to the roles Jesus came to perform as the ultimate mediator between God and humanity. (I Timothy 2:5).

Jesus and Asase Yaa (*Earth goddess*)

The concept of Asase Yaa is not peculiar to only the Asante people. It is, in fact, a concept that is common to most African societies. Asare Opoku is emphatic on this point. According to him,

All over Africa the Earth is regarded as a spirit, and in Akan society she ranks after God and is the second deity to be offered a drink at libations.¹⁰²

101 Bediako, 'Biblical Christologies...', 99

102 Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International, 1978), 56.

Many Christians see libation prayers as offensive to their Christian consciences because, in the prayers, drink is offered first to Asase Yaa, among the intermediaries, after it has been shown or pointed to Onyankopɔn. Who is Asase Yaa? The Akan say that Asase nyɛ bosom, ɔnkyerɛ mmusu, which means 'the Earth is not a deity, she does not divine.'¹⁰³

However, like deities, she receives offerings and sacrifices. This is done at the beginning of the farming season, before seeds are planted into the soil. Fowls are sacrificed on the plot of land for the blood to pour on the ground. Food may also be prepared and scattered on the four compass points of the plot of land to be farmed.¹⁰⁴ The Earth cannot be cultivated without the permission of Asase Yaa. The Earth is also offered sacrifice anytime a grave is to be dug for burial.

The Earth is the source of all the bounties that *Onyankopɔn* gives to mankind. In fact, no blessing of *Onyankopɔn* can be enjoyed independent of the Earth. Life itself is dependent on the Earth. Hence all petitions to *Onyankopɔn* for blessings have to pass through Asase Yaa, and that is why she is the first of the intermediaries to be called upon in libation prayers.

With the coming of our Lord Jesus, Paul writes of a new dispensation in which all things are brought together in Christ. In the letter to the Ephesians he writes:

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him. (Ephesians 1:10) NIV.

Verhey and Harvard refer to this passage as God's good future, which is his plan 'to gather up all things in Christ.' (1:10).¹⁰⁵ The Greek rendering of 'to gather up' is *anakephalaioo*, in which one can identify the Greek word *kephale* which means 'head.' They are therefore of the view that 'to gather up' implies 'bringing all things together under one head, namely Christ.'¹⁰⁶

103 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 56.

104 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 56.

105 Verhey and Harvard, *Ephesians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 46.

106 Verhey and Harvard, *Ephesians*, 46.

According to Foulkes, three ideas are present in the use of the word *anakephalaioo*, and these include, 'restoration, unity, and the headship of Christ.' The implication is that all things have to be restored to their intended function when brought under the headship of Christ.¹⁰⁷ When all things are gathered together in Christ, Jesus takes over the role of Asase Yaa because he is the source of all the spiritual blessings. Paul writes to the Ephesians thus:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3) NIV.

According to Guthrie, 'Paul thinks of the contrast between a shadow and its substance as a fitting illustration of the relationship between a ritual religion and Jesus.'¹⁰⁸ In the Asante traditional religion, the Asase Yaa spirit can be seen as a shadow that finds its reality in Christ.

The gospel, our Lord Jesus, came that people might have life, and that they might have it in abundance (John 10:10). Life and the abundance of it involves both physical and spiritual blessings and Jesus, as mediator, communicates both physical and spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). The source of blessings is *Onyankopɔn* and in Christ he gives all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms. Jesus becomes a better mediator because having tasted our humanity, he is in a better position to appreciate our weaknesses and know our needs, as it is written:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

The incarnation makes Jesus a better mediator because he can sympathize with our weaknesses and knows our needs better.

107 Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 60.

108 Donald Guthrie, 'Colossians' in D. Guthrie et al, *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), 1148.

The Asante also regard Asase Yaa as a keen upholder of truth. Asare Opoku states:

Whenever the veracity of a statement is in doubt, the person who made it would be challenged to touch the tip of his tongue with some soil to prove that he is telling the truth.¹⁰⁹

Jesus Christ is also a keen upholder of truth, infact, he is the truth. It is stated in John 1: 14 thus:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (KJV).

That Jesus is full of 'truth' (Greek: *aletheia*) implies that he is 'reliable both in words and actions. He can be depended upon to carry out what he promises, and his words are always true.'¹¹⁰ He is the truth (John 14:6) and he desires from men 'truth in the inward parts.' (Psalm 51:6). With Jesus being the truth, the one who accepts him does not need to prove his integrity or the veracity of his statements, because such a person is expected to let his 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No', 'No' (Matthew 5:37).

Asase Yaa, as a deity, 'abhors the spilling of human blood'¹¹¹, or murder. Whenever a person spills the blood of another, that is, when a person commits homicide, *Asase Yaa* has to be appeased by sacrifices. Jesus Christ, or the gospel also abhors murder. Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder', and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell (Matthew 5:21-22, NIV).

It can be deduced from this passage as France observes, that Jesus goes behind the act of murder itself to indicate that anger and hatred which give rise to murder are also blameworthy in God's sight.¹¹²

109 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 57.

110 Kruse, John, 71.

111 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 57.

112 R.T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 119.

The day of *Asase Yaa* is Thursday. Yaa is a name given to female persons born on Thursday. The Asante people observe this special day as a day of rest and people are not to till the land.¹¹³ Anyone who broke this taboo was severely punished because of the general fear among the people that this could bring evil or calamity on the whole society.¹¹⁴ There was also the fear that whoever entered the forest on that day could encounter a danger, therefore, the Asante people celebrated Thursday, '*Yawooda*' as a day of rest. This can be compared to the biblical Sabbath by which the Jews abstained from work on Saturdays. Like the Sabbath, the Asante people do not go to farm on Thursdays. Unlike the Sabbath during which the Jews did not do any type of work at all, the Asante people could do some work at home on Thursdays.

Relating this to the gospel, Jesus is the one who gives rest. He says in Matthew 11:28-29:

Come unto me all you that labour and are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest and you will find rest for your souls. (NIV)

Jesus gives a better rest. The day of rest given by *Asase Yaa* was a shadow of the real and better rest that is in Jesus Christ. Jesus also promises an eternal rest for those who remain faithful to him. It is stated in Revelation 14:13 thus:

Then I heard a voice from heaven say: 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their 'deeds' will follow them. (NIV)

The Asante also believe that *Asase Yaa* receives all men at death into her bowels. Libation is poured to her to formally request for her permission to dig a grave 'so that a child of *Asase Yaa* may be buried in her womb.'¹¹⁵ In the gospels, Jesus is the one who promises to receive believers at death. He told the disciples:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my father's house are many rooms; if it

113 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 56.

114 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 56.

115 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 56-57.

were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3. NIV).

Jesus takes the responsibility of receiving believers into his father's house. In Luke 23:43, the dying thief on the cross pleads with Jesus to remember him in his kingdom, and Jesus promised that he would be with him in paradise that very day. If Asante Christians have to grapple with the question, 'Where was Christ in the African past?' the spirit of *Asase Yaa* has her reality in Jesus Christ who comes to assume all these roles that the Akan believed were performed by *Asase Yaa*.

It is clear from the discussion so far that *Asase Yaa* is not a demonic spirit. In fact, she is closely related to *Onyankopɔn* and performed the mediatorial role that Scripture reveals Christ has performed as evident through his death and resurrection and that he continues to perform today and forever (1 Timothy 2:5-6 and Colossians 1:19-20). Parrinder asserts that:

Heaven and earth provide the stage where the human drama is played out. Men lift up their eyes to the sky and naturally regard its spirit as transcendent and mighty. But they live on the earth, plant seeds in it, derive food from it, and in its depths the dead are buried. So Mother Earth is nearest to men and linked with them by many bonds.¹¹⁶

Onyankopɔn and *Asase Yaa* are therefore the basis or foundation for human existence. It is important to note how drummers address the spirit of the earth:

*Spirit of Earth, sorrow is yours,
Spirit of Earth, woe is yours,
Earth with its dust,
Earth, while I am yet alive,
It is upon you that I put my trust,
Earth, who receives my body.*¹¹⁷

116 Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1963), 53.

117 R.S. Rattray, *Religion & Art in Ashanti* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 162.

This implies that in death and in life, the Asante believe that human beings depend on the spirit of the earth. This spirit cannot be an evil and demonic spirit. If the spirit of Christ has always been with the Asante people and Christ had been with the Asante before the coming of Western Christianity, then he was with them as the spirit of the earth – Asase Yaa, the mediator. The Jews saw Christ in their past traditions. He was the Passover lamb, he was the High Priest, and he was the rock that followed them on the desert. In the Asante context, he can be identified with Asase Yaa.

Jesus and the Abosom

Abosom are the next after Asase Yaa to be offered drinks when libation is poured. Ernestina Afriyie has argued that in translating the Bible into the Twi language, the word '*bosom*' was used to translate 'idol' or 'god' and therefore are regarded as enemies of God. This, according to her 'directly connects *abosom* with *ahonhommɛne* (demons)¹¹⁸ and therefore they have been the target of attack by Christians since the introduction of Christianity by Western missionaries to the Asante people.

However, traditionally, the *abosom* are believed to have been derived from *Onyankopɛn*. According to Christaller, *ɔbosom* is a '*tutelar* or guardian spirit of a town or family; imaginary spirits, subordinate to God.'¹¹⁹ They are referred to as *Nyame mma* (children of God) or *Nyame akyeame* (spokesmen of God).

Christaller further explains that they are worshipped or consulted by the 'natives' and generally called 'fetishes' by the Europeans, but contends that the term 'fetish' would better be restricted to '*asuman*', charm, or, in order to avoid confusion, the term 'fetish' should not be used at all to refer to *ɔbosom*. Afriyie is of the view that '*abosom*' are not 'gods' and are not worshipped. She contends:

Abosom are not enemies of *Onyankopɛn*. While it may seem that the *abosom* in Akan religion are worshipped as 'gods', they are not. They are only revered.¹²⁰

118 Ernestina Afriyie, '*The Theology of Okuapemhene's Odwira...*' 221.

119 Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)*, 43.

120 R.S. Rattray, *Religion & Art in Ashanti* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 162.

In actuality, the *abosom* are derivatives from *Onyankopɔn* and are more or less ministers sent to the earth to perform specific functions on his behalf. The Asante people interact more with the *abosom* than with *Onyankopɔn* and seek help and other benefits from them and therefore it appears the people see the *abosom* as ends in themselves. Afriyie explains this state of affairs as deriving from a certain philosophy which is portrayed in the Asante political organization, that 'a person only goes before the *Ɔhene* as a last resort'¹²¹ and therefore they do not go directly to *Onyankopɔn* but have to pass through the *abosom* who thus become intermediaries between God and the people.

Afriyie argues that the concept of *abosom* must have a place in Akan Christianity because of a seeming paradox. She asserts:

There must be a place for the concept of *abosom* in Akan Christianity otherwise there is a paradox of an *Onyankopɔn* who has all along until the coming of the gospel depended on 'evil spirits' for His operations.¹²²

Before this paradox can be resolved, there is the need to examine the origins and functions of *abosom* in the traditional context which will then enable us to place them in the Christian context.

Rattray, in his work *Ashanti*, gives the genealogy of the Asante gods. He narrates an Asante myth that recounts that *Onyankopɔn* had various sons one of whom was *bayɛyere* (favorite son). *Onyankopɔn* made a decision to send the children down to the earth so that 'they might receive benefits from, and confer them upon mankind'.¹²³ These sons bore the names of the rivers or lakes and they include:

Tano (the great river of that name).

Bosomtwe (the great lake near Coomassie)

Bea (a river).

Opo (the sea).¹²⁴

121 Ernestina Afriyie, 'The Theology of the Okuapehene's Odwira...', 223.

122 Ernestina Afriyie, 'The Theology of the Okuapehene's Odwira...', 223.

123 Rattray, *Ashanti*, 145-146.

124 Rattray, *Ashanti*, 146.

The tributaries of these rivers also constitute their children. These water bodies became the abodes of Nyame mma (the children of God) or abosom and include such ones as *Bosomtano*, *Bosomtwe*, *Bosombea*, and *Bosompo*. Rattray reports a priest as saying: 'As a woman gives birth to a child, so may water to a god'.¹²⁵ The Asante have come to this theological belief because they see water coming down from the skies, believed to be the abode of *Onyame*, and when it comes down it gives life to them and also enables their farm produce to grow. These waters run off into the rivers and therefore that should be the abode of the spirit from *Onyame*. Rattray notes:

Water in Ashanti, some in a greater, others in a lesser degree, are all looked upon as containing the power or spirit of the divine creator, and thus as being a great life-giving force.¹²⁶

The Asante people therefore see the rivers or water bodies as the abodes of Nyame mma. The abosom were expected to give life, that the people may have long life and avoid death. Nyame mma (the children of God) have come down from *Onyankopɔn*, the source of life, to bring life to the people. This expectation of the people is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came down from *Onyankopɔn* to bring life to men.' John states it clearly thus:

For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) NIV.

The *abosom* were also expected to bring healing to the sick. This aspiration is also met in Jesus Christ who brings healing. Peter said of him:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24). NIV.

125 Rattray, *Ashanti*, 146.

126 Rattray, *Ashanti*, 146.

Jesus thus fulfills all the functions that the abosom performed, and having identified himself with humanity by becoming a man, he knows our weaknesses and understands our situation and therefore is a better mediator. Afriyie asserts that:

In much the same way, what the abosom did for the Akan, Jesus Christ is now doing in a better and more comprehensive way.¹²⁷

Jesus, in the Asante context, can therefore be presented as the '*Obosom Kɛsɛ*' (the greatest *Obosom*). In the Graeco-Roman context of Christianity, Jesus was called Kyrios which means 'Lord' and therefore became the 'Lord of Lords.'¹²⁸ These Graeco-Roman lords were in competition with God and therefore enemies of God, but in the Asante context, the *abosom* have always cooperated and worked with and for God.

The Asante people go to the water bodies for life, because they see water as a life giving force. Jesus is the one who has the real water that wells unto eternal life. He said to the Samaritan woman,

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:13-14) NIV.

In that conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus said that if she had asked him, he would have given her 'living water'. The woman misunderstood Jesus' mention of water and took it literally. Jesus, however, was speaking of spiritual water that would be by far superior to any that came from the well. He meant that he was the living water that gives eternal life (John 4:14). As Harrison succinctly puts it, 'He tried to explain that He could plant a fountain of eternal life in the woman's heart'¹²⁹. In the view of Poole¹³⁰ the text, John 4:13-14, was excellently expounded by Jesus in John 7:38-39 when he said:

127 Ernestina Afriyie, '*The Theology of Okuapehene's Odwira*', 224.

128 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 52.

129 Everett F. Harrison, *John: The Gospel of Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 31.

130 Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible, Vol. 3* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 296

'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive' (NIV).

In the Asante context, these words of the Lord Jesus Christ imply that the water, which is the abode of abosom now springs out of a person when he receives the gospel, so that a believer becomes the abode of the Spirit, and therefore becomes an *abosom*. He no longer needs to go to the river, since he becomes the bearer of the Spirit that gives life. In the Jewish era of Christianity, Jesus was considered by the believers as their High priest (Hebrews 3:1) and he has made believers kings and priests (Revelation 1:6), and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

With the priesthood of all believers it can be deduced that the Jewish priesthood would be rendered obsolete. In the Asante context, Jesus as the *abosom Kɛsɛɛ* makes the believers abosom, who thus have access to the throne room of *Onyankopɔn* and this makes the mediatorial role of the abosom obsolete.

It must be noted, however, that not all the abosom are derived from God. Afriyie makes this observation thus:

Not all ahonhom that are called abosom are derived from *Onyame*. There are some ahonhom *bɔne*, which are also called *abosom* by the Akan.¹³¹

Asare Opoku makes a distinction between those abosom that are derived from *Onyame* and those that are not.¹³² Those from *Onyame*, according to him, are the Tete Abosom (the tutelary spirits) who have always been with the people from their ancient past. Harvey gives a description of the Tete Abosom thus:

The Tete Abosom occupy a particularly important position in the Akan cosmology. As the 'children' of *Onyame* (*Onyame mba*), the Tete Abosom are said to be 'ancient' and have been a major focus of veneration since perhaps the inception of Akan society.¹³³

131 Ernestina Afriyie, 'The Theology of Okuapehene's Odwira...' 224.

132 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 55.

133 Marcus Harvey, 'Medial Deities and Relational Meanings: Tracing Elements of an Akan Grammar of Knowing' in *Journal of Africana Religions*, Volume 3,

The other group of *abosom*, the *abosom abrafoɔ* are those brought in from other places. Harvey calls them *Suman Brafoɔ* and according to him:

They are said to originate from northern Ghana, and appear younger than the *Tete Abosom* when understood as historical developments related to an intermingling of societies that required additional protection.¹³⁴

They cannot be associated with *Tete Abosom* because according to Asare Opoku, they are 'physical objects or instruments used in the practice of magic which have been elevated to the status of gods.'¹³⁵ They are also distinguished from the *tete abosom* by the fact that they can be consulted by people to kill their enemies or cause them to suffer ill-health or other misfortunes.¹³⁶ Afriyie contends that these are not from Onyame. She asserts:

Not all *abosom* are intermediaries between human beings and Onyame... The Akan say '*suman sɛe abosom* (*suman* spoils the (*ɔbosom*)). This is because *asuman* are not derived from Onyame but from *mmoatia* and other *ahonhom*. *Abosom* which make *asuman* cannot be derived from Onyame.¹³⁷

Opoku Onyiah describes them as anti-witchcraft shrines that arose in the early part of the 20th century characterized mainly by their witch-hunting activities.¹³⁸ Among several of such shrines were *Abirewa* (old lady), *Hwemso* (watch over me), *Tigare*, *Tongo*, *Kankamea* and *Kune*, *Kwaku Firi*, *Kwasi Kukuro* and *Mframa* (wind).¹³⁹ These were importations and a corruption of the traditional religious system. These were not intermediaries between the people and God and therefore should not be

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134 Harvey, 'Medial Deities and Relational Meanings...' 415.

135 Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 55-56.

136 Kofi Asare Opoku, 'Aspects of Akan Worship' in *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1972, 2.

137 Ernestina Afriyie, '*The Theology of Okuapehene's Odwira*', 224. **Suman* refers to charms.

138 Opoku Onyiah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Blandford: Deo Publishing, 2012), 65.

139 Opoku Onyiah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 69.

considered as part of the traditional Asante worship. However, Christians being ignorant of this distinction classify all the abosom as evil and enemies of God.

Jesus and the ancestral function

In libation prayers that are offered to *Onyankopɔn*, *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* come after *Asase Yaa* and *Nananom Abosom* when drinks are offered. The Asante people believe that when a person dies and his spirit successfully gets to *asamando* (the land of the dead), he becomes an ancestor. They believe that when a person dies, he enters another realm of existence characterized by power'.¹⁴⁰ Being in the spirit realm, they are closer to *Onyankopɔn* and therefore in a better position to help the living by mediating for them in the palace of *Onyankopɔn*, receiving benefits from him for their relatives or kinsmen. Among the Asante people, the relationship between the living and *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* is consanguineous, and it is traced through matrilineal descent. Death does not terminate a person's membership of the matrilineage; *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* remain part of the matrilineage and the living expect from them care and protection from sickness, death and other calamities, and the acquisition of various benefits, for example, long life, many children, or great wealth. Pobee asserts that the most potent aspect of Akan religion is the cult of the ancestors' ancestors'.¹⁴¹

Veneration of *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* is highly prominent in many African societies, and also among the Asante people. Walls acknowledges this fact when he asserts that:

If as is argued here, a new form of Christianity is emerging shaped by the configuration of African life, it will be bound to take account in some way – not necessarily always in the same way – of the ancestors.¹⁴²

Kwame Bediako attempts to demonstrate that Christ can be

140 Samuel Ofori, *Christianity and African Culture: The Gospel in Asante Funeral Rites* (Accra: Pentecost Press Ltd., 2014), 64

141 John S. Pobee, *Towards an African Theology* (Abingdon: Partlenon Press, 1979), 46.

142 Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 128; Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: the Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, 31

presented as a better or greater ancestor when he asserts that:

Jesus has actually demonstrated, through his resurrection from the dead, the possession of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16). This can never be said of ancestors.¹⁴³

He asserts further that:

While not denying that spiritual forces do operate in the traditional realm, we can maintain that ancestral spirits, as human spirits that have not demonstrated any power over death, the final enemy, cannot be presumed to act in the way tradition ascribes to them.¹⁴⁴

According to him, therefore, 'Jesus is the only real and true Ancestor and source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors'.¹⁴⁵ Jesus is a better ancestor and surpasses the natural ancestor because he belongs to the eternal realm as divine spirit, being the Son of God, unlike the ancestral spirits which are human spirits essentially. Bediako further argues that ancestors are honoured and considered worthy of that, for having lived among us, but Jesus through the incarnation has 'achieved a far more profound identification with us in our humanity than the mere ethnic solidarity of lineage ancestors can ever do'.¹⁴⁶ Jesus, therefore, deserves more honour as an ancestor. Moreover, with regard to ancestors being models of behavior, Jesus provides a better model of exemplary behavior that humanity should emulate because of his sinless life. All these arguments go to support his assertion that 'Jesus Christ fulfils our aspirations in relation to ancestral function too.'¹⁴⁷

Pobee poses a question, which raises a problem in the application of the ancestral function to the gospel. He states:

Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth, who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe, and nation?¹⁴⁸

143 Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 31.

144 Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 31.

145 Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 31.

146 Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 31.

147 Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 31.

148 John S. Pobee, *Towards and African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press,

What makes Pobeë's question significant is the fact that *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* belong primarily to lineage and family. This makes beliefs about *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* seem to be beyond the reach of the gospel since, in his humanity, Jesus Christ of Nazareth does not belong to any lineage or family in Asante. Bediako attempts to provide a solution to this problem by arguing that *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* have no existence of their own but are a projection by the living community of their social values and spiritual expectations in the transcendent realm. This is because, according to him, *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* have no existence of their own which is independent of the community that produces them and determines who qualifies as one of the *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ*.¹⁴⁹ The beliefs about *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* are therefore relevant because of their functional value and Jesus thus fulfils, in a better way, the functions that *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* are expected to fulfil.

A prominent chief I interviewed also postulated that anyone who is seen to have contributed significantly to the Asante nation can be considered an ancestor even if the person is not related naturally. He gave the example of Okomfo Anokye, the traditional priest who facilitated the formation of the Asante nation. He is believed to be an Akuapem person by birth, but has become one of the *Nananom Nsamanfoɔ* of the Asante people because of his contribution. To him, therefore, the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for humanity, qualifies him as an ancestor of all ethnic groups.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

In this presentation, efforts have been made to examine some Asante religious traditions in the light of the gospel, that is, how these traditions relate to the gospel of our Lord Jesus. As Emmanuel Asante has observed:

1979), 81.

149 Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 30.

150 Interview of a chief on 16th August, 2014.

The essence of Christianity is the reality and message of incarnation, the message of the God who has become one of us, and the incarnational nature of Christianity demands that it enters into, and engages with, the world around it.¹⁵¹

Efforts have therefore been made to reconcile what is said in scripture with what is known of God's dealings with the Asante people in their tradition. It has been revealed that there are areas of continuity between the traditional practices and rituals and the Christian present. Magesa has noted that:

The mistake of missionary Christianity was to disregard the common stream of living history that joins one tradition to other religious traditions of humanity. Its error consisted in actually stressing aspects of discontinuity between Christianity and African cultures and traditional religion to such an extent that they excluded the aspects of continuity between them.¹⁵²

Akubueze Okwuosa, a Nigerian scholar has said 'Had missionaries taken time to view the African form of religion from a much more friendly perspective, they would have discovered a common ground for cooperation.'¹⁵³ From a friendly perspective, therefore, the Spirit of Jesus is seen in shadow in the Asante intermediaries of Asase Yaa, *Nananom Abosom*, and *Nananom nsamanfoɔ*.

All these demonstrate the fact that Jesus has never been a stranger to the spiritual world of the Asante people. This should change the attitude of the Christian church in Ghana towards the traditions of the people. As Appiah Kubi has rightly noted, 'if the churches in Africa are to grow and develop, they must be allowed to take root in the soil of Africa where they have been planted.'¹⁵⁴ This study can serve to guide the church as

151 Emmanuel Asante, 'Interpreting and Articulating the Faith: Lessons from Early Christian History for Africa Today' in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 17, No. 1, June 2014, 21.

152 Emmanuel Asante, 'Interpreting and Articulating the Faith: Lessons from Early Christian History for Africa Today' in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 17, No. 1, June 2014, 21

153 Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998): 21.

154 Akubueze Okwuosa is quoted in Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion*, 21.

it engages with the cultures and traditions of various cultural groupings of people to make the gospel relevant in their contexts.

The current shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to the southern continent, especially to Africa, opens the way for adopting traditional African categories to develop an authentically African form of Christian worship. In this way, Africa can surely make a profound contribution to world Christianity.

CHARISMATIC THEOLOGY OF THE BLOOD IN GHANAIAN CHRISTIANITY

Charles Owiredu

Key words

Holy Communion, blood, Charismatic Christianity, sacrament, tokens, African Christianity

Introduction

There are several independent Charismatic churches in contemporary West Africa, where worshippers carry communion wine and olive oil to be prayed upon, and sanctified as sacramental substances and tokens either for spiritual protection or for dealing with various existential problems. However, the belief in tokens is an African phenomenon and not something attributed only to a group of Christians labeled African Charismatics. It is an irony, that while the leaders of the historic mission denominations and classical Pentecostal traditions often dismissed these resources of supernatural succor as demonic and discouraging their use in their sermons and publications, most of their own members secretly visit these prophets who give them tokens and symbols like holy water, soaps, handkerchiefs, olive oil, apotropaic baths, candles, concoctions, magical rings, magical creams and many more. Sacred statements, words and songs can also be considered as tokens. Some scholarly works have been done on African Christian songs. These include Hayfron and Quayesi-Amakye.¹⁵⁵ However, their focus is not on the place of the blood of Jesus in African Christian songs.

155 D. Hayfron, "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs in Ghana: Theology and Spirituality in Prophetic Songs of Eunice Johnson," *Journal of African Christian thought* 16 (2013): 3-18; Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "God in Ghanaian Pentecostal Songs," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22 (2013): 131-151.

In order to understand the concept of blood¹⁵⁶ among Ghanaian charismatics, it is important to find out how they conceptualized the blood of Jesus and why they do so. One way by which we can find this out is by exploring some of their expressions that include blood and what these African Christians think of while at the Lord's table?" Ghanaian charismatics will agree with Kruger, that by the visible signs of sacramentals in the Holy Communion, Christ assures Christians that through the Holy Spirit they share in his true body and blood. However, my interaction with many communicants for the last thirty-five (35) years makes me conclude that their reflection at the Lord's Table includes more than the atoning function of the sacrament. Although the minister who administers the Holy Communion mentions the need to remember the work of Christ on the Cross, at the Holy Communion the focus of the Ghanaian charismatic communicant is more on the power in the sacramentals, especially, the blood.

The paucity of research in the area of African Christian haematology necessitates a new focus on blood in theological discourse. What we are dealing with here in this paper, is an African Christian worldview in which the invisible power of healing and protective power of Jesus Christ can be made available through both visible blood which is the communion wine and invisible blood "packaged in words" in ways that give the blood sacramental value. This paper examines the use of the blood of Jesus as sacramental and a token in African Christianity.

My thesis then is that the blood of Jesus is understood in African Charismatic churches as both therapeutic and apotropaic. I will explain this in the light of how some African Christians think of and manipulate the communion wine for their physical and

156 F. P. Kruger, "Participation in Christ's body and his blood during celebration of the Holy Communion as illustrated by the meaning lenses of cognition and recognition," HTS Theologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 74 (2018): 47-67, <http://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i2.4767>.

spiritual benefit. Thus, this paper is an attempt to generate a theological discourse in African Christian theology of blood, particularly, an academic conversation about the Blood of the Lamb. This study of Christian haematology (the doctrine of blood), with particular focus on the blood of the Lamb can be a starting point to offer biblical responses to the African who fear malefic effects of the ills afore-mentioned, frequent use of charms, gestures and words to ward off evil.

Ghanaians, like many other Africans, have a traditional worldview of mystical causality, which they cling so dearly to. Until such a worldview is transformed, these African Christians will continue to seek refined “Christian alternatives” to traditional resources of supernatural succor they are taught to consider evil and uncivilized. The reality is that, while their western trained ministers struggle to reconcile the African and western worldviews in conferences and debates, the so-called self-styled charismatic prophets seem to be providing solutions for the members and other seekers from the historic mission denominations and classical Pentecostal churches.

My thesis is that African Pentecostal Christians believe in therapeutic and apotropaic functions of the Blood of Jesus, and this is evident in their utterances and actions, especially in worship-scape. Any attempt to understand the African Christian haematology will be a near futile endeavor until it takes into consideration the worldview and mundane expectations of the people.

I have interacted with the Charismatic Christians in Ghana, been in their church services, prayer camps, and other religious gatherings for the last thirty-five (35) years. All these years, I have carefully observed their utterances, liturgies and other religious practices in church services and prayer meetings. Major information gathered for this research therefore come from personal observation, recent interviews with some charismatic leaders and African movies. Some of the data from popular Akan Christian songs. I also took some data from

various written sources. I have summarized some of these in the next section. In this paper, I employ the discursive and analytical approach to the topic under study.

I shall begin with a discussion of African Christian belief in tokens and sacramentals. Then we proceed to words used as tokens against evil. This will be followed by the use of the blood of Jesus as an armour. This will lead to a discussion on the sacramentality of the communion wine and therapeutic and apotropaic way in which Ghanaian Charismatics view the blood of Jesus. Finally, we will discuss the African worldview that has facilitated such an African Christian understanding and manipulation of the Blood of Jesus and draw conclusions which will help in restructuring the emerging African Christian haematology.

Tokens and Sacramentals in African Christianity

Defining tokens and sacraments

Asamoah-Gyadu defines signs and tokens as “physical substances that in the hands of religious functionaries, acquire sacramental value.”¹⁵⁷ Some independent African Charismatics use tokens as the prophet gives specific directions. These tokens include salt, water, oil, lime, etc. Some even believe the Bible can be a token placed under a pillow, put beside the head of a newly born baby or pointed at a suspected demonic agent to ward off or subdue satanic power.

A sacramental is a material object, thing or action set apart or blessed to manifest the respect due to the Sacraments and so to stimulate pious thoughts and to increase devotion. Sacramentals used by many Christians in mainline churches include sacred objects such as holy water, blessed candles, blessed palms, blessed ashes often placed on believers’ foreheads, blessed salt, holy cards and Holy Rosary, cross necklace and even an action - the sign of the cross. Some of these are recognized by

157 Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, “Signs, Tokens and Points of Contacts: Religious Symbolism and Sacramentality in Non-Western Christianity,” *Studia Liturgica* 48 (2018): 127-146.

the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches. Therefore, the use of sacramentals, tokens and symbols by African Independent Churches should not come to us as a surprise. Neither should the belief of African Charismatic Christians.

In Asamoah-Gyadu's discussion of sacramentals, he focuses on religious tangibility which he defines as "the institutionalization and deployment of visible substances for the mediation of religious power."¹⁵⁸ However, I dare to include in the range of sacramentals, religious intangibles like power packed utterances, prayers (both in speaking in tongues and understandable language) and songs designed to ward off evil or establish healing and other expected breakthroughs.

Intangible tokens: Words against evil

African Christians believe that words, though tangible in written form but intangible in spoken form, can be used as tokens. Thus, words, both tangible and intangible, can be thought of as tokens. Reciting portions of Scripture, spiritual songs, prayers and faith pronouncements written or spoken are all believed to be imbued with miraculous power to heal, exorcise and to secure protection. Portion of the Psalms, particularly Psalms 23, 91 and 124 are recited for their protective power while some imprecatory Psalms are employed in invoking judgment or curses upon one's enemies, for e.g., Psalm 69 and 109. One popular Akan Christian apotropaic utterance heard in Charismatic churches and prayer camps is the statement:

Mebɔ ɔbonsam tuo 'pee pee', me tiatia ɔbonsam so, meaning,
"I gun down the devil, greatly (with my gunshot sounding
'pee! pee!') I trample on the devil (under my feet)."

One wonders whether those who make such utterances believe the devil can be wounded or killed. The following are the lyrics of a common imprecatory song sang with jumping in Akan-speaking churches:

158 Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Tokens and Points of Contacts," 127-146.

*Metia əbonsam so, Metia əbonsam so
Mehuru makə soro, Metia əbonsam so
Metia əbonsam so, Metia əbonsam so
Mehuru makə soro, soro, soro; metia əbonsam so.*

Meaning in English:

*I stamp the devil under my feet, I stamp the devil under my feet
I'll jump up high, I'll stamp the devil under my feet.
I stamp the devil under my feet, I stamp the devil under my feet
I'll jump up high, higher, higher; I'll stamp the devil under my feet.*

These African Charismatic Christians' Scriptural support for this song is Romans 16:20, where Paul says, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

*Another song in Gã (of southern Ghana) says:
Abonsam ni gbaa mina, Matswia le tso,
Ayε ko ni gbaa mina, Matswia le tso,
Matswia le tso,
Madame Yesu sεε, Matswia le tso.*

Meaning in English:

*The devil that troubles me, I'll strike him with a stick
The witch that troubles me, I'll strike him with a stick
I'll strike him with a stick,
I'll stand behind Jesus, I'll strike him with a stick*

The Blood as Amour

For Ghanaians, "life is a battle". Malevolent spirits are always on the attack; therefore one needs one's armor readily in his reach. This explains why the blood of Jesus, as a token, is employed by Charismatics as both offensive and defensive amour. The "Blood of Jesus" could be an intangible token in the form of spoken words or a tangible token in the form of the communion wine. Whichever form it may be in, it is still potent. Like a shield, a defensive weapon, it is invoked by Ghanaian Christians to provide protection for the Christian against all sorts of potential threats to one's well-being. One often hears some Ghanaian Charismatics confessing "I hide my family under the Blood". Like an offensive weapon, the blood can be used to attack the enemy. One most popular apotropaic statement commonly heard among Ghanaian Charismatic Christians, whatever church denomination they may belong,

is *Yesu mogya nka w'anim*, meaning, "May the Blood of Jesus rebuke you" or "Be thou rebuked by the Blood of Jesus." With a gesture of pushing something away with the hands, they utter this statement in order to supplicate Christ's power over the devil. This has become an apotropaic utterance in the presence of a person suspected to be demonic or even when one feels an invisible demonic presence.

One Charismatic church elder in a personal conversation with me, said, "We believe this statement uttered in faith subdues every evil power being rebuked because of the overcoming power in the Blood of the Lamb as mentioned in Revelation 12:11." However, one contemporary Pentecostal theologian opines that, "there is no biblical justification for this statement. The Bible simply says to resist the devil and in Jude 1:9, Michael, when he was disputing with the devil did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, 'the Lord rebuke thee.'" Thus, it is difficult to find a biblical support for such application of function of the blood of Jesus. It is clearly an extension or an overstretching of the significance and functions of the blood of Jesus in Ghanaian Christian religious thought to meet the chronic crave for spiritual security.

Some of the statements made in prayers in relation to the application of the Blood of Jesus in spiritual warfare may be considered incredible. However, some Charismatic leaders who make such statements appeal to biblical precedents, such as Rev. 14:12, where we are told that we overcome the devil by the Blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimonies.¹⁵⁹

It seems merely declaring that Jesus has overcome the power of malevolent spirits, e.g., witches and curses, will do little to dissipate the African Charismatic's perception and fear. I have heard uncountable times, charismatics ending their services after the Grace, "I plead the Blood of Jesus, to cover me, shelter me and protect me all the days of my life. Amen." Recently, I boarded a bus in which a man preaching to the passengers,

¹⁵⁹ This discussion, however, will not go into the exegesis of that passage

ended his prayer with the words, "I insure this car with the Blood of Jesus." In fact, the statement, "Blood of Jesus," is printed on some vehicles to secure them from accidents. In a conversation with a leading Charismatic on such strange uses of the blood in prayer, asked with much surprise: "Do we really need to re-enforce the Blood of Jesus with broken bottles and nails to render it more efficacious?" He explained, with an anecdote that:

In 1993, I attended a prayer meeting held by some members of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in a home in Dansoman, Accra. There, I heard one woman praying in the Twi language:

Mebɔ ntumpan de ndadewa ka ho de fora Yesu mogya no twi ɔbonsam anim, literally meaning, "I break bottles, add nails, and mix them together with the blood of Jesus and give the devil a scratchy-scrub on his face."

This suggests an understanding of the function of the Blood of Jesus as an offensive weapon in their spiritual battle. This notion is a general Ghanaian Christian phenomenon and not only believed by the Charismatics. In addition to such apotropaic utterances is the biblical statement, "No weapon formed against me shall prosper, I condemn every tongue that rises against me in judgment" (Isaiah 54:17), which is also commonly used among Ghanaian Christians.

Thus, beyond the level of tangibility, the blood of Jesus is perceived as an intangible token whose power is appropriated in the form of apotropaic words or statements employed in prayers or declarations to ward off evil or attack malevolent spirits.

Therapeutic and Apotropaic Value of the Holy Communion

Despite the disagreement between Protestant and Catholics on the meanings attached to the elements of the Holy Communion, Ghanaian Charismatics believe that what is most important is the utility derived from this sacrament. In this section, we will look at a few examples regarding the Ghanaian Christian's understanding of the communion wine, where the Blood of Jesus, is perceived as medicine and an apotropaic substance.

The Holy Communion has become an important part of contemporary Pentecostal practice as one of their sacraments. For charismatics that use the wine as a sacramental, it reminds them of an underlining reality of the power of the blood that is not obvious to the senses. In West African Charismatic discourse, especially Ghana and Nigeria, therapeutic and apotropaic importance are assigned to the blood in the Holy Communion. The wine which represents the blood of Jesus is a sacramental with both therapeutic and apotropaic values. The wine as blood can be used in anointing. The anointing occurs when the communion wine is applied to the sick, accompanied by prayer. Some of these Christians refer to the blood of Passover Lamb smeared on the lintel and door post of the Israelites as a substance used to ward off the angel of death, thereby protecting the people in their house. Therefore, in their thinking, the Blood of Jesus, i.e., the Passover lamb can also be a protective substance.

There is a two-fold understanding of the communion wine as sacramental in African Charismatic discourse: firstly, the communion wine, representing the blood of Jesus, as a tangible sacramental is drunk during the communion service as medicine for healing the sick; secondly, the wine as the blood is applied to the body, usually used to draw the sign of the cross on the forehead for empowerment and fortification against supernatural evil.

The communion blood has also become a significant “point of contact” in Ghanaian Christian rituals of healing and divine interventions as found in many a Pentecostal church. In Ghanaian Christianity, the blood of Jesus serves as a means of experiencing the power of God through the wine, a visible substance consecrated for the use of congregants. Asamoah-Gyadu is right in saying, “In contemporary Pentecostalism therefore, the communion table is first and foremost a place of experiential encounter.”¹⁶⁰ In reference to the Pentecostals,

160 Asamoah-Gyadu, “Signs, Tokens and Points of Contacts,” 127-146.

he explains this by saying, that through Holy Communion the power of the Spirit working through the blood of Christ is invoked to bring transformation into lives and situations.¹⁶¹

Asamoah-Gyadu strongly affirms that,

The Christological meaning of Holy Communion lay not so much in participating in Christ's suffering and having fellowship with him and the Church Militant, but rather in accessing the potential for human empowerment that comes through the breaking of the body and the shedding of the blood of Christ.¹⁶²

Asamoah-Gyadu cites Mensa Otabil, the General Overseer of one of the biggest contemporary Pentecostal churches in Ghana as telling his congregation during a communion service:

we have come to encounter the Lord... We proclaim that Satan is defeated; that every demonic harassment is broken; and if Satan has laid any sickness on your body, it is broken in the name of Jesus.¹⁶³

In most African churches the blood on the cross is imagined and uttered against in apotropaic pronouncements against evil and malevolent spirits. They therefore drink the wine and apply it to their body (usually forehead) as a mark (sign) of protection or identity. The marking on their forehead with the communion wine reminds them of the blood of the lamb that was smeared on the entrance of the Israelite houses to ward off the angel of death during the Exodus.

In a personal conversation with one lady elder in the Family Bible Church, which has branches in both Ghana and the United Kingdom, this former Methodist observed, that:

When you are unwell, and you take the communion wine by faith in the Blood of Jesus you will have instant healing. Even if you have a disease on your skin, we believe if you dip your finger into the wine and smear it on the affected part you will receive healing. This is because the blood has the power to heal, protect and do a lot of things for us. It is important for a believer to exercise his or her faith in the elements of

161 Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Tokens and Points of Contacts," 127-146.

162 Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Tokens and Points of Contacts," 127-146.

163 Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Tokens and Points of Contacts," 127-146.

the communion in order to receive what he wants. When you drink the blood and after that make the sign of the cross with it on your forehead or just smear it on your forehead it wards off evil spirits-they can't even look into your face.¹⁶⁴

The Lady Elder's comment confirms Asamoah-Gyadu's observation that in Pentecostal sacramental discourses Holy Communion is a means of empowerment for healing and other breakthroughs in life. Imagining the Blood of Jesus in the communion wine, which is tangible, satisfies the African Christian who looks for a physical tangibility in identifying with and applying the power of the Blood of Jesus in daily experiences such as healing and protection.

If a token is something intended to represent another thing, then the communion wine becomes a token representing the blood of Jesus. This is the understanding many West African Charismatics have that makes them think of the communion wine as being therapeutic. The Nigerian Bishop, Oyedepo founded and leads Winner's Chapel, one of the largest Charismatic churches in Africa with many branches spread across the continent. His Church is strongly established in Ghana. Oyedepo interprets the passages in John 6:55 and Mark 14:22-24 in the following way:

When God opened my eyes to the flesh and blood of Jesus, I was so taken with it that I took it virtually every day. It answered to me in detail. All weakness and sickness in me died and life became increasingly more buoyant. This meal is designed for strength, health and longevity. If you take it with the correct spiritual perspective, expect to be strong, healthy and fulfil the number of your days.¹⁶⁵

For Oyedepo, the Holy Communion is a "supernatural meal, a balanced diet with medicinal value."¹⁶⁶ He teaches that upon eating (the flesh) and drinking (the blood) of Jesus:

164 Informant requested to remain anonymous.

165 David Oyedepo, *The Miracle Meal* (Ota: Dominion Publishing House. Canaan Land, 2002), 62-63.

166 David Oyedepo, *Signs and Wonders Today* (Ota: Dominion Publishing House. Canaan Land, 2006), 61-93.

Every zero sperm count, dead womb, dead ovaries, whatever is called dead will be quickened back to life by the power in the blood contained in this miracle meal. The power in the blood is what cured a brother's impotence—it quickened that which was dead.¹⁶⁷

Though Asamoah-Gyadu's earlier work focuses on the Pentecostals, it must be noted that the understanding of blood as therapeutic and apotropaic does belong to almost all Ghanaians Christians irrespective of the churches, whether Pentecostals or not. Until these communicants utter their thoughts in prayer one will never know what they think of the blood, whether in its tangible state in the wine or its imaginary form on the cross.

Ghanaian Charismatics approach the Lord's Table with the idea of warfare lingering in their minds. The adage *ɔbra ye ɔko*, "Life is war," pervades their thinking while they take the communion because their pastors often remind them of this in many ways. This warfare is not only physical in terms of wrestling the difficulties in life, but it is also a spiritual battle with the invisible forces who use physical agents against them.

The Fear of Evil and Search for Security

This section suggests why African Christians are prone to using religious tangibles. The reason is their worldview gives them reason to fear evil and therefore to be preoccupied with a constant search for security. African indigenous religious beliefs are concerned with God, spirits, human life, and the hereafter and perform ceremonies and festivals that embody praying, offerings, singing and dancing, eating and drinking, celebrating the birth of a child and harvest season.¹⁶⁸ In African traditional thought misfortunes and disasters have always been explained in terms activities of malevolent forces operating often through human agents, especially witches and sorcerers.

¹⁶⁷ Oyedepo, *The Miracle Meal*, 40.

¹⁶⁸ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1991), 11.

The reason is in the African worldview, in which invisible forces, both benevolent and malevolent, influence events and happenings in the physical realm, nothing happens by accident. In Africa, folk fears and beliefs, include witchcraft, sorcery, contact with persons believed to be demon-possessed, using amulet and rituals to undo the potency of curses and using negative words to cause undesired happenings or events. Field, in her analysis of witchcraft in Ghana, observed how witchcraft was rooted in the psychological reactions of those who were ill, and those who suffered misfortunes and inability to control their destinies.¹⁶⁹

In Akan thought, failure may be attributed to some invisible spiritual forces that are beyond human reasons and powers.¹⁷⁰ Thus, the fundamental question asked in the face of any misfortune, accident, ill-health sudden bankruptcy is, *Hena na ɔreyɔ me yi?* - Twi expression meaning, “who is doing this to me?” The search for the *ɔyɛfo* (in the Akan language) or *feelɔ* (in the Ga language), meaning the “doer” and the pursuit of solutions to the misfortunes, losses and spiritual attacks often lead people to the shrines of diviners and traditional priest who profess to have the answers. The question is, since Christians are forbidden to visit the shrines for solutions to their problems, where do they go?

They would rather stay in the church and begin to look again at the practices and elements in church rituals that can provide them with solutions in their search for interventions and security against the evil forces that work against them and their efforts in life. Most African Christians will not visit native doctors or traditional priests for talismanic resources and various protective substances. However, they will be at home with religious tangible tokens, worn on the body, ingested into

169 Margaret J. Field, *Search for Security: An Ethno-psychiatric Study of Rural Ghana* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960).

170 Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Africa Christian Press, 2005), 164.

the body, applied to the body or kept in their rooms or places of work. Hence the significance and relevance of symbols and tokens used by Christians.

Africans' witchcraft beliefs and their fear of them have been closely studied by several scholars.¹⁷¹ Opoku Onyinah, a prominent Pentecostal leader, rightly puts it, that among Ghanaians, like other West Africans, "the principal evil is attributed to witchcraft, since it is held that all the evil forces can be in league with witches to effect an evil act."¹⁷²

In Ghana, a *bayifo* (one who practices witchcraft) is believed to manifest in the form of a flickering ball of fire. One often hears of an old woman accused of using witchcraft to manipulate a relative. It is believed bayie (witchcraft) can be transferred from an old woman to a child through a meal. The equivalent of bayie in the Ga language is *ayɛ*. Belief in the danger of bayie or *ayɛ* is so pervasive that little lower primary school kids in Ghana are aware of their "murderous" activities. In a visit of one Education Inspector to one of the schools in rural Accra, the inspector asked a class to name an infant killer disease. The pupils mentioned malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, diphtheria, poliomyelitis, and measles. Then one pupil lifted his hand to say there is one more left out and that is *ayɛ*, which many adults have taught children, kill babies.

In a religious environment where people are brought up to feel under siege from evil supernatural powers all the time, worship-scape, whether in church auditorium or in the prayer camp, will become an important context for the use of 'potent' religious tokens in Ghanaian Christianity. Ghanaian

171 E. O. Parrinder, "African Ideas of Witchcraft," *Folklore* 67 (2006): 142-150; J. Parish, "The Dynamics of Witchcraft and indigenous shrines among the Akan," *Africa* 69 (1999): 427-447; F. Kakwata, "Witchcraft and Poverty in Africa: A Pastoral Perspective," *Black Theology* 16, (2017): 22-37; Opoku Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series*, vol. 34, (Dorchester: Deo Publishing, 2012), xxx. DOI: 10.18251/okh.v4i1.93.

172 Opoku Onyinah, "Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost," PhD diss., (The University of Birmingham, 2002), 1.

Charismatic Christians are aware of the danger of bayie and find its remedy in the invocation of the name Jesus and His blood. The Ghanaian Charismatic church attempts to give a Christian response to indigenous beliefs and the fear of malevolent spirits such as bayie. It does this by projecting in sermons, the sufficiency and applicability of the gospel in all spheres of life. Somehow, it seems this attempt has contributed to some Ghanaian Christians formulating their own theology of the Blood of Jesus to include other elements, meanings and functions apart from its atoning work on the cross.

Some Ghanaian Christians continue to hold Christian beliefs in one hand, while secretly holding on to their old indigenous religious beliefs in the other. This is evident in how many Christians still get involved in the traditional rituals involving the pouring of libation, partaking in tradition sacred rites, and many other practices that Christianity frowns upon. Until the issue of the fear of evil and the quest for security (supernatural and physical) is adequately addressed by providing tangible alternatives, many African Charismatic Christians will continue to see the gospel as inadequate for their daily living.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how the blood of Jesus has been reinvented as both therapeutic and apotropaic substance in contemporary Christianity in Ghana, particularly by Charismatic Christians. Until one looks at the African Christian beliefs and practices through the lenses of their worldview, we cannot understand or appreciate why these Christians have reinvented therapeutic and apotropaic meanings for the Blood of the Lamb. The African Christian looks for physical tangibility in identifying with and applying the power inherent in the blood of Jesus to his or her daily experiences such as healing and protection. Therefore, reducing the imaginary blood of Jesus to the level of the communion wine, which is rather tangible, appeals to the Ghanaian Charismatic Christian, who can have direct contact with it.

We considered how Ghanaian Charismatics have embraced in theory the finished work of Christ on the cross, but their praxis is still rooted in the traditional African context and worldview. For this reason, the reality of the Lord's Supper is interpreted mainly from the viewpoint of human experience while still capturing the original import of the meal – that is a thanksgiving celebration that frequently brings believers together to remember their Lord's finished work on Calvary.

The paper has demonstrated that the meaning of the saving and protective power of Christ's finished work on the cross through the shedding of the blood, will become clearer to African Christians through a culturally compatible Christian worldview. Therefore, if African Christians struggle to identify with a western formulated Christian worldview, then they will continue to seek alternative solutions to their fears and problems by looking at Christian practices through the lenses of African indigenous religious worldview. We have observed that Ghanaian Charismatic Christians see blood as possessing an apotropaic and therapeutic functions apart from its atoning significance. This conceptualization is informed by their African traditional view of life as a search for security against malevolent beings. As Christians, they find this security in Christian religious tokens and sacraments, especially where the Blood of Jesus is found.

Any future discussion of an emerging African Christian haematology will not be complete without considering the African Christian views of the function of the blood of Jesus discussed in this paper.

Abstract

The paper examines the conceptualization of the blood of Jesus and some related practices and utterances evident in Ghanaian Charismatic Christianity. It describes how these Christians view the blood from apotropaic and therapeutic point of view. This understanding of the function of the blood is important

because of the belief that life is a battle. To win the victory over the enemy, these Christians engage in the physical application and verbal use of the blood as a token to secure victory over the enemy. This paper adopts the discursive and analytical approach to the topic. It concludes that until one looks at the African Christian beliefs and practices through the lenses of their worldview, we cannot understand or appreciate why the Ghanaian charismatic Christians have reinvented therapeutic and apotropaic meanings for the Blood of the Lamb.

RELIGION AND SONIC PRACTICES: SIMILARITIES AS A SOURCE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN PENTECOSTALS AND ADHERENTS OF INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

Justice Anquandah Arthur

Keywords

Religious Conflict; Pentecostalism; Indigenous Religions; Sound and Performance; Music and Sonic Practices

Introduction

Silence plays a critical role in many Christian traditions as an important platform for prayer. However, the lived experiences in Pentecostal-Charismatic¹⁷³ Christianity are seldom quiet. Indeed, participating in a Pentecostal church service involves exuberant activities such as calls-and-responses, clapping, dancing, singing, and shouting. Sound and bodily movement are fundamental because central to their belief is the idea that the Holy Spirit fills adherents, making every action spirit-filled. These practices tend to be controversial and create tension with a section of the population in Ghanaian cities around the year, but they come to a full expression during the implementation of the annual ban on drumming and noisemaking preceding the celebration of the Ga festival of *Hɔmɔwɔ* in Accra.

Using their traditional calendar, the Ga traditionalists impose a thirty (30) day ban on noise generating activities in and around Accra every May-June, as part of the rituals in preparation for the celebration. The ban is enforced immediately after Ga traditional priests (*Wulɔmei*) have planted sacred corn or millet (*maaduɔwɔ*) in specific sacred locations. The time between the planting and the germination of the crops is the period of the ban. It is believed that during this period, the gods (*dzemawɔdzi*) and ancestors come to inhabit the communities to oversee the

173 I am aware of the discussions around the classification of Pentecostal groups. In this paper, I use both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Pentecostal interchangeably to refer to both classical and neo-Pentecostals.

growth of the plant, and this require an environment that is quiet and free from disturbances.¹⁷⁴ While it is difficult to show the link between the gestation of the plants and noisemaking, this ban is considered critical among the traditionalists because the planted seeds denote life in Ga cosmology. On the one hand, when the plants grow well, it is believed to be a sign of a bumper harvest for the following year. On the other hand, when the crops fail, it signifies a poor and disastrous year ahead. Therefore, the noise ban is enforced vigorously by the traditionalists in order to avert any misfortune. Accordingly, the implementation of the ban carries great religious and sociocultural implication as well as strong emotional attachment, to the extent that it captures John Mbiti's view that people are very often ready to die for their culture.¹⁷⁵

Thus, technologically amplified sounds coming from Pentecostal-Charismatic churches within the city during the noise ban is deemed not only as noise but also as disturbing the equilibrium of the Ga spiritual universe. On the other hand, the Christian groups assert their freedom of worship as enshrined in the Ghanaian constitution. These positions assumed by the two communities lead to the annual clashes between them, which have been a prominent feature on the religious and political landscapes since 1998.¹⁷⁶

174 An interview with Nuumo Okai I, the *Korle Wulɔmɔ*, October 24, 2015. The *Korle Wulɔmɔ* is one of the principal chief priests among the Ga. He is the priest of the Korle deity in Accra.

175 John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. (London: Heinemann International, 1994): 194.

176 For a more detailed treatment of the subject, see Rijk van Dijk, Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana. *Ghana Studies Series*, 4, (2001): 31-64; Marleen De Witte, Accra's Sounds and Sacred Spaces. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(3). (2008): 690-709; J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. African Traditional Religion, Pentecostalism and the Clash of Spiritualities in Ghana. In S. Hoover, & N. Kaneva, *Fundamentalism and the Media*. (London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009):161-178; Justice A. Arthur, *The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana*. (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2018). Mariam Goshadze, The Varieties of Sonic Experience: "Quiet" Versus "Not-Noise" in Ghanaian Harvest Festival. *American Anthropologist*. 124 (1). (2022): 165-174.

Approaching the nexus of religion and conflict through sonic practices, this article examines how the aural practices of the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, and the Ga traditionalists become the conduit for confrontations between them. Comparing the two communities, the paper argues that (i) the conflict is primarily a spiritual struggle between the two groups and (ii) behind the seeming antagonism between Pentecostal Christianity and indigenous religions is a significant resemblance in their sonic practices in relation to the spiritual, which is a key source of the conflict.

In the following paragraphs, I argue that a critical factor in the violent clashes between the indigenous religious group and the Pentecostal-Churches is the clash of their beliefs. I would do this by first, considering the theoretical baseline that underpins the discussion. I would then look at a description and nature of the existing demarcations by exploring how religion and culture are framed in this conflict. Subsequently, I would examine the means through which boundaries are expressed, interpreted, and enforced by considering the sound and sonic practices of the groups, showing the centrality of drums and considering the role of music and performances in the two communities.

Boundary Making, Sound and Religious Conflict

The conflict in many ways shows that boundaries are constructed and affirmed between religious groups. The boundary making framework, which originated in the seminal work of Fred Barth: “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Differences” is relevant in explaining how religious boundaries lead to conflict between the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and the Ga traditionalists.¹⁷⁷

Lamont and Molnár have subsequently extended the concept of boundaries beyond just ethnicity into other areas such as religion, language, and social and collective identity. They argue that boundaries can be understood as distinctions

¹⁷⁷ Barth, F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

between groups anchored in societal institutions, which play out in everyday practices and interactions.¹⁷⁸ Thus boundaries suggest categorical dimensions that divides the social world into social groups showing 'us' and 'them'.¹⁷⁹ Boundaries can be categorised into social and symbolic demarcations. Social boundaries deal with social differences that are expressed in unequal access to and distribution of social opportunities and resources while symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to classify objects, people, and practices.¹⁸⁰

Religious conflicts tend to be the result of the construction and negotiation of intra or inter-religious symbolic boundaries.¹⁸¹ Indeed, conflict itself presupposes the existence of boundaries among different actors. In the case of the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and Ga traditionalists, there is a "drawing of lines" between 'us' and 'them' on both sides and declaring of the other to be "wrong, morally inferior or theologically in error".¹⁸² Therefore, while the demarcation between the two groups shows different levels of boundary making, it is the spiritual and practice related ones that are predominantly expressed in their encounters.

Sound is fundamental in the boundary making process between these two groups. Indeed, sound is central to the negotiation of space and lived experience in big cities like Accra. As Schafer has highlighted, the world is full of sounds, even more so in the city setting.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, sound is more complex than often considered as it ranges between silence on the one hand

178 Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences. *Annual Reviews Sociology*, 28, (2002):167.

179 Wimmer, A.. The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113, 4, (2008, January): 975.

180 Lamont and Molnár. *The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences*. 168.

181 Bouma, G. D. Religious Resurgence, Conflict and the Transformation of Boundaries. In P. Beyer, & L. Beaman, *Religion, Globalization and Culture*. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007).

182 Bouma, *Religious Resurgence, Conflict and the Transformation of Boundaries*, 190.

183 Schafer, R.M. *The New Soundscape*. (Canada: Universal Edition No. 26905, 1969).

and noise, commonly defined as “sound out of place”¹⁸⁴ on the other hand. It is not only a measure of decibels but also a critical factor in the lives of religious people. While sound can have an overpowering physical impact on people, it also engenders a collective sense of space and aural communities;¹⁸⁵ serves as an identity marker and structures power relations.¹⁸⁶ Sound is relational because it gets transformed by negotiation between groups¹⁸⁷ and it is never a neutral phenomenon as proven by the numerous disputes over ‘noise’.¹⁸⁸

Significant to the discussion on boundary making is the idea that “aural space is both tactile and ephemeral: it cannot be contained within fixed boundaries.”¹⁸⁹ It has no favoured focus; a sphere without fixed boundaries.¹⁹⁰ This is so because sound can be amplified by developments in audio technology, replicated and dispersed like “dust over the entire cityscape.”¹⁹¹ Thus, sound easily defies spatial boundaries moving from “public and private, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility.”¹⁹² It is these characteristics that create the foundation for sound of religious nature to be an essential factor

184 P. Bailey, *Breaking the Sound Barrier*. In P. Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 195; That is, sound transforms into noise when it is heard where it is not supposed to or when it is perceived as contravening a social order.

185 D. Garrioch, *Sounds of the City: The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns*. *Urban History* 30, (2003) 5-25; Marlene de Witte, *Encountering Religion through Accra’s Urban Soundscape*. In J. Darling, & H. Wilson, *Encountering the City: Urban Encounters from Accra to New York* (133-150). (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

186 Sophie Arkette, “Sounds Like City,” *Theory Culture Society* 21 (2004): 159-168

187 Van Dijk, *Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana*. 31-64; Justice A. Arthur, *The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana*. (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2018).

188 Van Dijk, *Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana*. 31-64; De Witte, *Accra’s Sounds and Sacred Spaces*, 690-709; Arthur, *The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana*, 1-5. Mariam Goshadze, *The Varieties of Sonic Experience: “Quiet” Versus “Not-Noise” in Ghanaian Harvest Festival*. 165-174.

189 Arkette, “Sounds Like City,” 167

190 Carpenter, Edmund. *Eskimo Realities*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973). 35.

191 Arkette, “Sounds Like City,” 167

192 De Witte, *Accra’s Sounds and Sacred Spaces*, 692

by which conflicts between religious groups are sometimes defined. The tensions between groups occasioned by sonic practices are in many ways inevitable as sound cannot be contained within a particular geographic location.

Framing Religion and Culture: A Description of the Boundaries

A consideration of the actors in this conflict shows that the notion of religion is framed differently depending on which side a person belongs – whether a traditionalist or Pentecostal. Their conceptualisation of religion in effect also influences how the conflict is framed. There are two predominant views regarding how religion is defined. First, to the Ga traditionalists, there is no strict separation between religion and culture – they are one and the same idea. Therefore, a separation of the *Kpele* religion from other aspects of Ga culture is not only impossible but clearly unacceptable according to the emic view of the traditionalists.¹⁹³ Second, for the Pentecostal-Charismatic groups, there is a strict demarcation between religion and culture. This becomes even more obvious for Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians who are Ga themselves. While I understand that religion and culture are considerably intersecting categories, I choose to separate them while bearing in mind that they are constantly interacting with each other. For instance, in the Ga *Kpele* religion, culture serves as the channel through which religion is expressed.

This framing of religion and culture helps to describe the boundary construction process among the two main actors in conflict. It also brings into sharp focus the ongoing discussion on whether the implementation of the ban on drumming and noisemaking is a religious (spiritual) endeavour, cultural activity or just another means by which the Ga *Wulɔmei* assert their customary authority over the city of Accra. From the perspective of the Ga traditionalists, the noise ban is not the

¹⁹³ An interview with Nuumo Okai I, the *Korle Wulɔmeɔ*, September 3, 2017. *Kpele* is a Ga indigenous religious belief system which is based on the systematic conception of the organisation of the universe.

result of an 'ordinary' silence imposed on the city. It is one that is instituted in the name of the *Dzemawɔdzi*, the Ga deities and it is a vital requirement of the Kpele religious system. This is corroborated by a *Wulɔmɔ*:

The ban is an essential part of our existence and culture. The entire Ga state is required to obey and observe complete silence for this period, in fulfilment of our shared expectation for the impending year according to our traditional calendar. The 30-day period is marked with prayers to the gods and ancestors to grant the Ga lands peace and prosperity in the year ahead. We pray for a bumper harvest of fish and crops. So, any noise in the land distracts not only our act of worship but it also disturbs the gods and ancestors who come to inhabit the communities. It is also a distraction to us the *Wulɔmei* who require total peace and quiet to commune with the gods. These are the reasons why we insist on silence, so that the gods will be merciful and grant us prosperity in the coming year. We have lived like this for generations, and we will not allow anyone to interrupt our way of life.¹⁹⁴

Generally, there are three common narratives surrounding the noise ban and the subsequent celebration of the annual *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival. First, it is observed as an annual thanksgiving ceremony to the *Dzemawɔdzi* for ensuring a bumper harvest in the previous year as well as the subsequent one. It is also a celebration marking the intervention of the deities in the historical past when their ancestors encountered a severe famine in the Accra plains. Second, that the ban on drumming and noisemaking, which precedes the festival, is to bring the required environment that will enable the deities who come to visit the city to oversee the 30-day gestation period of the planted corn and millet in the sacred fields. An added layer to this second narrative, as articulated by the chief priest is that the noise ban is also to allow the *Wulɔmei*, the human representatives of the deities to communicate with the

194 An interview with Nuumo Nuumo Akwaa Mensa III, the *Nai Wulɔmɔ*, February 17, 2014. The *Nai Wulɔmɔ*, is considered the senior among the Ga chief priests and occupies a very prominent position among the Ga-Dangme people.

Dzemawɔdzi. These two narratives shows that the noise ban and the festival largely have spiritual implications. However, the final narrative deals with the socio-cultural implications of the festival. It is a period when many Ga people, regardless of their religious affiliations return to their ancestral homes (We) in Accra to celebrate with other family members. It is during this period that disputes among kinsfolk are settled and ethnic solidarity is exhibited in anticipation of a good year ahead.¹⁹⁵ This final narrative is clearly an affirmation of Durkheim's idea of the integrative role of traditional ritualistic gatherings.¹⁹⁶ Thus, besides seeing the noise ban as a religious act, festivals generally have a unifying role among the kith and kin.

Also, it is clear from the perspective of the *Wulɔmei* that the spiritual¹⁹⁷ implication of the ban supersedes any social-cultural inference, albeit the socio-cultural aspects have consistently been highlighted by the Ga traditionalists. It is this emphasis on the social-cultural nature of the ban that contradicts the churches' framing of the ban. The Pentecostal-Charismatic groups underscore the spiritual nature of the ban and therefore interpret the clashes as religiously motivated. The former General Secretary of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), the oldest and the largest ecumenical body of Pentecostals in Ghana affirms this view below:

I think the Ga traditionalists have the freedom to worship the way they want to. This includes strictly following any requirements within their religion to observe a period of silence. The challenge is when they extend that to people of other religious persuasions – that is clearly an infringement of their freedom of worship enshrined in our national constitution. I believe that it is the Ga

195 It must be stated that majority of Ga people are Christians, but there are significant Muslim and indigenous religious adherents among them. It is also common to find double and multiple religious belonging among the Ga.

196 Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. (K. E. Fields, Trans.) (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

197 While I am aware that 'religious' and 'spiritual' are often treated as separate categories among theologians, I use religious and spiritual interchangeably in this essay to refer to belief related actions or activities.

indigenous religion that demands them to observe the one-month period of silence. It is not a cultural demand as it is popularly proclaimed by the priests and chiefs. I don't see any reason why people will fight and confiscate property if it were indeed a cultural issue. It is simply because they believe their gods mandate them to do so, that is why they enforce the ban aggressively and extend it to everyone. It is definitely a religious issue and that is the exact source of the conflict, if you ask me. Clearly it has become a conflict between religions since they overstep their territory. Don't you wonder why the ban is enforced by the priests and not the traditional chiefs? The simple answer is that the priests are the representatives of the gods. Therefore, from the point of view of churches, the conflict is purely a religious one.¹⁹⁸

The perspective of this Pentecostal-Charismatic church leader is that the noise ban is intrinsically linked to the religious lived experience of the adherents of the Kpele religion. This view could also effectively be considered as a universal one among the churches. They consider the noise ban as a completely religious action and not a mere ban on silence. These notions have serious implications for both the adherents of Kpele and Pentecostal Christianity. It also explains why the churches have difficulty following the noise ban when it is implemented. The reason is they believe the silence is imposed by indigenous religious authorities they see as representatives of the Ga deities, in the name of deities and ancestors they do not believe in.

The idea of clash of religions is not something the *Wulomei* champion in public discussions. In public, they stress the notion of the noise ban as a cultural given, something that brings the Ga families together as a unit. Even the religious aspects are interpreted as being a fundamental part of the way of life of the Ga – their culture. The confusion is further deepened by the state, which through the National Commission on Culture, considers all traditional festivals including the *Hɔmɔwɔ* as cultural events.¹⁹⁹

198 An interview with Apostle Samuel Antwi, a former General Secretary of the GPCC, January 30, 2015. Apostle Antwi is currently one of the key executive members of the Church of Pentecost, perhaps the biggest Pentecostal Church in Ghana.

199 See Rijk van Dijk, *Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana*, 31.

The framing of the noise ban and the festival is critical because it helps to describe the sources of the boundaries that exist between the two actors in conflict. Taking together, the views of the *Wulomei* about the deities and ancestors who inhabit the city during the gestation period of the sacred plants and the Pentecostal-Charismatic interpretation of the noise ban as religious, this conflict can be framed as a battle between the gods for spiritual hegemony in the city. In this case, a battle between the Christian God and the Ga *Dzemawɔdzi*. It could also be seen as a competition of belief systems over legitimacy. Therefore, despite the multidimensional nature of the conflict, it should be seen predominantly as a battle between the unseen, but real transcendental beings present within the city.

Conflict Engendered by Similarities: Boundary Expression, Interpretation and Enforcement

Generally, conflicts presuppose the presence of significant differences between parties. In this conflict however, both differences and similarities exist concurrently. I argue that it is rather the similarities between the parties that give rise to the clashes. This is in many ways unusual because conflict studies literature is inundated with evidence of differences rather than similarities been the source of conflicts in multicomunal contexts.²⁰⁰ These similarities are a means by which the boundary between the Ga traditionalists and the Pentecostal churches is expressed. Some typical similarities include how both groups approach worship as a practice of mediation between adherents and the divine, anchored on certain forms of material media such as sound, touch, bodily experiences and objects like drums, anointing oil, plants among others to render the invisible divine being(s) concrete or make God's presence real. That is, they both require certain authorised forms of media to make manifest the divine.

In other words, both the Ga traditionalists and the Pentecostals

200 Gary Bouma. (2007). Religious Resurgence, Conflict and the Transformation of Boundaries. In P. Beyer, & L. Beaman, *Religion, Globalization and Culture*. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV., 2007): 187-202; Samuel Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

primarily rely on a form of mediation as a mechanism to encounter God, albeit the particular form of media may vary depending on the group. Along with utilising mediation to encounter the divine, it is obvious that these two groups live in the same urban space, they share similar notions of how to create communities through religious practices, share common ideas about family and occasionally, they share the same ethnic identities.²⁰¹

In line with a similar notion of mediation between these two groups, it is critical to highlight that media such as sound and sonic practices, the drum as a sacred instrument, music and performances are not only similarly employed by both groups, but they are also the means through which the boundaries between them are enforced. The following are empirically grounded illustrations of how essential these media forms are and the ways in which they are employed in relation to the divine.

Sound and Aural Practices of Pentecostals and Ga Traditionalists

The confrontations between the two parties are about sound or the absence of it. It is important then to consider how sound and sonic practices of the two communities lead to the annual clashes. Sound is central to both Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity and indigenous religions – be it loud sound, noise or silence. Churches were generally places to preserve a quiet environment as they respected the need for quiet contemplation.²⁰² Today, this could be true for some historical mission churches like the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Methodist Church where the need for silence is embedded in their liturgy. Unlike these churches, Pentecostal liturgy is characterised by sound that is heightened

201 There are members of the Ga communities, who are Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians as well. Some among the native Ga, who despite being Christians also participate in traditional rituals – a clear case of double or sometimes, multiple belonging. Moreover, there are Ga people, usually Pentecostal Christians who do not want to be associated with the rituals championed by the traditionalists.

202 Arquette, "Sounds Like City," 167

through amplification via modern public address systems.²⁰³ Pentecostal-Charismatics usually refer to their church halls as auditoriums, which implies the place and significance of sound and performances. It also indicates the centrality of experience in their services. These churches as sonic vessels tend to give worshippers what Arkette calls a “multisensory experience of the sacred.” Sounds in Pentecostal-Charismatic services include but not limited to calls-and-responses, handclapping, sounds of moans and groans in prayer, shouts of joy and music. For them public noise is a necessary requirement as it gives significance to their beliefs and doctrines, without which they lack expressive forms.²⁰⁴ The loud sonic practices are mostly anchored on several biblical texts, but the commonly utilised ones are Old Testament texts such as “make a joyful noise unto the Lord”²⁰⁵ and “...praise him with loud clashing cymbals.”²⁰⁶

Similarly, sound whether in the form of silence or noise is a precursor for all celebrations in Kpele indigenous religion and the wider Ga society. Sounds are used in rituals such as libation where a customary call-and-response approach is employed. Sounds are vital for spirit possession of mediums common in Kpele religion. Indeed, the confrontations between the Ga traditionalists and the churches is one that deals with silence and noise. The clashes are mostly seen as showing the difference between the two actors but, it also reveals the remarkable similarities between them – the centrality of sound to both religions. It is this significance of sound that leads to the clashes between them. On the one hand, the aural boundaries of the churches clearly go beyond the confines of their church buildings and travel as far as possible. This spill over of sound

203 This does not mean silence is completely absent in these churches. It is just not prominent at the congregational level. At the individual level, there are seasons of quiet time for prayer and Bible study.

204 Isaac Weiner, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Pluralism*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

205 Psalm 66:1-4 and Psalm 100:1, 4; Psalm 66:1-4 for example, extends an invitation to all the earth to worship. Pentecostals believe that in this context, worship is to be expressed by shouting with joy as the worshippers sing in the name God.

206 Psalm 150:4-6

outside the walls of the churches results from their tendency for loud forms of worship, preaching, prayer and music. On the other hand, during this 30-day period, the traditionalists require silence for the deities and ancestors to work on behalf of the Ga community. It is this similarity in the deployment of sound that causes the tension between the Ga traditionalists and the churches.

During the ritual period, the boundary between what is tolerable sound and noise is at the discretion of the traditionalists. Therefore, the Pentecostals' have sometimes complained of being targeted by the traditionalists because at the time they are clamping down on the churches, loud sounds of the Muslim call to azaan (adhan) coming from mosques within the city escapes the crack down.

Additionally, loud sounds coming from eateries, bars, vehicular traffic and industrial areas are not classified as noise worthy of distracting the deities. This makes what the traditionalists refer to as noise very complicated to define. It is anchored in the relationship they have with a particular group. In this sense, the meaning of noise is not fixed as it becomes valuable in negotiating the boundaries between these two actors. What the Pentecostals consider as religious sound is seen as nuisance by the Ga traditionalists during the period of the noise ban. Thus, the noise ban is vigorously implemented by the traditionalists to demarcate the outsiders from their community.

The Drum as a Sacred Instrument in Indigenous Religions and Pentecostalism

The sound of drums is an integral medium to both Pentecostals and Ga traditionalists relative to their encounter with divinity. Drum generated sounds are clearly a source of scaredness in Kpele religion of the Ga because it heralds every key religious event. As part of the implementation of the noise ban to usher in the celebration of the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival, special talking drums (Obonu) are played to welcome the deities and ancestors

into the city of Accra, to look after the maturation of the planted sacred crops. This is critical because in Ga traditional cosmology, if these plants sprout and do well, it signifies a good and prosperous year ahead. On the other hand, if the planted sacred crops fail to germinate, it is a sign of a bad impending year. Also, the end of this 30-day ban on drumming and noisemaking is marked by the sounds of the Obonu, the most sacred drums of the Ga traditionalists.

The Obonu drums are so sacred that they are played only twice in a year to mark the beginning and lifting of the noise ban, what is known as the Odadaa. Thereafter, the Obonu is kept in a secret sacred place until the next year. It is believed that the sound of the Obonu drums sets the Ga universe in equilibrium. Margaret Field, the British anthropologist states that in the past, no one beat secular drums, whistled, beat a cooking pot with a spoon or played an instrument during the noise ban in Accra. There was no wailing for the dead, no private dance, shouting, or celebration allowed within the city once the Obonu has been played.²⁰⁷

Therefore, sounds coming from the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches at the sacred period is considered as noise and a distraction to the Ga universe. To put it differently, the sounds are seen as what Bailey calls, “sound out of place”²⁰⁸ to the Ga traditionalists. Accordingly, the forceful implementation of the noise ban can be framed as a response to the Christians interrupting the order in the religious space. The application of the ban indicates the continuous clout the traditionalists still have even in a cosmopolitan city space. That is, because of the first comer status, the traditionalists’ claim the capacity to regulate who and what can be heard within the boundaries of Accra at a particular time. This is usually opposed by the churches who lay claim to the national constitutional provisions on their rights to worship. This disagreement is what eventually

207 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

208 Bailey, *Breaking the Sound Barrier*, 195.

results in clashes between the two groups.

Similarly, drums are very important musical instruments in Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality. The sounds of drums whether traditional or western play an essential role in their worship, albeit traditional drums are usually sanctified and dedicated to God before it is played in church.²⁰⁹ Drums permeate Pentecostal liturgy, to the extent that, even in churches where a complete set of musical instruments is absent, one is likely to see a set of drums. It is the first go to musical instrument among small and budding churches in this movement. Drum appellation, a traditional practice where the sound of the drum is used to evoke ancestral spirits and deities have been adopted by Pentecostal churches as part of an inculturation process. Drum appellations are used in these churches to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit during worship. This shows the centrality of drums as a sacred instrument in both indigenous religions and Pentecostal Christianity. The similarity in the role of the sound of the drum rather than bringing the two groups together leads to a conflict because of the tendency of both groups to build boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.

Music as Sound²¹⁰ and Sound as Performance

The term performance is used today to refer to diverse activities including the functioning of a car and the state of an investment. It was originally used in reference to a presentation of music, a play or even a text. This is the context within which I use the term: "the act of presenting something."²¹¹ Pentecostal liturgy²¹² and indigenous religious rituals are inseparably linked with performance, which involves verbal and non-verbal movement

209 It is believed that some of the trees that are fell for traditional drums are inhabited by deities. Therefore, these drums needed to be prayed on and sanctified for God's use.

210 Music is a manifestation of sound; it is organised sound.

211 E.C.F.A Schillebeeckx, (2000). 'Naar een herontdekking van de christelijke sacramenten. Ritualisering van religieuze momenten in het alledaagse leven.' *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 40 (2000): 164- 87.

212 In Christian liturgical studies, church liturgy is also considered as a ritual.

of the body. This gestural behaviour indicates an expression of thought. Sound is made through people's actions during ritual times in both cases, whether through playing a musical instrument, singing, handclapping, chanting, or stamping of feet etc. Sound in all its manifestations including music (organised sound) requires performance. Music, performance and ritual are therefore inextricably linked.

Music and performances are important conduits for community mobilisation in Ghana. Among the Ga traditionalists, music and performances like dance are critical means of establishing a sense of belonging, exposing social miscreants²¹³ and admonishing indecorous members of the community.²¹⁴

Indeed, music and performances are utilised to safeguard social cohesion among the Ga communities.²¹⁵ In part, the noise ban serves as a way of depriving the Ga communities of music and dance as they prepare for the most important celebration on the Kpele religious calendar, the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival. This culminates in a sense of release when the festival gets underway. Thus music and performances coming from Pentecostal churches is seen as not only breaking social and religious order but also an anti-climax to the celebration of the festival. Performances by spirit mediums are also a common feature on the Ga traditional calendar. So, music and performances play an important role during ritual periods in indigenous religions.

Also, in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, the services are alive with different varieties of music and performances. It is one of the main means of encountering the Holy Spirit in a service. Pentecostal worship is, in effect, a channel of communication to God, who is present in the service. Moreover, music and performances are important avenues for building communal cohesion and offering a sense of release to members. Mookgo

213 Marion Kilson. *African Urban Kinsmen: The Ga of Central Accra*. (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1974).

214 Margaret Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People*. (London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1940).

215 Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 48.

Kgatle has even argued that music is a form of therapeutic agent for Pentecostal Christians; it offers emotional therapy.²¹⁶ Additionally, being 'born-again' in the Pentecostal context is about a rapture with the past.

Therefore, Pentecostal-Charismatic churches encourage their members to stand back from 'worldly music', night clubs and other sources of sound that are deemed secular and demonic. Accordingly, the music and dance offered in churches, in many ways, serve as alternatives to the 'wordly' sources by delivering the same sense of emotional release. Music and performances are therefore not only considered critical in encountering the divine for both the Ga traditionalists and the churches, but also socially relevant for both communities. These commonalities rather than engendering a peaceful coexistence between the parties, become the channels through which boundaries are constructed and enforced between them. This is so because of the tendency of the churches to classify indigenous religions as inferior to Pentecostal Christianity and the Ga traditionalists' predisposition to always see Pentecostals in the city as 'foreigners' who have invaded their land. The apparent mutual exclusivity of their claims leads to the inevitable conflict and deadlock.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and indigenous religious groups in Ghana is generally complicated. Although many of their practices are clearly influenced by indigenous cultures, this group of churches tend to have a rather rocky relationship with indigenous religions. The ban on drumming and noisemaking in Accra during the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival presents a good platform to interrogate the relationship between Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and the Ga traditionalists. First, despite the multifaceted nature of the confrontations, it could be inferred that the conflict is a

²¹⁶ Mookgo Kgatle, *Singing as a Therapeutic Agent in Pentecostal Worship*. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40 (1) (2019): 4

spiritual battle between the Ga deities and Yahweh, the God of the Pentecostals. These transcendental beings are largely unseen, but they are considered real, powerful, and present in the city by their respective adherents. Therefore, the strength of the belief in their respective divinities is what translates into the physical confrontations.

Second, there are obvious similarities in the way the two groups approach worship mainly because they both require media in order to make the invisible transcendent beings visible. Sound and performances are critical media that cause the divine beings to materialise in order for the adherents to experience the divine. They both require sound and performances to encounter the divine - albeit during this particular ritual period (noise ban), the Ga traditionalists require silence and the Pentecostals produce noise. Silence and noise are both forms of sound, which can be considered on a continuum. Similarities are usually considered as the foundation for pursuing dialogue between groups while differences usually lead to conflicts. Nevertheless, in the clashes between the Pentecostal-Charismatic groups and the Ga traditionalists, it is not the differences that lead to conflict but rather the similarities between them. The groups clash because they see each other as obstructing the mechanism for making the invisible transcendent visible with the 'wrong' form of sound. It ultimately amounts to one party preventing the other from experiencing the presence of their respective transcendental being(s). This explains why the parties in conflict build boundaries instead of bridges.

Abstract

Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in African cities are noted for exuberant around-the-clock church services and evangelistic activities. While most cities are themselves very loud spaces due to commercial activities, religious sounds from this Christian community occupy a prominent place in the urban soundscape. The sound practices of the Pentecostal churches in Accra are not only a source of controversy throughout the

year, it also leads to clashes with Ga traditionalists in the city during the implementation of the annual ban on drumming and noisemaking, prior to the celebration of *Hɔmɔwɔ*,²¹⁷ the customary festival. Approaching the nexus of religion and conflict through sonic practices, this paper examines how the aural practices of Pentecostal churches and Ga traditionalists become the conduit for confrontation between the two groups. Comparing the two communities, the paper argues that (i) the conflict is primarily a spiritual struggle between the two groups and (ii) behind the apparent antagonism between Pentecostal Christianity and indigenous religions are similarities in their sonic practices in relation to the spiritual, which is a significant source of the conflict.

217 *Hɔmɔwɔ* translates as 'hooting at hunger'. It is the most essential celebration in the *Kpele* religion of the Ga of Ghana, who are the indigenes of the Greater Accra Region.

