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## THE AKAN BELIEVER AND HIS RELIGIONS

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[544]<sup>1</sup> *Introduction*<sup>2</sup>

In both the academic and the fictional literature on the relations between the ‘traditional religion’<sup>3</sup> of the Akan and ‘missionary Christianity’<sup>4</sup> one often detects a sense of betrayal, despair or doom. It is, perhaps, most succinctly expressed in a poem by Kofi Awoonor:

### *The Cathedral*

On this dirty patch  
a tree once stood  
shedding incense on the infant corn:  
its boughs stretched across a heaven  
brightened by the last fires of a tribe.  
They sent surveyors and builders  
who cut that tree  
planting in its place  
A huge senseless cathedral of doom<sup>5</sup>

The tree Awoonor alludes to is the silk cotton tree (*onyaa*, *Ceiba pentandra*). To him it is the symbol of rural life and traditional religion. It is one of those trees which are believed to possess a ‘strong soul’ which has *sasa* or a power of vindictiveness by which it, even after its ‘death’ – having been cut down –, may pursue those that are thought to

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<sup>1</sup> The pagenumbers of the original edition are indicated between square brackets. The endnotes [587-600] have been converted to footnotes as have the bibliographic references in the 1979 text.

<sup>2</sup> Two earlier drafts of this contribution were commented upon by the members of the ‘Werkgroep Empirische Godsdienstwetenschappen’ in the State University of Utrecht, by Dr. J.D.J. Waardenburg as one of the editors of this volume, and by Dr. J.S. Pobee from the Department of the Study of Religions in the University of Ghana at Legon, Ghana. To all, but especially to John Pobee, I am most grateful for their comments and suggestions for amelioration. Responsibility for any incorrect or unbalanced statements that have remained is fully mine. I also thank Dr. Hilary Waardenburg-Kilpatrick, Dr. J.D.J. Waardenburg and Dr. Peter Staples for carefully checking my English and suggesting so many improvements upon it.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Traditional religion’ is used here to indicate that religion among the Akan which others have termed ‘savage’, ‘primitive’, ‘tribal’, ‘preliterate’, ‘indigenous’ or ‘ethnic’ religion. It is the religion that is co-extensive with the Akan as a group of culturally and linguistically related peoples. It permeates their other traditional institutions. It has been, over the past centuries, typically their own religion, expressing religious experience in terms born from, and relevant to, Akan traditional cultural life.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Missionary Christianity’ is used here to indicate that major strand of Christian churches among the Akan that have come into existence as a result of the efforts of missionary societies from West Europe since 1828.

<sup>5</sup> Awoonor 1971: 25

have wronged or offended it.<sup>6</sup> It is also often regarded as the residence of a god (*obosom*) or the meeting-place at night of the local band of witches (*abayifo*). The surveyors and builders represent the aggressive and destructive inroads of the West, epitomised in the Christian cathedral they erect. To Awoonor and many other observers missionary Christianity stands co-indicted [544,<sup>7</sup> 545] of attempting to cut the Akan believers away from their roots in traditional culture and religion.

It is, however, also clear that the missionary churches, though they now dominate the religious scene, have failed in that attempt. They have not captured the exclusive allegiance of those they register as their members. Many of them 'owe allegiance to more than one religion at the same time'.<sup>8</sup> This basic fact in the religious situation of the Akan makes an analysis of it in terms of the concepts 'official/popular religion' irrelevant and misleading, as will become clear from this study. However, most of the materials used belong to the well researched field of the relationships of the Christian churches to the traditional culture and religion and were obtained by observers who worked from an explicit or implicit 'official/popular religion' framework of analysis. Their innate tendency to draw any new interpreter back into this one-sided, because one-way, analysis can be counteracted by dealing with them in terms of the wider issue of the encounter of religions. To achieve that, one must also draw on materials from the little-researched field of the relations of the traditional Akan religion to the immigrant religions, and focus on the ways in which individual Akan believers relate themselves to the several religions that are endemic now in their society.

#### *The Akan peoples of Southern Ghana*

The Akan are a number of peoples that live in the southern and middle parts of Ghana to the west of the river Volta and in the eastern half of southern Ivory Coast to the east of the river Bandama. Linguistically one can divide them in three dialect clusters: the Twi- and Fante-speaking groups of southern Ghana; those that speak Baule and Agni, in the Ivory Coast and south-western [546] Ghana; and the Guan-speaking groups in Middle Ghana and scattered along the coast of Ghana in Fanteland.<sup>9</sup> Apart from speaking mutually intelligible dialects, they possess a culture and a traditional social and political system and religion which is very similar, though not fully identical.

In this essay we will limit ourselves to the Akan of southern Ghana, and mainly to those of the Twi-Fante speaking peoples, such as the Asante (Ashanti), Kwahu, Akyem (Akim), Akwapim, Akwamu, Asen-Twifo, Wasa (Wassaw), and Fante-Agona; and by extension, because of the rapid spread of Twi, the Brong-Ahafo, the Sefwi and the Ahanta.<sup>10</sup> These Akan numbered in 1970 approximately 3.5000.000 or 40% of the population of Ghana.<sup>11</sup> As they occupy all southern Ghana west of the Volta except the south-eastern corner around Accra – which is Ga-Adangme territory, though urbanisation has drawn in many Akan –, 'southern Ghana' and 'Akan territory' will be used interchangeably in this study.

<sup>6</sup> Rattray 1927: 5-8; Sarpong 1971b: 10-12.

<sup>7</sup> Page 544 contained three maps: of Africa to indicate Ghana; of West Africa Akan speaking peoples in Ghana and Ivory Coast; of Ghana to indicate the several Akan regions and towns that are mentioned in this article. The maps are omitted from this newly drafted copy.

<sup>8</sup> Dickson 1975: 92

<sup>9</sup> Westermann & Bryan 1970: 78-82

<sup>10</sup> Manoukian, 1950, 9-10

<sup>11</sup> For these figures, cf. K.I.T. 1972: 15, 17.

*The religions of the Akan of Southern Ghana*

The religions that have a following in present-day Southern Ghana may be grouped in three main streams: traditional, Muslim and Christian. Each of these streams, however, is a composite of several strands, which, though akin, show up several degrees of differentiation. Within the space allowed only two of these streams can be discussed after their major internal differentiations, and the patterns of interactions between them, and between these two streams: traditional religion and Christianity. It would, however, have been very instructive to compare the findings of this analysis with those that can be established for Akan Islam, and its relations to the other two streams, especially to traditional religion, as it would show up some important parallels [547] and differences.<sup>12</sup>

*The traditional religion(s) of the Akan*

Within this stream internal differentiation is smallest. They all share the same basic theological structure of a pluriform, or inclusive, or diffuse monotheism,<sup>13</sup> *Nyame* (God) being the focal point in, and ultimate basis of, all other elements of Akan religion. Akan traditional religions also all exhibit a strong ritual stress on the gods (*abosom*), served by priests (*asofo*) and/or mediums (*akomfo*) and functionally related to the several segments of Akan society and to the needs of individuals.

Among all Akan societies one also finds a strong ritual and ceremonial stress on the cult of the matrilineal ancestors (*asamanfo*) as the origin and mainstay of Akan traditional social and political structure, the male ones being served in the *Adae*-ceremonies by the chief (*ohene*) and his courtiers, and the female ones by the 'queen-mother' (*ohemmaa*) and her attendants.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Akan Islam is composed of two mutually exclusive types. The first is Sudanic or 'Maliki' Islam which began to spread into Akan territories from at least as early as 1480 along the trade routes, at first those from Mali, later also from those from northern Nigeria. Maliki Muslim scholars and traders obtained much power and influence with some *Asantehenfo* (kings of Ashanti) in the late 18th and early 19th century, but the number of Akan converts to Islam remained so low as to be negligible (Wilks 1961: 21-29; 1966: 218, 227, 228, 230-231; 1971: 384-385; Cruickshank 1853, I: 56-57, 79-80, 125, Braimah 1973: 3-4). In this century, the Pax Britanica caused Maliki Islam to obtain a numerically large position in southern Ghana through the immigration of many non-Akan from the savannah regions to the north. Most of them came as non-Muslims, but settling in the *zongos* (the twin-towns for aliens, attached to the Akan towns), very many of them became Muslims there. But Maliki Islam attracted very few Akan converts, mainly because it was very aloof from modern, colonial society and especially from western school education. It became a religion of immigrants with a ghetto character (Danquah 1968/1944: 105-106; Trimmingham 1955: 29, 201, 203, 218-225; 1962: 224-226; Parsons 1963: 211; Smith 1966: 122-123; Debrunner 1967: 335-336; Braimah 1973: 7-10, 12-13, 15. Under the 1969 Aliens Act some 150.000 Maliki Muslims were expelled from Ghana (P.M.V. 1975: 29). This may have affected the exclusive character of Maliki Islam of late, and, perhaps, cause it to reconsider its relationship to the cultural and religious traditions of the Akan. The second type of Akan Islam is the Ahmadiyya. It originated in 1920 from an invitation from a group of disaffected Fante Muslims, the Ben Sam group at Ekroful near Saltpond, to the Ahmadiyya mission in London to send out a missionary to them. Ben Sam had been a Methodist catechist and had been converted, with all his Christian congregation, to Maliki Islam before 1900. But this had not tempered their eagerness for western education, which provoked many severe rebukes from visiting Hausa *malams*, and caused much internal strife. That dissention was resolved only in 1921 when those in favour of western education were taken into the Ahmadiyya fold. By 1958 there were some 25.000 Ahmadiyya in southern Ghana with a western-type schoolsystem of their own, crowned by a secondary college in Kumasi, manned with Pakistani teachers. Most Akan Ahmadiyya are converted from the Christian churches. A few have been won from Maliki Islam. Conversions from traditional religion seem to have been very rare (Trimingham 1955: 223, 230-232; Debrunner, Fisher & Fisher 1959: 23-35; Debrunner 1960, 13-29; Smith 1966: 123; Beetham 1967: 79; Debrunner 1967: 241-242, 302).

<sup>13</sup> For a general discussion of this type of monotheism, cf. van Baaren 1960: 16-18; 1966): 321-327. Sarpong terms Akan theology 'theocentric' (Sarpong 1971: 227-228; 1974: 12.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Busia 1951/1968: 23-29, 36-39, 42-45, 136-138.

Throughout Akan territory one finds the same eight dispersed, exogamous matrilineal (*abusua*), counterbalanced everywhere by eight dispersed, patrilineal groupings (*ntoro*).<sup>15</sup> All Akan groups possess a similar range of charms and 'medicines' (*asuman* and *aduru*), ritually manufactured by a herbalist (*odunsini*), or by the priest of a god, or by a Muslim (*kramo*, *okramoni*). A believer may buy them for the purpose of protection against evil influences, especially witchcraft; or to be cured of a disease; or to obtain prosperity in a venture.

Their concepts of the souls in men, animals and plants are very similar, as is their belief in the harm a man may cause to his fellow men by the evil use of medicine or by witchcraft (*bayi*). Belief in sorcery and witchcraft have greatly increased in the course of the last century, and are expressive of the profound and rapid structural [548] changes that have overtaken Akan society. To allay these anxieties a large number of new cults have arisen, such as those of the 'drinking-medicine gods' (*abosomnom*) and of the 'executioner-gods' (*abosombrafo*). Into these very popular cults of the 'youngest sons of Nyame' traditional religion has absorbed quite a few elements from missionary Christianity, such as a congregational structure, obedience demanded to a specific number of ethical commandments, and a covenant on the basis of that obedience between the god and his 'child', in which the god promises to kill or send mad anyone who attempts to harm his devotee by means of witchcraft or sorcery.<sup>16</sup>

It is, however, not uncommon for Akan traditional religions to differ on secondary points. In Fante religion e.g. some of the gods possess anthropomorphic or theriomorphic traits<sup>17</sup> which are markedly absent in the belief of other Twi-speaking Akan. In Fante religion too we find in the cult of the *egyabosom* (father's god), connected to the patrilineally organised *asafo* (military) companies, a stronger counterbalance to matrilineality than in the parallel *ntoro*-cult in the religions of the other Twi-speaking Akan.

The 1960 census registered some 33%,<sup>18</sup> or 940.000, of the Akan as adherents of traditional religion. As this figure seems to have been arrived at by the assumption that all those who did not register as Christians or Muslims or as professing no religion, must be taken to be traditional believers, one must treat it with caution. For traditional society has always harboured a number of sceptics. Most of these were doubtful only of some parts of, or of some persons active in, religion. But some may have disbelieved all religion. For traditional religion has never sealed off its believers, but has always been open and receptive to the [549] several different, divergent and even opposed views on religious matters that have reached it through trade, warfare and other ways of communication. And the number of these partial sceptics, interspersed with a few outright, though usually not outspoken, disbelievers, is bound to increase steeply when rapid and deep changes occur in the total societal context, such as those that took place in Akan society over the last century.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Christianity in southern Ghana*

Christianity in southern Ghana is composed of two main strands: one which we will term 'missionary' or 'Western Christianity'; and another one which we will term 'indi-

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Boahen 1966: 59. With the exception, however, of the Guan towns of Larteh, Mamfe and Mampong that have a patrilineal social organisation (personal communication from J.S. Pobee; cf. also Debrunner 1967: 190-191).

<sup>16</sup> Christensen 1959: 275-278; Field 1960: 87-104; Debrunner 1959: 105-133; Platvoet 1973: 31-39; Opo-ku 1972: 2-6.

<sup>17</sup> Ellis 1887: 31, 32, 34, 36; Christensen 1959: 261

<sup>18</sup> For this figure, cf. K.I.T. 1972: 16.

<sup>19</sup> cf. Kudadjie 1973: 46n3

genous' or 'African Christianity'.<sup>20</sup> The first is so termed, because it was established by the missionary activities of the Christian churches from the West, mainly from Europe, and because they, though autonomous now, still stand strongly in the western tradition of their parent churches, having 'not really made much accommodation to African traditional culture'.<sup>21</sup> The second is so termed, because the bodies composing it were founded by Akan religious leaders. They call their congregations the 'Spiritual churches',<sup>22</sup> proclaiming them to be more authentically Christian than the missionary churches. They are significant for our study as they possess a morphological structure which resembles that of traditional religion. They appear to be constituted by the very polar tension between that which makes them 'Christian' and that which marks them out as 'traditional' or 'African'.

*'Western' Christianity among the Akan*

'Western' Christianity, as it exists at present in Southern Ghana, is the outcome of the missionary activity [550] of West European churches since 1828. It will be discussed in a later section of this paper. Before 1828 the attempts at establishing the Christian religion by properly missionary work were only a few and all short-lived, mainly because of the heavy toll in lives which the climate exacted.<sup>23</sup> Some very tiny Christian congregations came into existence, however, as the by-product of the heavy trading activities on the Gold Coast by European chartered companies. These usually appointed chaplains to their major fortified establishments at Elmina, Cape Coast, Accra and Anomabu. They were charged only with the spiritual care of the European personnel of the company, their African or mulatto wives and concubines, living in or near the castle, and their mulatto children. A few chaplains, however, also extended their ministrations to some of the Africans such as had regular business in or with the castle. Chaplains were also in charge of the castle schools, into which the mulatto children, and some African children from the town were taken whenever they were in operation - and often, for long periods, they were not!

Of the small Christian communities in the commercial towns on the coast between 1478, when the Portuguese built the castle at Elmina, and 1828, we will discuss only

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<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to propose an adequate terminology for these two major strands of Akan Christianity, as any set of opposed terms – e.g. 'missionary'/'western'/'historical' Christianity as opposed to 'indigenous'/'African'/'prophet-healing'/'spiritual'/'pentecostal'/'sectarian'/'separatist' Christianity (apart from the particular deficiencies of each term, and each set of terms), may easily be mistaken for descriptive terms. So the opposition 'western' churches to 'indigenous churches' may be taken to affirm that the missionary churches are completely alien institutions, hostile and allergic to anything Akan, and that in the spiritual churches there is a complete absence of things western, and a full identity with Akan modes of thought. That is certainly not so. But these terms are used here only as classificatory and typological, i.e. as designating a shift towards one or the other end of an analytical continuum, and indicate a more or less dominant characteristic that is used for classificatory purposes. It is not at all excluded that the analytically opposed characteristic is also present and active, though it cannot be present in a dominant form.

<sup>21</sup> Pobee 1973a: 7

<sup>22</sup> Baeta 1962: 1

<sup>23</sup> There were five attempts in all: six Portuguese Augustinians worked in Elmina-town, and in the adjacent Kommenda and Efutu areas from 1572 to 1576; nine French Capuchins did so from 1637 to 1639 in Assini, Axim and Kommenda; and in 1687 one French Dominican stayed for a year at Assini again, preparing the way for two others who worked there from 1701 to 1703/04 (Wiltgen 1956: 20-25, 34-36, 73-74, 80, 89-92; Debrunner 1967: 27, 32-33. The Moravians twice, in 1737 and in 1790, attempted to start missionary work in and around Accra, and the Anglican SPG made a vigorous start with Thomas Thompson in 1751, but illhealth forced him to retire in 1756. His Cape Coast-born successor, Philip Quaque (Kweku, male born on Wednesday), had to attempt missionary work from his post as chaplain to the castle, where a strong aversion against all attempts to convert Akan to Christianity prevailed (Wiltgen 1956: 106-108; Debrunner 1967: 60, 62, 65, 71, 73, 75, 76-77; Tufuoh 1968: 34-36).

one, that in Elmina in the decade before the Dutch captured the castle in 1637 and made it their headquarters on the Gold Coast. Thereby completely isolated from the rest of Roman Catholicism, it came to exhibit a significant process of reversal of what we usually expect to find in the relations between Christianity, which was at the doorstep at that time of becoming a 'world religion', and a 'preliterate' or 'primitive' religion: by 1880 Elminian Catholicism re-emerges as a distinctive traditional cult, fully integrated into the traditional religion of Elmina.

[551] *Elminian Christianity re-absorbed into traditional religion*

In 1632 the vicar in the castle at Elmina writes a gloomy letter to the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* at Rome, stating that in Elmina-town there are some 400 Christians – half the population of the town, he estimates – but they are Christians in name only. They participate freely in such 'pagan' rites as pyromancy and the annual festive veneration of a large rock on the beach. They also, secretly, consult the pagan priest, placing more confidence in him than in their Catholic priests. 'Magic' is a great passion with them. From the most distant parts they invite 'magicians' to come to Elmina. The governors of the castle have on several occasions tried to drive these impostors out of the town, but to no avail.<sup>24</sup>

Other documents in the Roman archives, however, report that in that same year 1632 something of a 'revival' caught on in Elmina when a new governor brought with him three new statues for the chapel in the castle: one of Mary, one of St. Francis of Assisi, and one of St. Anthony of Padua. Two miracles are reported that set these saints in the centre of the attention and devotion of the Elminians. One had happened shortly before the ship, carrying the governor and the statues, had arrived in Elmina. When sailing past what is now the Ivory Coast, the face and the hands of St. Francis (after Iberian fashion the rest of the statue was clothed) were reported to have turned black. It was exclaimed: St. Francis has turned negro with the negroes to let us know that he will win them all to the Catholic faith.

The second miracle happened some time after the solemn enthronement of the saints in the chapel of the castle. A grand procession through the town in their honour had preceded it. On the occasion of it a man, who was renowned for his prudence and intelligence, had [552] gone 'mad' and had had to be chained to a log. He had managed, however, to break loose and make his escape into the forest. A search for him had gone on for days, and had finally been abandoned on the assumption that he had been killed by a beast of prey. Two weeks after his funeral had been held, he, however, had suddenly re-appeared, sane. Marching straight into the chapel of the castle, he had pointed at St. Anthony and told the vicar that that man had appeared to him, had made him well, and had ordered him to ask for baptism. This request the vicar then and there granted. The document concludes that the convert set a shining example of Christian life till his death.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 29-30

<sup>25</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 48-49, based on documents in the archives of the Propaganda Fide. This conversion story is of great interest because it exhibits a very precise morphological parallelism to the first possession of an Akan *okomfo* (medium) by an *obosom* (god) who wishes to have him or her for its mouthpiece (*okyeame*) and priest (*obosomfo*) and to establish a cult for itself. Such an initiatory 'madness' from a god 'falling upon' someone and driving him or her into the wilds usually occurs during the festive annual 'outdooing' of a local god, or during the festive Sunday *Adae* (rites for the important ancestors, celebrated every six weeks), when there is a general atmosphere of gay excitement and much drumming and dancing (cf. Rattray 1923: 147; Field 1960: 55-104; Platvoet 1973: 21, 23). It is probable that the convert-to-be went 'mad' and became possessed of a 'god', which turned out to be St. Anthony, when that saint was carried through the town in a solemn procession.

It is very probable that for each of these saints, after Iberian custom, an *irmandade* or confraternity had been formed, each drawn from a separate quarter of the town<sup>26</sup> and charged with carrying its saint in the solemn processions through the town, and with taking care of him or her in other ways.<sup>27</sup> In August 1637, shortly before the castle was taken by the Dutch, the vicar, well aware of Dutch hostility to 'popery', entrusted the sacred vessels, missal and Mass vestments and the candlesticks to the Catholics in the town, and the statues of the saints each to its own confraternity.<sup>28</sup>

Though in 1743 the African, Leiden-trained, reformed chaplain of the Elmina castle, Capitein, reports that the majority of the Christians in Elmina were still 'papists',<sup>29</sup> Elminian Catholicism must by then already have been far on its way towards integration into the traditional religion of the town. The avowed policy of the Dutch of non-interference in local religious affairs (except for a prohibition of public services by the 'papists') and of paying an annual allowance to the 'pagan' priest of Benya, the tutelary god of the town,<sup>30</sup> may have contributed to the re-absorption. By 1872, when the Dutch left Elmina, [553] having sold their Gold Coast possessions to the British, this process had long been completed, though some of the distinct Iberian Catholic features remained easily discernable to even casual observers then.<sup>31</sup>

In 1880, when Roman Catholic missionary work was re-started in Elmina by the French SMA-priests Moreau and Murat, they too could not fail to notice these Catholic pagans in whose houses they found old, worn statues of saints. Some of them called themselves the *Santamariafo*, the people (-fo) of Santa Maria. They often, on Fridays, held a procession through the town, clad in white, knee-length gowns, carrying candles, and halfchanting, half-murmuring a formula that resembled part of the 'Hail Mary'-prayer in Portuguese.<sup>32</sup> Later investigations by others have brought more details to light. The *Santamariafo* all live<sup>33</sup> in one quarter of the town, Amanfu. If someone dies there, burning candles are set beside the body lying in state, and two candles are set beside a statue of Mary on a table nearby. They also sprinkle water on the corpse from a dish by means of a small branch and place a cross on the breast of the deceased. When 'outdooing' a newly born baby,<sup>34</sup> the *Santamariafo* also present it with a cross and a lighted candle and sprinkle water on it three times.

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<sup>26</sup> If that is so, Elminian Catholicism followed a deeply ingrained traditional pattern for the organisation of the cult of the saints, for Akan towns are traditionally divided into a number of quarters (bron), each of which is inhabited by a local matrilineal (*abusua*) and protected by its own tutelary god (*obosom*) and governed by the 'head of the family' (*abusua panyin*), who has a seat in the council of elders of the chief and serves as 'priest' to the god of the clan and its ancestors (Debrunner 1967: 198). But the *irmandades* may also have been re-organised along these traditional lines after 1637, as one of the mechanisms by which Elminian Catholicism was inserted into the traditional religion.

<sup>27</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 143, 146-7, 148

<sup>28</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 52-53, 143, 147-148

<sup>29</sup> Debrunner 1967: 35

<sup>30</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 148

<sup>31</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 138, 139, 144

<sup>32</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 142-143

<sup>33</sup> The present tense used here is the 'ethnographic present' and refers to period between 1880 and 1950.

<sup>34</sup> By this rite of passage a baby is accepted as a new member of the community. The rite takes place on the eighth day after its birth. The first week of its life is a period of liminality, in which the child is kept hidden indoors to wait and see whether or not 'it has come to stay'. If it dies in this week, it was a 'ghost child' that had no intention of staying. It is not mourned. If it, however, has come to stay, it is then solemnly taken out of doors, exposed to the sun, and then given its 'strong names' by its paternal grandfather, paternal aunt or its father, who sprays water on it from his or her mouth. Gifts are presented to it, and the father takes the child in his arms through the town to show it to the community (cf. Rattray 1923: 53; 1927: 59-63, 186-187; Christensen 1958: 74-75; Lystad 1958: 74-75).

Other Catholic pagans, Moreau and Murat found, called themselves *Antonifo* or *Santonafu*, the people (-*fo*) of Anthony or San Ntona, a contraction of the Portuguese Santo Antonio. In their quarter, Bantuma, they had a temple,<sup>35</sup> called *Ntona Buw*, residence (*buw*) of Ntona, which was the centre of the most popular traditional cult in town,<sup>36</sup> that of the *obosom* (god) *Nana*<sup>37</sup> Ntona.<sup>38</sup> It houses, in a special calebash, the remnants of the Anthony statue of 1632, an old altar, an ancient missal and remnants of church vestments.<sup>39</sup>

Apart from the possession-story, referred to above – of which the Elminians, however, have no recollection –, [554] *Nana* Ntona's popularity may have been based also on the fact that the Portuguese in Elmina were wont to pray for rain through his intercession. When drought threatened the groundnut-plantations because rain was late in coming, the women of the town would bring yams and eggs to the priest of Ntona and ask him or her – the priest may be female – to pray to Ntona for rain. For this reason too *Nana* Ntona's annual festive 'outdooing', called *Kotobun Kese*, the great (*kese*) praying for (*koto*) greenness (*ebun*), seems to have been moved forward from June 13th, the feast of St. Anthony, to March/April when the early rains are due. The procession now includes the traditional rite of washing the broken Anthony statue on the beach. Part of the water, used in this ablution, the priests of Ntona sprinkle about the town in the dead of the night to scare off evil spirits. The rest they keep for healing purposes.<sup>40</sup>

In another annual procession, this one headed by an iron cross on a long pole, all the people and priests of the town head from *Ntona Buw* to the entrance of the castle. There prayers are said for the repose of the souls of the *Yankufion Embahina* (sic), 'all the servants of God',<sup>41</sup> buried outside the castle walls. On their return to the shrine of Ntona the officiating priest sprinkles all the people on his right and left with a branch which he dips repeatedly into a copper basin that is carried at his side on a wooden stand.<sup>42</sup> Elminian chiefs must repair to *Ntona Buw* immediately after their installation to undergo a ritual there. Only after that they may be 'outdooed' and ride in their palanquin through the town.

Once a year all the chiefs from the neighbourhood assemble to pour a libation over the statue to honour *Nana* Ntona.<sup>43</sup> Priests in trance must not enter *Ntona Buw*. The mo-

<sup>35</sup> In Bantuma there is another temple, called *Domo Buw*, which is probably connected with early Elminian Catholicism. It may be in the very place where the Augustinian missionaries of 1572-1576 erected the village church, which they may have called *Domus Christi* (Wiltgen 1956: 145-147 for the Roman archival documents on which he bases his inferences).

<sup>36</sup> Outstripping in popularity that of the tutelary deity of the town, *Nana* Benya, residing in the river Benya that passes between the castle and modern Elmina.

<sup>37</sup> *Nana* is a title of respect used in addressing grandparents, a child in whom an ancestor is believed to have returned, heads of extended families, chiefs, ancestors, gods and God.

<sup>38</sup> Wiltgen rightly stresses that Elminians do not venerate St. Anthony of Padua in the form of *Nana* Ntona, though there is a historical continuity between the St. Anthony of Portuguese times and *Nana* Ntona of modern times. *Nana* Ntona is a god, as Benya, the rivergod, is one. Wiltgen also correctly states that the Elminians do not worship 'the statue, a piece of wood, [but] the deified personality, called Ntona who was thought to reside in [it]' (Wiltgen 1956: 151). But he is wrong when he adds that they think that Ntona is 'confined by' and 'contained within' the broken statue or its substitutes. No Akan traditional believer conceives of a god as confined by the material form by which he is represented, and through which he may be approached and venerated. Gods may, or may not, come and be present in these meeting-points with their believers, and they may desert them for good. Rattray (1923: 116) found many 'empty' shrines.

<sup>39</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 144, 149, 150

<sup>40</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 148, 150

<sup>41</sup> Probably: *Nyankopon mma nyinaa*, 'all God's children', i.e. all 'departed souls'. I owe this translation to Dr. J.S. Pobee.

<sup>42</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 149

<sup>43</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 149, 150

ment they do so, their god leaves them.<sup>44</sup> This may be an active remnant of the doctrinal antagonism of Portuguese Christianity to traditional religion in traditional religion.

[555] *Destruction attempted: modern missionary Christianity*

Christianity, as it exists in southern Ghana today, has come into being through the efforts, since 1828, of several missionary societies from Europe, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Anglican and others. The churches that have grown from these efforts have been as deeply marked by the West European cultural background of their founders as by their Christian inspiration, or perhaps even more so. Though all, or nearly all, their leaders and all their members are Akan today, these churches have so far all failed to become Akan institutions.<sup>45</sup> As determining causes of their continuing alienness the following may be mentioned:

1. the ideas, prevalent among Europeans of the 19th century about the moral, intellectual and cultural inferiority, even baseness of the negro; and Europe's consequent 'burden of civilisation';
2. the 'abolitionist' movement, propagating 'commerce and Christianity'; and the position of 'quasi-establishment' which Christian missions held in the British spheres of power;
3. the social origins of many of the missionaries and their often narrow lower-bourgeoisie pietism;
4. the severely antagonistic attitudes of the missionaries, who worked among the Akan, to Akan culture and religion, and their separatist missionary policy
5. the social background and general character of the early Christian communities.

When these causes, alienating Akan Christians from Akan culture and religion, have been briefly examined,

6. the response, and relatively weak resistance, of traditional society to this intrusion, intent on destruction, by early missionary Christianity remains to be discussed.

The reverse of the medal must then, however, be shown [556] in:

7. the discrepancy between the factual religious behaviour of these Akan Christians and the prescriptions of their churches for it;
8. the mounting tide of articulate dissent on the part of the Akan intelligentsia, demanding a policy of indigenisation from their church leaders; and
9. the slowness, and even unwillingness, so far, of these church leaders to bring about significant changes in this respect.

Each of these nine points must now be briefly elaborated.

1. The prejudices against the negro and negro societies were very deeply engrained in western societies in the 18th and 19th century. They may be exemplified by a few quotations from Brodie Cruickshank's<sup>46</sup> two-volume *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast* (1853). Though it contains many penetrating and sympathetic observations on the Akan and their society, the general picture of the negro in it is a very sombre one. 'A complete demoralisation' and 'a brutish insensibility' have taken hold of him.<sup>47</sup> 'Lying, prevarication, low cunning, breach of engagement, and trick and artifice of every description are with them legitimate weapons in the battle of life. Intemperance, excess,

<sup>44</sup> Wiltgen 1956: 151

<sup>45</sup> Busia 1950: 79; P.M.V. 1975: 32; Neefjes 1974: 41, 44-46

<sup>46</sup> A British trader and official who lived for 20 years, 1834 to 1854, in Cape Coast and Anomabu, 'wielding a vast influence over the people [and having] an implicit confidence in them' (Sarbah 1906/1968: 101). For other details of his career, cf. Claridge 1915/1964, I: 480n2, 496; II, 584; Metcalfe 1962: 110, 111; Bartels 1965: 57-59; Cruickshank 1853, I: 6, 212; II: 175, 180, 184, 186.

<sup>47</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 2

lewdness, strifes, abusiveness and malice predominate in the[ir] general character'.<sup>48</sup> But he refuses to go along with the prevalent view that these are due to the negro's innate depravity.<sup>49</sup> They are, he says, due to a constitutional law of human nature that is operative on all men: whites would have been as depraved as negroes are, if they too had been exposed to equally long periods of dark superstition and external and internal lawlessness as negroes have been. The negro is not by nature inferior to the white man.<sup>50</sup> And the white man is himself a major cause of the negro's degradation through the slave trade, commercial exploitation and bad moral example.<sup>51</sup> So he should not now scorn to admit the negro an equality of [557] origin,<sup>52</sup> but take up the mission of civilisation<sup>53</sup> and toil patiently to undo the effects of 'long ages of progressive debasement'.<sup>54</sup>

In this slow process of uplift the first phase must necessarily be one of compulsion, in which the strong hand of (European) power puts down their barbarous customs, removes their confirmed habits, rouses them from their sloth and establishes a just law, order and tranquility, protection and security for all.<sup>55</sup> Schools and the Christian religion are instruments in this civilising of the negro,<sup>56</sup> but they will achieve progress only very slowly and gradually.<sup>57</sup> But they will deliver the negro both from his religion – which is 'a system full of the most insistent contradictions',<sup>58</sup> – and from 'the abominations into which (this) dark superstition invariably leads him',<sup>59</sup> such as the killings of some of the slaves and wives of a deceased person of importance;<sup>60</sup> their slavish fears of idols;<sup>61</sup> the pitch of frenzy they work themselves into, under the delusion that in it their idol mysteriously communicates with them and grants them their prayer;<sup>62</sup> and the crowd of ceremonial observances, which they perform mechanically, without mental participation in the act<sup>63</sup> at the dictates of their priests, who skilfully exploit any possibility of deceit and imposture to the full.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, Cruickshank must admit that this religion has 'its value as an engine of civil government [...] for there can be no doubt that, with all its vile impostures and foul abominations, it has a most salutary restraint upon human conduct, and that the removal of that restraint, without the substitution of such a powerful moral agent as Christianity, would at once give loose to the most frightful scenes of a brutal and ferocious anarchy'.<sup>65</sup>

2. Brodie Cruickshank's views on the negro, in as far as he gives a sympathetic picture of him, or puts some [558] of his 'customs' in their proper perspective,<sup>66</sup> were represen-

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<sup>48</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 57

<sup>49</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 8

<sup>50</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 2-3

<sup>51</sup> Cruickshank 1853, I: 30-93, 300-310; II: 57-58

<sup>52</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 2

<sup>53</sup> Cruickshank 1853, I: 6-7

<sup>54</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 3

<sup>55</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 47-54

<sup>56</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 59, 62

<sup>57</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 78-79, 87-88

<sup>58</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 137

<sup>59</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 137

<sup>60</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 137

<sup>61</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 138

<sup>62</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 128-129

<sup>63</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 139

<sup>64</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 140-153

<sup>65</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 157. On this section, cf. also Pobee 1975: 217-237.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. that human sacrifices of captives of war are not due to bloodthirstiness, but to 'a religious sense of duty to their gods' (II: 174). But of the 'human sacrifices' in Kumase and Abomey on the occasion of the

tative of those more select circles in Western Europe that go by the name of the 'abolitionists', of evangelical-pietistic inspiration, who spearheaded the ban on the slavetrade, resettled liberated slaves, sponsored the exploration of the interior of Africa to open it up 'for legitimate trade and Christianity' and experimented in new crops and methods of cultivation.<sup>67</sup> Cruickshank's judgement on the actual moral standards of the negro, however, reflects the general view of Africans in 19th century Europe,<sup>68</sup> which was held by all, 'abolitionists' included, except a very few, such as Dr. Isert, a disciple of Rousseau,<sup>69</sup> and Mary Kingsley.<sup>70</sup>

In Cruickshank's time Christian missions had already begun to team up, not only with 'legitimate' commerce,<sup>71</sup> but also with the incipient forms of British political power, as established over the coastal peoples of the Gold Coast in the 1830's by Maclean.<sup>72</sup> This alliance virtually amounted to what Max Warren has termed 'the quasi-establishment' of Christian missions<sup>73</sup> in the British colonies in Africa.<sup>74</sup> In any clash between missions, or Christians, and the authorities of the traditional states (*aman*) British colonial power usually sided with the missionaries, even in the period of the 'Dual Mandate' or 'Indirect Rule' after 1920.<sup>75</sup>

3. The missionaries, who in the 19th century came to bring Christianity to the Akan, had been born, by and large, in the humbler circles of European society. More precisely, they belonged to those of the underprivileged who, in the huge restructuring process of north-west European society that is called 'the industrial revolution', [559] had become an upward-mobile group, entering into the respectability of the lower bourgeoisie. Very conscious of their newly attained status as the aristocracy of labour, these 'new mechanics' looked down on the industrial and rural proletariat from which they had recently risen. It is among these hard-working, classconscious men that we find both the pioneers of the Trade Union movement and of the Christian missions,<sup>76</sup> as well as many

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death of an Ashanti or Dahomey king, or of the annual remembrance there of the dead kings, he says that 'a frightful sacrifice of human life often takes place [...] to gratify [their] bloodthirsty impulse' (II: 225-226). A more correct view by a contemporary is that of Richard Burton: 'The king (of Dahomey) takes no pleasure in torture and death, or in the sight of blood. [...] Human sacrifice in Dahomey is founded on a purely religious basis. It is a touching instance of the king's filial piety, deplorably mistaken, but perfectly sincere' (Burton 1864/1966: 232). Burton also observed that the victims to be executed were well-looking after and well-fed, and in the best of moods, enjoying the music of the very ceremonies in which they were to be killed, and attempting to beat time to the drumming with their feet, though bound and bundled up in wicker baskets. They chatted amongst themselves, looked wholly unconcerned and allowed themselves to be led to the slaughter like lambs (Burton 1864/1966: 204-206). For a correct view of the killings of humans in Ashanti, cf. Rattray 1927: 104-114, 139-143.

<sup>67</sup> Warren 1967: 27-28, 125; Tufuoh 1968: 46-47

<sup>68</sup> Cf. e.g. Todd 1962: 25; Jahoda 1961: 90-93

<sup>69</sup> Smith 1966: 26-27; Debrunner 1967: 86

<sup>70</sup> Sarbah 1906: 259-265

<sup>71</sup> Tufuoh 1968: 45-50; Debrunner 1967: 154, 182-183

<sup>72</sup> A new and significant development if compared to the often outspoken hostility, extended by governors and traders to the chaplains of the castle especially the more zealous ones, when they attempted to conduct a school for mulatto and African children for their instruction into the Christian faith and to do some missionary work in the town; cf. Pobee 1975: 217-237. On Maclean, cf. Metcalfe 1962.

<sup>73</sup> Warren is careful to point out that it was not to the local church, but to its European leaders, the missionaries, that the church-state relationship of quasi-establishment was extended by the white officials in the colonial administration (Warren 1967: 33, 144). For particular instances of it, cf. Todd 1964: 33, 44; Ellis 1893: 206-207; Metcalfe 1962: 243; Tufuoh 1968: 38-44, 50; Debrunner 1967: 119-120, 123-124, 174, 187; Williamson 1974: 44-45; Cruickshank 1853, II: 115, 289-335).

<sup>74</sup> Warren 1967: 24-35

<sup>75</sup> Smith 1966: 115-117; Busia 1951/1968: 133-138, 220-222; Tufuoh 1968: 38-44, 50

<sup>76</sup> Warren 1967: 36-44, 54

who entered the service of the merchant companies trading in West Africa, or the colonial military or civil service.<sup>77</sup>

The missionaries among them were, however, under yet another spell: they were the 'inner-directed men', fundamentalist by conviction, with 'an overwhelming compulsion to follow some course of action which to others may seem wildly inopportune, extremely dangerous and possibly subversive to the "natural order of things"'.<sup>78</sup> Their pietism brought them an enormous release of power and energy. Lacking in formal education, they won the bare minimum of it (and sometimes much more than that) in the hard way, e.g. 'by eating Greek and meals together'.<sup>79</sup> Becoming a clergyman or minister even if only in one of the non-established churches, or no more than a missionary,<sup>80</sup> sent out to a society of 'savages' in a 'barbarous' climate to face instant death, was hardwon promotion.<sup>81</sup> Boatmakers, smiths, ropemakers and other artisans studied Greek, Hebrew and the Bible and were sent out to India, Oceania and Africa by British, Dutch and Swiss-German Protestant missionary societies from 1796,<sup>82</sup> and somewhat later in the 19th century by Roman Catholic ones, especially from France.<sup>83</sup>

4. These men, who bettered themselves, set out to better the negro. They had been hard upon themselves. They did not intend to be less exacting upon the Africans. In their minds African societies lacked the benefit of an industrious, Christian middle class. They set out to [560] create one,<sup>84</sup> and scored greater success in it by the system of literacy education they set up and ran, than in establishing a viable Christianity.

The missionaries who worked among the Akan fit well into this general picture. Joseph Dunwell, the first, lone Methodist missionary in Cape Coast (1835, January 3 to June 24) was the son of a Yorkshire rural carrier, who threw him out of his house because of his association with Methodism. In Cape Coast he showed himself very diffident and ill at ease in the company of the Europeans and kept aloof from them. In his relations with the Africans he was more at ease, but he set his face strongly against their polygamy, enjoining them to put away all their wives but one.<sup>85</sup>

Wrigley, who managed to live a bit longer (September 1830 to November 1837), kept up that stand, creating dissensions among his Christians. He also launched a regular Sunday evening exhortation meeting that was devoted to attacks on 'vain and foolish customs'. He forbade Christians to partake in traditional funerals and to pay their share in the costs of them.<sup>86</sup>

Cruikshank writes of these two first missionaries: they 'burned with an intemperate enthusiasm approaching to fanaticism. [...] In season and out of season they dinned into unwilling ears their lost and miserable conditions. They attacked their idolatrous practices, their social immoralities, and their more innocent conventional usages, and for-

<sup>77</sup> Metcalfe 1962: 1-11, 110

<sup>78</sup> Warren 1967: 44

<sup>79</sup> Warren 1967: 38, 48

<sup>80</sup> The public image of the missionary was a poor one then: 'the lineaments of a religious fanatic came to be associated with missionaries in the minds of all too many reasonable people in the first half of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century' (Warren 1967: 65; cf. also 58-76; Todd 1964: 24).

<sup>81</sup> Warren 1967: 50-52

<sup>82</sup> Warren 1967: 49-57

<sup>83</sup> To my knowledge, no historian has yet investigated the social background of the R.C. missionaries in West Africa. But my own, admittedly very limited experience, bears out the thesis of Max Warren, not only in respect of the 19th century ones (cf. also Todd 1964: 26, 39-42, 55), but also for many of the Dutch ones of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. also Roes 1974: 150-151 on the recruiting of Dutch R.C. missionaries.

<sup>84</sup> Warren 1967: 116-131; Smith 1967: 106, 246; Jahoda 1961: 93-95; Debrunner 1967: 140

<sup>85</sup> Bartels 1965: 10-19; Metcalfe 1962: 120-121; Debrunner 1967: 96-99

<sup>86</sup> Bartels 1965: 26

bade their repetition with such a tone of authority as the possession of only a power to still at once the raging sea or the stormy passions of men could have warranted. [...] To [...] the African, animadversions upon their customs, conveyed in such loud and objuratory language, assumed the character of personal abuse; and their pride took offense at what they were inclined to regard as a wanton piece of insult.[561] [...] Owing to this over-zeal [...] much acerbation of feeling was the consequence'.<sup>87</sup> It led to hostilities in Dominase in September 1837. And at Asaba, where a few Christians were manhandled, the chiefs complained of Christians behaving as if they were a race apart.<sup>88</sup>

Thomas Birch Freeman, a mulatto missionary (1838-1890) and a much more diplomatic person, knew how to ease off these tensions. But his ideas on traditional society and religion were as depreciative: students, in training to be teachers and preachers, must be taken into a boarding school so as to keep them 'entirely beyond the reach of demoralising influence, allowing them no contact with the townspeople'.<sup>89</sup> Kumasi, he says, is the stronghold of Satan, and a dark abode of cruelty.<sup>90</sup> And the custom to 'send off' a slave to go (*ko*) and serve (*som*) a royal ancestor is outright murder.<sup>91</sup>

The condemnation of traditional society and religion was even more outspoken with the missionaries of the Basle Mission, who started to work in the Akwapim hills in 1835.<sup>92</sup> Dark, sanguinary idolatry, said Paul Steiner, must be destroyed. The tricks of its *Teufelspriester* (priests of the devil) must be exposed. They exploit the people by the use of poison and magic incantations, establishing over them a religion of fear and bestial ideas, and so underpin the despotism of their chiefs, who oppress them as slaves without rights.<sup>93</sup> The overriding motive of the Basle missionaries was an implacable antagonism to 'fetishes' and 'fetish priests'. The most fanatical in the drive to expose their 'absurdity' were J.G. Auer (1858-1861) and J.A. Mader (1851-1877). Auer, seeing a priest make a sacrifice to his god, publicly ridiculed him, saying: 'See this stupid man. He calls and receives no answer; he brings the fetish something and the fowls feed on it!'<sup>94</sup> [562] And Mader 'conducted [...] a private feud against "fetish"-priests',<sup>95</sup> earning himself the name Kwadjo Okoto, '(born on) Monday who beats up', by flogging a priest who opposed him.<sup>96</sup> He had a peculiarly nasty way of punishing the students in the seminary at Akropong, when he was in charge of it. He sent them to fetch black soil for the garden from the sacred grove of Akropong, which the students could not do without running the gauntlet of the scandalised and angry townsfolk.<sup>97</sup> Mader's zeal, says Smith,<sup>98</sup> may have been exceptional, but his attitude was not untypical.<sup>99</sup>

The Basle Mission separated converts from traditional society not only spiritually, but also spatially by settling them in Christian 'salems' at some distance from the traditional towns.<sup>100</sup> This removal, not only from traditional religion, but also from allegi-

<sup>87</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 115-116

<sup>88</sup> Bartels 1956: 25-26, 36

<sup>89</sup> Bartels 1965: 33

<sup>90</sup> Smith 1967: 88

<sup>91</sup> Williamson 1974: 46; cf. Rattray 1927: 139 sq

<sup>92</sup> Smith 1967: 86-92; Williamson 1974: 44-58

<sup>93</sup> Smith 1967: 88

<sup>94</sup> Smith 1967: 89

<sup>95</sup> Smith 1967: 89

<sup>96</sup> Smith 1967: 90; Debrunner 1967: 161

<sup>97</sup> Smith 1967: 91

<sup>98</sup> Smith 1967: 91

<sup>99</sup> Even the famous missionary-linguist J.G. Christaller could not break free from the spell of this 'priestcraft' theory. He says for instance that an *okomfo*, priest and medium of a god, 'pretends' to be the interpreter and mouthpiece of his god (Christaller 1881: 248).

<sup>100</sup> Williamson 1974: 56, 79-80, 147; Debrunner 1967: 125, 130, 176, 187, 197-198; Busia 1951/1968:

ance to traditional authorities and the duties that go with it, caused much strife and dis-sension, and occasionally open hostilities, as at Mamfe, Amonokrom and Aburi in the 1850s;<sup>101</sup> at Kibi and elsewhere in Akim from 1878 to 1888, where order had to be restored by the troops of the government;<sup>102</sup> at Oda in 1890;<sup>103</sup> in 1896 at Abetifi;<sup>104</sup> and from 1905 to 1941 in Ashanti.<sup>105</sup>

The colonial government legislated against a number of traditional customs, such as the killings at the funerals of, and the memorials for, deceased chiefs; human sacrifice to certain gods;<sup>106</sup> burial in the floor of one's house; 'carrying the corpse' (*afunsoa*) to find out who is guilty, by 'witchcraft', of the death of the one to be buried;<sup>107</sup> the poison ordeal (*odomwe*); and some of the new 'drinking-medicine' (*sumanbrafo*) cults that also used poison ordeals.<sup>108</sup> The Basle missionaries, however, [563] thought these measures very incomplete and constantly prodded the British on to take much more vigorous measures against 'heathenism'.<sup>109</sup>

5. One of the causes of the disturbances at Kibi in 1878 was that the entire Christian congregation there consisted of 200 former slaves of the Paramount Chief (*omanhene*) of Akim, Amoaka Atta I (1866-1888).<sup>110</sup> They had opted out of bondage to him in consequence of the abolition of internal slavetrade and domestic slavery in 1874. Though entitled to some financial compensation, Amoaka Atta and other chiefs suffered a considerable loss in terms of economy (they worked on his fields) and of status (the size of a chief's retinue adds much to the amount of respect he commands.<sup>111</sup> Similarly in the other parts of Southern Ghana a considerable part of the congregations consisted at that time also of persons who had been in a position of structural oppression in traditional society: slaves, people accused of witchcraft,<sup>112</sup> and women. Others became Christians because they had a good reason to opt out of traditional society. Some were involved in

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134, 137-138, 154

<sup>101</sup> Smith 1967: 91

<sup>102</sup> Smith 1967: 115-117; Debrunner 1967: 190-198

<sup>103</sup> Smith 1967: 120

<sup>104</sup> Smith 1967: 119

<sup>105</sup> Busia 1951/1968: 133-134, 137-138, 220-222

<sup>106</sup> There is very little evidence that human sacrifices to gods were ever practised. There are a few historically documented killings of human beings that cannot be related to royal funerals or the cult of the royal ancestors, but these show no clear connection with the cult of some god, but more with the preparation of a powerful 'medicine' (*suman*). For the rest one only finds traditions that in ages long ago human sacrifices used to be performed when a great affliction had come over the whole people. There is also the Winneba-tradition about the origin of *Aboakyer*, the deerhunt festival in honour of the tutelary deity of the town, Penkye Otu, that in earliest times a 'prince' was annually sacrificed to him, but that he later settled for an animal, first for a leopard, then for a bushbuck (Opoku 1972: 10). Such traditions, however, are no proof that human beings have in fact been sacrificed.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Rattray 1927: 167-170

<sup>108</sup> Smith 1967: 92, 122, 132-133

<sup>109</sup> Smith 1967: 89

<sup>110</sup> Smith 1967: 115; Debrunner 1967: 193-194

<sup>111</sup> Claridge 1915/1964 II: 177-186

<sup>112</sup> As late as 1930 a female traditional priest came to a minister of the Presbyterian Church to deliver him an injunction from Christ which she said she had received in a dream: 'In my dream, sir, I passed by the gate of a very large and nice city, and entered into a nasty and gloomy one, where I recognized some dead relatives. I even saw a Christian who has died lately. He did not go to heaven, because he was a wizard when alive. On my returning, I was directed to see a man of considerable size and beauty in a snow-white garment, who was introduced to me as that Jesus whom you preach. He bade me to tell you that he was not pleased at all with your methods of ministering the Word of God, because you accepted everyone who listened to you and wished to become a Christian, witches and wizards especially. All who became Christians not very long ago were of such kind: drive them away' (Parsons 1963: 64).

a political struggle over succession to an important 'stool';<sup>113</sup> others had been traditional priests who had run into trouble with colleagues, clientele, or traditional authorities.<sup>114</sup>

A second body of Christians were those seeking and finding employment in the Christian missions: labourers, masons, carpenters and other artisans for the building of the mission stations, chapels and schools; employees in the plantations and other commercial ventures, and in the production and distribution of Christian literature; and teachers in the schools, and interpreters, evangelists, catechists and ministers for pastoral and missionary work.<sup>115</sup>

[564] A third group of Christians were those seeking education in the schools, or training in a craft. This group came to outstrip by far, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two other groups and to give to missionary Christianity that peculiar character of a 'classroom religion'.<sup>116</sup>

Origin from a depressed group does not at all rule out a sincere conversion to Christianity, but may lend to the profession of it an antithetical and fanatical character. Job-identification may likewise lend it an uncritical and conservative character; or, the profession of Christianity may last no longer than the job is held. So also with education: once secured, few of those who have secured it may continue as practicing Christians, and this was in fact the case.<sup>117</sup>

The fanaticism of some of the early Christians was the major cause of the bad feelings and hostilities between the traditional community and the Christians. They not only refused to participate in the state and family rituals for the gods and the ancestors, in funerals and in festivities, in drumming and dancing, and in the traditional processes of law, but they also purposely violated traditionally sanctioned rules of conduct, such as the prohibition to work or to fish on *dabone* (evil, i.e. holy, days), or to fish in a particular part of a river, or to hunt or eat a certain animal. They violated sacred places, such as the groves of gods, and felled sacred trees. They introduced into the towns animals that were 'hateful' (*akyide*) to the god of those towns. They destroyed the charms and amulets of private persons, and the statues of the gods.<sup>118</sup>

6. In view of the clean and complete shift of allegiance [565] which the missionaries demanded of their converts, and of the provocations directed by the Christians to traditional religion and customs, it is significant that the response of traditional society, though occasionally violent, may be said to have in general been very tolerant. One way of explaining this leniency is that the traditional leaders were acutely aware that the colonial administration would, in last resort, always side with the missionaries. They, moreover, shrewdly assessed the advantages to be gained from good relationships with the missionaries for obtaining schools for their towns and villages, so as to integrate them into the new economy.<sup>119</sup> Another way of accounting for this phenomenon is that traditional courtesy demanded that the missionaries, as strangers and as 'priests of God', be received

<sup>113</sup> 'Stools' (*akonnua*) symbolise political, socio-structural, military and court positions; cf. e.g. Sarpong 1967, 1971.

<sup>114</sup> Smith 1967: 39-40, 116, 115; Cruickshank 1853, II: 115; Debrunner 1959: 135-142; 1967: 165-169; Parsons 1963: 64; Bartels 1965: 56-59

<sup>115</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 68sq; Claridge 1915/1964, I: 465; Bartels 1965: 42; Williamson 1974: 22; Debrunner 1967: 137-140

<sup>116</sup> Taylor 1963: 1-14; Williamson 1974: 32-35, 37-38, 43; Smith 1967: 165-183; Debrunner 1967, 151-152, 178, 183, 184; Busia 1951/1968: 131-133.

<sup>117</sup> Smith 1967: 212, 215; Cruickshank 1853, II: 68-77; P.M.V. 1975: 3, 8, 14, 26-27, 33

<sup>118</sup> Claridge 1915/1964, I: 466; Busia 1951/1968: 133-138, 220-222; Parsons 1963, 65-67, 89-90; Smith 1967: 116, 117, 131

<sup>119</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 113, 115; Busia 1951: 133-138; Debrunner 1967: 174-175, 178, 184, 186-187

ed well. Traditional culture had taught them to be respectful, tolerant and hospitable to any immigrant cult or religion. So they respected the Christian religion, which, they said, was 'a good and sweet word', to be pondered upon.<sup>120</sup> And they knew to distinguish between Christians and the Christian religion, as an old man is reported to have said in Aburi in 1860: 'There are many rascals among the Christians, but the cause itself is good'.<sup>121</sup>

But, perhaps, the most fundamental cause of this tolerance was the fact that traditional believers had become increasingly diffident about their own religion. It must be noted that in traditional culture a wide latitude of doubt and scepticism, especially towards particular gods, medicines and priests, had always been endemic. It had fostered a strong public opinion in traditional society – e.g. that some priests are impostors and roques – and a constant 'turn-over' of gods and medicines, old ones being abandoned or discarded in favour of newly invented or imported ones. Contacts with Europeans – who were all, traders, officials and missionaries, strong adherents of [566] the theory of priestcraft – and mulattos, with Christians and with the growing body of those who had been Christians but had not reverted to the practice of traditional religion, greatly strengthened this diffidence; which turned in some into, usually private, scepticism towards traditional religion as such.<sup>122</sup> It was this endemic, but now virulent, diffidence and doubt, that lay at the root of the demise, in the Mankesim riots of 1849-1851, of the central religious shrine of the Fante, the *Nanampow* (the grove of the three royal ancestors) at Mankesim,<sup>123</sup> much more than the violations of that grove by Methodist Christians which touched off these riots.<sup>124</sup> It also caused the opposition to missionary Christianity to be disconnected, sporadic and unsustainable.<sup>125</sup>

In this way missionary Christianity intruded upon Akan societies in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, squarely allied to commerce and colonialism, and intent on the destruction of that 'blood-stained superstition' and 'murderous customs',<sup>126</sup> which we now term Akan traditional religion. This myth of the bloodthirsty savageness of traditional religion was a charter sanctioning the colonial enterprise, and with it the pursuance of the interests of the trader, the government official, and the missionary, and of those Akan, who were quick to perceive and pursue the better social and economic opportunities which colonial society offered. This myth, and its reverse: Western culture and Christianity as civilisation, progress and truth, the missionaries deeply imprinted upon the minds of the Akan Christians. It even now retains some of its spell over many of them.

#### *Destruction denied: the religious behaviour of Akan Christians*

7. When one takes into consideration all that has been [567] said in the previous section, it is truly remarkable that the factual religious observations of many, if not most, Akan Christians have, over the past century, corresponded so little to the pattern of Christian

<sup>120</sup> Smith 1967: 92

<sup>121</sup> Quoted by Debrunner (1967: 169)

<sup>122</sup> Smith 1967: 92; Cruickshank 1853: II, 155-156; Christensen 1959: 263-264, 277-278

<sup>123</sup> Christensen 1954: 12-18

<sup>124</sup> The *Nananom* ('grandfathers') of the *Nanampow* grove at Mankesim were the three ancestors that led the 16<sup>th</sup> century migration of the Fanti from Techiman to Mankesim. The shrine was served by a group of five priests and possessed great oracular authority in public and private matters. Cruickshank played a central role in the drama of its demise as acting judicial assessor. For his version of it, cf. Cruickshank 1853, II: 149-152; for other versions of it, stressing the rule of the Christians, cf. Reindorf 1889/1966: 234-235; Ellis 1893: 213-216; Sarbah 1906/1968: 50-51 Claridge 1915/1964 I: 464-473; Williamson 1974: 54-55; Bartels 1965: 55-60).

<sup>125</sup> Smith 1967: 92

<sup>126</sup> Reindorf 1889/1966: 335

life in which the missionaries and African pastors trained and strictly disciplined them. They retained, secretly at first and later (more) openly, many elements of traditional religion.

The picture of early Wesleyan Christianity around Cape Coast, which Brodie Cruickshank felt honesty dictated him to draw,<sup>127</sup> was so bleak, that he apologises for it to his readers. Williamson, Smith and others, writing a full century later, state that this 'bleak' picture still very much continues, and amply document it. But they do not apologise for it, but search for the reason why it continues to prevail. One must first of all note that the Akan may affiliate themselves, or are affiliated to, the missionary churches in three ways:

- There are many who in a census register as a member of one of the missionary churches but are not so registered by that church. In 1960 62.7% of the Akan,<sup>128</sup> or 2.200.000, were returned as belonging to one of the missionary churches. Those who registered as Roman-Catholic exceeded by 52% those registered by the R.C. church (31).<sup>129</sup> And the same 1960 census showed an excess of Protestants of 145% over those in the registers of the Protestant churches.<sup>130</sup> This very large group of 'census Christians' is the (by-)product<sup>131</sup> of the school-system which the missionary churches set up to serve the (diverse) interests of the several components of colonial society. Whoever attended the schools of a particular church felt, and in the R.C. church usually was, as a matter of course and of routine, incorporated en masse into that church. On completing the school, such people, however, as routinely quietly passed out of (the active [568] participation in) that church also<sup>132</sup> into a 'diffuse Christianity'<sup>133</sup> which consists in a loose, emotionally tinged bond with that church – though with the freedom to practise any religious rite that is deemed necessary, useful, respectful or profitable – and in a status association. For to be a 'Christian' is synonymous with having received an education in the schools, and with the white-collar, bourgeoisie status that goes with it.<sup>134</sup> The fact, however, that they register as 'Christian' in a census means that they take themselves as Christians and wish to be considered so by others.
- A second way of affiliation is that of the very large group of Christians who have been ritually admitted into a missionary church and duly registered as members but have been excluded from full membership by a disciplinary measure of their church, or, in the Roman Catholic church, by a canonical impediment. The discipline, as practiced in the Protestant churches before 1950, was felt and resented as unbendingly severe by many Christians, who often did not accept it or regard it seriously.<sup>135</sup> Some Christians were excluded from the church altogether, but most were suspended for a period, be it often an indefinite one. The main categories of offenses were fail-

<sup>127</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 72-80

<sup>128</sup> For this figure, cf. K.I.T. 1972: 16.

<sup>129</sup> For this figure, cf. P.M.V. 1975: 9. Beetham (1967: 164) says that the difference is 38%. These figures are for the whole of Ghana, but are likely to be even more pronounced for the Akan.

<sup>130</sup> For this figure, cf. Beetham 1967: 164; cf. also Baëta 1968: XII; Neeffjes 1974: 33-34, 37

<sup>131</sup> But an inevitable one because of the very great amount of time and energy which ministers and priests had to spend on the management of their schools. But even if they would have spent all their time on religious instruction and pastoral care, their numbers would have been very inadequate to the number of the Christians in their charge (Williamson 1974: 31-43; Smith 1967: 165-183, esp. 173-174; Bartels 1965: 285; P.M.V. 1975: 16, 26, 32).

<sup>132</sup> Bartels 1965: 234; P.M.V. 1975: 3, 5, 14, 26

<sup>133</sup> J.S. Pobee, personal communication. However, in Pobee 1973a: 21, he seems to use the term in a much more restricted sense, applying it mainly to our second way of affiliation

<sup>134</sup> Smith 1967: 227-228, 246

<sup>135</sup> Cruickshank 1853, II: 84-90; Williamson 1974: 144

ure to contract a marriage blessed in church – nine out of every ten adult Roman Catholics are 'excluded from the sacraments' for this reason –,<sup>136</sup> polygamy, concubinage, adultery, drunkenness, non-payment of church-dues, and participation in the rituals of traditional religion.<sup>137</sup> In spite of their being excluded from full, sacramental membership some of these censored Christians continued [569] to behave as active and committed members of their churches.

- A third way of affiliation is that of the relatively few who are both registered members and not subjected to disciplinary measures. Most of these are very devoted to their church and actively committed to it. They form the core of each of them.

The relative ease with which these several categories of Christians participate in traditional customs and in the rites of traditional religion, or resort to the Spiritual churches, or to a Muslim *malam* probably stands in a more or less inverse ratio to the strength of their affiliation to their church. The looser the attachment to one's church, the greater the ease in the participation in e.g. traditional rites. But all seem to participate in them at times, though staunch church members may attempt to do so secretly.<sup>138</sup>

In the 19th century Christian congregations could still feel rather secure in the fiction that 'paganism' was an outside enemy, into which some Christians 'relapsed', because they had not yet been well enough converted to, and grounded in, Christian life, and so must be disciplined to achieve that, or be expelled. But after 1900 it became clear that adherence to traditional beliefs and practices was, even in the face of strong official disapproval and severe disciplining, an undeniable reality within the Christian community. Fostered by several non-religious factors, such as the anthropological literature on traditional Akan religion and culture, the rise of nationalism, the struggle for, and achievement of, independence, the ideology of 'African personality', etc., the resilience among Christians of elements of traditional religion has ever become more patent<sup>139</sup> in the course of this century. Some instances may be cited:

- Christians freely participate in the traditional communal [570] festivals now, such as the *Odwira* (old year/new year celebrations), and the greater *Adae*, celebrated every six weeks on Sundays in honour of the ancestors of the chiefs and the queen mothers.<sup>140</sup> They engage (more) freely in drumming and dancing, and in traditional communal processes, such as the swearing of the *ntam kese* (great oath) in a traditional process of law. They accept traditional offices, even if that entails exclusion from full membership by their church.<sup>141</sup>
- Christians also take part in family rituals, such as the 'outdooring' of a newly born baby,<sup>142</sup> in libation to contact the ancestors,<sup>143</sup> and in the traditional rites of burial and mourning, and the rites of widowhood.<sup>144</sup> Most Christians contract marriages according to the traditional customs, thereby causing the near-complete failure of church-blessed marriage. They fear to contract monogamous, Christian marriage, because it does not allow of the relatively easy divorce that is the rule in traditional society.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>136</sup> P.M.V. 1975: 21-25, 33

<sup>137</sup> Williamson 1974: 53-54, 145-147, 155; Smith 1967: 140n1, 217-218

<sup>138</sup> Smith 1967: 213, 216, 217, 222, 233, 248sq; Jahoda 1961: 1961, 121; P. M.V. 1975: 30

<sup>139</sup> The retention of, or reversion to, traditional religious practices is not always, and not even usually, motivated by purely religious reasons. Other motivations, cultural, ideological, economic or social ones, will often be also, and sometimes be solely, operative.

<sup>140</sup> Smith 1967: 255; Busia 1951/1968: 197

<sup>141</sup> Smith 1967: 136, 216

<sup>142</sup> Smith 1967: 249, 297

<sup>143</sup> Smith 1967: 298; Bartels 1965: 230-232; P.M.V. 1975: 30

<sup>144</sup> Smith 1967: 253, 295

<sup>145</sup> Williamson 1974: 53-54, 77-79, 145-146, 155; Smith 1967: 251-252, 291; P.M.V. 1975: 21-25

- Christians also resort to personal traditional rites, especially for protection against witchcraft and sorcery, and for healing. They resort to a diviner (*ommusukyerefo*), a priest of a god (*obosomfo*) who can show (*kyere*) them by stirring his pot (*ekoro*) the causes of their misfortune (*mmusu*); and to a herbalist (*odunsinni*, *osumanni*, *oduru-yefo*), the priests of a god, or to a Muslim *malam* to obtain 'medicine' (*suman*, *aduru*) against it. Or they visit the shrine of one of the 'killing'-gods (*abosombrafo*, *sumanbrafo*) and enter into a covenant with him, or the healing-compound of the prophet of one of the Spiritual churches.<sup>146</sup>
- [571] Elements of traditional religion have, however, also penetrated, again in the face of strong disapproval and resistance from ecclesiastical authorities, into some of the Christian rituals themselves. 'Outdooring' is practiced universally by Christians, with some changes, such as a prayer by the minister addressed to God, and not to the ancestors. But it takes pride of place over baptism.<sup>147</sup> The nubility rites for girls have become obsolete, but elements of them have penetrated into the rite of confirmation, which now functions as a rite of passage into female adulthood.<sup>148</sup> The traditional belief that the menstrual state of women is an unclean one which is highly repulsive (*akyiwade*) and dangerous to any spiritual agent strongly persists among Christians. Women usually absent themselves from church services in this period. Catechists and church-elders impress upon them that they should certainly not participate in the Lord's Supper (Eucharist) in this state.<sup>149</sup> Christians may also be weary of participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, because they conceive them in the traditional framework of *abosomnom*, the drinking (*nom*) of (the medicine of) a god (*obosom*) which is at once a communion – though this element is not stressed –, a covenant, and an ordeal. Failure on the part of the devotee to live up to the terms of the pact may be swiftly and ruthlessly punished by the 'killing' (*brafo*, executioner) god in him.<sup>150</sup>
- Christian funerals are generally more sedate than the traditional ones, but for the rest follow the traditional pattern very closely. The body of the deceased is laid in state as in traditional funerals. Alcoholic drinks may be served. The coffin is usually [572] very expensive. Not only is the body enclosed in it, but so are often some of the most intimate or treasured possessions (*akrade*, things dear to the soul) of the deceased, some pieces of cloth, some 'soul'-money (*krasika*), a sponge and a towel, and his Christian credentials: his baptismal and confirmation certificates, his Bible and hymnbook, and his 'monthly dues' tickets. A libation is often poured to notify the ancestors of this death, and to 'send off' this deceased. Measures are also taken to prevent the deceased from haunting the living. Incense is burnt in and around the house, as ghosts are thought not like the smell of it. The widow(er) is ritually bathed in strongly scented water and undergoes other rites. And all the personal possessions of the deceased are removed from the house. Christian funerals are as expensive as the traditional ones, and are paid for in the same way: partly the expenses are shared among the members of the matriline (*abusua*) of the deceased, the other mourners (patrilineal kin, affines and friends) also donating towards the costs; they are partly paid for by a loan raised by the matriline. The churches have also not been able to prevent the end of the traditional period of mourning, one full year after the death of

<sup>146</sup> Smith 1967: 256sq, 261-266; Bartels 1965: 233; Christensen 1959: 269-270; Field 1960: 49-54; P.M.V. 1975: 30; Neeffjes 1974: 45

<sup>147</sup> Williamson 1974: 75; Smith 1967: 250-251; Neeffjes 1974: 44

<sup>148</sup> Williamson 1974: 75; Smith 1967: 250-251

<sup>149</sup> Williamson 1974: 74

<sup>150</sup> Williamson 1974: 74-75

the one mourned, from receiving a Christian ritualisation in the form of the welladvertised, crowded 'memorial service', usually held on Sundays. After it the traditional rites concluding the mourning are held in the 'family-house', attended by all who have been in church.<sup>151</sup>

Surveying this, one agrees with Smith<sup>152</sup> and Williamson<sup>153</sup> that many, if not most, Akan Christians adhere to Christianity in a way that is complementary to, and not exclusive of, significant [573] portions of their traditional religion. They have turned Christian, partly for the traditional religious reason of *Nyamesom*, worship of God, Christianity being a more consistent and more elaborate form of it, and partly – often mainly – for the non-religious but respectable reason that it attached them to a group that moves with the times and provides them with the means to better themselves and with a status in the new society. But as individual believers they are Christians after the hospitable mode of traditional belief, which is not, and refuses to be, constrained by well-articulated, sharply focused dogmas. So, in their factual religious behaviour, they reject the dogmatic exclusiveness and the attempt at destruction of traditional customs and religious practices by missionary Christianity. They also reject its insistence on the indissolubility of Christian monogamous marriage; and the western, rationalistic and 'unbiblical' approach to the existence of gods, witchcraft and 'medicines', and to the 'spiritual' causation of disease and other misfortunes.<sup>154</sup> Their Christianity being informed by this receptive mode of traditional belief, Christians who are elected to a 'stool',<sup>155</sup> or called by a god who 'falls upon them' to be his priest and medium (*okomfo*), find no great difficulty in accepting that office or that calling, and may continue as much of their allegiance to their church as that church will allow them.<sup>156</sup> This superimposition of (meaningful portions of) Christianity upon (viable portions of) traditional religion is no exceptional trait of modern Akan culture. One finds a similar non-exclusive complementarity of modern, supra-'tribal' state structure, with its many new forms of association, to the traditional allegiances to one's *abusua* (local matriclan), [574] *kurow* (native town), and *oman* (traditional state).<sup>157</sup>

One may conclude with Smith that 'the African has added the Christian Gospel to the totality of the spiritual resources which he already possesses'.<sup>158</sup> A religion that includes Christianity is for him a viable one. A Christianity that dogmatically excludes all elements of traditional religion is not.

8. Over this central issue of the relation of the Christian religion to Akan traditional religion the missionary churches seem in a deadlock at present. Most of the older, usually less educated ministers and laymen strongly advocate adherence to the centuryold line of condemnation, disciplining and exclusion. But against this refusal to do something about the 'alienness'<sup>159</sup> of Christianity in Southern Ghana, a mounting tide of articulate dissent is rising from educated laymen, Christian chiefs, younger missionaries and Ghanaian theologians.<sup>160</sup> It is inspired mainly by the research which they themselves have

<sup>151</sup> Williamson 1974: 76; Smith 1967: 252-255, 295; P.M.V. 1975: 33; Pobee 1973a: 21n1, 24, 26-28

<sup>152</sup> Smith 1967: 241-242, 248

<sup>153</sup> Williamson 1974: 161, 169, 172

<sup>154</sup> Williamson 1974: 135-151, 172-176; Smith 1967: 241-242, 246-249, 269-272; Parsons 1963: 93-96, 199-202; Asamoah 1962: 300-301

<sup>155</sup> I.e. to a traditional office of authority over a local matriclan (*abusua*), town (*kurow*), or state (*oman*).

<sup>156</sup> Christensen 1959: 269-270, 277

<sup>157</sup> Apter 1972: 287-289; Smith 1967: 241, 242

<sup>158</sup> Smith 1967: 241-242

<sup>159</sup> Busia 1950: 79

<sup>160</sup> This dissent has a history of its own, beginning before the turn of the century with Fante barristers like

undertaken into Akan traditional religion and culture, or by the study of the works of Christaller, Rattray, Field, Christensen, Busia and others.

9. Though the open, well-informed spirit of dialogue of the educated laity and professional theologians has in the last decade grown into a good match for the antagonistic conservatism of the older clergymen and laity, one cannot but extend to all missionary churches what Neefjes writes of the Roman Catholic church, that they, as institutions, have remained foreign bodies that have failed to take root in Akan culture because they have paid too little attention to Akan world view<sup>161</sup> and made not really much accommodation to Akan culture as yet.<sup>162</sup> The 1955 conference on 'Christianity and African Culture' gave high hopes for a speedy and thorough indigenisation among some missionary churches. They [575] were not fulfilled. Even Baëta<sup>163</sup> seems, as a church leader, unable to develop an effective policy of indigenisation. The failure, on his part<sup>164</sup> and on the part of the church leaders in general, to treat indigenisation as a critical issue<sup>165</sup> fosters in one the fear that the modern spirit of dialogue may only be a verbal affirmation of intent to respect whatever is good in Akan traditional religion and culture which is powerless, against the dead weight of unreformed 'Rules and Regulations' and practical church politics, to effect an integration of it into the life of the missionary churches and build a bridge to what is the religion, not only of their 'pagan' fellow Akan, but also of very many of their fellow Christians.<sup>166</sup>

*A mode of integration: the 'indigenous' or 'spiritual' churches*

Having insisted on the alienness of the missionary churches, it may be appropriate to speak of 'indigenous' or 'African' churches when referring to a number of churches that

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John Mensah Sarbah (1864-1910) and J.E. Caseley Hayford (1866-1930) and ministers like Attoh Ahumah (1864-1922), Mark C. Hayford and J.E.K. Aggrey (1875-1927) (cf. Mobley 1970: 31-46). The most important of the second generation of critics is Dr. Joseph Boakye Danquah for his extensive studies in traditional religion and culture and for bringing about discussions between (Christian) chiefs and the leadership in the churches. To this generation also belong Dr. J.W. de Graft Johnson, Nana Annor Adjaye, paramount chief of western Nzima, and E. Amu (Mobley 1970: 46-57; Nketia 1962: 122; Smith 1967: 179, 235-241, 273; Williamson 1974: 152-153). Prominent in the third generation is the social anthropologist K.A. Busia. His thesis that 'the Christian churches are still alien institutions, intruded upon, but not integrated with indigenous social institutions' (Busia 1950: 79) was something of a shock and an eye-opener and led to the conference on 'Christianity and African Culture', organised by the Christian Council of Ghana in Accra in 1955, in which a spate of critical lectures were read by S.G. Williamson, Busia, C.G. Baëta, E.A. Asamoah and J.H. Nketia. This generation of critics also includes Ako Adjei, and N. Smith (cf. Mobley 1970: 57-63, 67-69, 71; Parsons 1963: 92, 176; Smith 1967: 232-233; Baëta 1971b: 9-11). To the youngest generation of critics may be reckoned K.A. Dickson (1961, 1964, 1966, 1973, 1975), J.S. Pobee (1969, 1973a, 1973b, 1974, 1975); J.K. Agbeti (1971); and J.N. Kudadjie (1973).

<sup>161</sup> Neefjes 1974: 41, 45

<sup>162</sup> Pobee 1973a: 7

<sup>163</sup> Baëta played a major role in developing the theology of dialogue with other religions in the World Council of Churches, chairing the 1963 meeting, on World Mission and Evangelism in New Mexico; cf. Baëta 1971a): 13-14.

<sup>164</sup> Baëta 1971a: 20

<sup>165</sup> Smith 1967: 240

<sup>166</sup> Cf. P.M.V. 1975: 31 on this same deadlock between the spirit of dialogue that animates Roman documents that propound doctrine on the relations to other religions, and the legalistic tone of those that give the minute rules and regulations for church life and leave no leeway at all for that same spirit. Theologians in Ghana appeal to the former, to the documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, no. 17, *Ad Gentes*, no. 9, and *Nostra Aetate* nos 1 and 2 which state that the Church does not allow to perish whatever good may be found in the hearts and minds of men, and in their religious rites and cultures, and takes it onto itself to bring it to its completion. The bishop abide very much by the latter.

have been given a variety of names in the literature on them. The better ones, showing least western-missionary bias against them,<sup>167</sup> are: African church movements, African independent churches, prophet-healing churches and African indigenous churches. In southern Ghana, however, the Christians of these churches prefer to call them spiritual churches (*sunsum asore*).<sup>168</sup> Among the Akan these churches have become prominent only in the last 25 years. By 1950 we find only some ten of these churches. Then a steep rise sets in. In 1972 a list, drawn up by the Christian Council of Ghana, has 351 of them, though of only 107 more or less full particulars were known. The total of their membership was some 430.000. The total number of the members of all spiritual churches may be over 1.000.000.<sup>169</sup> [576] They are strongly concentrated in the urban areas, and cater mainly for the spiritual needs of the members of the missionary churches. They have but few converts from traditional religion or from Islam.<sup>170</sup> They all have, through their founders, a background in the Protestant missionary churches, except for a few that originated from a Roman Catholic one. Eager to share in the esteem in which the missionary churches are held, they have often applied for admission into the Christian Council of Ghana in the last decade, but so far only one of them, the 'Eden Revival Church' of Yeboah Korie has been admitted.<sup>171</sup> In the face of this rebuff, a 'Council of Spiritual Churches' was founded in 1968, which had been joined by 202 African churches by 1971.<sup>172</sup>

For the purpose of our analysis<sup>173</sup> it is important now to indicate the particular balances of elements of morphology derived from, or similar to those in, the missionary churches and those derived from, or similar to those in, traditional religion in these churches. One usually finds a 'western' element counterbalanced by a 'traditional' one, or vice versa. Where a traditional element appears to rule supreme, one should keep in mind that the youth and receptivity of these churches causes them to be pliable and fluid, so that counterpoising 'western' elements could easily develop, e.g. if the missionary churches enter into a fraternal dialogue with them.

In some of these balances 'western' elements predominate, or do so at first sight. For instance, the spiritual churches are organised as 'churches', i.e. as congregations of believers apart from the other roles in society of their members, according to the congregational and democratic patterns of the Protestant churches. These patterns have been formally preserved, but within them the actual management is [577] clearly hierarchical: the head of the church occupies a position similar to that of the chief in traditional society, to that of the 'big man' in modern Akan society, and to that of the hierarchy in western episcopal churches.

The worship in these churches resembles that of the missionary churches in the formal elements of time, place and overall pattern of the services. But for the rest their form is very 'African': the services are long, at certain points emotionally very tense and they invite the participation of all present through rhythmic handclapping, dancing, singing and response to, and interruptions by acclamations of, the prayers, the preaching and the 'witnessing'.

<sup>167</sup> Some that show more of this bias are: antichristian, separatist, syncretistic, neopagan, nativistic, and magico-religious sects and clapping churches; cf. also Lamont 1971: 11.

<sup>168</sup> Baëta 1962: 1

<sup>169</sup> Meerts 1974: 79-81, 83

<sup>170</sup> Meerts 1974: 86, 128-130

<sup>171</sup> Barrett 1968: 165; 1971: 34; Beckmann 1975: 54

<sup>172</sup> Meerts 1974: 88

<sup>173</sup> The descriptive elements used in the analysis of these balances have been taken from Meerts (1974: 73-230) who studied the Akan prophet David Mensah and his 'Nazarene Healing Church' in Accra from September 1971 to April 1972. The interpretation of these materials is, however, my own.

The Bible occupies a central place in the belief systems and worship of these churches too. But their predilection is very much for the Old Testament with its stories of the patriarchs and the prophets and its rules of conduct. The New Testament seems to be to them a part of the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ one of the biblical prophets. The prophet-founders of these churches think of themselves as continuing that line of revelatory activity of God. They are as much spokesmen (*akyeame*) and mouthpieces of God as were the biblical prophets and Jesus Christ.

In some other balances 'African' elements seem to predominate. These churches are monotheistic, albeit not (yet) in the fully developed trinitarian sense of the missionary churches, but in one that resembles, but is not identical to, the diffuse monotheism of Akan traditional religion. On the contrary: they vehemently oppose and denounce as evil spirits all the gods, ancestors and medicines which in traditional religion are 'included' in a 'pluriform' monotheism. Even so, the traditional mode of thought about God<sup>174</sup> is at the basis of the theology of the Spiritual churches, though with this cardinal difference that the many spiritual agents coming from, going to, and existing in [578] God in traditional religion have been compressed into one: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is very little thought of as a person in a triune God, but is God in his possessional activity. The Holy Spirit is God in his external aspect, God operative in the prophet God has chosen; in the power with which this prophet exorcises and performs healings by the imposition of his hands; in the powerful prayer from his mouth; and in the protective and therapeutic effects of the potions and preparations which his prophet has made, blessed and handed out by his own hands. In short, in the Holy Spirit God is as pervasively incarnate and actively present in one man, his prophet, as he is in traditional religion in its many spiritual agents. We find in both the spiritual churches and in traditional religion a strong theocentrism. In the latter it takes the form of an inclusive, pluriform monotheism, in the former of a (proto-)trinitarianism with strong pneumatological overtones. Their christology is, as yet, dormant or very weak. But it is never actively denied.

These churches also are very 'African' (and claim to be very biblical) in their strong affirmation of the existence and activity of a host of unseen beings: gods and ancestors; souls in men, animals and plants; witches, male and female; and 'medicines'. They fear their operation and seek deliverance from them, and protection against them, from the Spirit-inspired prophet.

The spiritual churches differ most markedly, perhaps, from the missionary churches in their concept of 'salvation'. They do not conceive of it in the personalistic terms of western Christianity: the forgiveness of sins and restoration of communion with God. Salvation, as they understand it, certainly needs a personalistic ambience, for obedience to God after the rules he has made known in the Bible and through his prophet is indispensable. But this obedience is only creative of [579] the right relationships, within which the salvation sought for can materialise. That salvation is the 'traditional' one: liberation from, and protection against 'evil' spirits and the consequent achievement of harmony in social relations and prosperity and health for the individual, his dependants and all the other members of his community. This salvation is not a spiritually removed one, but a spiritual one that materialises into happy material consequences. Liberation from the 'evil' spirits too is not sought after because association with them is thought of as sinful, as if they were intrinsically evil – they are not held to be so –, but because they possess capricious temperaments and are very demanding and so are liable to be

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<sup>174</sup> In Akan traditional religion, God is mediated in several ways to men: by gods, ancestors, souls (in men, animals and plants) and medicines, who seem all, more or less closely, to be included in God as parts of God.

quick in inflicting serious harm on the believer's health, prosperity or social relationships. So in these churches the believers do not first and foremost seek forgiveness of sins, but liberation from tangible misfortunes such as sickness, barrenness, impotence, drunkenness, failure in schools, jobs, business or in courting, unemployment, road-accidents, etc., which are all the business of the church because they are understood to have been caused, or may be caused, by spiritual aggression of 'evil' spirits or 'evil' men.

The 'theology' of these churches seems to be well developed in its pneumatological, ecclesiological, and soteriological aspects. The protological, christological and eschatological aspects are not. They may yet be developed when the missionary churches extend to these churches the fellowship they ask for. The WCC at Geneva has tried hard over the past decade to bring this about, but has not yet scored much success in the attempt. Rome has not yet adopted such a policy of prodding on its African bishops to take a more sympathetic view of, and attitude to, these churches. Nobody protested when, in the Synod at Rome in September/October 1974, a spokesman of the African bishops [580] included these churches in the category of the non-Christians!<sup>175</sup>

#### *Summary of the analytical data*

Purely objective facts do not exist. All 'facts' imply a theory that conditions both their perception and description. So it is now in order to summarise those data in our descriptions that may serve to develop or to criticise existing theories in this field, and at the same time clarify the theoretical orientations that underlie the 'descriptions' so far presented. In this study of the several relationships between Akan Traditional Religion and Akan Christianity four distinct patterns have emerged. Two of these may be classified as 'integrative' or 'absorbative'; the other two as 'exclusivist'.

A first pattern is the one that is operative in Akan believers. Nearly all Akan believers, whether adhering to traditional religion or to one of the Christian churches, missionary and spiritual, seem to continue to believe in the receptive, non-exclusivistic mode that has been ingrained in Akan religious culture by centuries of traditional religion. This inclusivist mode of belief stands out most sharply in the context of membership of the Christian churches, which, as religious institutions, are severely exclusivist and attempt to have their adherents believe in that mode. Their members, however, even when they have a stable, active and undisciplined association with their church, will introduce into their personal faith elements from traditional belief that are alien to the belief system of their church, such as e.g. belief in the existence and activity of witches. Particularly impressive in this respect too is the fact that the traditional rites of passage and aggregation, at birth, marriage, and at death, are [581] continued, virtually unimpaired, by these Christians. This indicates that the patterns of the Akan worldview, that underlie them, continue to be stable points of orientation in the lives of Akan Christians, as does the traditional social structure which they underpin. Stably associated Christians will resort to another church, or to the specialist of another religion only in a situation of distress or misfortune, with which their church is unable, or unwilling, to cope. Such a stable association is not the general rule. Many more Akan Christians are a body that is afloat between the religions and churches in their society, participating successively or simultaneously in the rites of two or more of them, and often developing an allegiance to more than one at the same time. But it is not only Christians who resort to other churches or religions than their own. There also are traditional believers who know and respect the doctrines of a Christian church, occasionally attend its services, and often

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<sup>175</sup> Heyke 1975: 286

donate to it, expressing in this way an allegiance to that church, though they are not, and never intend to be, affiliated to it.

The second integrative pattern is that of Akan traditional religion in its relation to Christianity as an immigrant religion. Traditional religion has always allowed for the introduction into the personal faith of its adherents and into the religious life of its communities of elements of other religions. When early Elminian Catholicism was robbed of the external support of the Portuguese trading establishment, which sheltered it, and of its expatriate religious leaders, the chaplains in the fort, local traditional religion absorbed it without destroying all traces of its former identity. This (re-)absorption was made easy because these Catholics had continued to believe in the receptive mode of traditional religion, continued to adhere to several elements of belief of traditional [582] religion, and because the Catholic congregation had a strong ritual centre in the cult of the recently introduced saints, which showed strong morphological parallels to the cult of the gods in traditional religion. It was also sociologically possible because the Elminians, though associated in trading relations to the Portuguese and the Dutch, still lived in a relatively closed world, or, in the terms of Robin Horton,<sup>176</sup> in a social, political and religious 'microcosm'. In such a world we find a stronger stress, especially ritually, on the 'middle'-beings in a traditional religion, such as ancestors, gods and saints than on e.g. the Supreme Being.

From modern Christianity Akan traditional religion has selectively adopted much for two other cultic spheres, that of *Nyamesom*, the worship of God, and that of the ever-renewing cults of the youngest gods. Its strong theo-centrism (Sarpong) made it easy for traditional religion to affirm and accept much of the doctrine of God as Islam and Christianity proclaimed it, so much so, that many Akan traditional believers are apt now to think about God in terms that have, at least in part, been borrowed from the immigrant religions, and will unequivocally affirm the identity of Nyame to Allah and the God of Christianity. In the cult of the youngest gods the influence of Christian ideas may be traced in the elaboration of some traditional elements, such as the pact, concluded in the drinking of the god (*abosomnom*), developing into a covenant between him and his child; the rules of behaviour in relation to things or actions the god abhors (*akyiwade*) being now formulated as a limited number of ethical commandments; and the development of a more or less congregational structure in the loose body of the devotees of such a god.

The receptivity of Akan traditional religion in precisely these two particular spheres tallies again with the sociological theory of Robin Horton which postulates [583] these expansions in consequence of the fact that the Akan, after 1850, were increasingly forced to leave their relatively stable 'microcosm' for an ever expanding 'macrocosm', political, economical, social and religious. Ritual attention to the cultic correlates of the traditional political and social structure, the older gods and the ancestors, receded somewhat, and that to Nyame became more prominent, as did the belief in, and the fear of witchcraft and sorcery, which was countered by an increased ritual activity involving the youngest gods with their 'killing' properties, and by procuring new protective medicines from traditional, Muslim, Christian and even Hindu religious specialists, or by resorting to the healing activities of the spiritual churches.

The 'exclusivist' patterns are proper to the Christian churches as institutions. A first one, that of the missionary churches, was strongly fostered by the ideas prevalent among 19<sup>th</sup> century whites, that the negro was morally debased, that his customs were savage and murderous and that his religion was unrelieved darkness. Posing as the very antithesis of traditional religion, presenting western culture as civilisation and progress,

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<sup>176</sup> Horton 1975: 219-235

and offering the instruments of upwards social mobility in the new colonial society, the missionary churches demanded, and attempted to discipline their members into, a clean and complete break with traditional religion. As a more developed expression of *Nyamem*, worship of God, these churches were attractive to the Akan. They were even more so because of their intimate association with the new society, for which they created its new bourgeoisie. But the religious limitations which they imposed were never really accepted by many of their adherents. This fact has been faced, and by some accepted, since the mid-fifties. The church leaders, however, have as yet shown no initiative [584] to set an effective policy of indigenisation moving, and have merely begun to tolerate the penetration of elements of traditional religion and customs into the religious practices of their Christian congregations.

The other 'exclusivist' pattern is that of the spiritual churches towards traditional religion. These churches are as vocal and stringent in their denunciation of traditional religion as the missionary churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were. These churches, however, are attractive to Akan believers, not because they are a means of social improvement,<sup>177</sup> but because they are more 'African' than the missionary churches. They aim at securing the traditional tangible salvific goods; their liturgical services are emotionally satisfying; and they possess a 'diffusive' theo-centrism that is morphologically similar to that of Akan traditional religion. To those who, temporarily or permanently, resort to these churches – and they come mainly from the missionary churches – they are a viable alternative to traditional religion. Which may in part explain their exclusivist attitude to traditional religion.

The concepts of 'official/popular religion' seem to have little analytical value for this field of religious interaction, because it is much more complex than the field for which they were originally devised. They are, moreover, one-sided and biased concepts, because they are expressive of an approach that is 'one-way' and 'top down' – from 'official religion' to 'popular religion' only; never vice versa – as well as 'system-oriented', viz. towards the 'official religion'. Their fundamental bias is a theological one: the exclusivist theology of Western monotheistic religions, once these had become [585] structurally related to the elites of their societies and shared in the wielding of power over them. Because of this bias it is always clear what 'official religion' is. 'Popular religion', however, is an undefinable 'container'-concept that may contain all and every religion or part of one that does not happen to be, or to be part of, the 'official religion'.

To analyse as complex a field of religions and their interactions as is that which we find among the Akan in Southern Ghana adequately, a much more ample kit of analytical tools is required that will enable such a field to be separated into at least three distinct layers of analysis:

- the relations of each of the religions in that society to the social structure of the society and to the several segments of it, and groups in it; and vice versa;
- the relations of each of the religions in that society to all other religions in it in all the ways they view each other, and influence each other;
- the relationships of each of these religions to their own adherents and to those of the other religions in that society; and, more importantly, of the individual believer to his own and to the (his) other religions. The freedom of movement in and between the religious systems which the Akan believer exercises, even when the religious institution is unwilling to grant it, seems to be the single most important datum in the religious situation of Southern Ghana for a relevant empirical analysis.

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<sup>177</sup> They are usually not. They help those that frequent their meetings to bear the burden of their misfortunes, such as poverty and unemployment, from which many of them have very little prospect of ever being relieved.

Some of the materials, necessary for such a three-layer analysis, have been brought together in this contribution, and in a limited way their analysis has been attempted. In the religiously pluriform society of present-day Southern Ghana we find no 'official religion'. Missionary Christianity may, however, be said to hold the [586] pride of place among the religions there. It dominates the religious, and even more, the public scene by the sheer numbers of its adherents. It is held in general esteem as the socio-religious bourgeois establishment to which all those who have received a formal, western education belong. As all the political and intellectual leaders of the country belong to this establishment, the religious leaders of missionary Christianity enjoy a large influence in public affairs through their moral influence in this establishment.

Akan traditional religion may also be said, however, to dominate the religious scene, though in a much less obtrusive way. It is still present everywhere, not only in the countryside and the traditional towns, but also in the big modern cities, both as an organised religion and as a private religion. As an organised and public religion it is not very prominent, having become very much a 'compound'-religion.<sup>178</sup> It has suffered severely in the cataracts of changes over the last century and a half. But it has shown a great capacity for survival, and is re-asserting itself, especially in the religious 'bi-lingualism' of the modern Akan. These two languages of faith, Christian and traditional may, perhaps, one day merge into one, richer language. The spiritual churches have made a first attempt to speak it.

As for the concept of 'popular religion', some might perhaps maintain that it applies well to the resort which members of the missionary and spiritual churches sometimes have to Muslim and traditional specialists, and those of the missionary churches to the prophet-healers of the spiritual churches, and to the participation of both in the customary rites of their matriclan and native town and state. This, however, would impose an alien and biased concept upon only a part of the field of empirical analysis and obscure many significant empirical facts in it.

[587-600: endnotes 1-43]

[600-606] *References*

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<sup>178</sup> This term was suggested by Dr. Peter Mckenzie of the University of Leicester in a paper on Yoruba traditional religion, read at the 13th International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions at Lancaster University from 15-20 August 1975. The term may be used to denote both the space in which traditional rituals are often celebrated, the usually closed compound, so that traditional religion has very little public visibility – to which the time of celebration also contributes as many rites are celebrated in pre-dawn or night time –, and the complex structure of traditional religion.

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